

America in the 1950s



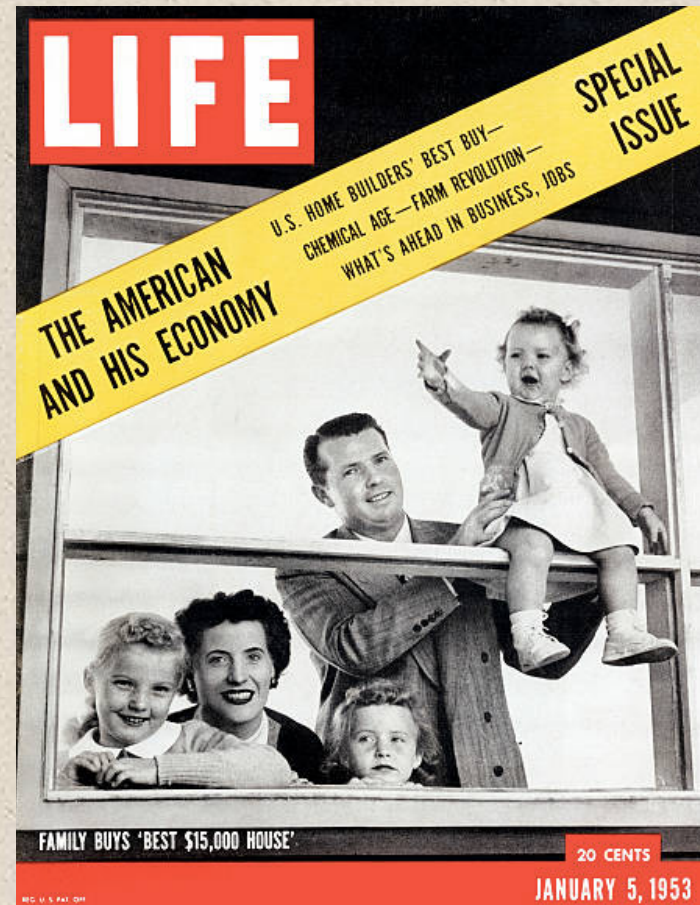
1950s Economy



- The postwar period brought a more equitable distribution of income than ever before.
 - Increase in real income went almost entirely to the growing middle class.
 - ↑ The middle class (those who earned \$4000-7000) grew from 5.5 million in 1929 to 17.9 million!
 - The number of high-income people (\$7500+) increased, but their share of the nation's income declined. ↘
 - The poor declined from 15.6 million people to 11.7 million. ↓
- What changed economically in the postwar period?
 - Before the war, most Americans worked in factory jobs. After the war, new machines performed jobs that used to be done by people.
 - By 1956, majority of all American workers held **white collar jobs**.
 - **Up-side to white collar jobs**: Better pay, shorter hours, less dangerous
 - **Down-side to white collar jobs**: impersonal (don't see the product being produced), employers put pressure on employees to dress, think, & act alike
 - Wages & working conditions also improved for factory workers. (Average industrial wage doubled from pre-Depression levels.)

- With the economic improvements, the average income per person nearly doubled.
- Years of **pent-up demand** – WHY?
 - People were not able to buy during the Depression because they were poor
 - Not able to buy during WWII because of rationing and b/c companies stopped making consumer goods in order to make military goods
- In the 1950s, Americans willingly went into debt after years of economic depression

1950s Economy



By the 1950s, thanks to rising income and economic growth, 60% of Americans were in the middle class.

It's a promise!



JIM'S going away tomorrow . . . and there will be long, lonely days before he comes back.

But that little home sketched there in the sand is a symbol of faith and hope and courage. It's a promise, too. A promise of gloriously happy days to come . . . when Victory is won.

Victory Homes of tomorrow will make up in part at least for all the sacrifices of today . . . and that's our promise!

They will have better living built in . . . electrical living with new comforts, new conveniences, new economies to make every day an adventure in happiness.

Plan for your Victory Home now . . . the one sure way is to buy War Bonds. Every Bond you buy is an investment in your future happiness and security . . . every dollar you put into Bonds helps bring our boys back sooner—and safer. Buy another Bond today.

