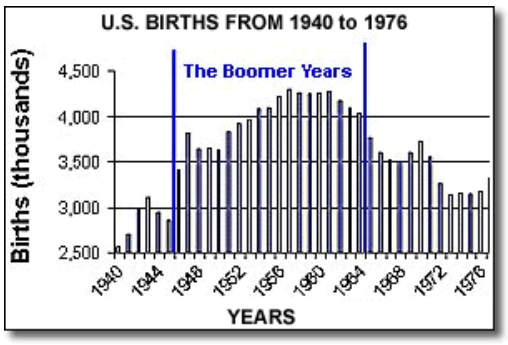
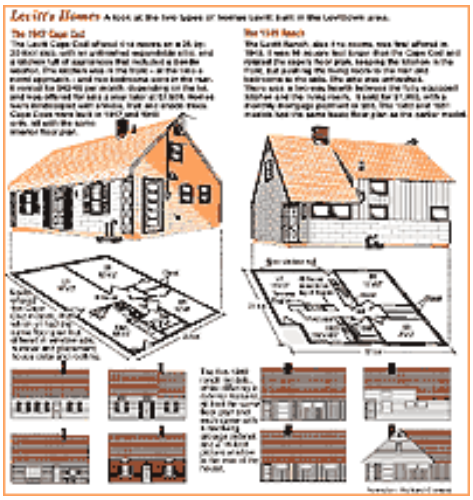
The Suburbs in the 1950s

For many generations and many decades, the American Dream has promised an egalitarian society and material prosperity. For many, the notion of prosperity remained just a dream.
But for millions of Americans in the 1950s, the American Dream became a reality. Within their reach was the chance to have a house on their own land, a car, a dog, and 2.3 kids.
Postwar affluence redefined the American Dream. Gone was the poverty borne of the Great Depression, and the years of wartime sacrifice were over.
Automobiles once again rolled off the assembly lines of the Big Three: Ford, General Motors, and Chrysler. The Interstate Highway Act authorized the construction of thousands of miles of high-speed roads that made living farther from work a possibility.

The Baby Boom



As soldiers returned from World War II and settled into family life, they contributed to an unprecedented population explosion known as the baby boom. During the late 1940s and through the early 1960s, the birthrate in the U.S. soared. At the height of the baby boom, in 1957, one American infant was born every seven seconds—a total of 4,308,000 that year. The result was the largest generation in the nation's history.



William Levitt offered five different versions of each type of home, but all had the same floor plan.

Suburbia

Most Americans worked in the cities, but fewer and fewer of them lived there. New highways and the availability and affordability of automobiles and gasoline made commuting possible. Racial fears, affordable housing, and the desire to leave decaying cities were all factors that prompted many white Americans to flee to suburbia. And no individual promoted suburban growth more than William Levitt.
Contracted by the federal government during the war to quickly build housing for military personnel, Levitt applied the techniques of mass production to construction. In 1947, he set out to erect the largest planned-living community in the United States on farmland he had purchased on Long Island, New York. Levitt identified 27 different steps to build a house. Therefore, 27 different teams of builders were hired to construct the homes.
Each house had two bedrooms, one bathroom, and no basement. The kitchen was situated near the back of the house so mothers could keep an eye on their children in the backyard. Within one year, Levitt was building 36 houses per day. His assembly-line approach made the houses extremely affordable. At first, the homes were available only to veterans. Eventually, though, Levittown was open to others as well.
By the early 1960s, every large city in the United States was surrounded by suburbs. Of the 13 million new homes built in the 1950s, 85% were built in the suburbs. For many people the suburbs embodied the American dream of an affordable single-family house, good schools, a safe environment of the children, and congenial neighbors like themselves.

William Levitt revolutionized the way Americans live and ushered in an age of suburbia by providing inexpensive housing outside the city.

The corollary of the growth of the suburbs was the deterioration of the cities. For example, as people moved to the suburbs, suburban malls sprang up to meet their retain needs. The vital commercial and social life of urban business centers slowly eroded. Suburbanization also changed the racial balance of most cities.

