



1950s Culture

1950s Prosperity

- U.S. economy continued to grow after WWII due to consumer spending
- Americans had 135 billion to spend
 - Ready to buy consumer goods



Rise of Consumerism

- By the mid 50s, nearly 60% of Americans in the middle class
- **Consumerism** (buying material goods)=with success and status
- Personal debt increased nearly 3x



The GI Bill



- Provided loans to veterans to attend college, set up businesses, and buy homes
- Many moved into suburbs

Cookie Cutter Homes

- After war, there was a housing shortage for returning vets
- As a result, assembly line methods were used to produce homes
- Of the 13 million built, 85% were built in the suburbs



One of four different styles of the Jubilee



One of four different styles of the Levittowner



Levittown IN 1957



One of five different styles of the Pennsylvania



One of four different styles of the Country Clubber

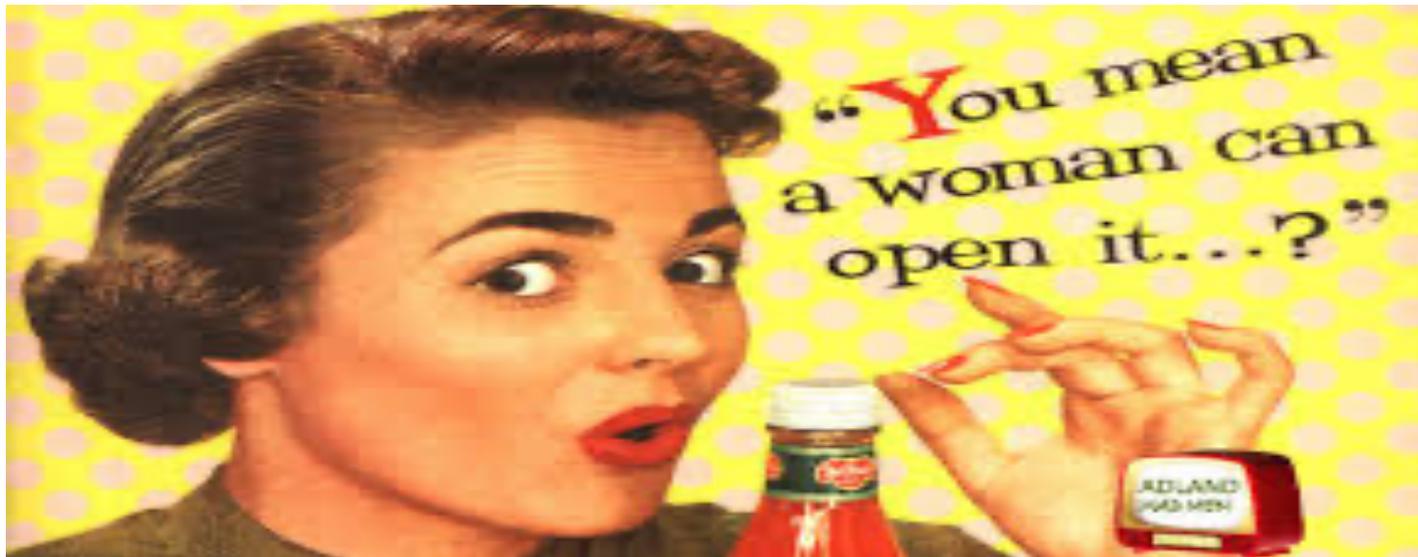
Redefining the Family

- A return to traditional roles after the war was the norm
- Men work, women stay home



