

The Affluent Society

Guide to Reading

Connection

In the previous section, you learned about the transition of the United States to a peacetime economy. In this section, you will discover the great changes a postwar economic boom brought to American society.

Main Idea

- An increase in service sector and professional jobs led to a great increase in American income from 1940 to 1955. (p. 675)
- Despite a baby boom and cultural pressure, the number of women in the workforce increased. (p. 677)

- Technological changes included the development of early computers, advances in medicine, and new conquests of outer space. (p. 678)

Content Vocabulary

white-collar, blue-collar, multinational corporation, franchise, baby boom

Academic Vocabulary

accompany, benefit, generate

People and Terms to Identify

John Kenneth Galbraith, David Riesman, Levittown, Jonas Salk

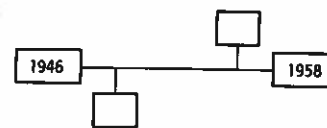
Reading Objectives

- Explain the reasons for and the effects of the nation's economic boom.

- Describe changes to the American family that took place during the 1950s.
- Discuss the technological and medical discoveries of the 1950s.

Reading Strategy

Sequencing As you read about American society in the 1950s, complete a time line similar to the one below by recording the scientific and technological breakthroughs of the time.



Preview of Events

1946

1947

Construction of Levittown begins

1950

1950

David Riesman's *The Lonely Crowd* published

1954

1955

Salk polio vaccine becomes widely available

1958

1958

John Kenneth Galbraith's *The Affluent Society* published

The following are the main History–Social Science Standards covered in this section.

11.8.1 Trace the growth of service sector, white collar, and professional sector jobs in business and government.

11.9.7 Describe the effects on society and the economy of technological developments since 1945, including the computer revolution, changes in communication, advances in medicine, and improvements in agricultural technology.

11.10.7 Analyze the women's rights movement from the era of Elizabeth Stanton and Susan Anthony and the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment to the movement launched in the 1960s, including differing perspectives on the roles of women.

11.11.3 Describe the changing roles of women in society as reflected in the entry of more women into the labor force and the changing family structure.

11.11.7 Explain how the federal, state, and local governments have responded to demographic and social changes such as population shifts to the suburbs, racial

concentrations in the cities, Frostbelt-to-Sunbelt migration, international migration, decline of family farms, increases in out-of-wedlock births, and drug abuse.

The Big Idea

Societies change over time. Between 1940 and 1955, the income of American workers increased as the number of white-collar jobs grew. People began to purchase more luxury items and buy homes in the suburbs. During this time, the country also experienced a baby boom. Despite an emphasis on women's roles as homemakers, the number of women in the workplace increased. Advances in technology and medicine brought about the development of early computers, new medicines, and the world's first space satellite.

A New Road Culture ►

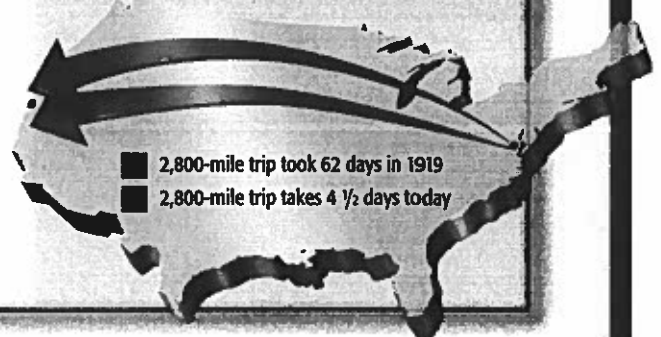
The interstates created an automobile society. In 1997 \$687 billion were spent on private automobiles compared to \$22.8 billion for public transit. Additionally, chains of fast food restaurants and motels replaced independent operators across the country.



Speed of Travel

The interstate highways drastically decreased the time it took to travel across the continent. In 1919 a young Dwight D. Eisenhower joined 294 other members of the army to travel the 2,800 miles from Washington, D.C., to San Francisco. They made the trip in 62 days, averaging 5 miles per hour. During World War II, General Eisenhower was impressed with the modern design of Germany's freeway system, the Autobahn. "The old convoy," he said, "had started me thinking about good, two-lane highways, but Germany had made me see the wisdom of broader ribbons across the land." Wide lanes and controlled entrance and exit points allowed cars to travel at much higher speeds. Using the interstate highways, Eisenhower's trip would now take 4½ days.

Travel Times: Washington, D.C., to San Francisco



ANALYZING THE IMPACT

Check for Understanding

1. **Identify** How was the initial purpose of the interstate highway system related to the Cold War?

Critical Thinking

2. **Evaluate** Explain the value of the interstate highway system in your area. Is the system an important part of your area's economy and culture?

American Abundance

Main Idea An increase in service sector and professional jobs led to a great increase in American income from 1940 to 1955.

Reading Connection Did you shop or eat at a franchise this week? Read on to find out about the growth of franchises and multinational corporations during the 1950s.

In 1958 economist John Kenneth Galbraith published *The Affluent Society*, in which he claimed that the nation's postwar prosperity was a new phenomenon. In the past, Galbraith said, all societies had an "economy of scarcity," meaning that a lack of resources and overpopulation had limited economic productivity. Now, the United States and a few other industrialized nations had created what Galbraith called an "economy of abundance." An abundance of goods and services allowed many people to enjoy a standard of living they never before thought possible. Kemmons Wilson was one example of how the standard of living was changing.