Keeping Up with the Joneses

With the ability to own a detached home, thousands of Americans soon surpassed the standard of living enjoyed by their parents. Nevertheless, the movement was not without its critics. Architects called Levitt's designs and emphasis on conformity an abomination. Because little variety was expressed in the construction, homeowners struggled to keep their communities looking uniform. Residents had to pledge to mow their lawns on a weekly basis. African Americans were excluded by practice. The irrational need to "keep up with the Joneses" was born in the American suburb.

Despite such criticism, a generation of Americans loved the chance to avoid rent and the dirtiness of the city to live in their own homes on their own land. Soon, shopping centers and fast food restaurants added to the convenience of suburban life. Thousands and thousands migrated to suburbia.
America and the American Dream would never be the same.

As suburbia grew, fast food restaurants began to pop up all over the country. Ray Kroc bought a single burger joint called McDonald's and paved the way for the fast food giant. Pictured above is Kroc's first new restaurant, which opened in 1955.

Music of the 1950s

The prosperity of the '50s allowed teenagers to spend money on records by their favorite bands and singers.
Rock and roll was everything the suburban 1950s were not. While parents of the decade were listening to Frank Sinatra, Perry Como, and Big Bands, their children were moving to a new beat. In fact, to the horror of the older generation, their children were twisting, thrusting, bumping, and grinding to the sounds of rock and roll.
This generation of youth was much larger than any in recent memory, and the prosperity of the era gave them money to spend on records and phonographs. By the end of the decade, the phenomenon of rock and roll helped define the difference between youth and adulthood.

The Roots of Rock

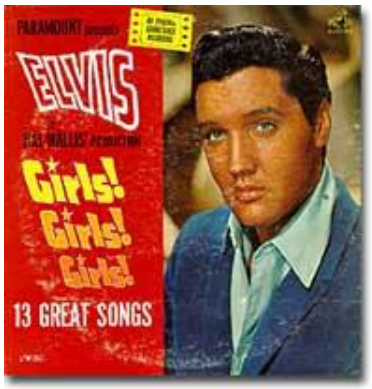
The audience was mostly white but African-American musicians usually produced the music.
The roots of rock and roll lay in African American blues and gospel. As the Great Migration brought many African Americans to the cities of the north, the sounds of rhythm and blues attracted suburban teens. Due to segregation and racist attitudes, however, none of the greatest artists of the genre could get much airplay.
Disc jockey Alan Freed began a rhythm-and-blues show on a Cleveland radio station. Soon the audience grew and grew, and Freed coined the term "rock and roll."
Early attempts by white artists to cover R&B songs resulted in weaker renditions that bled the heart and soul out of the originals. Record producers saw the market potential and began to search for a white artist who could capture the African American sound.
Sam Phillips, a Memphis record producer, found the answer in Elvis Presley. With a deep Southern sound, pouty lips, and gyrating hips, Elvis took an old style and made it his own.
From Memphis, the sound spread to other cities, and demand for Elvis records skyrocketed. Within two years, Elvis was the most popular name in the entertainment business.
After the door to rock and roll acceptance was opened, African American performers such as Chuck Berry, Fats Domino, and Little Richard began to enjoy broad success, as well. White performers such as Buddy Holly and Jerry Lee Lewis also found artistic freedom and commercial success.

Alan Freed, the Cleveland disc jockey credited with coining the phrase "rock and roll," was the master of ceremonies at many of the first rock concerts, including his 1955 Easter Jubilee.

Chuck Berry's songs about girls and cars hit a nerve with American teens and sent his star rising high in the early days of rock and roll.