Women's Roles in the 50s

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

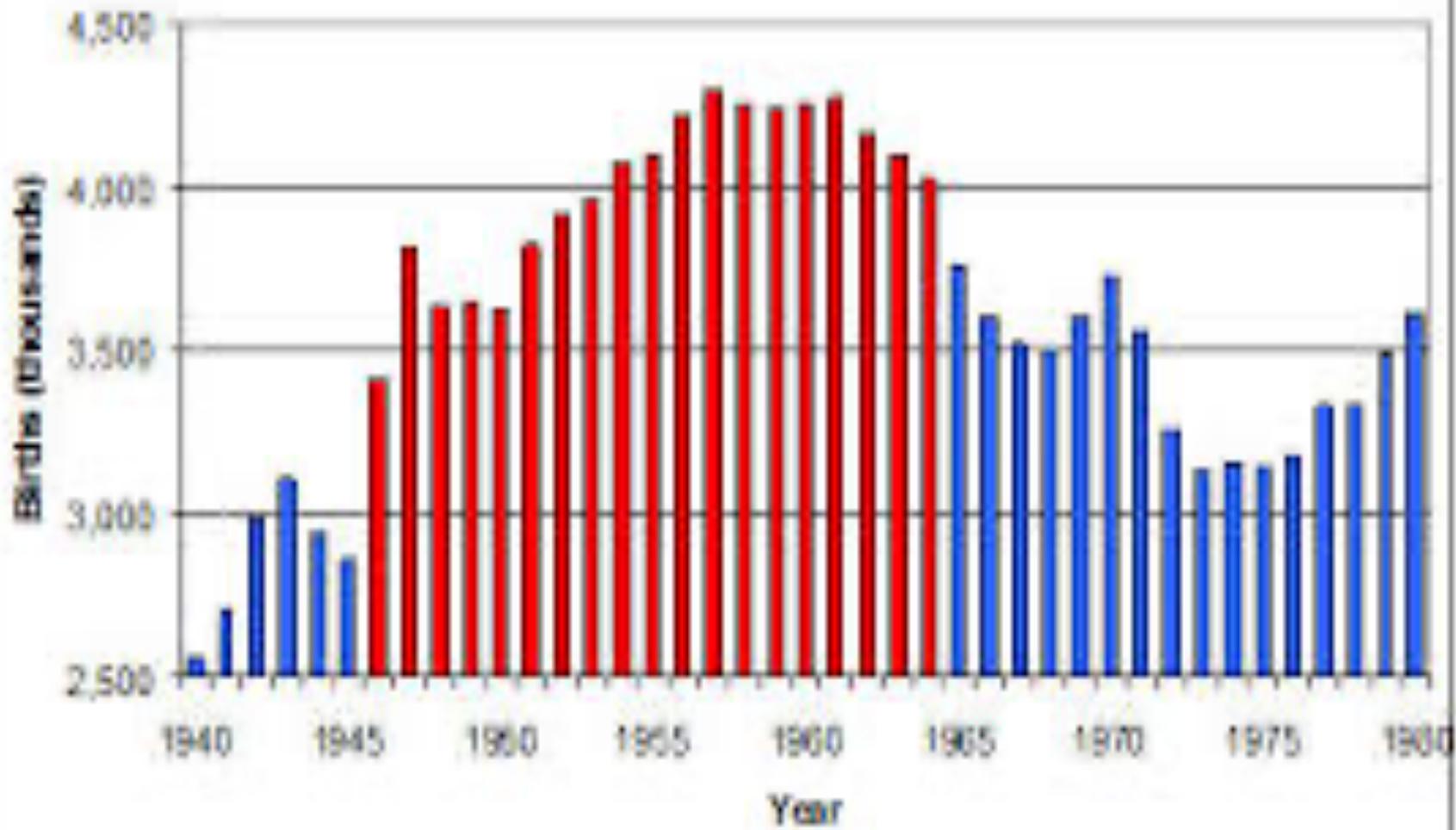


The Baby Boom

- During the 40s and through the early 60s, the birthrate in the U.S. soared
- Baby boomers represent the largest generation in U.S. history



U.S. Births: 1940-1980
(Baby Boomer Generation in Red)

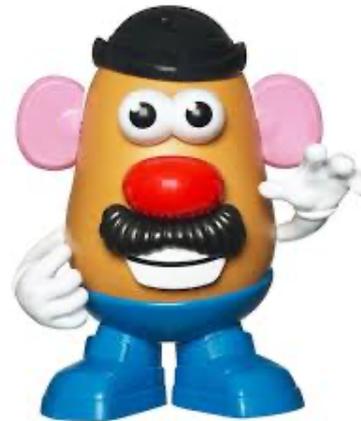


Why so many babies?

- Advances in medicine
- Husbands return from war
- Desires for large family
- Confidence in economy
- Decreasing marriage age

Impact of Baby Boom

- 10 million students entered elementary school in the 50s
- Toy sales soared (1957-1.25 billion)



Margret Sanger

- Created Planned Parenthood
- Spearheaded the development of birth control
 - 1957- FDA approves pill
- 1962-1.2 million women on pill, still illegal in some states