★ An American Story ★

In the summer of 1951, Kemmons Wilson traveled with his family from Memphis, Tennessee, to Washington, D.C. He noticed that some of the motels they stayed in were terrible. Each added a \$2 charge per child to the standard room price, and many were located far from restaurants, forcing travelers back into their cars to search for meals.

Frustrated, Wilson decided to build a motel chain that would provide interstate travelers with comfortable lodgings. They would be located near good family restaurants and allow kids to stay free. Together with a group of investors, Wilson began building the Holiday Inn motel chain. Families loved his motels, and soon Holiday Inns were sprouting up all over the country.

Wilson said he never doubted the success of his endeavor. "I like to think that I'm so . . . normal that anything I like, everybody else is going to like too," he said. "The idea that my instincts are out of line just doesn't occur to me." His prosperity mirrored a growing affluence in the nation. This time of prosperity made the shortages of the Great Depression and World War II a distant memory.

—adapted from *Watching TV: Four Decades of American Television*

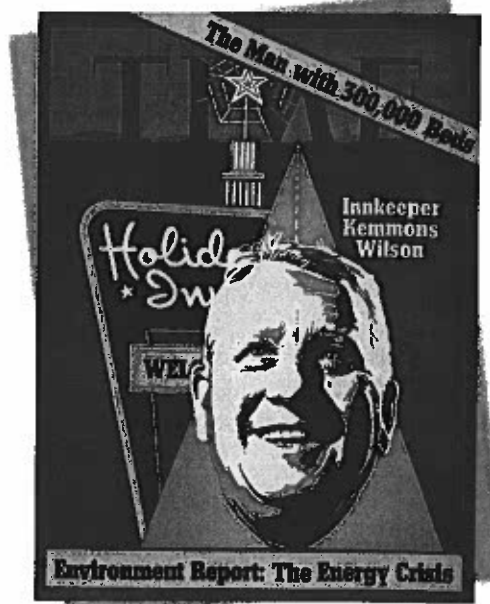
Kemmons Wilson's motel chain proved successful largely because the 1950s was a decade of incredible prosperity.

The Spread of Wealth Some critics accused Galbraith of overstating the situation, but the facts and figures seemed to support his theory. Between 1940 and 1960, the average income of American families roughly tripled. Americans in all income brackets—poor, middle-class, and wealthy—experienced this rapid rise in income. The dramatic rise in home ownership also showed that the income of average families had risen significantly. Between 1940 and 1960, the number of Americans owning their own homes rose from about 43 to about 62 percent.

Accompanying the country's economic growth were dramatic changes in work environments. Mechanization in farms and factories meant that fewer farmers and laborers were needed to provide the public with food and goods. As a result, more Americans began working in what are called **white-collar** jobs, such as those in sales and management. In 1956, for the first time, white-collar workers outnumbered **blue-collar** workers, or people who perform physical labor in industry.

Multinationals and Franchises Many white-collar employees worked for large corporations. As these businesses competed with each other, some expanded overseas. These **multinational corporations** located themselves closer to important raw materials and benefited from a cheaper labor pool, which made them more competitive.

Kemmons Wilson on magazine cover ▼





Analyzing Political Cartoons

The Organization Man In the 1950s, more and more people worked in white-collar corporate jobs. Some social critics worried that this development emphasized conformity. In what other ways did society encourage people to conform?

The 1950s also witnessed the rise of **franchises**, in which a person owns and runs one or several stores of a chain operation. Because many business leaders believed that consumers valued dependability and familiarity, the owners of chain operations often demanded that their franchises present a uniform look and style.

The Organization Man Like franchise owners, many corporate leaders also expected their employees to conform to company standards. In general, corporations did not desire free-thinking individuals or people who might speak out or criticize the company. Some social observers recognized this phenomenon and disapproved of it. In his 1950 book, *The Lonely Crowd*, sociologist **David Riesman** argued that this conformity was changing people. Formerly, he claimed, people were “inner-directed,” judging themselves on the basis of their own values and the esteem of their families. Now, however, people were becoming “other-directed,” concerning themselves with winning the approval of the corporation or community.

In his 1956 book *The Organization Man*, writer William H. Whyte, Jr., criticized the similarity many business organizations in the United States cultivated in order to keep any individual from dominating. “In group doctrine,” Whyte wrote, “the strong

personality is viewed with overwhelming suspicion,” and the person with ideas is considered “a threat.”

In the 1950s, more and more people worked in white-collar corporate jobs. Some social critics worried that this development emphasized conformity. In what other ways did society encourage people to conform?

The New Consumerism The conformity of the 1950s included people’s desires to own the same new products as their neighbors. With more disposable income, Americans bought more luxury items, such as refrigerators, washing machines, vacuum cleaners, and air conditioners. Americans also bought a variety of labor-saving machines. As *House and Garden* magazine boasted in a 1954 article, coffeemakers, blenders, and lawn trimmers “[replaced] the talents of caretaker, gardener, cook, [and] maid.”

Accompanying the nation’s spending spree was the growth of more sophisticated advertising. Advertising became the fastest-growing industry in the United States, as manufacturers employed new marketing techniques to sell their products. These techniques were carefully planned to whet the consumer’s appetite. The purpose of these advertisers was to influence choices among brands of goods that were essentially the same. According to the elaborate advertising campaigns of the time, a freezer became a promise of plenty, a second car became a symbol of status, and a mouthwash became the key to immediate success.

The Growth of Suburbia Advertisers targeted their ads to consumers who had money to spend. Many of these consumers lived in the nation’s growing suburbs that grew up around cities.

