

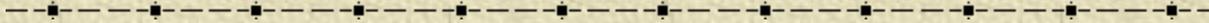


Chapter Twenty-Seven

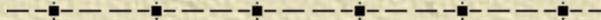
**America at Midcentury,
1952–1963**



Part One:



Introduction



Chapter Focus Questions

- ✦ What characterized post-World War II prosperity?
- ✦ What was the ideal of suburban life? What was the reality?
- ✦ What characterized the emergence of youth culture?
- ✦ What were the criticisms of television and mass culture?
- ✦ What characterized foreign policy in the Eisenhower years?
- ✦ Who was John F. Kennedy and what was the promise of a New Frontier?



Part Two:

Popular Music in Memphis

Memphis

- ✦ Memphis was a rapidly growing segregated city with whites and blacks of various classes.
- ✦ Elvis Presley listened to both “white” and “black” music.
- ✦ Sam Phillips, a white producer, recognized that Elvis could sing with the emotional intensity and power of black performers.
- ✦ Elvis blended black styles of music with white styles to help create a new style of music.
- ✦ Rock ‘n’ roll united teenagers and gave them the feeling that it was *their* music (and misunderstood by adults).



Part Three:

**American Society at
Midcentury**

The Eisenhower Presidency

- ✦ President Dwight D. Eisenhower inspired confidence and adopted a middle-of-the-road style.
- ✦ He ran the government in a businesslike, cooperative manner, pursuing policies that helped private companies and allowing practices that harmed on the environment.
- ✦ He also rejected calls from conservatives to dismantle the welfare state.
- ✦ Although his presidency included two brief recessions, he presided over an extensive increase in real wages.

Subsidizing Prosperity

- ✦ The federal government helped subsidize this prosperity by providing loans for homes and assisting the growth of suburbs.
- ✦ One of the first planned communities was built by William Levitt and encompassed 17,000 homes, without a single African-American resident.
- ✦ The federal government:
 - ◆ paid for veterans' college education
 - ◆ built an interstate highway system
 - ◆ following the Russian launch of a satellite spent millions on education

Suburban Life

- ✦ Suburban life:
 - ◆ strengthened the domestic ideal
 - ◆ provided a model of the efficient, patient suburban wife for television
- ✦ Suburban growth corresponded with an increase in church attendance.
- ✦ Chart: Growth of Suburbs
- ✦ Popular religious figures stressed the importance of fitting in.

California and Suburban Life

- ✦ California came to embody postwar suburban life, with the cars connecting its components.
- ✦ Chart: L.A. County Population

Organized Labor and the AFL-CIO

- ✦ In the mid-1950s, trade unions reached a peak of membership and influence, especially in the Democratic Party.
- ✦ The merger of the AFL and the CIO marked the zenith of the unions.
- ✦ Total membership numbers declined after 1955 but new inroads were made in the public sector.

Lonely Crowds and Organizational Men

- ✦ Critics found the suburbs as dull and conformist—points that obscured the real class and ethnic differences found in many suburbs.
- ✦ David Reisman said that Americans had become overly conforming, less individualistic, and more peer-oriented.
- ✦ C. Wright Mills wrote how people sold not only their time and energy but their personalities.

The Expansion of Higher Education

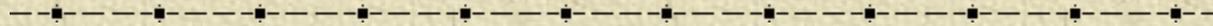
- ✦ The postwar baby boom was paralleled by a tremendous expansion of higher education, assisted by extensive federal aid.
- ✦ Colleges accepted the values of corporate culture with 20 percent of all graduates majoring in business.
- ✦ Students tried to conform to the corporate values.

Health and Medicine

- ✦ Immunization begun during the war continued after peace.
- ✦ New medicines, like antibiotics, and new vaccines against diseases like polio allowed many Americans to live healthier lives.
- ✦ Doctor shortages, however, meant that poor and elderly Americans and those in rural areas lacked access to these improvements.
- ✦ The AMA did nothing to increase the flow of new doctors and discouraged any national health insurance.



Part Four:



Youth Culture



The Youth Market

- ✦ The word “teenager” became common in the American language after WWII.
- ✦ Young people’s numbers grew and their purchasing power increased.
- ✦ The marketplace, schools, and mass media reinforced the notion of teenagers as a special community.

“Hail! Hail! Rock ‘n’ Roll”

- ✦ Structural changes in the media transformed radio into a music-dominated medium.
- ✦ In addition, small independent record labels promoted black rhythm-and-blues artists, many of whom “crossed over” to white audiences.
- ✦ Established record companies offered toned-down white “cover” versions that frequently outsold the originals.
- ✦ Alan Freed, a white Cleveland disc jockey, promoted black artists and set the stage for the first major white performer who could play rock ‘n’ roll: Elvis Presley.
- ✦ Black singer-guitarist Chuck Berry was probably the most influential artist after Elvis.

Almost Grown

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- ✦ Rock 'n' roll united teenagers, giving them a feeling it was *their* music and focused on the trials and tribulations of teenage life.
 - ✦ Ironically, teenagers were torn between their identification with youth culture and the desire to become adults as quickly as possible.
 - ✦ Many adult observers saw rock 'n' roll as unleashing youthful passions in a dangerous way.
 - ✦ Rock 'n' roll was closely linked to juvenile delinquency.
 - ✦ Popular films like *The Wild One* and *Rebel Without a Cause* showed the different reactions of youth and adults to the growing generation gap.