Advances in Medicine

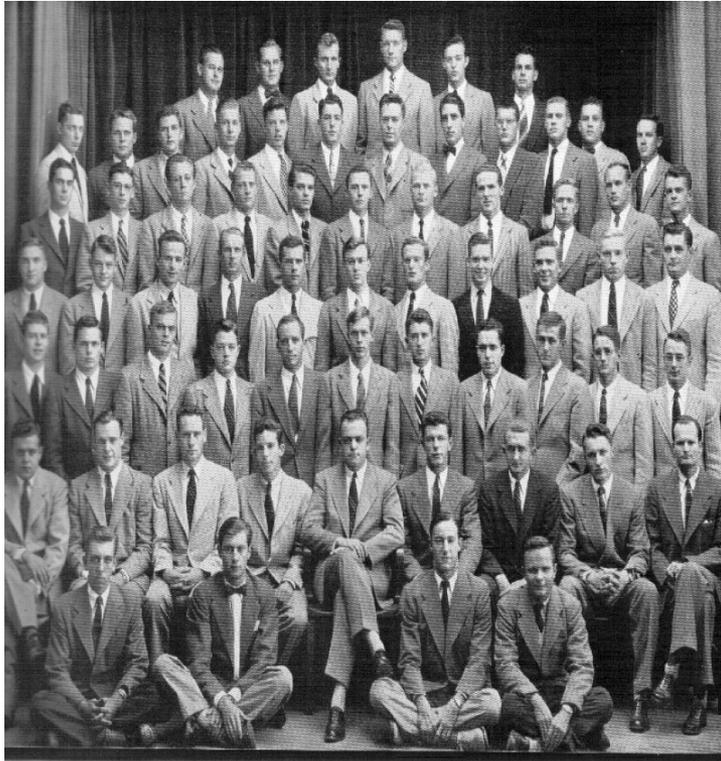
- Surgical procedures
- Antibiotics
- Diabetes
- Cancer and heart disease
- Polio

The American Dream in the 50s

- By the end of the 50s, Americans enjoying the highest standard of living in the world
- Worked in white collar jobs
 - First time, white collar jobs (management, clerical, advertising) outnumbered blue collar jobs (physical labor)



Social Conformity



- In the 1950s, it was common to see people conform (be like each other) to one another
- Individuality is not encouraged, especially at work

The Advertising Age

- New products=need for advertising
- The advertising industry became the fastest growing industry in the U.S. using new techniques to sell products.



Franchises Emerge

- Franchising: a person owns or operates several chain stores
- Company offers similar services in many locations
- Fast food restaurants developed first American franchises



Leisure Time

- Shorter work weeks, more vacation time
- Leisure activities became a multi-billion dollar industry
- Labor saving devices added more spare time



The Automobile Culture

- After the rationing of WWII, inexpensive and plentiful fuel as well as easy credit led many to buy cars
- By 1960, over 60 million owned cars



Federal Highway Act

- Passed by Congress in 1956
- Construction of 40,000 miles of interstate highways
- Was highly needed
 - # of Am. Who owned cars increased
 - Transport military equipment



Impact of the Highway



- More trucking
- Less railroad
- More suburbs, further away

Highways “Homogenize” America

- The scenery of America began to look the same
- Restaurants, motels, highways billboard, gas stations, etc. all began to look similar



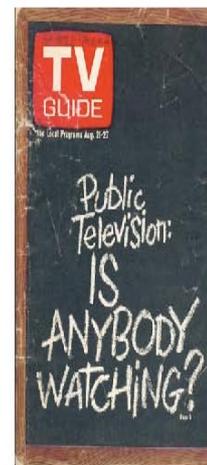
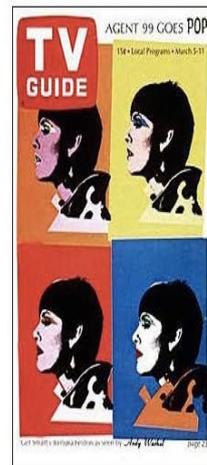
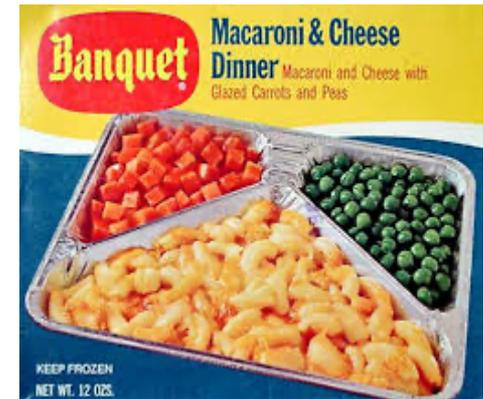
Popular Culture

- A new era of mass media emerged in the 50s
- In 1948, 9% of homes had TVs
- In 1950, 55%
- By 1960, 90%

