

America at Mid-Century

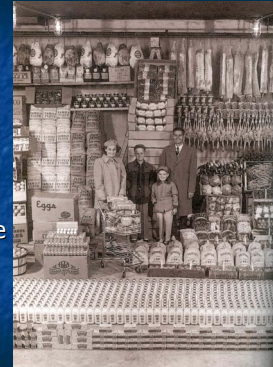
Affluence, Anxiety, and Rebellion



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The Affluent Society

- 60% middle-class
- highest standard of living in the nation's history
- 25% rise in real income 1946-59
- 62% families in 1960 owned home (43% in 1940)



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What makes affluence possible?

- Oligopolies (a few large producers controlling national and world markets)
 - 1970, top 4 firms produced 91% of motor vehicles, 90% breakfast foods, 72% of tires, 84% cigarettes, 70% detergents.
- Conglomerates combined companies in unrelated industries (diversification)
 - International Telephone and Telegraph (Continental Baking, Sheraton Hotels, Avis Rent-a-Car, home builders, Hartford Fire Insurance.)
- 3rd great merger wave (1890s and 1920s)

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Global Responsibilities and International Markets

- Exports increased
 - \$4 million (1940)
 - \$10 million (1950)
 - almost \$20 million (1960)
 - \$43 million (1970)
- Trade surplus of \$ 5 billion in 1960

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Domestic Consumerism

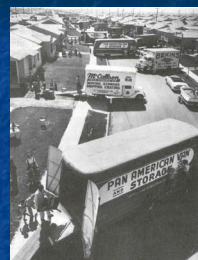
- \$140 billion in savings from WWII
- short-term consumer credit \$8.4 billion (1946) to \$45 billion (1958)
 - 1st credit card (1950)
- consumer appliances (washing machines, electric dryers, home freezers)
- Consumer use of electricity doubles during 1950s



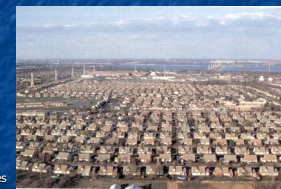
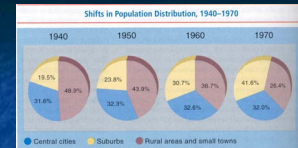
87% American families had at least one television set (1960)

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Suburbia



- 13 million new homes built in 1950s
 - most single-family, owner-occupied homes
 - 25% of all housing
 - 85% in suburbs
- > 40 million moved to suburbs (1945-1960)
- suburban malls (8 in 1945; 4,000 in 1960)
- Suburban industrial parks (Silicon Valley)



Levittown, Pennsylvania
Mass-produced homes (150/week) for less than \$8,000 (1947)

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Car Culture



1937 Chevrolet Bel Air



Ray Kroc purchased the rights to franchise McDonald's in 1954. Chain stores capitalized on the public's desire for uniformity and efficiency.

- 58 million cars purchased
- 90% of suburban families owned cars
- In 1960, avg. worker worked five-day week, 8 paid holidays, plus two weeks
- 1/7 of GNP spent on leisure and entertainment



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"Everyone has a Car"

"Our immediate decision to buy a car sprang from healthy instincts. Only later did I learn from bitter experience that in California, death was preferable to living without one....The nearest supermarket was about a half a kilometer south of our apartment, the regional primary school two kilometers east, and my son's kindergarten even farther away. A trip to the post office - an undertaking, to the bank - an ordeal, to work - an impossibility....At first perhaps people relished the freedom and independence a car provided. You get in, sit down, and grab the steering wheel, your mobility exceeding that of any other generation....The result? A widely scattered city, its houses far apart, its streets stretched in all directions....Because greater distances mean more commuting and more commuting leads to more cars. More cars mean problems that push people even farther away from the city, which chases after them....Why bother parking, getting out, getting in, getting up and sitting down, when you can simply "drive in"? Mailboxes have their slots facing the road, at the level of the driver's hand. That is how dirty laundry is deposited, electricity and water bills paid. That is how love is made, how children are taken to school. That is how the anniversary wreath is laid on the graves of loved ones. There are drive-in movies. And, yes, we saw it with our own eyes: drive-in churches. Only in death is a man separated from his car and buried alone."

