
THROUGH THE PICTURE WINDOW: SOCIETY AND CULTURE, 1945–1960

CHAPTER OBJECTIVES

After you finish reading and studying this chapter, you should be able to

1. Account for the emergence of a consumer culture in the prosperous postwar era.
2. Discuss the relationships among the baby boom, the growth of suburbs, the youth culture, and consumerism in the 1950s.
3. Describe the growth of suburbs in the United States after World War II.
4. Illustrate the widespread conformity in American culture in the 1950s.
5. Understand the ideas of the major critics of conformity.
6. Explain the artistic and literary dissent beginning in the 1950s.

CHAPTER OUTLINE

- I. Postwar economy
 - A. Growth and prosperity
 1. Military spending
 2. International trade dominance
 3. Technological innovation
 4. Baby boom and consumer demand
 - B. GI Bill of Rights
 1. Economic measure
 2. Veterans Administration
 3. Benefits and effects
 4. Participants

- C. Consumer culture
 1. Television
 - a. Popularity
 - b. “Electronic hearth”
 2. Dispersion of affluence
 - a. Labor and blacks
 - b. Exceptions
 3. Marketing and packaging
 4. Credit cards
- D. Growth of suburbs
 1. Rural-to-urban migration
 2. Levittowns
 3. Automobiles and roads
 4. “White flight”
- E. African-American migration
 1. Reasons for moving
 2. Effects on northern cities
- II. Postwar conformity
 - A. Corporate life
 1. White-collar jobs
 2. Large corporations
 - B. Women and the cult of domesticity
 - C. Religion
 1. Growth in church membership
 - a. Religious revival
 - b. Patriotism
 2. Reverend Norman Vincent Peale and positive thinking
 3. Neo-orthodoxy
 - a. Critical of religiosity
 - b. Reinhold Niebuhr
 - D. Social critics of conformity
 1. John Kenneth Galbraith’s *The Affluent Society*
 2. *The Crack in the Picture Window*
 3. David Riesman and *The Lonely Crowd*
 - E. Youth culture
 1. Consumerism at shopping malls
 2. Permissive parents
 3. Juvenile delinquency
 4. Mobility
 - F. Rock ‘n’ roll
 1. Origins
 2. Bridge between white and black music
 3. Elvis Presley

- 4. Vehicle for youth revolt 1957
 - 5. Controversial 1957
- III. Alienation and liberation in the arts 1958
- A. Drama

- 1. Oppressiveness of mass culture
- 2. Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*

- B. The novel
- 1. The individual's struggle for survival
 - 2. *From Here to Eternity* by James Jones
 - 3. Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man*

- C. Painting
- 1. Edward Hopper and desolate loneliness
 - 2. Abstract expressionism
 - a. Violent and chaotic modern society
 - b. Jackson Pollock
 - c. Willem de Kooning, Mark Rothko, et al.

- D. The Beats
- 1. Liberation of self-expression
 - 2. Greenwich Village background
 - 3. *Howl* by Allen Ginsberg
 - 4. Jack Kerouac's *On the Road*
 - 5. Anti-heroes
 - a. James Dean and Marlon Brando
 - b. Mort Sahl and Lenny Bruce
 - c. Bob Dylan

KEY ITEMS OF CHRONOLOGY

- Servicemen's Readjustment Act 1944
- Invention of mechanical cotton picker 1944
- Saul Bellow, *Dangling Man* 1946
- Benjamin Spock, *The Common Sense Book of Baby and Child Care* 1946
- The first Levittown constructed 1947
- Arthur Miller, *Death of a Salesman* 1949
- David Riesman, *The Lonely Crowd* 1950
- James Jones, *From Here to Eternity* 1951
- Norman Vincent Peale, *The Power of Positive Thinking* 1952
- Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man* 1952
- "One nation under God" added to the Pledge of Allegiance 1954
- "In God We Trust" placed on money 1955
- Allen Ginsburg, *Howl* 1956
- John Keats, *The Crack in the Picture Window* 1956

VOCABULARY BUILDING

Listed below are some words or phrases used in this chapter. Look in the dictionary for the meaning of each term you do not know.

- chasm provincial
- spawn gouge
- infusion homogenize
- dismantle dint
- differentiate flux
- gloss harangue
- corrosive lambast
- fester inculcate
- mask sedate

TERMS TO MASTER

Listed below are some important people or terms with which you should be familiar after your study of this chapter. Identify each name or term.

- 1. Servicemen's Readjustment Act 20. rock 'n' roll
- 2. Veterans Administration 21. Alan Freed
- 3. baby boom 22. Elvis Presley
- 4. Sunbelt 23. Arthur Miller
- 5. William Levitt 24. *Death of a Salesman*
- 6. Levittown 25. James Jones
- 7. white flight 26. *From Here to Eternity*
- 8. white collar 27. Ralph Ellison
- 9. "In God We Trust" 28. *Invisible Man*
- 10. Norman Vincent Peale 29. Jackson Pollock
- 11. "positive thinking" 30. abstract expressionism
- 12. neo-orthodoxy 31. Saul Bellow
- 13. Reinhold Niebuhr 32. *Dangling Man*
- 14. John Kenneth Galbraith 33. the Beats
- 15. the affluent society 34. Allen Ginsberg
- 16. David Riesman 35. *Howl*
- 17. *The Lonely Crowd* 36. Jack Kerouac
- 18. Benjamin Spock 37. *On the Road*
- 19. juvenile delinquency

- vaunted
- regiment (v.)
- surmount
- garner
- pagan
- vile
- melancholy
- bohemian
- affinity
- vagabond
- existential
- pantheon

EXERCISES FOR UNDERSTANDING

When you have finished reading the chapter, answer each of the following questions. If you have difficulty, go back and reread the section of the chapter related to the question.