Satan's Music

Rock and roll sent shockwaves across America. A generation of young teenagers collectively rebelled against the music their parents loved. In general, the older generation loathed rock and roll. Appalled by the new styles of dance the movement evoked, churches proclaimed it Satan's music.
Because rock and roll originated among the lower classes and a segregated ethnic group, many middle-class whites thought it was tasteless. Rock and roll records were banned from many radio stations and hundreds of schools.
But the masses spoke louder. When Elvis appeared on TV's *The Ed Sullivan Show*, the show's ratings soared. Elvis, unofficially the “King of Rock ‘n’ Roll,” first developed his musical style by singing in church and listening to gospel, country, and blues music on the radio in Memphis, Tennessee.
The commercial possibilities of the music were limitless. As a generation of young adults finished military service, bought houses in suburbia, and longed for stability and conformity, their children seemed to take comfort for granted. They wanted to release the tensions that bubbled beneath the smooth surface of postwar America.
Above all, they wanted to shake, rattle, and roll.



Elvis Presley brought rock-and-roll music to the masses during the 1950s with hits such as "Love Me Tender" and "Heartbreak Hotel."

TV and Rock ‘n’ Roll

American Bandstand, hosted by disk jockey Dick Clark, was the first network television show dedicated exclusively to rock ‘n’ roll. A local Philadelphia grogram, it began broadcasting nationally in 1957. *Bandstand* featured teens dancing to the latest hits, often as the song was being lip-synched by the performer. Many of the top recording artists appeared on the show during its first 30 years on network TV. *American Bandstand* brought rock ‘n’ roll into the mainstream of American life.

http://www.ushistory.org/us/53d.asp

Television in the 1950s

Perhaps no phenomenon shaped American life in the 1950s more than television. At the end of World War II, the television was a toy for only a few thousand wealthy Americans. Just 10 years later, nearly two-thirds of American households had a television. The biggest-selling periodical of the decade was TV Guide. In a nation once marked by strong regional differences, network television programming blurred these distinctions and helped forge a national popular culture.

Television forever changed politics. The first president to be televised was Harry Truman. It did not take long for political advertisers to understand the power of the new medium. Dwight Eisenhower's campaign staff generated sound bites — short, powerful statements from a candidate — rather than air an entire speech.

Lucille Ball's new baby brought 44 million viewers to the show and graced the cover of the first national issue of *TV Guide* in 1953. *TV Guide* soon became the most popular periodical in the country.

America Loves Lucy

Americans loved situation comedies — sitcoms. In the 1950s, *I Love Lucy* topped the ratings charts. The show broke new ground by including a Cuban American character (Ricky Ricardo, played by bandleader Desi Arnaz) and dealing with Lucille Ball's pregnancy, though Lucy was never filmed from the waist down while she was pregnant.

Forty-four million Americans tuned in to welcome her newborn son to the show.

Through shows such as *Leave It to Beaver* and *Father Knows Best*, television created an idyllic view of what the perfect family life should look like, though few actual families could live up to the ideal. Television's idea of a perfect family was a briefcase-toting professional father who left daily for work, and a pearls-wearing, nurturing housewife who raised their mischievous boys and obedient girls. With rare exceptions (such as Desi Arnaz) members of minorities rarely appeared on television in the 1950s.

The Wild West

America's fascination with the Wild West was nothing new, but television brought Western heroes into American homes and turned that fascination into a love affair. Cowboys and lawmen such as Hopalong Cassidy, Wyatt Earp, and the Cisco Kid galloped across televisions every night.

The Roy Rogers Show and *Rin Tin Tin* brought the West to children on Saturday mornings, and Davy Crockett coonskin caps became popular fashion items. Long running horse operas, such as *Bonanza* and *Rawhide*, attracted viewers week after week.

One Western, *Gunsmoke*, ran for 20 years — longer than any other prime-time drama in television history. At the decade's close, 30 Westerns aired on prime time each week, and Westerns occupied 7 spots in the Nielsen Top-10.

Variety Shows: Vaudeville in American Living Rooms

Because most early television was live, the producers of major networks found their talent among people already had experience with live performance: vaudeville. Television and vaudeville combined to created the form of entertainment known as the variety show. Variety Shows were made up of short acts — musical numbers, comedy sketches, animal tricks, etc. — usually centered around an engaging host. Former vaudevillians such as Bob Hope hosted popular programs.