Levittown, New York, was one of the earliest of the new suburbs. The driving force behind this planned residential community was Bill Levitt, who mass-produced hundreds of simple and similar looking homes in a potato field 10 miles east of New York City. Between 1947 and 1951, thousands of families rushed to buy the inexpensive homes, and soon other communities similar to Levittown sprang up throughout the United States.

Suburbs became increasingly popular throughout the 1950s, accounting for about 85 percent of new home construction. The number of suburban dwellers doubled, while the population of cities themselves rose only 10 percent. Reasons for the rapid growth of suburbia varied. Some people wanted to escape the crime and congestion of city neighborhoods. Others viewed life in the suburbs as a move up to a better life for themselves and their children. In contrast to city life, suburbia offered a more

picturesque environment. As developers in earlier periods had done, the developers of the 1950s attracted home buyers with promises of fresh air, green lawns, and trees.

Affordability became a key factor in attracting home buyers to the suburbs. Because the GI Bill offered low-interest loans, new housing was more affordable during the postwar period than at any other time in American history. Equally attractive was the government's offer of income tax deductions for home mortgage interest payments and property taxes. For millions of Americans, the suburbs came to symbolize the American dream. They owned their homes, sent their children to good schools, lived in safe communities, and enjoyed economic security.

Nevertheless, some social commentators, such as architect Lewis Mumford and writer John Keats, viewed such plain and identical-looking communities as another sign of conformity. "You too can find a box of your own," wrote Keats, "inhabited by people whose age, income, number of children, problems, habits, conversations, dress, possessions, perhaps even blood types are almost precisely like yours."

Reading Check **Interpreting** What were two causes and effects of the economic boom of the 1950s?

The 1950s Family

Main Idea Despite a baby boom and cultural pressure, the number of women in the workforce increased.

Reading Connection Do most of the women you know work outside the home? Read on to learn about the number of women who held jobs and raised families in the 1950s.

In addition to all the other transformations taking place in the nation during the 1950s, the American family also was changing. Across the country, many families grew larger, and more married women entered the workforce.

The Baby Boom The American birthrate exploded after World War II. From 1945 to 1961, a period known as the **baby boom**, more than 65 million children were born in the United States. At the height of the baby boom, a child was born every seven seconds.

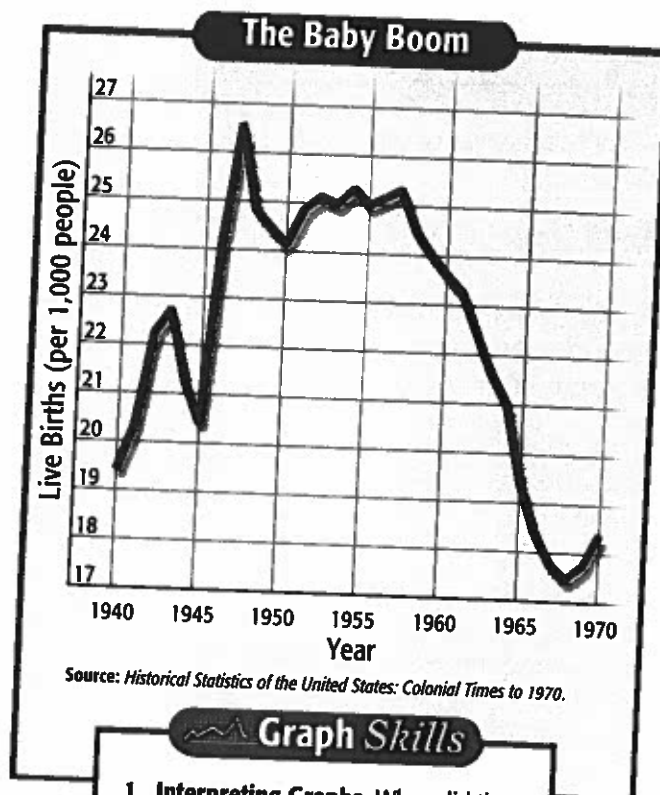
Several factors contributed to the baby boom. First, young couples who had delayed marriage during World War II and the Korean War could now marry, buy homes, and begin their families. In addition, the government encouraged the growth of fami-

lies by offering generous GI benefits for home purchases. Finally, on television and in magazines, popular culture celebrated pregnancy, parenthood, and large families.

Women in the Fifties Many women focused on their traditional role of homemaker during the 1950s. Even though 8 million American women had gone to work during the war, the new postwar emphasis on having babies and establishing families now discouraged women from seeking employment. Many Americans assumed that a good mother should stay home to take care of her children.

"Let's face it, girls," declared one female writer in *Better Homes and Gardens* in April 1955, "that wonderful guy in your house—and in mine—is building your house, your happiness and the opportunities that will come to your children." The magazine advised stay-at-home wives to "set their sights on a happy home, a host of friends and a bright future through success in HIS job."

Despite the popular emphasis on homemaking, however, the number of women who held jobs



Graph Skills

- Interpreting Graphs** When did the rapid rise in population shown here reach its peak?
- Analyzing Cause and Effect** What factors contributed to this rapid rise in births?

Profiles IN HISTORY

Dr. Jonas Salk 1914–1995



The man who developed the vaccine for one of the nation's most feared diseases almost did not go into medicine. Jonas Salk enrolled in college as a pre-law student but soon changed his mind. "My mother didn't think I would make a very good lawyer," Salk said, "probably because I could never win an argument with her." Salk switched his major to pre-med and went on to become a research scientist.