The General Electric Consumers Institute at Bridgeport, Conn., is devoted to research on wartime home problems such as Nutrition • Food Preparation • Food Preservation • Appliance Care • Appliance Repair • Laundering • Home Heating and Air Conditioning. Helpful booklets are available from your G-E Appliance Dealer, or General Electric Consumers Institute, Dept. 15-3.

APPLIANCE AND MERCHANDISE DEPARTMENT, BRIDGEPORT, CONN.

GENERAL  ELECTRIC



Face in on Frontier Fleet and the News every Tuesday, Thursday, Saturday mornings and G.E.S. On Sunday night listen to the "Hour of Charm" over N. B. C. See newspapers for times, stations.

Domestic Life

Post-war dreams:
middle-class life,
home in the suburbs,
new car, big yard,
family



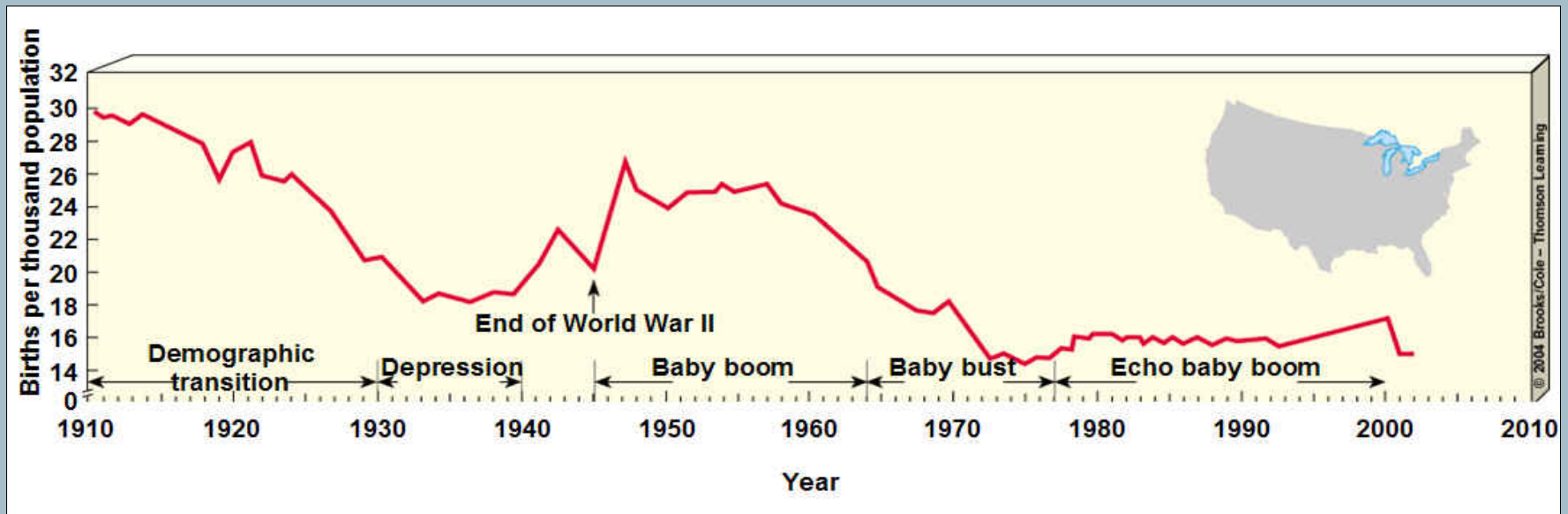
The GI Bill

(The Servicemen's Readjustment Act)

- Many Americans' post-war dreams were made all the more possible in part thanks to the **GI Bill** which gave veterans of WWII low-interest mortgages to buy new homes & tuition assistance for college.
 - Before WWII, college education for the average American was for the most part unattainable. By 1947, veterans accounted for 49% of college admissions.
 - By the time that the original GI Bill ended on July 25, 1956, 7.8 million of 16 million World War II vets had participated in an education or training program.



