

The 1950's Part 2



The Mood of the 1950's

- People felt *comfortable*
- Still recovering from years of depression and war so preferred *security* over adventure
- Wanted **better life for their children** than they had
- Now preferred *conformity* to individuality



Gender Roles



- With the end of the war, women who had been employed in factories and other key jobs were expected to “return to the kitchen”
- Their “jobs” were to raise the children and maintain the home
- Men of this time often judged themselves and others by what they could afford to buy with the money they earned
- Women were expected to play a supporting role for their husbands
- This meant dinner on the table when they came home from work and cleaning up after him and the rest of the family
- If you were a married woman who worked outside of the home it was usually because you had to and was seen as shameful in middle-class America

Were they all “Happy Housewives”?

- While many women gladly resumed their positions in the home after the war, not all women shared this view and wished for greater rights
- However, it would be another decade before the “Womens’ Rights” movement would really take off in America



Youth Culture



- Called the “**silent generation**”
- Most had little interest in problems of the larger world
- Strong economy meant young people **could now stay in school** instead of dropping out to help family pay bills

The “Birth of the Teenager”

- For the first time in American life, the concept of the “teenager” existed
- Instead of jumping right from childhood into adulthood and working life, adolescents now had more leisure time and could enjoy just being a teen
- Devoted their energies to pursuing **entertainment** and **fun**

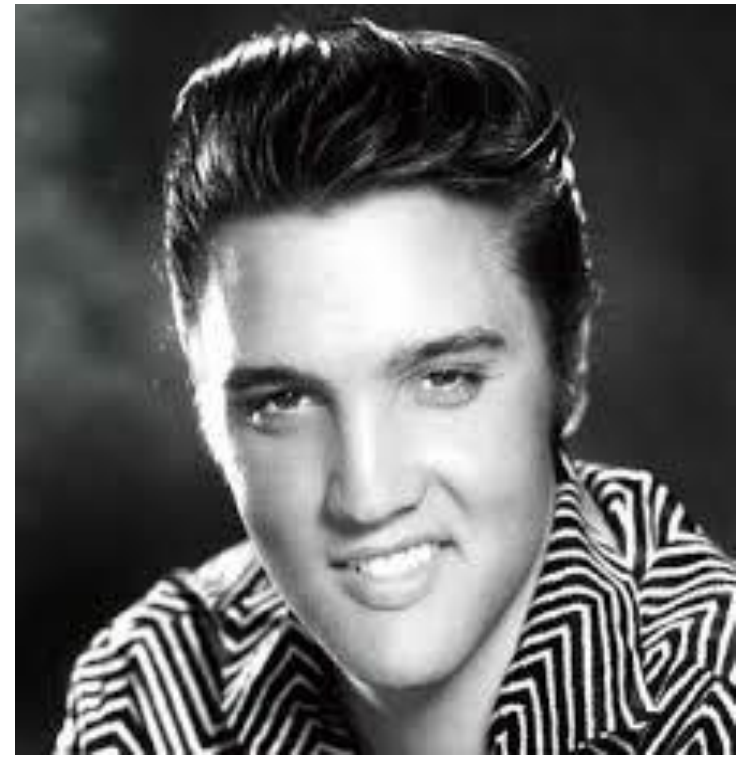


Teen Culture

- Ads and movies **created image of** what it meant *to be a teenager*
- Boys in varsity letter sweaters
- Girls in **bobby socks** and **poodle skirts**
- These images created a greater sense of **conformity in style** – wanted to have the “in look”



Rock n' Roll



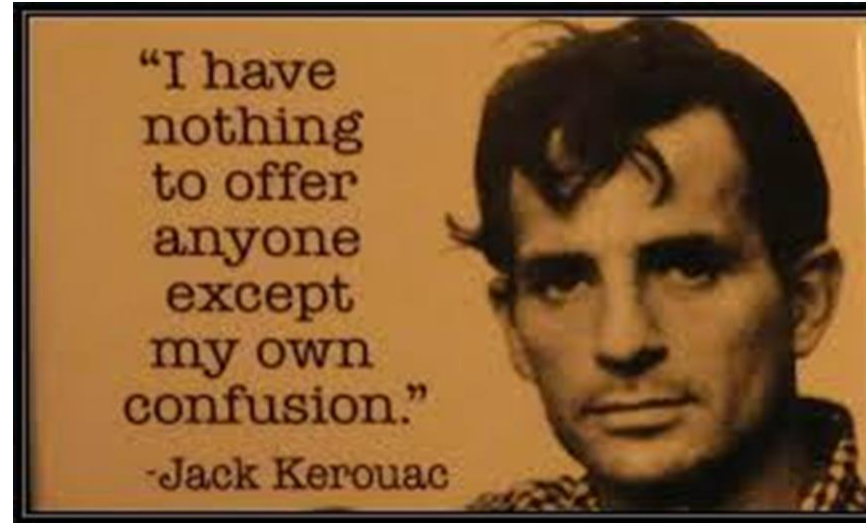
- **Rock and roll first introduced – gave teens something rebellious**
- Chuck Berry, Little Richard and Elvis
- Screaming teenage girls and **large record sales**
- Parents thought it was devil's music and tried to ban it – made it more popular