Salk initially directed the search for a cure to the dreaded ailment of polio at the University of Pittsburgh's Virus Research Laboratory. Every so often, Salk would make rounds in the over-

crowded polio wards of nearby Municipal Hospital, where nurses described their feelings of pity and helpless rage as paralyzed children cried for water. As one nurse said, "I can remember how the staff used to kid Dr. Salk—kidding in earnest—telling him to hurry up and do something."

Salk became famous for his breakthrough vaccine. The shy doctor, however, did not desire fame. About his becoming a celebrity, Salk observed that it was "a transitory thing and you wait till it blows over. Eventually people will start thinking, 'That poor guy,' and leave me alone. Then I'll be able to get back to my laboratory."

outside the home actually increased during the 1950s. Most women who went to work did so in order to help their families maintain their comfortable lifestyles. By 1960 nearly one-third of all married women were part of the paid workforce.

Reading Check **Evaluating** What were three factors that contributed to the baby boom?

Technological Breakthroughs

Main Idea Technological changes included the development of early computers, advances in medicine, and new conquests of outer space.

Reading Connection What recent advances have been made in the study of outer space? Read on to discover the early satellite launch from Cape Canaveral.

As the United States underwent many social changes during the postwar era, the nation also witnessed several important scientific advances. In medicine, space exploration, and electronics, American scientists broke new ground during the 1950s.

Advances in Electronics The electronics industry made rapid advances after World War II. In 1947 three American physicists—John Bardeen, Walter H. Brattain, and William Shockley—developed the transistor, a tiny device that generated electric signals and made it possible to miniaturize radios and calculators.

The age of computers also dawned in the postwar era. In 1946 scientists working under a U.S. Army contract developed one of the nation's earliest computers—known as ENIAC (Electronic Numerical Integrator and Computer)—to make military calculations. Several years later, a newer model called UNIVAC (Universal Automatic Computer) would handle business data and launch the computer revolution. The computer, along with changes and improvements in communication and transportation systems, allowed many Americans to work more quickly and efficiently. As a result, families in the 1950s had more free time, and new forms of leisure activity became popular.

Medical Miracles The medical breakthroughs of the 1950s included the development of powerful antibiotics to fight infection; the introduction of new drugs to combat arthritis, diabetes, cancer, and heart disease; and groundbreaking advances in surgical techniques. Polio, however, continued to baffle the medical profession.

Periodic polio epidemics had been occurring in the United States since 1916. Franklin Roosevelt contracted the disease as a young man and used a wheelchair for the remainder of his life. In the 1940s and 1950s, however, polio struck the nation in epidemic proportions. Officially known as infantile paralysis because it generally targeted the young, the disease brought a wave of terror to the country. No one knew where or when polio would strike, but an epidemic broke out in some area of the country each summer, sometimes paralyzing or killing its victims. People

watched helplessly while neighbors fell sick. Some died or needed an iron lung as part of their treatment. Iron lungs were large metal tanks with pumps that helped patients breathe.

Because no one knew what caused the disease, parents searched for ways to safeguard their families each summer. Some sent their children to the country to avoid excessive contact with others. Public swimming pools and beaches were closed. Parks and playgrounds across the country stood deserted. Nevertheless, the disease continued to strike. In 1952 a record 58,000 new cases were reported.

Finally, a research scientist named **Jonas Salk** developed an injectable vaccine that prevented polio. Salk first tested the vaccine on himself, his wife, and his three sons. It was then tested on 2 million schoolchildren. In 1955 the vaccine was declared safe and effective and became available to the general public. The results were spectacular. New cases of polio fell to 5,700 in 1958 and then to 3,277 in 1960. American scientist Albert Sabin then developed an oral vaccine for polio. Because it was safer and more convenient than Salk's injection vaccine, the Sabin vaccine became the most common form of treatment against the disease. In the years to come, the threat of polio in the United States would almost completely disappear.

Conquering Space After the Soviet Union launched *Sputnik*, the world's first space satellite, in October 1957, the United States hastened to catch up with its Cold War rival. Less than four months later, on January 31, 1958, the United States launched its own satellite from Cape Canaveral, Florida. Reporter Milton Bracker described the jubilant scene:

“As the firing command neared, a deadly silence fell on those who were watching. In the glare of the searchlights, a stream of liquid oxygen could be seen venting like a lavender cloud from the side of the seventy-foot rocket. . . . At fourteen and one-half seconds after time zero, after the priming fuel had ignited almost invisibly, the main stage engine came to life with an immeasurable thrust of flame in all directions. . . . With thousands of eyes following it, the rocket dug into the night and accelerated as its sound loudened. Spectators on near-by beaches pointed and craned their necks and cried, ‘There it is!’ and began to cheer.”

—quoted in *Voices from America's Past*

Meanwhile, engineers were building smoother and faster commercial planes. Poet Carl Sandburg wrote about taking the first American jet flight from New York to Los Angeles. The trip took only five and a half hours. “You search for words to describe the speed of this flight,” wrote an amazed Sandburg. “You are whisked . . . from an ocean on one side of the continent to an ocean on the opposite side in less time than it takes the sun to trace a 90-degree arc across the sky.”

Reading Check **Examining** What medical and technological advances met specific needs in the late 1940s and 1950s?

SECTION 2 ASSESSMENT

Checking for Understanding

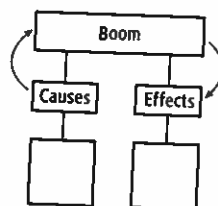
- Vocabulary** Define: accompany, white-collar, blue-collar, multinational corporation, benefit, franchise, baby boom, generate.
- People and Terms** Identify: John Kenneth Galbraith, David Riesman, Levittown, Jonas Salk.
- Describe** how and why the suburbs became popular places to live.