Sid Caesar had two popular variety programs in '50s, *Your Show of Shows* and *Caesar's Hour*. These shows featured the writing talents of Carl Reiner, Mel Brooks, Larry Gelbart, and Woody Allen. Nat "King" Cole became the first African American host of a television series when his variety show appeared in 1956.

But perhaps no variety program had a greater effect on American culture than *The Ed Sullivan Show*, which ran for 23 years beginning in 1948 and was for a while America's most popular show. Combining highbrow and popular entertainment, Sullivan's "really big shew" became a major stop for both established performers and young, up-and-coming artists. Although Elvis Presley had appeared on other shows in the past, it was his performance on *The Ed Sullivan Show* that grabbed the headlines. By securing rock-and-roll acts, Sullivan won the adolescent market, truly making the variety show a whole-family event.

Commercials: Selling through the Screen

In 1955, the adorable cartoon characters Snap, Crackle, and Pop leapt around and sang about the joys of eating Rice Krispies. Advertisements were an integral part of television viewing then just as they are today.

With more and more American families owning televisions, manufacturers now had a new way to sell their products, and the television commercial was born. By late 1948, over 900 companies had bought television broadcast time for advertising. By 1950, sponsors were leaving radio for television at an unstoppable rate.

Television sponsors ranged from greeting cards to automobiles, but perhaps the most advertised product was tobacco. *TV Guide* voted Lucky Strike's "Be Happy, Go Lucky" ad commercial of the year for 1950, and Phillip Morris sponsored *I Love Lucy* for years, inserting cartoon cigarette packs in the show's opening animation. Cartoon characters were common in '50s commercials, representing everything from light bulbs to beer. In 1950, Coca-Cola launched its first television ad campaign using a combination of animation and celebrity endorsement.

By 1954, television commercials were the leading advertising medium in America. The life of the American consumer would never be the same.

Children's Programming

Understanding that the population of children was in greater numbers than in previous generations, television producers developed a host of children's programs. Shows such as the Mickey Mouse Club and Howdy Doody, entertained millions of American tykes.

During the 1950s, few households owned more than one television, so viewing became a shared family event. Even the American diet was transformed with the advent of the TV dinner, first introduced in 1954.

The Howdy Doody Show, the first children's program to run five days a week, helped the young NBC network grow exponentially during the 1950s.

The Automobile in the 1950s

The Automania

Americans were well on the way to becoming a motorized society before the 1950s, but the Depression and the halt in auto production during World War II slowed the growth of America's car culture. During the Fifties, though, the number of cars in the U.S. nearly doubled from 39 million to 74 million. By 1960, 80% of American families had at least one car and 15% had two or more. Easy credit terms and extensive advertising persuaded Americans to buy cars in record numbers.

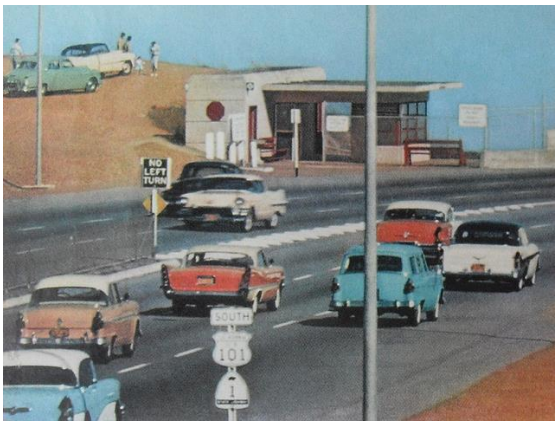
Suburban living made owning a car a necessity. Most of the new suburbs, built in formerly rural areas, did not offer public transportation, and people had to drive to their jobs in the cities. In addition, many of the schools, stores, synagogues, churches, and doctors' offices were not within walking distance of suburban homes.

By making radical year-to-year design changes, Detroit automakers encouraged consumers to scrap older cars to buy the latest models, even as often as once a year. On average, 4.5 million cars were junked every year during the 1950s. By 1960, Americans owned more cars than all the rest of the world put together.