Challenges to Conformity

- While most wanted to fit in, **a few rejected the values of their parents** and society and **felt misunderstood and alone**
- **Jack Kerouac** and **Allen Ginsberg** were two of the leaders of what became known as the **“beat generation”**
- Often dressed in ways that showed their disdain for pop culture and the conformity of others in society
- Popularized wearing black, with a beret and goatee
- Inspired the “hippies” that would arise a decade later during the anti-war movement of the 60’s



Beatniks



- **Beatniks** – members of the “**Beat Generation**” – embraced poetry, art, and more meaningful ideas and **rejected materialism and the conformity** of mainstream America
- Author **Jack Kerouac**, the spiritual leader of the beatniks, gathered with others in coffee houses in San Francisco, California, to share ideas and experiences.
- Wrote his best-selling novel, *On the Road*, on a 250-foot roll of paper not using standard punctuation or paragraph structure to reflect his open approach to life

Resurgence in Religion

- In the 1950's Americans, who had drifted away from religion in earlier years, flocked back to their churches or synagogues.
- The **new interest in religion** was a response in part to the cold-war struggle against "godless communism"
- Some looked to religion to find hope in the face of the threat of nuclear war



“One Nation Under God”



- In 1954 Congress added the words “under God” to the Pledge of Allegiance, and the next year it required the phrase “In God We Trust” to appear on all American currency.
- Like other aspects of American life, religion became more commercial. Those in need could call Dial-a-Prayer for the first time, and new slogans such as “The family that prays together stays together” became commonplace.
- Evangelists, like Billy Graham, used radio and TV to carry their messages to more people than ever before.

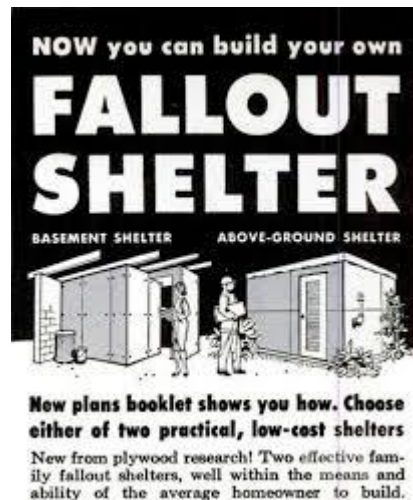
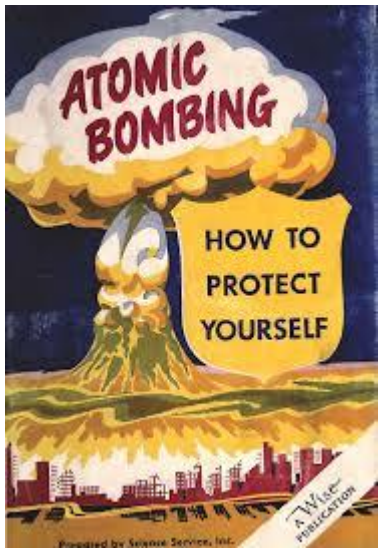
Politics



- WWII war hero **Dwight Eisenhower** (or Ike as he was affectionately called) won the presidential election in 1952 and 1956 (his slogan was “**I like Ike**”)
- As a **republican** he scaled back some of the social programs that the democrats Truman and FDR supported
- Republican ideas – **cut spending, reduce taxes**, and balance the budget
- Continued America’s **Cold War** against the Soviet Union and Communism

Bomb Shelters

- The fear of communism and nuclear war ran deeper than just McCarthy and in the government.
- Some families began to build “fallout shelters” underground to be used in the event of a nuclear war
- Ranged in cost from \$100 Basic models to \$5,000 suites



“Duck and Cover”

- Duck and Cover Drills were practiced in schools all over America like lock-down drills are today
- Kids would be told to go under their desks and cover their heads for protection
- Clearly not going to save you, but psychologically made people feel a greater sense of safety
- “Bert the Turtle” cartoon taught kids what to do in the event of a nuclear bomb



Write a Letter

- Imagine you are WWII veteran living in the 1950's. *Write a letter to a friend or relative explaining the changes you have seen since the pre-war days of the Great Depression. Incorporate at least 5 facts (and number or underline them!) from the power point about the 1950's. Be sure to discuss the *improvements to your daily life* as well as the *opportunities now available* to you.*



Beat Art & Poetry

- Imagine you are a *Beat* poet or artist
- Write a **poem** (at least 5 stanzas/10 lines) *or* **draw an image** that expresses your rejection of the mainstream values of 1950's America including, *materialism* (obsession with buying new products) and *conformity* (acting the same as everyone else)
- Keep it appropriate!