Reviewing Big Ideas

- Explaining** How was the affluent society of the United States in the 1950s different from previous decades?

Critical Thinking

- Historical Analysis** **Interpreting** What caused the advertising industry boom in the 1950s? **CA III**
- Organizing** Use a graphic organizer similar to the one below to list the causes and effects of the economic boom of the 1950s.



Analyzing Visuals

- Analyzing Photographs** Study the photograph of Kemmons Wilson on the cover of *TIME* magazine on page 675. Using the information in this section, who or what would you put on the cover of a magazine if you were the editor? Sketch your cover on a sheet of paper.

Writing About History

- Descriptive Writing** Write an article for a magazine such as *Better Homes and Gardens* describing changes the American family underwent during the 1950s. **CA 11WA2.3C**

Popular Culture of the 1950s

Guide to Reading

Connection

In the previous section, you learned about the changes an economic boom brought to American society. In this section, you will discover how Americans entertained themselves in the 1950s.

Main Idea

- Technological enhancements increased the popularity of television and movies. (p. 681)
- Rock 'n' roll music and the literature of the beat movement defined youth culture. (p. 683)

- Although few African Americans performed on television, many had a profound impact on early rock 'n' roll. (p. 685)

Content Vocabulary
generation gap

Academic Vocabulary
device, controversial

People to Identify

Ed Sullivan, Alan Freed, Elvis Presley, Jack Kerouac, Nat King Cole

Reading Objectives

- Explain the characteristics of the new youth culture.

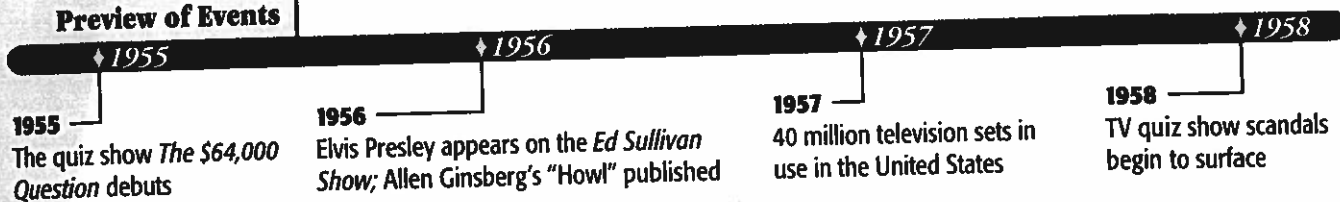
- Discuss the contributions of African Americans to 1950s culture.

Reading Strategy

Categorizing As you read about the popular culture of the 1950s, complete a graphic organizer similar to the one below comparing new forms of mass media during the 1950s.

New Forms of Mass Media	Description

Preview of Events



The following are the main History-Social Science Standards covered in this section.

11.8.8 Discuss forms of popular culture, with emphasis on their origins and geographic diffusion (e.g., jazz and other forms of popular music, professional sports, architectural and artistic styles).

The Big Idea

Societies change over time. With more money and time available, Americans bought more televisions. Comedies, action and adventure shows, variety programs, and game shows captivated viewers. Hollywood tried to regain audiences with 3-D films and new panoramic screens. A new youth culture that developed during this time embraced rock 'n' roll and the literature of the beat movement. While few African Americans were able to perform on television, many still had a profound impact on rock 'n' roll.

The New Mass Media

Main Idea Technological enhancements increased the popularity of television and movies.

Reading Connection What television shows do you like to watch? Read on to learn about the early television shows and stars.

Although regular television broadcasts had begun in the early 1940s, there were few stations, and sets were expensive. By the end of the 1950s, however, the small, black-and-white-screened sets sat in living rooms across the country. One of the shows of the time that captivated audiences was *I Love Lucy*.

★ An American Story ★

In 1953 Lucille Ball and her real-life husband, Desi Arnaz, were starring in one of the most popular shows on American television, *I Love Lucy*. In January, Ball had a baby—both in real life and on her show. Her pregnancy and the birth of her baby became a national event that captivated her audience. A pre-filmed segment of the show showed Lucy and her husband going to the hospital to have the baby, and the show was broadcast only a few hours after the real birth. More than two-thirds of the nation's television sets tuned in, an audience of around 44 million viewers. Far fewer people watched the next day when television broadcast a presidential inauguration.

I Love Lucy was so popular that some people actually set up their work schedules around the show. Marshall Field's, which had previously held sales on the same night the show was on, eventually switched its sales to a different night. A sign on its shop window explained, "We love Lucy too, so we're closing on Monday nights." A relatively new medium, television had swept the nation by the mid-1950s.

—adapted from *Watching TV: Four Decades of American Television*

Television's popularity forced the other forms of mass media—namely motion pictures and radio—to innovate in order to keep their audiences.

The Rise of Television Popularity During World War II, televisions became more affordable for consumers. In 1946 it is estimated there were between 7,000 and 8,000 sets in the entire United States. By

1957 there were 40 million television sets in use. Over 80 percent of households had televisions.

By the late 1950s, television news had become an important vehicle for information. Television advertising spawned a growing market for many new products. Advertising, after all, provided television with the money that allowed it to flourish. As one critic concluded, "Programs on television are simply a device to keep the advertisements and commercials from bumping loudly together." Televised athletic events gradually made professional and college sports one of the most prominent sources of entertainment.