Some point to the imaginative cars of the second half of the Fifties—with their swooping decorative fins and sparkling chrome accessories—as classic examples of automobile design. Others are more critical of all the waste involved. Cars were becoming more aerodynamic before the 1950s, but with the advent of fins and lavish grilles, most cars of the decade only *appeared* streamlined; as cars became heavier and their engines more powerful, they required more and more gas to operate. Safety, efficiency, and durability were all sacrificed on the altar of automobile fashion.

The Interstate Highway System

President Eisenhower was an opponent of extravagant federal spending, yet one of his most enduring legacies is the Interstate Highway System, which his Secretary of Commerce called "the greatest public works program in the history of the world." President Eisenhower signed in 1956. The idea had entered Eisenhower's head in 1919 when, as a young army officer, he had accompanied a cross-country military convoy to test the quality of the nation's roads. The journey of 81 trucks and autos took two months to cross the United States—at an average of only 50 miles a day. Roads were "from average to non-existent," Eisenhower noted. When he saw the modern autobahns of Germany after World War II, he again grew enthusiastic about the possibility of a new high-speed U.S. highway system.



The new freeway system, officially known as the National System of Interstate and Defense Highways, had a military as well as civilian purpose: it could be used to rapidly evacuate cities in case of a Soviet missile attack. It was a monumental undertaking to build 41,000 miles of four-lane roads. The nationwide construction project, which involved building more than 16,000 entrance ramps and 55,000 bridges, would not be fully completed until the early 1990s. The roads, whose wide shoulders and easy curves were designed for high-speed driving, would end up costing a grand total of some $129 billion.

To satisfy urban interests, sections of highway were constructed into and around cities. The historian Lewis Mumford predicted that Americans would regret "all the damage to our cities and our countryside . . . that this ill conceived and preposterously unbalanced program will have wrought." No one listened. Americans were delighted with the ability to drive from place to place at high speed, with no stoplights or intersections to worry about.

The Impact of the Auto

Mumford's warnings began to resonate with more Americans by the 1970s, when oil shortages left Americans waiting in long lines to fill up at the gas station. The nation's growing dependence on the automobile proved to be a mixed blessing. Many Americans wanted to escape the cities and live in surrounding suburbs, and the automobile allowed them to do so. Of the 12 largest cities in the United States, 11 lost population during the 1950s. (The one exception was Los Angeles, which became a kind of car-culture mecca.) The cities suffered economically and culturally as a result.

While enormous public investment went into accommodating automobiles, much less was devoted to mass transit. Buses and subways accounted for 35% of urban passenger miles in 1945; by 1965 they made up only 5%. Highway construction near cities displaced residents and divided neighborhoods, further hastening urban deterioration. On the other hand, new businesses catering to car owners flourished. Drive-in movie theaters boomed—there were 3,000 in operation nationwide by 1956. Motels became common, led by chains

like Holiday Inn. Shopping malls, offering new shopping convenience, began to appear everywhere. By the middle of the decade, 1,800 shopping centers had appeared in the United States. Fewer and fewer people went to the inner city to shop, leaving the streets of many cities largely deserted at night.

No state has exemplified automania in the U.S. more than California. By the late 1990s, Californians owned more cars, held more drivers licenses, and traveled more miles on their roads than the people of any other state. The center of this automobile culture is the metropolitan area of Los Angeles.

Consumerism in the 1950s

By the mid-1950s, nearly 60% of Americans were members of the middle class, about twice as many as before World War II. They wanted, and had the money to buy, increasing numbers of products. Consumerism, buying material goods, came to be equated with success.

New Products

One new product after another appeared in the marketplace, as various industries responded to consumer demand. *Newsweek* magazine reported in 1956 "hundreds of brand-new goods have become commonplace overnight." Consumers purchased electric household appliances—such as washing machines, dryers, blenders, freezers, and dishwashers—in record number.
With more and more leisure time to fill, people invested in recreational items. The bought televisions, tape recorders, and the new hi-fi (high-fidelity) record players. They bought casual clothing to suit their suburban lifestyles and power lawn mowers, barbeque grills, swimming pools, and lawn decorations for their suburban homes.