- Baby boom: time when there was a large increase in the number of children born each year (1946-1964)
 - Birth rate had fallen during the Depression and WWII.
 - During the baby boom years it rose significantly.
- | | |
|------|---------------------------|
| 1940 | 2,559,000 births per year |
| 1946 | 3,311,000 births per year |
| 1957 | 4,300,000 births per year |
| 1964 | 4,027,000 births per year |





William J. Levitt & Levittown



- Applied skills he had used in building barracks for the Army in WWII
- Levitt's contribution to the 1950s: Introduced mass production techniques to home building
 - HOW? Assembly line production, standardization of parts, narrow job assignments (i.e., painter who paints only the window sills on the front side of the house)
- Built affordable houses in weeks as opposed to months:
 - Average builder built 5 houses a year
 - Levitt built 17,450 houses a year



Construction & Design

- All major plumbing served double duty
 - Avoid double plumbing, reorientation of closets and rooms, etc.
 - Result = more open, informal social life, decreased privacy and increased contact in intimate moments.
- Orientation of rooms:
 - Design kitchen & living room to look out on the street (mom could watch children playing whether she was doing housework or relaxing in the living room.)
 - Underlying assumption that the *street* was the center, the playground, the focus.
 - Later changed orientation to the backyard in his ranch style homes

The Rancher

SPECIAL INTRODUCTORY PRICE - \$8,990
\$57 A MONTH!

A NEW HOUSE has just been built in Levittown, Pa., the most perfectly planned community in America. It may be seen 7 days a week from 10 A.M. to 10 P.M. at the Exhibit Center right on the Bristol Pike at the entrance to Levittown.

There is nothing to compare with it anywhere. Corners are \$500 additional and are on plots at least 80 x 100. Inside plots are at least 60 x 100.

Each house has an entrance foyer, a very large living room, two beautiful bedrooms, a kitchen, a bathroom, and a porch or carport on the main floor. There is a stairway to a large open attic which can be finished into two more bedrooms and another bath.

This special introductory price is subject to increase at any time. Those who make application will be protected against any rise.

The Following is Included in Every House:

- Bendix Automatic Washer
- General Electric Range
- Tracy All-Steel Cabinets
- General Bronze Sliding Aluminum Windows
- Thermopane Insulated Glass
- Briggs Colored Bath Fixtures
- Porcelain-on-Steel Wall Tile
- Hot Water Radiant Heating
- Municipal Sewers and Water
- Federal Circuit Breakers—No Fuses
- York-ShIPLEY Automatic Oil Burner
- Fibreglas Complete Insulation
- Matico Tile Floors
- Complete Landscaping
- Outside Garden Storage Closet
- Free Use of Levittown Swimming Pools
- Free Use of Levittown Playgrounds
- Free Use of Levittown Baseball Diamonds

Total Settlement Charges \$10

APPLICATIONS:

Applications must be made in person at the Exhibit Center in Levittown, and must be accompanied by a good-faith deposit of \$100.

FOR VETERANS:

NO DOWN PAYMENT IS REQUIRED

Carrying charges are \$57 a month and that includes taxes, fire insurance, interest and complete repayment of the mortgage. On a corner \$60 pays everything.

FOR NON-VETERANS:

Total cash required (including the \$100 mentioned above) is \$950. Carrying charges are \$58 a month and that includes taxes, fire insurance, interest, and complete repayment of the mortgage.

SETTLEMENT CHARGES:

Total settlement charges are only \$10. For veterans, that figure is included in the mortgage. For non-veterans, it is included in the down payment mentioned above.

LEVITTOWN MAY BE REACHED AS FOLLOWS:

By car from Philadelphia: Drive out Roosevelt Boulevard continuing on Route 1 for about 5 miles. Turn right at Levittown sign to Route 13. Turn left on Route 13 about 3 miles to the Exhibit Center.

By bus from Philadelphia: Take Levittown Express Bus at Bridge Street station of elevated direct to Exhibit Center.

By car from Camden: Drive out Route 130 (Burlington Pike) to Burlington. Turn left and cross bridge to Bristol. Turn right on Route 13 four miles to Exhibit Center.



BRISTOL PIKE • LEVITTOWN, PA. • Telephone BRISTOL 3324

Life in Levittown was not without its restrictions...

- *All houses were equal in size and style:*
 - Kitchen outfitted w/ a GE stove & refrigerator, stainless steel sink & cabinets, the latest Bendix washer, & a York oil burner
 - Only differences were color, roof line, and window placement
- *Homeowner could add their personal touch, but there were strict rules about making changes to the home's design, decoration, etc.*

RESTRICTIONS

EVERY good community has restrictions that will insure its continued maintenance. As a result property values increase and greater enjoyment results to all homeowners. Here is a summary of those at Levittown. If you read them carefully you will see that they have but one purpose in mind: that you and your neighbors benefit from them.

