

II. The Golden Age

WHAT WERE THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE AFFLUENT AGE?

Golden Age: Jen Kurek, Jacki Dorsey

Characteristics

1. Changed Economy
2. A Suburban Nation
3. A Consumer Culture
4. The TV World
5. A New Ford
6. Women at Work:
7. Segregated Landscape

Golden Age

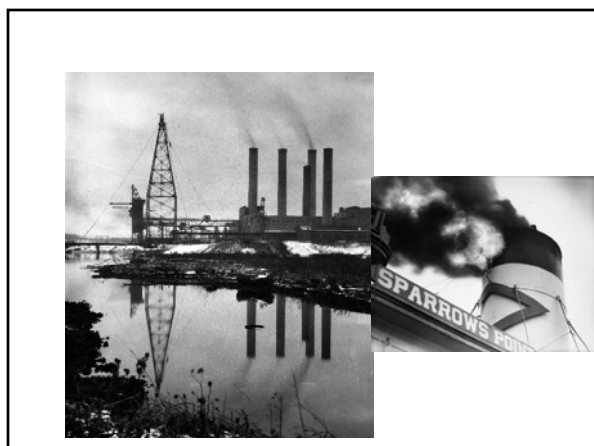
- Why were the '50s called the “Golden Age”?

Conservatism, Complacency, and Contentment

- “Anxiety, Alienation, and
- Social Unrest” ??

Economic Boom

- Robust post war economy fueled by a society eager to spend after years of depression and war.
- Factories re-tooled from machinery of war to consumer goods!
- And, the Cold War fueled industrial production



The Organization And The Organization Man



White Collar jobs expanded greatly in the 1950s

- During the 1950s, businesses expanded rapidly
- More and more people held “white-collar” jobs - clerical, management, or professional jobs
- The fields of sales, advertising, insurance and communications exploded

A Suburban Nation

US first suburban nation

Causes

- Good economy!
- Returning veterans
- Baby boom
- Pent-up wartime demand: housing shortage in cities
- Highway Act
- Automobiles
- Etc.



Baby Boom

- During the late 1940s and through the early 1960s the birthrate in the U.S. soared

Why did the baby boom occur when it did?

- Husbands returning from war
- Decreasing marriage age
- Desirability of large families
- Confidence in economy
- Advances in medicine



- Baby boomers represent the largest generation in the nation's history

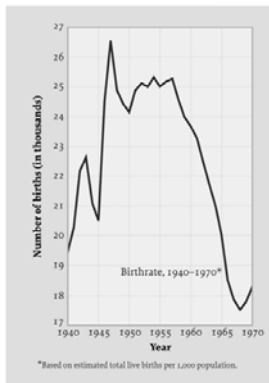
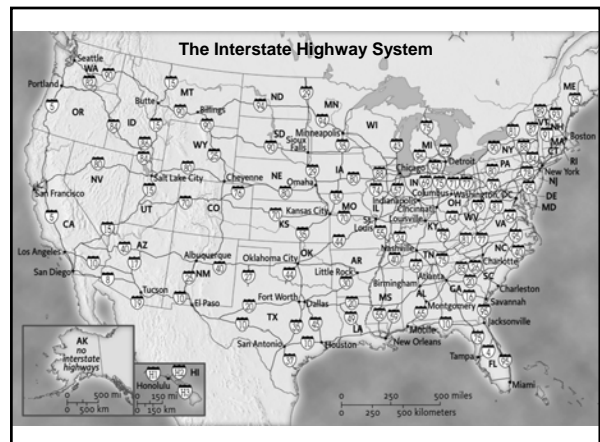


Figure 24.2 The Baby Boom and Its Decline

Give Me Liberty! An American History (Forster)
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Highway Construction

- Interstate Highway and Defense Act, 1956
- Purpose?
- Unintended Consequence: Why would this bill promote suburbanization?
- Federal funds helped cities pay for the highways needed for suburbanization