Planned Obsolescence

In addition to creating new products, manufacturers began using a marketing strategy called planned obsolescence. In order to encourage consumers to purchase more goods, manufacturers purposely designed products to become obsolete—that is, to wear out or become outdated—in a short period of time. Carmakers brought out new models every year, urging consumers to stay up-to-date. Because of planned obsolescence, Americans came to expect new and better products, and they began to discard items that were sometimes barely used. Some observers commented that American culture was on its way to becoming a "throwaway society."

Buy Now, Pay Later

Many consumers made their purchases on credit and therefore did not have to pay for them right away. The Diner's Club issues the first credit card in 1950, and the American Express was introduced in 1958. (Diner's Club and American Express were fairly exclusive, limited to middle class people and carried a high fee. In the 1970s, credit card companies would expand credit to just about anyone, and consumer debt became a crucial engine driving the American economy.)

In addition, people bought large items on the installment plan and make regular payments over a fixed time. Home mortgages (loans for buying a house) and automobile loans worked the same way. During the decade, the total private debt grew from $73 billion to $179 billion. Instead of saving money, Americans were spending it, confident that prosperity would continue.

The Advertising Age

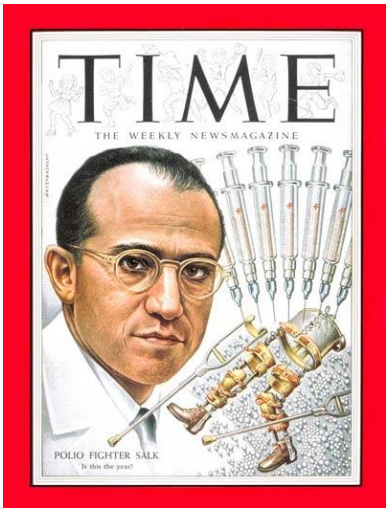
The advertising industry capitalized on this runaway consumerism by encouraging even more spending. Ads were everywhere—in newspapers and magazines, on radio and television, and on billboards along the highways—prompting people to buy goods that ranged from cars to cereal to cigarettes. Advertisers spend about $6 billion in 1950; by 1955, the figure was up to $9 billion. Since most Americans had satisfied their basic needs, advertisers tried to convince them to buy things they really didn't need.
More and more, ad executives and designers turned to psychology to create new strategies for selling. Advertisers appealed to people's desire for status and "belongingness" and strived to associate their products with those values.
Television became a powerful new advertising tool. The first one-minute TV commercial was produced in 1941 at a cost of $9. In 1960, advertisers spend a

total of $1.6 billion for television ads. By 2013, a 30-second commercial during the Superbowl cost an advertiser $3.8 million. Television had become not only the medium for mass transmission of cultural values, but also a symbol of popular culture itself.

Medicine and Technology in the 1950s

Medical Miracles

12 April 1955, a historian noted, "was one of the most exciting days of the decade." People drove around honking their car horns, church bells rang, and some schools let students out early to celebrate. What had happened? It was the day that researchers announced that the Salk vaccine had proven effective in preventing polio. Science had conquered a dreaded disease that had, time and time again, swept through the country with devastating effects.



Many Americans thought of former President Franklin D. Roosevelt, crippled by polio, who had died exactly ten years earlier. Poliomyelitis is a contagious, unpredictable viral infection that can cause temporary or permanent paralysis, deformity, or death. An epidemic in 1950 afflicted 32,000 children. Another in 1952 made 58,000 ill and killed 1,400. Dr. Jonas Salk, a researcher at the University of Pittsburgh Medical School, developed a vaccine from killed viruses. His efforts were furthered by the 100 million Americans who contributed to the March of Dimes, a charity that was started in 1938 specifically to find a cure for polio. Salk began a program of inoculations in 1954, and once the vaccine's effectiveness was shown, widespread vaccination virtually eradicated polio. By 1962, just a few years after the vaccine was introduced, only 910 cases were reported nationwide.