Part Five:

Mass Culture and Its Discontents

Television: Tube of Plenty

- ✦ Television's development as a mass medium was eased by the prior existence of radio.
- ✦ The high cost of TV changed advertising as sponsors left production to others.
- ✦ Early TV replicated radio formats including situation comedies set among urban ethnic families.
- ✦ By the late 1950s, situation comedies featured idealized, white suburban families.
- ✦ As revenues declined, movie studios sold off old films and began to produce westerns and cop shows for TV.
- ✦ Television also created overnight fads and sensations.
- ✦ Chart: Radio and Television Ownership, 1940–1960

Television and Politics

- ✦ Prime-time shows made no references to contemporary political issues and avoided being tainted with communist influence.
- ✦ Television did bring important congressional hearings before mass audiences and by 1952, slick ads began to shape presidential campaigns.

Culture Critics

- ✦ The new mass culture prompted a growing chorus of critics.
- ✦ Intellectual critics bemoaned the great “Middlebrow Culture” that was driving out high culture.
- ✦ The Beats articulated some of the sharpest dissents from conformity, celebrating spontaneity, jazz, open sexuality, drug use, and American outcasts.
- ✦ The Beats foreshadowed the mass youth rebellion of the 1960s.



Part Six:

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The Cold War Continued

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The “New Look” in Foreign Affairs

- ✦ Eisenhower favored a reliance on American nuclear superiority in favor of more expensive conventional forces.
- ✦ Secretary of State John Foster Dulles called for a policy of rollback to reverse communist gains.
- ✦ This “new look” for American foreign policy was in conflict with Eisenhower’s cautious approach.

Foreign Affairs

- ✦ Ike refused to intervene to aid anticommunist uprisings in East Berlin and Hungary. After Stalin died, new Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev raised hopes for a warming of relations.
- ✦ Following some steps toward a more peaceful coexistence, the thaw quickly froze when the Soviets shot down an American spy plane.

Covert Action and Intervention

- ✦ Eisenhower favored covert action.
- ✦ The CIA sponsored paramilitary operations in the Third World when newly emerging nations sought to recover resources from foreign investors.
- ✦ American interventions in Iran overthrew the government and helped secure oil concessions.
- ✦ Support for Israel was challenged when Ike rejected European appeals to help seize and return the Suez Canal to Britain.

Intervention in the Caribbean

✦ Map: The U. S. in the Caribbean

✦ In just one of several actions, the CIA-sponsored coup overthrew the government of Jacobo Arbenz Guzman in Guatemala.

Vietnam

- ✦ The United States provided France with massive military aid in its struggle to hold on to Vietnam.
- ✦ Ike rejected the use of American ground troops, but believed that if Vietnam fell the rest of Southeast Asia would fall like dominoes.
- ✦ Vietnam was temporarily divided at the 17th parallel.

Ike's Warning

- ✦ A growing public anxiety over nuclear weapons led to small but well-publicized protests.
- ✦ Ike expressed his own doubts when he warned the nation of the growing “military industrial complex.”



Part Seven:

**John F. Kennedy
and the New
Frontier**

The Election of 1960

✦ Map: the Election of 1960

- ✦ JFK was a young man from a wealthy Irish-Catholic family in Massachusetts who became a senator.
- ✦ After winning the Democratic nomination, Kennedy won a narrow victory over Republican vice-president Richard Nixon.
- ✦ His inauguration brought out a bevy of intellectuals who heard him inspire a sense of sacrifice among young Americans.

New Frontier Liberalism

- ✦ JFK proposed a liberal agenda but conservatives in Congress prevented much of it from passing.
- ✦ JFK supported efforts to improve employment equality for women.
- ✦ He used fiscal policy to stimulate the economy.
- ✦ JFK committed the country to expanding its manned space program.
- ✦ JFK's greatest achievement may have been strengthening the executive branch of government.

Kennedy and the Cold War

- ✦ In his three years as president, JFK's foreign policy shifted from containment to easing tensions.
- ✦ He expanded both nuclear and conventional weapons and created the Green Berets who fought unsuccessfully to stop communist movements in Laos and Vietnam.
- ✦ JFK supported the Alliance for Progress, ostensibly a Marshall Plan for Latin America.

The Cuban Revolution and the Bay of Pigs

- ✦ The Cuban Revolution brought Fidel Castro to power in 1959.
- ✦ Ike cut off aid when Castro began a land reform program and later the United States severed diplomatic relations.
- ✦ JFK implemented Ike's plan for a CIA-backed invasion by Cuban exiles.
- ✦ The plan failed, leading Castro to ask Khrushchev for help.

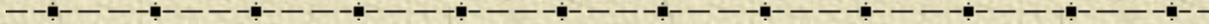
The Missile Crisis

- ✦ The Soviets began shipping missiles to Cuba.
- ✦ JFK rejected calls for an immediate attack but ordered a blockade on Cuba.
- ✦ The Soviets backed down and withdrew the missiles and JFK pledged not to invade Cuba.
- ✦ Kennedy tried to improve cooperation with the Soviets.

Assassination

- ✦ The November 22, 1963, assassination of Kennedy made him a martyr and raised questions about what he would have achieved, had he lived.

Part Eight:



Conclusion



America at Midcentury

- ✦ America in 1963 still enjoyed the postwar economic boom, but Kennedy's election had symbolized the changing of generations.
- ✦ Media: Chronology