Comedy, Action, and Games Early television programs fell into several main categories including comedy, action and adventure, and variety-style entertainment. Laughter proved popular in other formats besides the half-hour situation comedy. Many of the early television comedy shows, such as those starring Bob Hope and Jack Benny, were adapted from popular old radio shows. Benny enjoyed considerable television success with his routines of bad violin playing and stingy behavior.

Television watchers in the 1950s also relished action shows. Westerns such as *Hopalong Cassidy*, *The Lone Ranger*, and *Gunsmoke* grew quickly in popularity. Viewers also enjoyed police programs such as *Dragnet*, a hugely successful show featuring Joe Friday and his partner hunting down a new criminal each week.

▼ *Lucille Ball and Desi Arnaz*



Variety shows such as *Ed Sullivan's Toast of the Town* provided a mix of comedy, opera, popular song, dance, acrobatics, and juggling. Quiz shows attracted large audiences, too, after the 1955 debut of *The \$64,000 Question*. In this show and its many imitators, two contestants tried to answer questions from separate glass-encased booths. The questions, stored between shows in a bank vault, arrived at the studio at airtime in the hands of a stern faced bank executive flanked by two armed guards. The contestants competed head-to-head, with the winner returning the following week to face a new challenger.

In 1956 the quiz show *Twenty-One* caused an uproar across the nation after Charles Van Doren, a young assistant professor with a modest income, won \$129,000 during his weeks on the program. The viewing public soon learned, however, that Van Doren and many of the other contestants had received the answers to the questions in advance. Before a congressional committee in 1959, Van Doren admitted his role in the scandal and apologized to his many fans, saying, "I was involved, deeply involved, in a deception." In the wake of the *Twenty-One* fraud, many quiz shows went off the air.

Hollywood Adapts to the Times As the popularity of television grew, movies lost viewers. "Hollywood's like Egypt," lamented producer David Selznick in 1951. "Full of crumbling pyramids." While the film business may not have been collapsing, it certainly did suffer after the war. Attendance dropped from 82 million in 1946 to 36 million by 1950. By 1960, when some 50 million Americans owned a television, one-fifth of the nation's movie theaters had closed.

▼ Charles Van Doren with quiz show host Jack Berry



Throughout the decade, Hollywood struggled mightily to recapture its audience. "Don't be a 'Living Room Captive,'" one industry ad pleaded. "Step out and see a great movie!" When contests, door prizes, and an advertising campaign announcing that "Movies Are Better Than Ever" failed to lure people out of their homes, Hollywood began to try to make films more exciting. Between 1952 and 1954, audiences of 3-D films received special glasses that gave the impression that a monster or a knife was lunging directly at them from off the screen. Viewers, however, soon tired of both the glasses and the often ridiculous plots of 3-D movies.

Cinemascope, movies shown on large, panoramic screens, finally gave Hollywood a reliable lure. Wide-screen spectacles like *The Robe*, *The Ten Commandments*, and *Around the World in 80 Days* cost a great deal of money to produce. These blockbusters, however, made up for their cost by attracting huge audiences and netting large profits. The movie industry also made progress by taking the "if you can't beat 'em, join 'em" approach. Hollywood eventually began to film programs especially for television and also sold old movies, which could be rebroadcast cheaply, to the networks.

Like television, the films of the fifties for the most part adhered to the conformity of the times. Roles for single women who did not want families were few and far between. For example, each of Marilyn Monroe's film roles featured the blond movie star as married, soon to be married, or unhappy that she was not married.

Movies routinely portrayed African Americans in stereotypical roles, such as maids, servants, or sidekicks for white heroes. Even when African Americans took leading roles, they were often one-dimensional characters who rarely showed human emotions or characteristics. African American actor Sidney Poitier resented having to play such parts:

“The black characters usually come out on the screen as saints, as the other-cheek-turners, as people who are not really people: who are so nice and good. . . . As a matter of fact, I'm just dying to play villains.”

—quoted in *The Fifties: The Way We Really Were*

Radio Draws Them In Television also lured away radio listeners and forced the radio industry, like Hollywood, to develop new ways to win back audiences. After television took over many of radio's concepts, radio stations began to specialize in

THE KING OF ROCK

Elvis Presley, shown here signing autographs after a performance in Houston, took American youth in the 1950s by storm. Parents, on the other hand, were less than thrilled with his music—a blend of African American-inspired rhythm and blues and early rock 'n' roll—and his hip-swiveling gyrations on stage. For Presley's first appearance on *The Ed Sullivan Show*, the host insisted that cameras show him only from the waist up. Elvis added to his fame by starring in a string of films that audiences loved but critics panned.



presenting recorded music, news, public-service programming, and shows for specific audiences.

As a result of this targeted programming, radio stations survived and even flourished. Their numbers more than doubled between 1948, when 1,680 stations were broadcasting to the nation, and 1957, when more than 3,600 stations filled the airwaves.

✓ Reading Check **Identifying** How did the television industry affect the U.S. economy?

The New Youth Culture

Main Idea Rock 'n' roll music and the literature of the beat movement defined youth culture.

Reading Connection How does the music and literature of your generation differ from that of the 1950s? Read on to find out about the beginnings of a unique youth culture.

While Americans of all ages embraced the new mass media, some of the nation's youth rebelled against such a message. During the 1950s, a number

of young Americans turned their backs on the conformist ideals adult society promoted. Although these youths were a small minority, their actions brought them widespread attention. In general, these young people longed for greater excitement and freedom, and they found an outlet for such feelings of restlessness in new and controversial styles of music and literature.