- 1.** You can add another carport or garage or room—IF it is similar in architecture, color and material to the dwelling—IF it doesn't project in front of the original house at all, or *more than 15 feet* in back of it—and IF at all times there still remain at least 20 feet of open yard in the rear and 7 feet on each side. (On corner lots, *each* side of the house facing a street is considered a front. If your house fronts on 2 streets you must leave at least 6 feet of open yard at one interior side and 15 feet at the other; if you bought one of the rare corners fronting on 3 streets, you must leave at least 6 feet of open yard at the remaining interior side).
- 2.** You may display a residence sign but don't make it more than one square foot in size.
- 3.** You may keep a couple of household pets (dogs or cats, etc.) but no commercial breeding or maintaining is allowed.

Restrictions (cont.)

4. If you are a physician or a dentist or other similar professional person, you may have your office in your home *BUT no business of any kind is permitted* — the *residential* sections of Levittown must remain residential.

5. When you put your garbage out for collection make sure it is in a *tightly closed* metal container. Don't strew rubbish or garbage around your property.

6. You may plant a shrub or other *growing* fence *BUT* keep it no higher than 3 feet. If you have a young child or a pet and want to pen them in, try a good thorny barberry or similar hedge fence of that height—it should do the job perfectly. **NO FABRICATED FENCES** (wood, metal, etc.) **WILL BE PERMITTED**. In laying out the plots at Levittown we have achieved a maximum of openness and park-line appearance. Fences will cut this up into small parcels and spoil the whole effect no matter how good-looking the fence material itself might be—and some of it is pretty terrible! This item is of prime importance.

7. Laundry can be hung in the rear but please use one of the revolving portable dryers. Old-fashioned clotheslines strung across a lawn look messy. And please don't leave laundry hanging out on Sundays or holidays when you and your neighbors are most likely to be relaxing on your rear lawn.

8. If your property backs on a road, the lot has been made 20 feet deeper than usual. This is so the rear 20 feet can be landscaped and screened, thereby protecting your privacy from passing automobiles and pedestrians. You must—and we're sure you'll want to—take care of this landscaping. With reasonable attention it will soon grow thick and high enough to give you complete privacy. This is the one and only place where shrub fencing is permitted to grow *higher* than 3 feet (see item 6 above). If you live

on a corner plot, the same is true as regards the diagonal corner line connecting the sidewalks.

