Chapter Twenty-Seven

America at Mid-Century
1952-1963
Part One:

Introduction
America at Midcentury

- What does this photo indicate about American families at midcentury? Who is missing from this photo?
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:

American Communities
Popular Music in 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: strengthen the domestic ideal
  - provided a model of the efficient, patient suburban wife for television
- Suburban growth corresponded with an increase in church attendance.
- 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.
L.A. County Population

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1920</td>
<td>936,455</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1950</td>
<td>4,151,687</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>7,477,503</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- White: 52.9%
- Hispanic: 27.4%
- Black: 12.6%
- Native American: 6.5%
- Asian: 0.6%
- Other: 2.5%
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, 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

- Rock-'n’-roll united teenagers by giving them a feeling that it was *their* music and that it 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

- 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.
Radio and Television Ownership, 1940-1960

- **1940**
  - **Radios:** 28.0 (80.2%)
  - **Televisions:** 3.9 (8.9%)

- **1950**
  - **Radios:** 40.7 (93.6%)
  - **Televisions:** 3.9 (8.9%)

- **1960**
  - **Radios:** 50.1 (94.9%)
  - **Televisions:** 45.8 (86.7%)
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:
The Cold War Continued
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.
The Changing Cold War

- Ike refused to intervene to aid anti-Communist 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, p. 857
- In just one of several actions, the CIA-sponsored coup overthrew the government of Jacobo Arbenz Guzman in Guatemala.
The U.S. in the Caribbean, 1948-1966
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, p. 861
- JFK was a young man from a wealthy Irish-Catholic family who became a Senator from Massachusetts.
- 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.
The Election of 1960

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Candidate</th>
<th>Electoral Vote</th>
<th>Popular Vote</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>JOHN F. KENNEDY (Democrat)</td>
<td>303 (56)</td>
<td>34,227,096 (49.7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Richard M. Nixon (Republican)</td>
<td>219 (41)</td>
<td>34,108,546 (49.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harry F. Byrd (Independent)</td>
<td>15 (3)</td>
<td>501,643 (.7)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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.
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 Mid-century

- America in 1963 still enjoyed the postwar economic boom, but Kennedy’s election had symbolized the changing of generations.
- Media: Chronology, Chapter 27
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event 1</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event 2</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1950</td>
<td>David Riesman publishes <em>The Lonely Crowd</em></td>
<td>1958</td>
<td>National Defense Education Act authorizes grants and loans to college</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>students</td>
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<tr>
<td>1952</td>
<td>Dwight D. Eisenhower is elected president</td>
<td>1959</td>
<td>Nikita Khrushchev visits the United States</td>
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<tr>
<td>1953</td>
<td>CIA installs Riza Shah Pahlavi as leader of Iran</td>
<td>1960</td>
<td>Soviets shoot down U-2 spy plane</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>John F. Kennedy is elected president</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>CCTV installs Riza Shah Pahlavi as leader of Iran</td>
<td></td>
<td>Almost 90 percent of American homes have television</td>
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<td>1954</td>
<td>Vietminh force French surrender at Dien Bien Phu</td>
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<td></td>
<td>CIA overthrows government of Jacobo Arbenz Gamin in Guatemala</td>
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<td></td>
<td>United States explodes first hydrogen bomb</td>
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<tr>
<td>1955</td>
<td>Jonas Salk pioneers vaccine for polio</td>
<td>1961</td>
<td>President Kennedy creates “Green Berets”</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba fails</td>
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<tr>
<td>1956</td>
<td>Federal Highway Act authorizes Interstate Highway System</td>
<td>1962</td>
<td>Cuban missile crisis brings the world to the brink of a superpower</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Elvis Presley signs with RCA</td>
<td></td>
<td>confrontation</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Eisenhower is reelected</td>
<td>1963</td>
<td>Report by the Presidential Commission on the Status of Women documents</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Allen Ginsberg publishes <em>Howl</em></td>
<td></td>
<td>ongoing discrimination</td>
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<tr>
<td>1957</td>
<td>Soviet Union launches Sputnik, first space-orbiting satellite</td>
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<td>Betty Friedan publishes <em>The Feminine Mystique</em></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Jack Kerouac publishes <em>On the Road</em></td>
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<td>Limited Nuclear Test Ban Treaty is signed</td>
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<td>President Kennedy is assassinated</td>
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