

Affluence and Anxiety



The Postwar Boom

- 1945–1960: Rapid economic growth
- 1960: Fear of another depression wanes

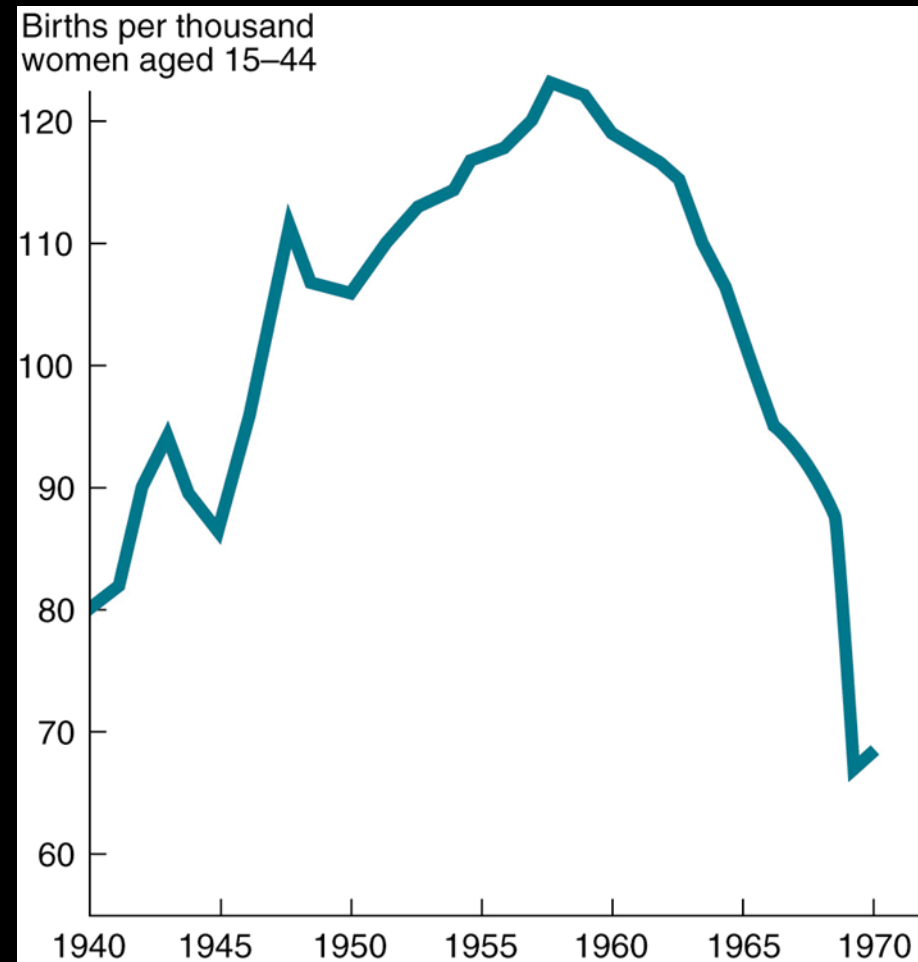


The increased free time of adolescents caused the rise of youth subcultures such as Mods.

Postwar Prosperity

- Stimuli to consumer goods industry:
 - Baby boom
 - Population shift to suburbia
- Increased defense spending
- Increase in capital investments
- Employment expands

Birthrate, 1940–1970



Postwar Prosperity: Lingering Problems

- Agricultural overproduction, low prices
- Older industrial areas declined
- 1957–1958: Recession slowed decade's economic growth

Life in the Suburbs

- Suburbia inhabited by middle class
- Characteristics of suburbs
 - Dependence on the automobile
 - Family togetherness
- Traditional feminism discouraged
- Entrance of more women into workplace stimulated new feminism

The Good Life?

- Consumerism the dominant social theme of the 1950s
- Quality of life left Americans anxious and dissatisfied