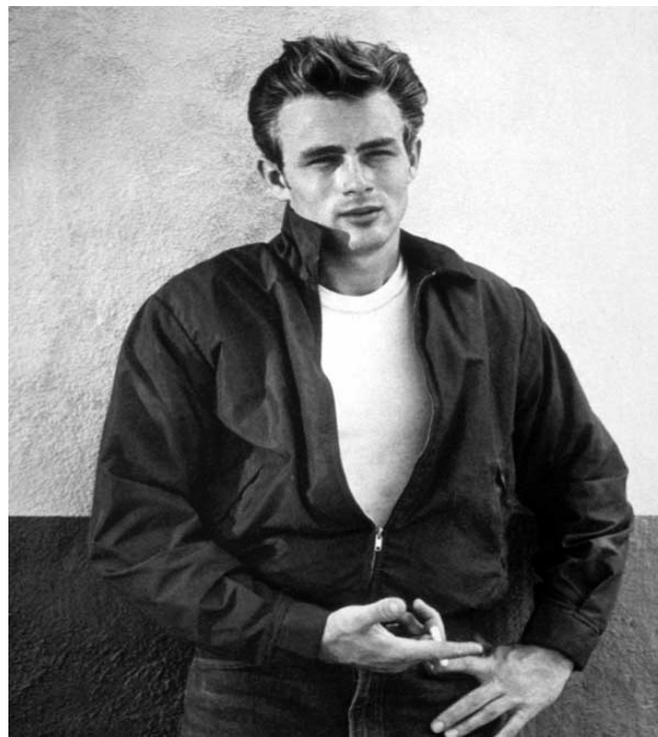


Golden Age of TV

- Comedies were the main attraction Milton Berle, Lucille Ball and Desi Arnaz were very popular
- TV guide became fastest selling magazine
- TV dinners created

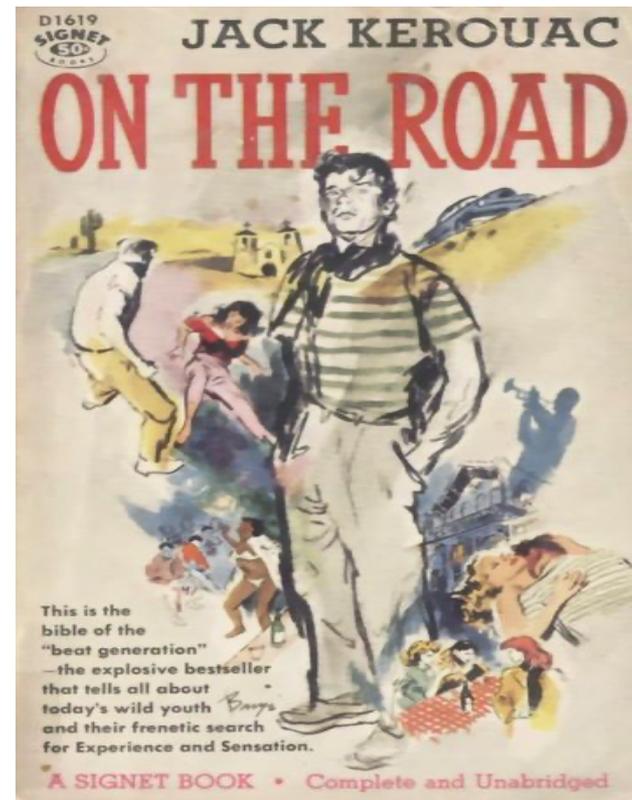


Iconic Movie Stars



Artistic Movement

- A group of writers, who called themselves the beats, highlighted the value gap that existed in the 50s
- 1957, Jack Kerouac writes *On the Road*, which shocked readers, but became an American classic



Beatniks



- Followers called “beatniks” tended to shun work and sought understanding through Zen Buddhism, music and sometimes drugs



Young Americans



- Rebelled against the conformist ideals of adult society and looked to controversial styles in music and literature

Music in the 50s

- 1951, radio disc jockey Alan freed got permission from his manager to play African-American rhythm and blues
 - Called it “rock and roll”
- Listeners loved it, soon white artists copied the sound

Rock n Roll

- Chuck Berry, Elvis, made it popular
- Several cities banned it, created generation gap



Social Rebel

- Greasers- In the 50s, rise in juvenile delinquency-criminal behavior of youths. Most teens did nothing illegal, but stereotyped by the way they dress