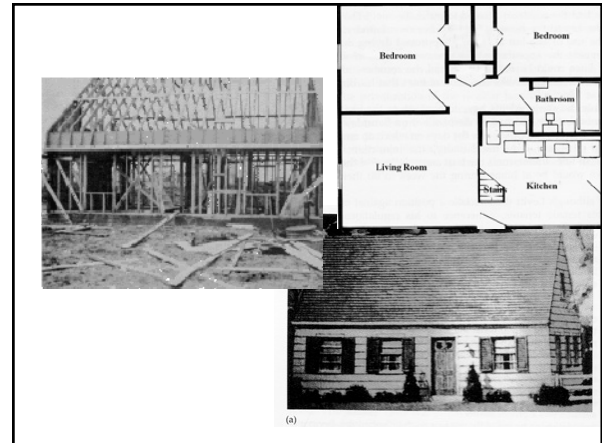
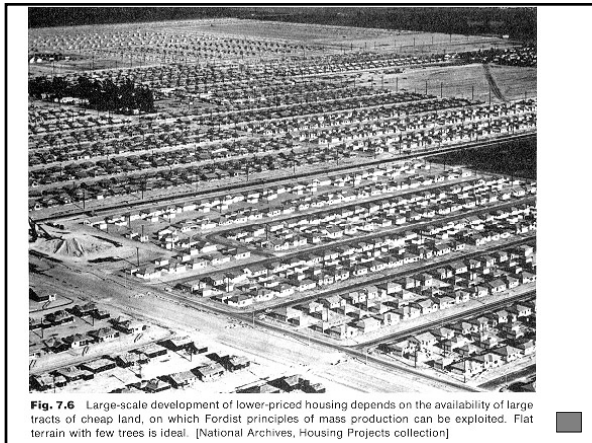




Houses cheap and plentiful

FHA and VA subsidies
National Housing Act, 1934

- The dream of home ownership came within reach of the majority of Americans



A Consumer Culture

Freedom interpreted as consumerism?

- gratify market desires
- living in never-ending debt
- Marked superiority of the American way of life to communism (film: shopping center)

People of Plenty: Consumerism



- Consumer Goods/ TV, Cars, Stereos, Dishwashers

- National Fads/

- Rise in Consumer Credit/ up 800% (1945-57)



The TV World

- Television replaced newspapers as the most common **source of information**
- Provided Americans with a **common cultural experience**
- TV avoided controversy and projected a **bland image of middle-class life**
- Television also became the **most effective advertising medium ever invented**



The average family watched 4 to 5 hours of TV a day

A New Ford

- Along with a home and television set, the car became part of what sociologists called "the standard consumer package" of the 1950s
- Auto manufacturers and oil companies vaulted to the top ranks of corporate America



Cars

- Main form of urban transportation from 1930s-present
- Allows suburbs to expand beyond mass transit corridors
- In the 1950's car manufacturers began to make yearly changes to car designs



The Female Sphere

Did women loose or gain during this period?

After 1945, women lost most of the industrial jobs they had performed during the war

- By the mid-1950s women were working again, but the nature and aims of women's work had changed
- Women were expected to get married, have children, and stay at home

Women at Home



- Popular Psychology insisted that women play role of wife, mother, homemaker
- Pop culture glorified marriage, family, and parenthood (*Leave it to Beaver, Father Knows Best*)
- Educational programs promoted the domestic sciences

<http://westfieldj.com/mccn/images/housewife.jpg>

- During the 1950s, the role of homemaker and mother was glorified in popular magazines, movies and television



Lonliness?



- Men and women led separate lives
- Those women who did work were finding job opportunities limited to fields such as nursing, teaching and office support



How to raise the Children?