Rock 'n' Roll In the early 1950s, rock 'n' roll emerged as the distinctive music of the new generation. In 1951 at a record store in downtown Cleveland, Ohio, radio disc jockey **Alan Freed** noticed white teenagers buying African American rhythm and blues records and dancing to the music in the store. Freed later recalled, "I wondered for about a week. Then I went to the station manager and talked him into permitting me to follow my classical program with a rock 'n' roll party." Calling himself "Moondog," Freed aired his first program on July 11, 1951. Just as the disc jockey had suspected, the listeners went crazy for it. Soon, white artists began making music that stemmed from these African American rhythms and sounds, and a new form of music, rock 'n' roll, had been born.

With a loud and heavy beat that made it ideal for dancing along with lyrics about romance, cars, and other themes that spoke to young people, rock 'n' roll grew wildly popular among the nation's teens. Before long boys and girls around the country were rushing out to buy the latest hits from such artists as Buddy Holly, Chuck Berry, and Bill Haley and the Comets. In 1956 teenagers found their first rock 'n' roll hero in **Elvis Presley**. Presley, who had been born in rural Mississippi and grown up poor in Memphis, Tennessee, eventually claimed the title of "King of Rock 'n' Roll."

While in high school, Presley had learned to play guitar and sing by imitating the rhythm and blues music he heard on the radio. By 1956 Elvis had a record deal with RCA Victor, a movie contract, and public appearances on several television shows. At first the popular television variety show host Ed Sullivan refused to invite Presley on, insisting that the rock 'n' roll music was not fit for a family oriented show. When a competing show featuring Presley upset his own high ratings, however, Sullivan relented. He ended up paying Presley \$50,000 per performance for three appearances, more than triple the amount he had paid any other performer.

The dark-haired and handsome Presley owed his wild popularity as much to his moves as to his music. During his performances he would gyrate his hips and dance in other suggestive ways that shocked many in the audience. Presley himself admitted the importance of this part of his act:

“I’m not kidding myself. My voice alone is just an ordinary voice. What people come to see is how I use it. If I stand still while I’m singing, I’m dead, man. I might as well go back to driving a truck.”

—quoted in *God’s Country: America in the Fifties*

Not surprisingly, parents—many of whom listened to Frank Sinatra and other more mellow and mainstream artists—condemned rock 'n' roll as loud, mindless, and dangerous. The city council of San Antonio, Texas, actually banned rock 'n' roll from the jukeboxes at public swimming pools. The music, the council declared, “attracted undesirable elements given to practicing their gyrations in abbreviated bathing suits.” A minister in Boston complained that “rock and roll inflames and excites youth.”

The rock 'n' roll hits that teens bought in record numbers united them in a world their parents did not share. Thus in the 1950s rock 'n' roll helped to create what became known as the **generation gap**, or the cultural separation between children and their parents.

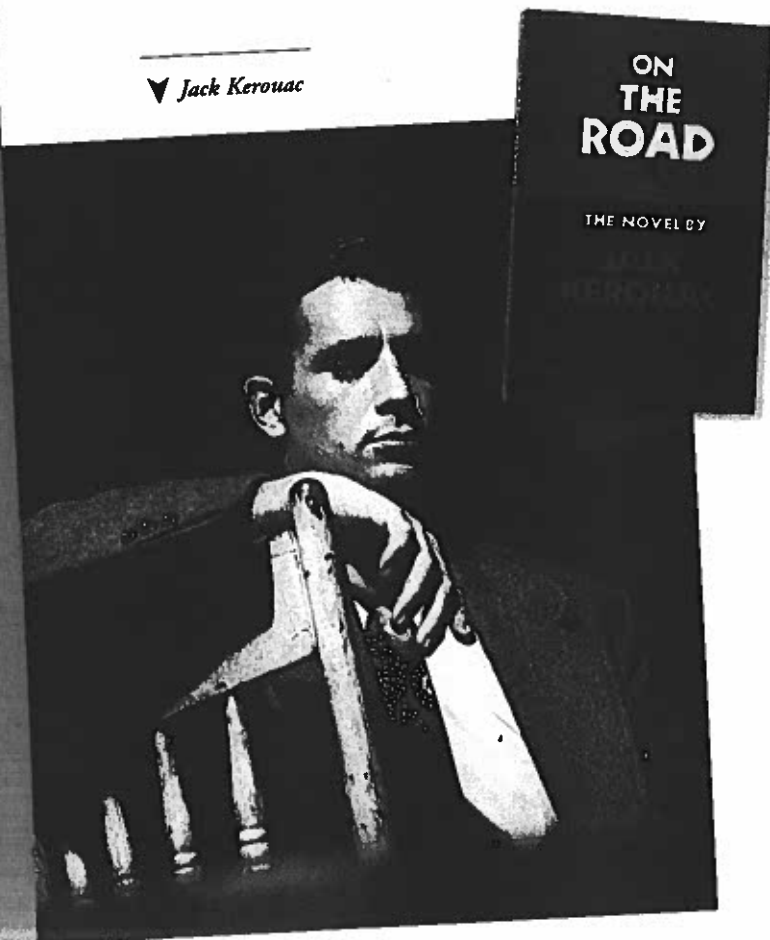
The Beat Movement If rock 'n' roll helped to create a generation gap, a group of mostly white artists who called themselves the beats highlighted a values gap in the 1950s United States. The term *beat* may have come from the feeling among group members of being “beaten down” by American culture, or from jazz musicians who would say, “I’m beat right down to my socks.”

The beats sought to live unconventional lives as fugitives from a culture they despised. Beat poets, writers, and artists harshly criticized what they considered the sterility and conformity of American life, the meaninglessness of American politics, and the emptiness of popular culture.