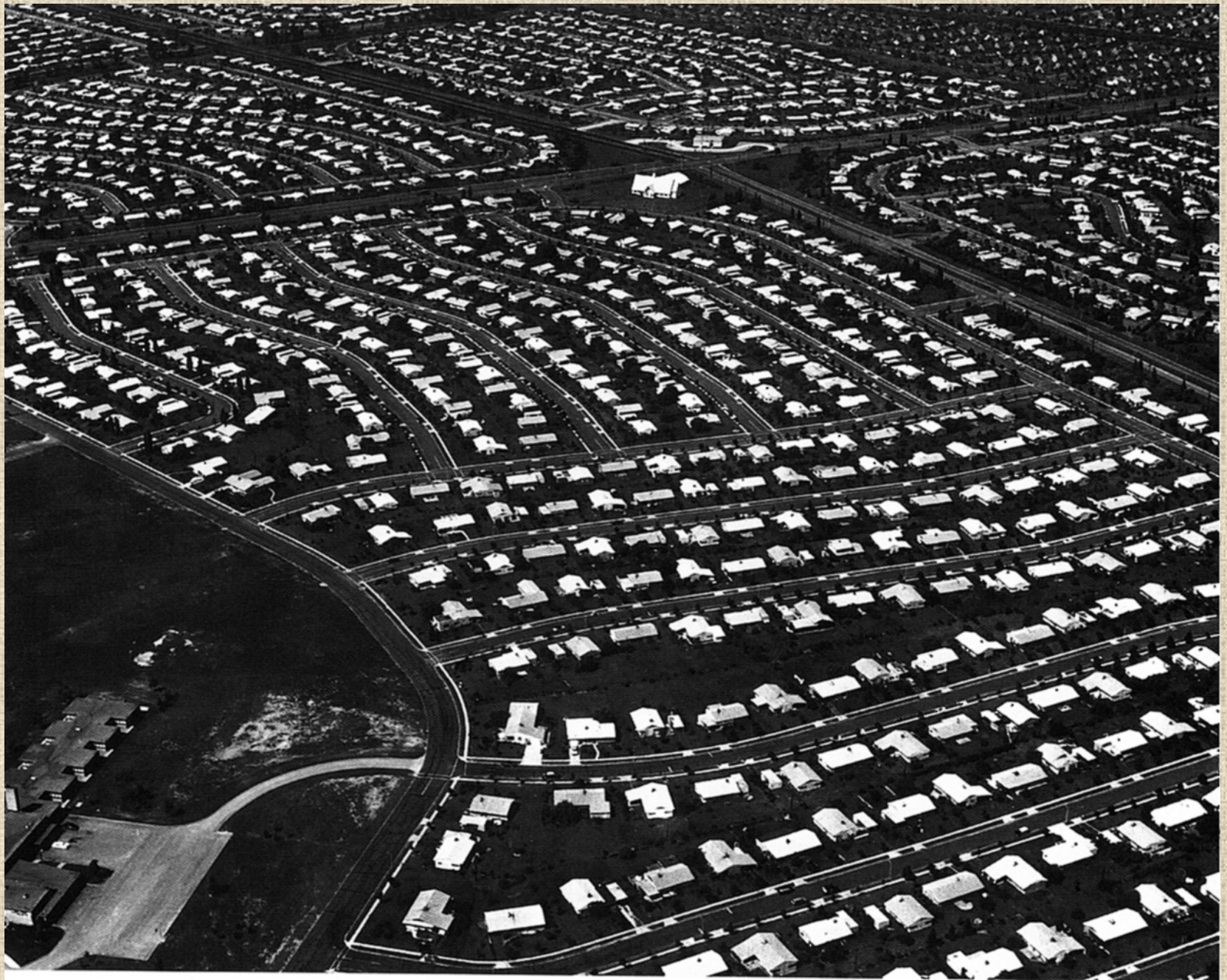
9. Mow your lawn and remove weeds at least *once a week* between April 15th and November 15th. Nothing makes a lawn—and a neighborhood — and a community — look shabbier than uncut grass and unsightly weeds. A lot of thought, work and money has gone into the preparation of your lawn. It will flourish if you take care of it—but it will quickly grow wild and unkempt if you don't.

10. If you live on a corner you cannot remove or add anything to the planting at the corner. If anything dies you may re-plant the same items if we don't. We go to special pains on corners and that's why we don't want them changed.

If you are interested in the full text of the Restrictions, they have been filed as an official public record in the Bucks County Recorder's office at Doylestown.



BEFORE



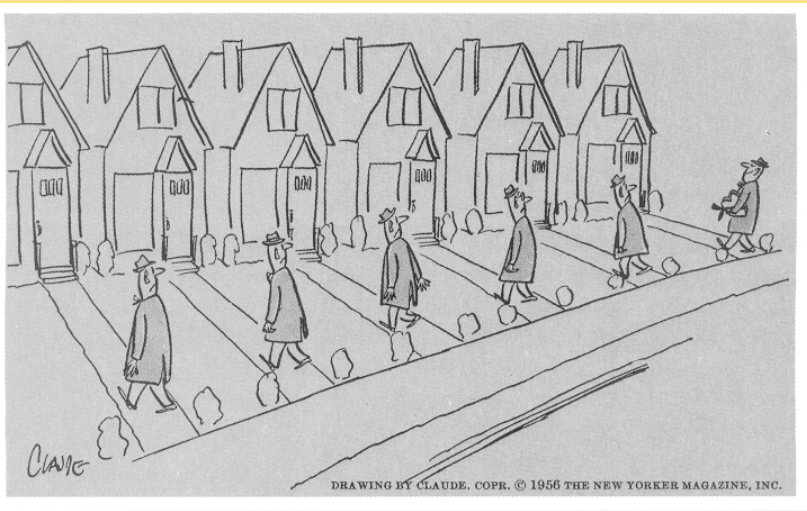
AFTER

Broad Classes of Reasons Given for Moving to the Suburbs, and Percentage of Respondents Mentioning Each Type (*Since many respondents gave more than one reason, the sum of the percentages does not equal 100.)

