THE 1950s:

“Conservatism, Complacency, and Contentment”

OR

“Anxiety, Alienation, and Social Unrest” ??

1a. Baby Boom

It seems to me that every other young housewife I see is pregnant.

-- British visitor to America, 1958

1957 → 1 baby born every 7 seconds

2a. Baby Boom

Dr. Benjamin Spock

and the Anderson Quintuplets

1b. Baby Boom

Levittown, L. I.; “The American Dream”

1949 → William Levitt produced 150 houses per week.

$7,990 or $60/month with no down payment.

2a. Suburban Living:

The New “American Dream”

- 1 story high
- 12’x19’ living room
- 2 bedrooms
- tiled bathroom
- garage
- small backyard
- front lawn

By 1960 → 1/3 of the U. S. population in the suburbs.
2b. Suburban Living

SHIFTS IN POPULATION DISTRIBUTION, 1940-1970

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1940</th>
<th>1950</th>
<th>1960</th>
<th>1970</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Central Cities</td>
<td>31.6%</td>
<td>32.3%</td>
<td>32.6%</td>
<td>32.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suburbs</td>
<td>19.5%</td>
<td>23.8%</td>
<td>30.7%</td>
<td>41.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural Areas/Small Towns</td>
<td>48.9%</td>
<td>43.9%</td>
<td>36.7%</td>
<td>26.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

U. S. Bureau of the Census.

2c. Suburban Living: The Typical TV Suburban Families

The Donna Reed Show 1958-1966
Leave It to Beaver 1957-1963
Father Knows Best 1954-1958
The Ozzie & Harriet Show 1952-1966

3a. Consumerism

1950 → Introduction of the Diner’s Card

All babies were potential consumers who spearheaded a brand-new market for food, clothing, and shelter.

-- Life Magazine (May, 1958)

3b. Consumerism

3a.  Consumerism

4a. A Changing Workplace

Automation:
1947-1957 → factory workers decreased by 4.3%, eliminating 1.5 million blue-collar jobs.
By 1956 → more white-collar than blue-collar jobs in the U. S.
Computers → Mark I (1944), First IBM mainframe computer (1951).

Corporate Consolidation:
By 1960 → 600 corporations (1/2% of all U. S. companies) accounted for 53% of total corporate income.

WHY?? Cold War military buildup.

4b. A Changing Workplace

New Corporate Culture:
“The Company Man”
1956 → Sloan Wilson’s The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit
5a. The Culture of the Car

Car registrations:
- 1945 → 25,000,000
- 1960 → 60,000,000

2-family cars doubles from 1951-1958

1956 → Interstate Highway Act → largest public works project in American history!
- Cost $32 billion.
- 41,000 miles of new highways built.

5b. The Culture of the Car

America became a more homogeneous nation because of the automobile.

5c. The Culture of the Car

The U. S. population was on the move in the 1950s.
NE & Mid-W → S & SW (“Sunbelt” states)

1955 → Disneyland opened in Southern California. (40% of the guests came from outside California, most by car.)

6a. Television

1946 → 7,000 TV sets in the U. S.
1950 → 50,000,000 TV sets in the U. S.

Television is a vast wasteland. → Newton Minnow, Chairman of the Federal Communications Commission, 1961
Mass Audience → TV celebrated traditional American values.

Truth, Justice, and the American way!

6B. Television - The Western

Davy Crockett
King of the Wild Frontier

The Lone Ranger
(and his faithful sidekick, Tonto):
Who is that masked man??

Sheriff Matt Dillon, Gunsmoke

6C. Television - Family Shows

Glossy view of mostly middle-class suburban life.

But...

Social Winners... AND... Loosers?

I Love Lucy

The Honeymooners:
7A. Teen Culture

In the 1950s → the word "teenager" entered the American language.

By 1956 → 13 mil. teens with $7 bil. to spend a year.

1951 → "race music" → "ROCK 'N ROLL"

Elvis Presley → "The King"

7B. Teen Culture

"Juvenile Delinquency" ???

1951 → J. D. Salinger's A Catcher in the Rye

Marlon Brando in The Wild One (1953)

James Dean in Rebel Without a Cause (1955)

7C. Teen Culture

The "Beat" Generation:

- Jack Kerouac → On The Road
- Allen Ginsberg → poem, "Howl"
- Neal Cassady
- William S. Burroughs

"Beatnik" → "Clean" Teen

7D. Teen Culture

Behavioral Rules of the 1950s:

- Obey Authority.
- Control Your Emotions.
- Don't Make Waves → Fit in with the Group.
- Don't Even Think About Sex!!

8A. Religious Revival

Today in the U. S., the Christian faith is back in the center of things. -- Time magazine, 1954

Church membership:
1940 → 64,000,000
1960 → 114,000,000

Television Preachers:

1. Catholic Bishop Fulton J. Sheen → "Life is Worth Living"
2. Methodist Minister Norman Vincent Peale → The Power of Positive Thinking
3. Reverend Billy Graham → ecumenical message; warned against the evils of Communism.

8B. Religious Revival

Hollywood: apex of the biblical epics.

- The Robe 1953
- The Ten Commandments 1956
- Ben Hur 1959

It's un-American to be un-religious!

-- The Christian Century, 1954
9a. Well-Defined Gender Roles

The ideal modern woman married, cooked and cared for her family, and kept herself busy by joining the local PTA and leading a troop of Campfire Girls. She entertained guests in her family's suburban house and worked out on the trampoline to keep her size 12 figure. -- Life magazine, 1956.

The ideal 1950s man was the provider, protector, and the boss of the house. -- Life magazine, 1955.

1956 → William H. Whyte, Jr. → The Organization Man.

A middle-class, white suburban male is the ideal.

9b. Well-Defined Gender Roles

Changing Sexual Behavior:

Alfred Kinsey:
1948 → Sexual Behavior in the Human Male
1953 → Sexual Behavior in the Human Female

Premarital sex was common.
Extramarital affairs were frequent among married couples.

Kinsey's results are an assault on the family as a basic unit of society, a negation of moral law, and a celebration of licentiousness. -- Life magazine, early 1950s.

10a. Progress Through Science

1951 → First IBM Mainframe Computer
1952 → Hydrogen Bomb Test
1953 → DNA Structure Discovered
1954 → Salk Vaccine Tested for Polio
1957 → First Commercial U. S. Nuclear Power Plant
1958 → NASA Created
1959 → Press Conference of the First 7 American Astronauts

10b. Progress Through Science

1957 → Russians launch SPUTNIK I

1958 → National Defense Education Act

10c. Progress Through Science

UFO Sightings skyrocketed in the 1950s.

Hollywood used aliens as a metaphor for whom??

10d. Progress Through Science

Atomic Anxieties:
- "Duck-and-Cover Generation"

Atomic Testing:
- 1946-1962 → U. S. exploded 217 nuclear weapons over the Pacific and in Nevada.
The 50s Come to a Close

1959 → Nixon–Khrushchev “Kitchen Debate”

Cold War ----> Technology & Affluence

Assess the validity of the above statement and explain how the decade of the 1950s laid the groundwork for the social and political turbulence of the 1960s.

Class Discussion Topic:

The postwar era witnessed tremendous economic growth and rising social contentment and conformity. Yet in the midst of such increasing affluence and comfortable domesticity, social critics expressed a growing sense of unease with American culture in the 1950s.

That's right sweetheart, dreams and goals are Satan's way of distracting you from making dinner.