In 1956, 29-year-old beat poet Allen Ginsberg published a long poem called “Howl,” which blasted modern American life. Another beat member, **Jack Kerouac**, published *On the Road* in 1957. Although Kerouac’s book about his freewheeling adventures with a car thief and con artist shocked some readers, the book went on to become a classic in modern American literature.

✓ **Reading Check** **Summarizing** How did rock 'n' roll help create the generation gap?

▼ Jack Kerouac



African American Entertainers

Main Idea Although few African Americans performed on television, many had a profound impact on early rock 'n' roll.

Reading Connection What African American entertainers currently have shows on television? Read on to discover the discrimination nonwhite performers faced during the 1950s.



Picturing History

African American Entertainers Rhythm and blues music provided the roots of the 1950s rock 'n' roll sound. Did African American rock 'n' roll artists experience the same acceptance as artists like Elvis Presley? Why or why not?

out the world. Little Richard and Chuck Berry, for example, provided inspiration for the Beatles, whose music swept Britain and the world in the 1960s. Elvis's music transformed generations of rock 'n' roll bands that were to follow him and other pioneers of rock. Despite the innovations in music and the economic boom of the 1950s, not all Americans were part of the affluent society. For much of the country's minorities and rural poor, the American dream remained well out of reach.

Reading Check **Evaluating** What impact did American rock 'n' roll artists have on the rest of the world?

While artists such as Jack Kerouac rejected American culture, African American entertainers struggled to find acceptance in a country that often treated them as second-class citizens. With a few notable exceptions, television tended to shut out African Americans. In 1956, NBC gave a popular African American singer named **Nat King Cole** his own 15-minute musical variety show. In 1958, after 64 episodes, NBC canceled the show after failing to secure a national sponsor for a show hosted by an African American.

African American rock 'n' roll singers had more luck gaining acceptance. The talented African American singers and groups who recorded hit songs in the fifties included Chuck Berry, Ray Charles, Little Richard, and the Drifters. The latter years of the 1950s also saw the rise of several African American women's groups, including the Crystals, the Chiffons, the Shirelles, and the Ronettes. With their catchy, popular sound, these groups became the musical ancestors of the famous late 1960s groups Martha and the Vandellas and the Supremes.

Over time, the music of the early rock 'n' roll artists had a profound influence on music through-

SECTION 3 ASSESSMENT

Checking for Understanding

- Vocabulary** Define: device, controversial, generation gap.
- People and Terms** Identify: Ed Sullivan, Alan Freed, Elvis Presley, Jack Kerouac, Nat King Cole.
- Explain** what happened to motion pictures and radio when television became popular.

Reviewing Big Ideas

- Describing** What roles did African Americans play in television and rock 'n' roll?

Critical Thinking

- Comparing** How did the themes of television shows of the 1950s differ from the themes of the literature of the beat movement?
- Organizing** Use a graphic organizer similar to the one below to list the styles of music and literature that made up the new youth culture of the 1950s.



Analyzing Visuals

- Analyzing Photographs** Study the photograph on page 682. In the 1950s television game shows were a trend in programming. What new trends exist in television programming today? Do you think television is as popular today as it was in the 1950s? Explain your answer.

Writing About History

- Expository Writing** Imagine you are a beat writer in the 1950s. Explain to your readers how the themes you write about are universal themes that could apply to everyone. **CA 11WA2.4a**



JAMES DEAN had a brief but spectacular career as a film star. His role in *Rebel Without a Cause* made him an icon for American youth in the mid-50s. In 1955 Dean was killed in a car crash. He was 24.

"I guess I have as good an insight into this rising generation as any other young man my age. Therefore, when I do play a youth, I try to imitate life. *Rebel Without a Cause* deals with the problems of modern youth. . . . If you want the kids to come and see the picture, you've got to try to reach them on their own grounds. If a picture is psychologically motivated, if there is truth in the relationships in it, then I think that picture will do good."

—from an interview for *Rebel Without a Cause*

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VERBATIM

“It will make a wonderful place for the children to play in, and it will be a good storehouse, too.”

MRS. RUTH CALHOUN,
mother of three, on her backyard
fallout shelter, 1951

“Riddle: What’s college? That’s where girls who are above cooking and sewing go to meet a man they can spend their lives cooking and sewing for.”

ad for Gimbel’s department store
campus clothes, 1952

“Radioactive poisoning of the atmosphere and hence annihilation of any life on Earth has been brought within the range of technical possibilities.”

ALBERT EINSTEIN,
physicist, 1950

“If the television craze continues with the present level of programs, we are destined to have a nation of morons.”

DANIEL MARSH,
President of Boston University, 1950

“Every time the Russians throw an American in jail, the House Un-American Activities Committee throws an American in jail to get even.”

MORT SAHL,
comedian, 1950s

WINNERS & LOSERS



Poodle Cut

ARCHIVE PHOTOS

POODLE CUTS
Short, curly hairstyle gains wide popularity and acceptance

TV GUIDE
New weekly magazine achieves circulation of 6.5 million by 1959

PALMER PAINT COMPANY OF DETROIT
Sells 12 million paint-by-number kits ranging from simple landscapes and portraits to Leonardo da Vinci’s *The Last Supper*

THE DUCKTAIL
Banned in several Massachusetts schools in 1957

COLLIER’S
The respected magazine loses circulation, publishes its final edition on January 4, 1957

LEONARDO DA VINCI’S THE LAST SUPPER
Now everyone can paint their own copy to hang in their homes



The Ducktail

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