Type of Reason	Per Cent*
Better for children	81
Enjoy life more	77
Husband's job	21
Near relatives	14
Other	3



Downsides to Life in Suburbia



- Everything was the same
- Pressure to conform to the norm - HOW SO?
- Reinforced gender stereotypes:
 - Because all women were stay-at-home mothers and all men were the sole providers, it was expected that everyone would follow the same norms.
- All white - legal documents (restrictive covenants) actually barred homeowners from selling to non-white families.

The growth of suburbia was made possible by...

- The rapid production of cars:
 - 70,000 cars made in 1945; 8 million in 1955
- Development of a national highway system.
 - The **Interstate Highway Act** (1956) provided \$26 billion to build a national highway system more than 40 thousand miles long!
- The boom in car ownership and growth of highways also led to the development of a new phenomenon...fast food!





The birth of mass production in food service – McDonalds!



- The first McDonalds drive-up restaurant was opened in San Bernardino, CA in 1939. At first it was run as a drive-up – attracted a younger crowd; it was a fun place to hang out!
- Brothers realized restaurant could be run more efficiently and profitably. So they closed the restaurant down for a month in 1948 and made some changes – LIST 2:
 - Fired the carhops and added a drive-thru window (no seating in restaurants)
 - Changed the menu (too many items) + found that 80% of sales were hamburgers
 - Cut menu from 25 items to 9 (featured hamburgers and chose condiments – ketchup, mustard, onions and pickles – and found a machine to make the patties)
 - Started preparing the food in an assembly line
 - Replaced small grill with two 6 foot grills and replaced plates and silverware with disposable paper goods (eliminated need for a dishwasher)
- New and improved restaurant was designed to attract families rather than singles and teens. It was successful! Families came for low prices & restaurant food, ordered and ate in the car.

McDonalds - Like "Levittown on a Bun..."

- The McDonald brothers had done for hamburgers what Henry Ford had done for cars. MEANING WHAT?
- In 1954, the 2 brothers partnered with **Ray Kroc**, a former Multi-mixer salesman, who made McDonalds what it is today.
 - By 1954, the brothers already had nine franchises but the brothers were less ambitious than Kroc.
 - DEFINE: a business that is owned by an entrepreneur but which is then leased out in name to another person who runs their own stores and give the owner a % of its sales (i.e., Dunkin Donuts)
 - Kroc had a vision...saw the potential for franchising – he was responsible for developing McDonalds into the first national chain.



- In 1961, Kroc bought out the McDonald brothers, who he thought were holding him back with their laziness and lack of ambition.
 - The brothers got \$1 million each for the sale of the name and the company (some estimate that Kroc made \$600 million the time he died in 1984!!)
- Once Kroc had control, he forced the McDonalds brothers to remove the name - their own name - from the original restaurant. They renamed it Big M. Kroc didn't stop there; he opened a brand new McDonalds one block away!
- By 1984, when Kroc died, McDonalds was serving 17 million customers a day!





Popular Culture in the 1950s

Fashion, Fads, Inventions, etc.



In 1950...

- The population of the U.S. is 150,697,361. (In 2017, the population was double that.)
- The divorce rate was 23%. (In 2017, the divorce rate is 40-50%.)
 - Median age for 1st marriage is 22 years old for men and 20 for women. (Today it is closer to 29 years old for men and 27 for women.)
- 21.6% of wives worked outside the home. By 1960, that number hit 30.5%. The reason for the jump? There was simply so much to buy. (Today, women account for 47% of the workforce.)
- FBI institutes the 10 Most Wanted list.
- Smokey the Bear gains national popularity.
- Silly Putty is introduced!
- Walt Disney's "Cinderella" opens in theaters.
- Cartoonist Hank Ketcham created "Dennis the Menace."
- The first self-service elevator is installed in Dallas.
- Food:
 - Pillsbury and General Mills introduce prepared cake mixes.
 - KRAFT® Deluxe processed cheese slices - the first commercially packaged sliced process cheese - are introduced.
 - Minute Rice is launched.
 - The Open Kettle, a coffee and donut shop in Quincy Mass. is renamed Dunkin' Donuts. The first franchise is offered in 1955.