Medical science was also moving forward on many other fronts. Researchers developed new antibiotics to treat a whole range of infections diseases. They invented antihistamines to remedy the effects of allergies. The first tranquilizer, began to be marketed in 1955, kicking off a deluge of mind-altering pharmaceuticals. One of the most notable new drugs of the period was the birth control pill. Approved for use in 1960, the pill would change the lives of millions of women and contribute to the sexual revolution of the 1960s.

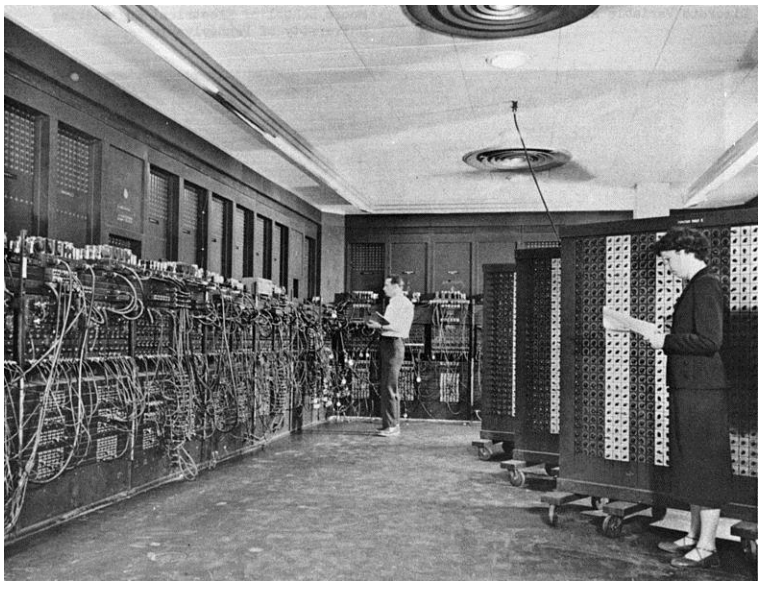
The fight against heart disease moved forward with new techniques for open-heart surgery. Doctors could implant artificial valves and pacemakers to keep heart patients alive.

Vaccines for whooping cough and diphtheria helped restrict those diseases, which had killed many children during earlier decades. The average life expectancy reached nearly 70 years by 1960, up from only 63 in 1940. Because of improved nutrition, children in the Fifties grew up taller and stronger than their parents.

Not everything was rosy, however. Cancer remained a mysterious affliction for which there were few treatments. Medical care was expensive, and many citizens lacked medical insurance. President Truman's proposal for a national health insurance plan died in Congress. When Eisenhower put forth a much more modest program to help private health insurance companies, the American Medical Association, a doctors' group, raised the fear of "socialized" medicine. The plan failed to pass and the problem of Americans lacking health insurance continues today.

Technology

The closest thing to a computer in 1950 was the Electrical Numerical Integrator And Calculator or ENIAC (built in 1947). Constructed out of 18,000 vacuum tubes and consuming about 180,000 watts of electrical power, the ENIAC was capable of multiplying numbers rapidly… and not much more.



Work on the hydrogen bomb was not the only factor that pushed scientists to increase the capacity of the computer. With the rapid growth in population, the U.S. Census Bureau wanted a new machine for tabulating its data and in 1951 took delivery of a Universal Automatic Computer or UNIVAC, the first commercial computer. In 1952, CBS borrowed UNIVAC and used it to correctly predict Eisenhower's victory over Stevenson from the early results of the presidential election.

Computers would have remained massive and ungainly contraptions if not for the invention of the transistor in 1947. Scientists at Bell Laboratories used the electrical conductive properties of crystals to put the function of a vacuum tube into a solid-state device. The first transistor-based computer arrived in 1955.