- Dr. Spock's *Baby and Family Care* (1946)
- The purpose of child rearing is to help the child reach its full potential.
- All needs must be subordinate to the child's

Segregated Landscape

Why did the suburbs remained segregated communities

- Suburbanization hardened the racial lines of division in American life
 - Seven million whites left the cities for the suburbs while three million blacks moved into cities

Segregation

- The process of racial exclusion became self-reinforcing
 - Whites viewed urban ghettos as places of crime, poverty, and welfare
 - "Blockbusting"
- Suburban home ownership long remained a white entitlement

Life in Suburbia

Beaver Cleaver's World and Fifties Fears

Comfort in Conformity



Leisure in the 1950s

- Americans experienced shorter work weeks and more vacation time than ever before
- Leisure time activities became a multi-billion dollar industry
- Labor-saving devices added more spare time



Leisure Activities



- In 1953 alone Americans spent \$30 billion on leisure
- Popular activities included fishing, bowling, hunting and golf
- Americans attended, or watched on T.V., football, baseball and basketball games

TV Ads, TV Guides and TV Dinners Expand

- TV advertising soared from \$170 million in 1950 to nearly \$2 billion in 1960
- TV Guide
- TV dinners



BUT . . . Contrasting Images



(Internal) Domestic Prosperity VS (External) Fear of Communism

Fear of the Bomb:

- [video.mp4](#)
- [video\(2\).mp4](#)
- [video\(3\).mp4](#)

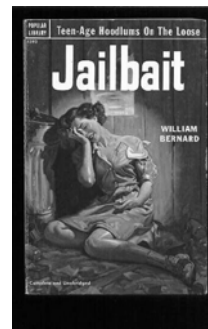


Fear of Polio



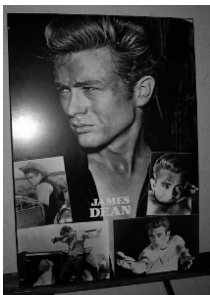
Fear of Teenagers

- The term teenager had not really been used until after WWII.



- *Cultural Split between parent/teens- Different dress/hair*
- *How to Live with Your Teenager (1953)*
Understanding Teenagers (1955)

Teens: Boring Suburbs



<http://www.webhighcentral.com/retro/other/james-dean.jpg>

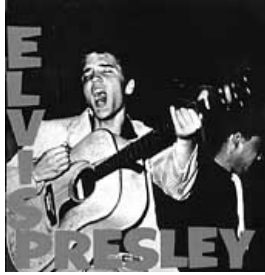
- Teens rejected the suburbs/ nothing ever happens
- Many teens felt misunderstood or alone
- The ideal of being a rebel/rise in juvenile crime
- James Dean/ *Rebel Without A Cause* (1955)

Teens: Rock and Roll



- Birth of Rock and Roll
- Grown out of the rhythm-blues tradition.
- Lyrics more explicit, having sexual overtones
- Teenagers love it/ Parents hate it
- Rock influenced race relations/ integrated concerts

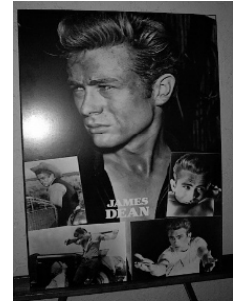
Teens: Elvis is Alive



- Elvis Presley brought rock and roll to white middle class America
- He was a big hit with young female fans but a nightmare for their parents
- Became a symbol of the rebellious youth

Rebels without a Cause

- generational tensions lay beneath the bland surface of 1950s life
- Cultural life during the 1950s seemed far more daring than politics
 - Rock and roll
 - *Playboy*



The Beats

The Beats were a small group of poets and writers who railed against mainstream culture

- Rejected
 - work ethic
 - the "desperate materialism" of the suburbs
 - the militarization of US life by the Cold War
- Celebrated impulsive action, immediate pleasure, and sexual experimentation

The Beatniks



- Emergence of literature and film dealing with alienation
- **Were against conformity/ stressed spontaneity and spirituality**
- Jack Kerouac/ *On the Road* (1957)
- J.D. Salinger/ *The Catcher in the Rye*