

During the 1950s in the United States, manufacturing and home construction were on the rise as the American economy was rising. The Korean War and the beginning of the Cold War created a politically conservative climate in the country, and the Cold War between the Soviet Union and the United States played out through the entire decade. The 1950s in the developed Western world are generally considered both socially conservative and highly materialistic in nature. The 1950s are noted in United States history as a time of approval and also, to a lesser extent, of rebellion.

Before the 1950's, there had been nearly 20 years of economic stagnation, thanks to the Depression and WWII. Lifestyles had been changed and social changes were made in response to the difficult conditions of the past years. When the war ended, and the veterans returned, America was finally ready to enjoy life.

When all these soldiers returned home to their sweethearts and started families, there was a huge housing crisis because no new houses had been built in 20 years or so, so people began pushing out to the edges of the cities, forming communities called suburbs.

The development of suburbia benefited many things, the most important the automobile business. Suburban houses were far from jobs, schools, businesses, and so on. With the car so popular, it became a status symbol. Shapes and styles changed regularly, and the companies and advertisers updated the trends constantly, encouraging people to buy new cars in order to look good.

During this time, men's and women's roles in society were reverted to the stereotypical notions of what each sex should be doing. During World War II, women had risen up in the workplace, taking the jobs of the men who were away at war. After the war, however, when men returned home, women returned to their places in the kitchen, while men took over the workforce again.

Women were expected to be good mothers and wives. Many families were able to support themselves on one income, the man's, and so there was no need for the women to work.

In the post-war years, with families settling down and making lives for themselves, there was a population explosion. The dramatic increase, commonly known as the baby boom, had influence throughout country, some good, some bad. Family life in the 1950's was focused on the children, and giving them the best possibilities. Schools had to be built at an enormous rate, and parents were expected to give their children any opportunity they could.

On the older end of the spectrum, there were the teenagers. They were the new generation, breaking away from their parents and defining itself in new ways. The teenagers of the 1950's were more self sufficient than their parents had been—they did not remember the Depression or WWII, and had no desire to save money. Before, any money made by children went towards long-term goals, like a college fund or a bike. Now, as this new middle class emerged in America, it created a whole new group of consumers: the young. The teens had an average weekly income of \$10.55, about the same as a whole family's disposable income 15 years before. Their purchases leaned towards the music-related industry, anything from records to radios. These teenagers affected the nation as they were the beginning of the youth culture, the first young people to really have an impact on the nation as a whole.

The music of the past generation had been polished and bland, as was the mood of the period, but rock and roll brought about a revolution in music which simultaneously reflected the changes going

on in the lives of the younger generation. The music of the early forties and fifties was slow and sentimental reflecting the hard times of the war.

Rock and roll had a powerful effect on society, especially the younger generation, because teenagers wanted to rebel so that they could break away from being reliable to their parents. It became so important because young people wanted anything to change the sweet suburban mood of their parents which to many adolescents hangs in the air like a family lie. The simplicity surrounding them caused teenagers to question authority and their lives, and it could only be the younger ones to realize that life wasn't perfect because they hadn't planned out their lives and they didn't yet know who they aspired to be. Since teenagers were still impressionable, they hadn't had the same outlook on life that everyone else did, that is what made the Fifties a turning point.

One of the major social changes of the 1950's was the "coming of age" of television and its effect on people's leisure habits and family life. While the first regular commercial broadcast had been in 1939, television broadcasting had been suspended during the war and did not take off until the 1950's. At first, television was only available on the East Coast between Boston and Washington, D.C., but by 1951 television could be viewed throughout the country.

Because of the rise of the television, the movie industry suffered several blows. Throughout the 1950's, theater audiences dropped radically. Hollywood produced twice as less films than before ww2. There were several reasons for the decline, the major one was the use of tv in modern homes. and Hollywood tried various methods to bring back its audience.

Television had three major effects: on the family, on the entertainment industry, and on the nation's politics. Television, in essence, changed the structure of the American family. Instead of gathering around to discuss the day's events, the family would gather around their television set. By 1959, the typical American family was watching six hours of television a day, seven days a week. Television united the family and shattered it at the same time. No longer did they meet and talk, they watched television. On the other hand, television gave them a common interest, binding them together.

Overall, the 1950's were a decade of transition and new beginnings. It was the time between the end of World War II and the political and social uprisings of the 1960's. During this period, the returning war veterans experienced an era of prosperity and development that changed the entire nation.