Areas of Greatest Growth

- Church membership
- School attendance
- Television watching

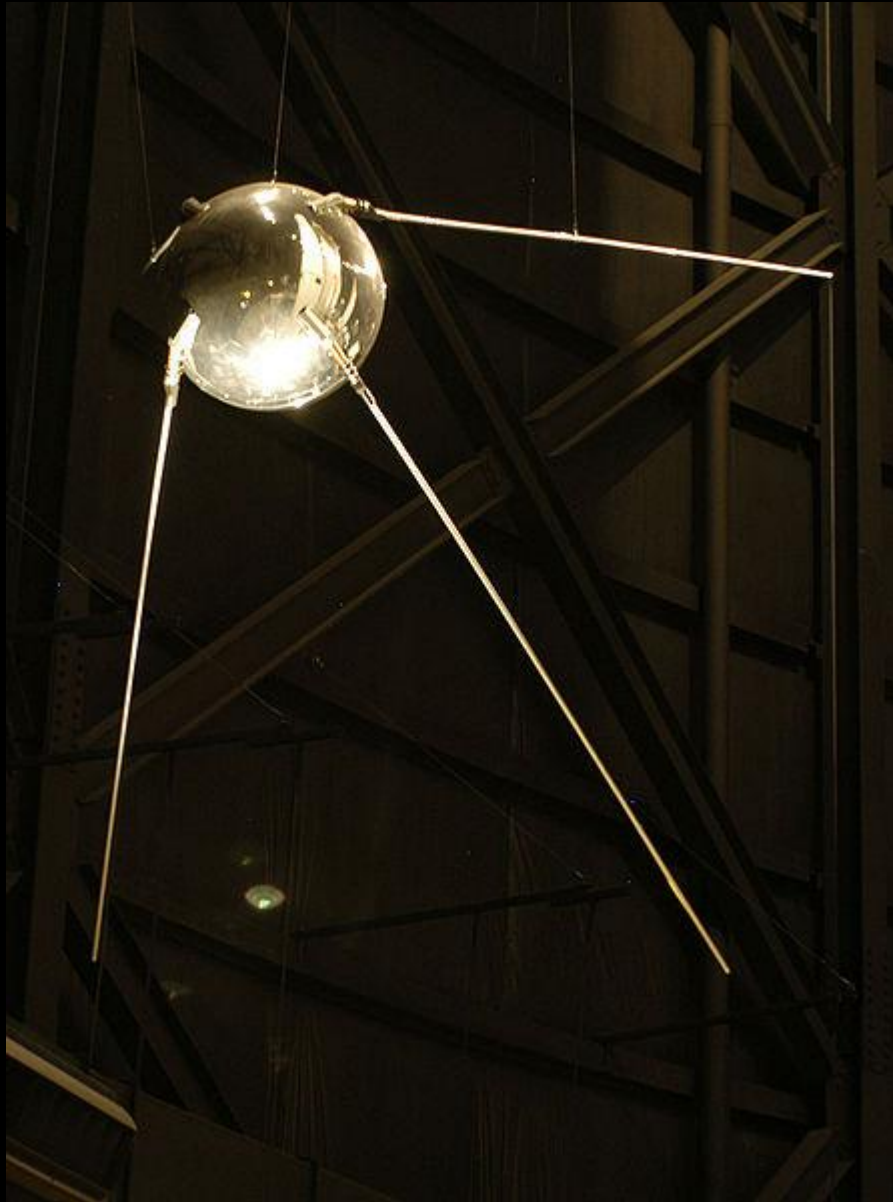
In the mid-1950s Elvis Presley became the leading figure of the newly popular sound of rock and roll.



Critics of the Consumer Society

- Social critics of suburban culture
 - John Keats
 - William Whyte
 - David Riesman
- C. Wright Mills criticized corporations
- Jack Kerouac, “Beat” artists promote counterculture

The Reaction to *Sputnik*



- 1957: Russians launched *Sputnik*
- American response
 - National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA)
 - National Defense Education Act—upgrade the teaching of science
- Sense of failure, declined by 1960

Farewell to Reform

- Spirit of reform waned in postwar years
- Reasons:
 - Growing affluence reduced sense of grievance
 - Americans eager to enjoy their new prosperity



Truman and the Fair Deal

- Fair Deal attempted to expand New Deal
 - Medical Insurance for all Americans
 - Revived and strengthened Fair Employment Practices Commission (FEPC)
 - Federal aid to education

Truman and the Fair Deal

- Fair Deal failed
 - Doctor's lobby convinced people that insurance plan was "socialized medicine"
 - Southerners opposed FEPC and aid to education
- Truman's achievements
 - Consolidated Roosevelt's reforms
 - Set the agenda for future attempts to expand New Deal

Eisenhower's Modern Republicanism

- Eisenhower left New Deal intact
 - Raised minimum wage and expanded Social Security
 - Created Department of Health, Education, and Welfare
- 1954: Democrats regained Congress
- 1956: Highway Act created interstate highway system
 - Stimulated the economy
 - Shaped metropolitan growth patterns
- Overall, Eisenhower years were politically moderate

The Interstate Highway System



The Election of 1956

Candidate	Party	Popular Vote	Electoral Vote
Eisenhower	Republican	35,585,245	457
Stevenson	Democratic	26,030,172	73

The Struggle Over Civil Rights

- Cold War prompted quest for American moral superiority
- Legal discrimination against African Americans challenged U.S. self-image
- African Americans expected more in postwar America

Civil Rights as a Political Issue

- Truman's civil-rights legislation failed
- 1948: African American vote gave Truman his margin of victory
- Civil rights made part of the liberal Democratic agenda
- Truman integrated the armed forces

Desegregating the Schools

- 1954: *Brown v. Board of Education*
 - Segregated schools unconstitutional
 - Desegregate “with all deliberate speed”
- Massive resistance in Deep South
- 1957: Eisenhower’s actions
 - Federal troops sent to Little Rock, Arkansas
 - Commission on Civil Rights established

The Beginnings of Black Activism

- NAACP: Pressed for civil rights in courts
- 1955: Martin Luther King, Jr. led **Montgomery bus boycott**
- 1956: Southern Christian Leadership Conference directed at anti-segregation
- Sit-ins protested segregation laws
- 1960: Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee

Restoring National Confidence

- American people more optimistic in 1960 than in 1950
- Fear of economic depression waned
- Fear of Cold War continued
- Growing recognition of incompatibility of racial injustice with American ideals