In 1958, Jack Kilby, a scientist Texas Instruments, found that arrays of transistors would work even better if packed onto a

single wafer of semiconductor material. His invention of the integrated circuit set the computer industry on the fast track. So what were computers like by the end of the Fifties? By modern standards, pitiful. Digital Equipment Corporation's state-of-the-art PDP-1 stored data on punched paper tape and had a memory of 9 kilobytes (though it could be upgraded to 144 kilobytes). In modern terms, this memory is ludicrously tiny—a single average-size photograph stored in your computer requires about 1,000 kilobytes. In spite of its limitations, though, customers at the time thought the machine was worth its price tag: $120,000. And it was used to play the first ever video game, called Spacewar!

Sports in the 1950s

Prosperity after World War II gave Americans more leisure time to enjoy sports. Also helping sports' popularity were technological advances, including the growth of television coverage, improved airline service that prompted professional leagues to expand westward and improved equipment such as the automatic pinsetter in bowling alleys. Professional sports increasingly became more racially integrated.

"He who would know the heart and mind of America had better learn baseball," observed culturist Jacques Barzun. To look at baseball and other sports to see how they wove themselves into the fabric of American life in that crazy time when the baby boomers were growing up is more than an exercise in nostalgia. It reveals an important aspect of the American character and suggests the seriousness of sports to Americans—the extent to which spectators involve themselves in sporting contests, and the way in which sports become, for the enthusiast, a metaphor for life.

Land of Confusion

The 1950s exploded in a display of cultural expression. During the 1950s almost all sports became desegregated; several sports endured scandals; the standards of professionals were imposed on amateurs and even children; antitrust exemptions were challenged; franchises moved with the population to the West Coast; new sports challenged old for an audience; and, most important, sports and television discovered they were made for each other.

Broadening Interests

At the beginning of the decade the most significant sports in American life were Major League Baseball and intercollegiate football. By the end of the decade the National Football League (NFL) dominated the airways in the fall, the National Basketball Association (NBA) filled the winter months with frenetic sports action, and the Professional Golf Association (PGA) and Professional Bowling Association were inspiring weekend athletes to join "Arnie's Army" and to emulate Don Carter.

Dynasties

Growing out of the fact that teams had absolute control over the movement of their players and were located in large cities with a broad economic base (especially through local television), several teams were able to establish championship dynasties unrivaled in American sports history. The New York Yankees had purchased their pennants of the 1930s from the Boston Red Sox by acquiring Babe Ruth in the 1920s. From 1949 to 1953 the Yankees won five straight World Series. In 1956, with the arrival of Bill Russell, the Boston Celtics went on a run of eleven NBA titles in thirteen years, including eight in a row.

Sport for Children

Sports were not exempt from the effects of the Cold War. As the threat of a real war being waged on American soil grew with every passing day, the nation's leaders recognized that the youth of the country needed to be physically fit. The establishment of the President's Council on Youth Fitness was the result. The Communist threat included godlessness, and through sport America responded by reviving the concept of muscular Christianity. Little League Baseball, Pop Warner Football, and Biddy Basketball became tools with which American society could inculcate the moral values deemed necessary for young boys and teenagers. The notion that "sport builds character" grew increasingly more powerful as the decade wore on.

Girls and Women

In the 1950s the moral fiber of America's youth was considered far more important than its physical well-being, at least for males. If the men were strong, women need not worry, people believed. The gains women made during the war were quickly lost in the 1950s. Jobs women had performed admirably in factories were given back to their "rightful" owners—the returning soldiers. The All-American Girls Professional Baseball League,

started in 1943, quickly turned from a moneymaking, midwestern phenomenon into a money loser abandoned by the general public. By 1954 the league, which had attracted more than a million fans a year, folded. Pockets of girls' sports remained, however. In Iowa, for instance, girls' high-school basketball had a large following even if the game was played by archaic rules to protect the fragile females. The girl's Iowa state basketball playoffs always sold out and outdrew the boys' tournament. In most towns and cities, however, girls were limited in their sports participation to softball, play days, and cheerleading. The belief that girls could not directly benefit from sports participation was powerful.