Multiple-Choice Questions

Select the letter of the choice that best completes the statement.

1. Higher education became much more widespread due to
 - A. suburbanization.
 - B. the migration of blacks out of the South.
 - C. the baby boom.
 - D. the GI Bill.
2. After World War II, a significant migration occurred from
 - A. cities to suburbs.
 - B. the rural South to the rural North and Midwest by southern African Americans.
 - C. the South, Southwest, and West to the Northeast.
 - D. rural areas to central cities.
3. In 1970, most Americans lived
 - A. in cities.
 - B. in suburbs.
 - C. in the South.
 - D. along the Pacific coast.
4. William Levitt was the leader of
 - A. neo-orthodoxy in religion.
 - B. the Beats.
 - C. the suburban revolution.
 - D. the black migration out of the South.
5. In the postwar era, big business grew because
 - A. labor union contracts favored large companies.
 - B. government contracts during wartime had favored big business concentration.

- C. members of "the lonely crowd" preferred to work for large corporations.
 - D. all of the above
6. White-collar workers
 - A. were professionals, such as doctors and lawyers.
 - B. worked only for large corporations.
 - C. made a higher hourly wage than blue-collar workers.
 - D. outnumbered blue-collar workers by 1960.
 7. The ideal for middle-class women in the 1950s was to be
 - A. an independent white-collar professional.
 - B. a wife and mother.
 - C. employed outside the home.
 - D. like Rosie the Riveter.
 8. Examples of conformity in the 1950s included
 - A. Levittowns.
 - B. the growing memberships in social organizations.
 - C. the religious revival of the 1950s.
 - D. all of the above
 9. The religious revival of the 1950s was spurred by
 - A. the cold war.
 - B. television.
 - C. a mobile population's need for community.
 - D. all of the above
 10. Norman Vincent Peale was a leading exponent of
 - A. modern art.
 - B. neo-orthodox religion.
 - C. domesticity for women.
 - D. positive thinking.
 11. One likely cause of juvenile delinquency during the 1950s was the
 - A. greater mobility provided by cars.
 - B. large baby boom generations.
 - C. wide dispersion of television.
 - D. rapid growth of suburban communities.
 12. "Love and responsibility" for others caused pain, according to
 - A. Reinhold Niebuhr.
 - B. William Levitt.
 - C. Norman Vincent Peale.
 - D. Jackson Pollock.
 13. The dominant American personality had become "other-directed," according to
 - A. John Kenneth Galbraith.
 - B. David Riesman.

- C. Benjamin Spock.
 - D. Allen Ginsberg.
14. John Keats's *The Crack in the Picture Window* attacked
 - A. the new television culture.
 - B. neo-orthodox religion.
 - C. suburbia.
 - D. rock 'n' roll and the youth culture.
 15. A "pack of oddballs who celebrate booze, dope, sex, and despair" was Time's description of
 - A. C. Wright Mills, John Kenneth Galbraith, and John Keats.
 - B. the Beat writers, poets, painters, and musicians.
 - C. abstract expressionists.
 - D. white-collar residents of suburbs.

True-False Questions

Indicate whether each statement is true or false.

1. Defense spending was the most important contributor to economic growth after World War II.
2. The postwar purchasing frenzy was caused by consumer demand that had been pent up during the war.
3. The suburban boom was stimulated by favorable government mortgage policies.
4. The most popular household product after World War II was the air conditioner.
5. Most blacks who migrated to the North lived in the suburbs.
6. The gap between average incomes of whites and blacks narrowed during the prosperous 1950s.
7. White flight described the migration to the new Sunbelt.
8. "In God We Trust" became mandatory on American money in 1955.
9. "One nation under God" was added to all U.S. currency in 1955.
10. The advocates of neo-orthodoxy believed Norman Vincent Peale represented "religiousness without religion."
11. According to David Riesman, the inner-directed person lived according to a set of basic values similar to the Protestant work ethic.
12. Elvis Presley coined the term "rock 'n' roll."
13. In the 1950s most major novels celebrated American life and had happy endings.

14. Ralph Ellison wrote *Invisible Man*.
15. Bob Dylan first recorded "Howl" and "On the Road" in 1959.

Essay Questions

1. What factors contributed to the economic growth and prosperity of the postwar period?
2. How was the growth of suburbs a key to other changes in postwar American society?
3. What were the major components of the postwar consumer society?
4. In what ways did conformity characterize the postwar American? Was it a characteristic peculiar to the period?
5. In what ways did innovation characterize the postwar American? Was it a characteristic peculiar to the period?
6. What happened in U.S. religious life after World War II?
7. What was the "youth culture" of the 1950s and how did it resemble or differ from the larger culture?
8. Who were the important contemporary critics of life in the 1950s and what were their criticisms?

ANSWERS TO MULTIPLE-CHOICE AND TRUE-FALSE QUESTIONS

Multiple-Choice Questions

1-D, 2-A, 3-B, 4-C, 5-B, 6-D, 7-B, 8-D, 9-D, 10-D, 11-A, 12-A, 13-B, 14-C, 15-B

True-False Questions

1-T, 2-T, 3-T, 4-F, 5-F, 6-F, 7-F, 8-T, 9-F, 10-T, 11-T, 12-F, 13-F, 14-T, 15-F