Inventions and Innovations of the 1950s

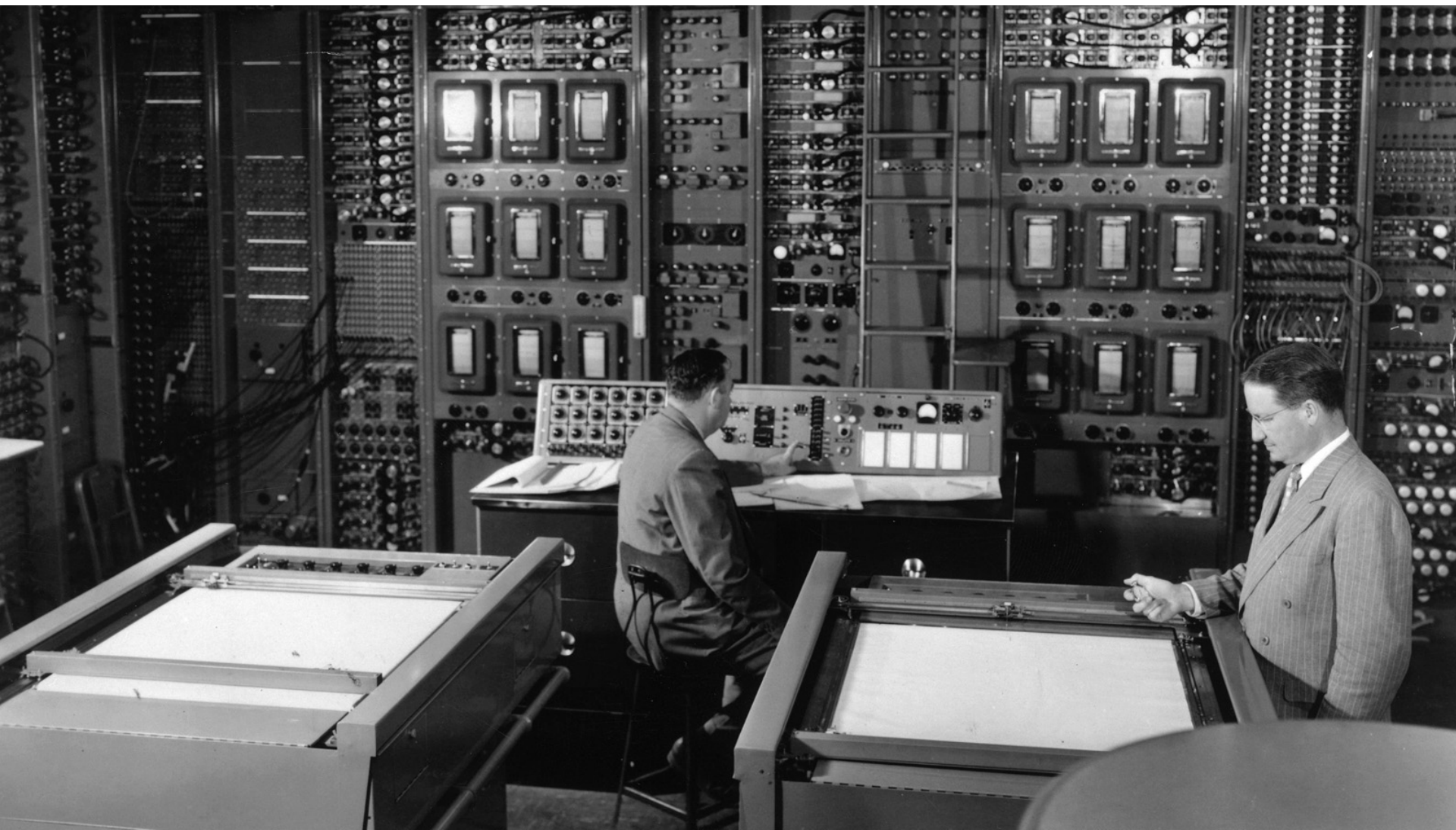
- Mr. Potato Head made his debut in 1952.
- The original Mr. Potato Head toy consists entirely of pieces – children used a real potato for the body!
- Mr. Potato Head was the first toy ever advertised on network TV.