Hanoch Bartov, writer/journalist from Israel

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Sun Belt Growth

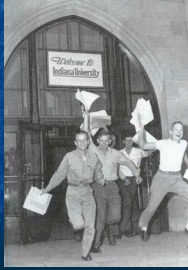


- Inexpensive land
- Unorganized labor
- Low taxes
- Warm climates
- Legacy of World War II

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Government Role in Subsidizing Prosperity: affirmative action for veterans, men, white Americans, and the middle-class

- 1944 Servicemen's Readjustment Act
 - GI Bill of Rights
 - unemployment compensation
 - 16 million veterans
- low-interest loans to purchase homes, farms, and small businesses
 - 1.3 million bought houses
- funds for job training and education
 - 7 million




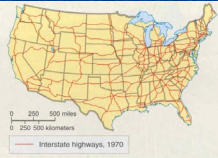
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Federal Housing Administration

- Low-interest mortgages for housing
- favored suburban single-family homes
- contrast to 1937 National Housing Act which funded public housing construction and provided subsidies for low-income families
- "If a neighborhood is to retain stability, it is necessary that properties shall continue to be occupied by the same social and racial classes."
 - FHA Underwriting Manual
- *Shelley v. Kraemer* (1948)
 - restrictive covenants unconstitutional, but still practiced
 - "No dwelling shall be used or occupied by members of other than the Caucasian race."
 - Levitt did not sell houses directly to blacks until 1960.

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Interstate Highway Act (1956)

- \$26 billion in federal funds to build 42,500 miles of road
- cold war context: allow military transportation and evacuation in case of nuclear attack

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Neighborhood Demolition and Deterioration of Public Transportation



- 1949-1967, urban renewal demolished 400,000 buildings
- displaced 1.4 million people

"Buses go once an hour along the city's boulevards and avenues, gathering all the wretched of the earth, the poor and the needy, the old ladies forbidden by their grandchildren to drive, and other eccentric types. But few people can depend on buses, even should they swear never to deviate from the fixed routes....There are no tramways. No one thought of a subway. Railroads - not now and not in the future."

■ Hanoch Bartov, Los Angeles

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Urban Migration

- Mexican Americans and the Permeable Border
 - 275,000 in 1950s
 - 444,000 in 1960s
- *Braceros* programs
 - WWII - 200,000 enter to harvest crops
 - 1951-1964 - 450,000
- Majority in urban areas by 1960s
 - Service and manufacturing jobs
- Puerto Ricans
 - 70,000 (1940) to 613,000 (1960)
 - 1st to migrate by air
- Cubans
 - 180,000 in 1959
- Asian migration
 - War Brides Act (1945)
 - 17,000 Koreans (1950-1965)
 - Asian ghettos
- African Americans
 - Reduction in cotton acreage (43 mill in 1929 to 15 mill in 1959)
 - Southern farm population 16.2 mill in 1930 to 5.9 mill in 1960
 - 3 million to Northern and Western cities (1940-1960)
- Native Americans
 - Termination (1953)
 - Terminate legal standing of native tribes
 - Move members off reservations



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Fighting the Cold War through education and economic development

- Military-Industrial Complex
- Eisenhower: "get more bang for the buck"
- hightech, capital intensive defense policy
- increased reliance on nuclear weapons and long-range delivery systems, less expensive than conventional forces
- 6,000 to 18,000 nuclear weapons (1958-1960)
- Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles (ICBMs)
 - no recall capability

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The Space Race

- *Sputnik* (1957) - Soviet launched 1st satellite
- National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) est. 1958



John Glenn becomes the 1st to orbit the earth in 1962

Neil Armstrong and "Buzz" Aldrin, Jr. land on the moon in July 1969.

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National Defense Education Act (NDEA) of 1958

- \$887 million for science, math, and foreign language education
- \$295 million in student loan funds
- 1.5 million attended in 1940 (15% of college-age youths) to 3.6 million in 1960 (>40%)

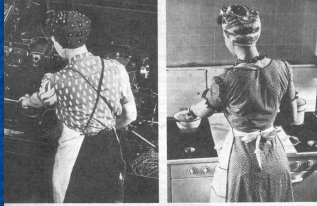
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Government subsidized growth of science and technology

- federal government underwrote 90% of research costs on aviation and space
- subsidized scientific instruments, automobile, and electronics industries
- 1/7 Americans owed job to military-industrial complex
- "For years, I thought what was good for the country was good for General Motors and vice versa."
 - "Engine Charlie" Wilson, Secretary of Defense, 1952

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Opportunity for all?



What's Become of Rosie the Riveter?

- Women constituted 47% of college students in 1920
 - 25% in 1950
 - 33% in 1960
- 50% male vs. 37% female students who started college received degrees
 - "The woman's fundamental status is that of her husband's wife, the mother of his children."
 - Talcott Parsons at Radcliffe College, 1949

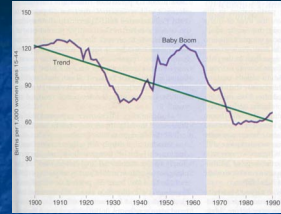
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The Mrs. Degree and the Baby Boom



"Of all the accomplishments of the American woman, the one she brings off with the most spectacular success is having babies."

Life Magazine, 1956



- Drop in avg. marriage age (22 for men; 20 for women)
 - 68% married (1960)
- women averaged 3.2 children in the 1950s (2.4 in 1930)

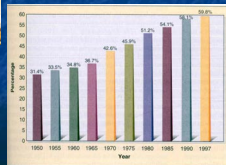
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Working the Double Shift



"Women must boldly announce that no job is more exacting, more necessary, or more rewarding than that of housewife and mother."

- 1/3 women worked outside of home
 - typical worker, married and had children
- 80% in typically female occupations (service, clerical, non-professional)
- women earned 53% of what men did (1950)



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"The Problem that Had No Name"

- "I felt totally fulfilled, totally happy. We were the perfect couple – Ted was supportive of me and I was supportive of him and we never argued. Well, we didn't know how. We'd had no experience with conflict... After the second baby, that was the first time I can remember conflict, feelings of being trapped, wondering what I was doing with my life... At one point I expressed some of these feelings, in a very tentative way, to Ted and he said, 'Well, if you feel that way, maybe we should get a divorce.' I was terrified. The idea of divorce was inconceivable. I never mentioned the subject again... At the same time, I got such pleasure, real physiological pleasure from my children – from playing with them, feeding them, watching them develop. Then we moved and Ted went into general practice and at about the same time I had another child. I became his secretary, his nurse, and I was also handling the children, keeping them out of his hair. And of course, we were also establishing our identity as the doctor and his wife, so there was a lot of socializing. It was a busy time. What amazes me now is that it never occurred me not to do this. His career was just my life. There came a time when I felt I didn't have the strength for all this and I started breaking down. I can remember going into the shower and screaming – in the shower so that no one could hear me. Even then I didn't have conscious thought of 'I hate this life' – I didn't think there was anything objectively wrong with the way I was living, just that I couldn't take it any more." Joy Wilner, Fifties Housewife

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"Nuclear" Families during the Cold War

- Rockets vs. consumer goods
- domesticity vs. female participation in the economy
- nuclear family and consumption as essence of American freedom



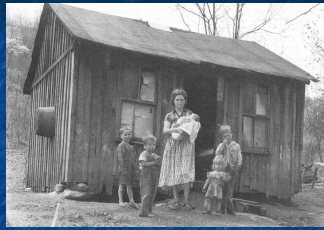
"kitchen debate": Nixon vs. Khrushchev at the American Exhibition in Moscow (1959)

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Race and Education

- African American enrollments increased
 - 37,000 (1941) to 90,000 (1961)
- but still only 5% of all college students (less than half the general population)
- majority attended black colleges
 - > 90% completion rate for African American women
- school segregation
 - Brown V. Board of Education* (1954)
 - "Separate educational facilities are inherently unequal."
 - problem of enforcement

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The Other America (1962)

40 million (22% of population) below subsistence-level and another 39 million just above (1960)

- senior citizens
- rural areas, including migrant farm workers, Native Americans on reservations, and farmers/miners of Appalachia
- urban ghettos and barrios
- families headed by single mothers

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Youth Culture and Rebellion



- Teenagers
- consumerism
- Sexuality
 - Kinsey Reports (1948 and 1953)
 - 90% men and 50% women had premarital intercourse
 - 50% men and 25% women in extramarital affairs
 - >1/3 men had homosexual experiences
- delinquency

Jack Kerouac and the "Beats": "Weariness with all the forms of the modern industrial state"

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Liberal idealism

- TV and politics
- "Ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country."



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The Way We Think We Were

- Affluence and suburban nuclear middle-class families
- Cold War subsidy of American affluence for particular groups
- The Other America
- Conformity, Discontent, and Rebellion

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