Other Inventions and Innovations

- **1950:**
 - Zenith introduces "*lazy bones*" tuning. Hand held device plugs into TV.
 - *Answering Machine* created.
- **1951:**
 - UNIVAC 1 becomes the first commercial *computer*.
 - Atomic Energy Commission produces *electricity* from atomic energy.
 - *Super glue* invented.
 - First *videotape recorder* invented.
 - Still camera gets *built-in flash* units.
- **1952:**
 - Sony, a brand new Japanese company, introduces the first pocket-sized *transistor radio*
- **1953:**
 - The first *3-D movie* is shown
 - Dow Chemical creates *Saran Wrap*
 - *TV color broadcasting* began in 1953
- **1954:**
 - The first successful *kidney transplant* was performed in the U.S.. The patient survived for seven more years.
- **1955:**
 - Zenith invented the "Flashmatic," the first *wireless TV remote*.
 - Gregory Pincus develops the first *oral contraceptive*
 - The first *home microwave ovens* are manufactured. They cost \$1300 which really slows sales!
- **1956:**
 - The first *computer hard disk* used.
 - Secretary Bette Nesmith Graham invented "Mistake Out" (White Out).
- **1957:**
 - Fortran (*computer lang.*) invented.
 - *Velcro* is patented.
 - "*AA*" size *alkaline batteries* invented
- **1958:**
 - The *modem* invented.



Fads of the 1950s

- Hula hoops
- Telephone booth cramming
- 3-D movies
- Coonskin caps
- Chlorophyll
- Poodles
- Poodle skirts & saddle shoes
- Panty raids
- Yo-yos
- Barbie and GI Joes
- Bikinis
- Frisbees



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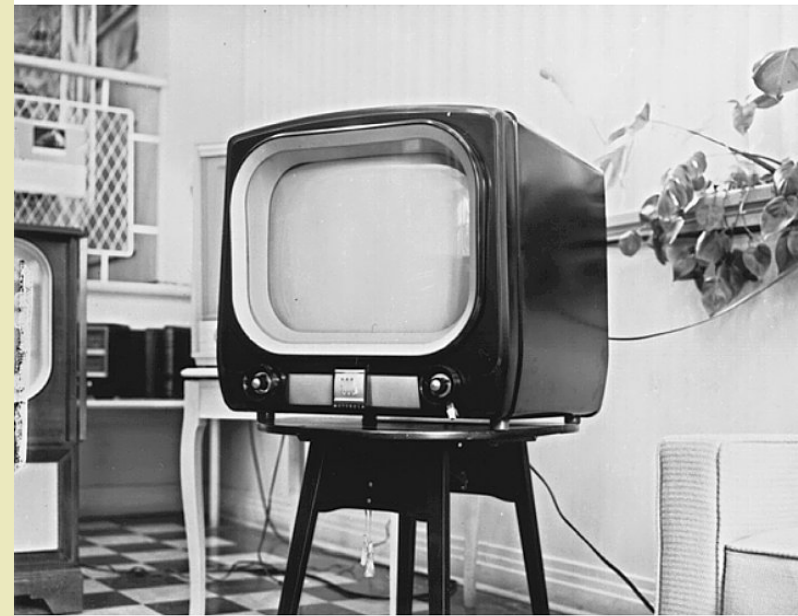
Fashion of the 1950s





Television in the 1950s

- Developed in the 1930s but not popular until after WWII. Prior to the 1950s, people relied on **radio** and **newspaper** for entertainment.
- 1950s saw a boom in TV sales
 - 1947, RCA mass-produced a 7-inch TV and sold 170 thousand of them
 - 1950, there were about 10 million TV sets in the U.S.
 - By 1953, 2/3 of all American families owned TVs
- In 1955, the average American family watched TV for 4-5 hours a day
- 1950s TV was black and white, mostly on in the afternoons and evenings, relied on an antenna for reception (no remote controls)
- Change to color TVs by the early to mid-1960s (too expensive to purchase in the 1950s and many had only just bought their TVs)



1950s Television



Roadside.com

Mousekartoon Promo
Darlene Gillespie, 1955
The Mickey Mouse Club

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