I. Creating the American Dream - American Society

A. Post-WW II economic boom and the "affluent society"

1. US in great position, rest of the world had just

blown itself up

2. industrial productivity

a. increase in blue collar jobs,

i. manual labor

ii. skilled and semi-skilled

b. consumer durables, housing, military industrial complex, autos, highway construction

c. increase in wages, skilled and semi-skilled

production workers were able to become

middle class

d. and see opportunity for their children, college

2. Larger organizations - government and corporate

a. Huge increase in white collar jobs,

i. mental

ii. managers, execs, advertising, PR personnel

iii. teachers and government workers

a. highest percent of workers

b. higher status than blue collar, privileging of mental over manual

labor

3. but also after 1950 millions of jobs for secondary teachers, local and

federal government office workers, and hospital staff

4. Benefits to workers

a. Disposable income doubled

b. per capita +35%

c. 60% middle class

B. Government subsidized this

a. GI Bill of Rights 1944, called the Serviceman's

Readjustment Act provided for

a. education,

b. job training,

c. business loans,

b. Employment Act of 1946, which committed the federal

government to promote "maximum employment, production, and

purchasing power and set up a Council of Economic Advisers for

developing "national economic policies"

c. Govt subsidies to auto industry

a. highway construction 1956 Interstate and

Defense Highway Program $97 billion

b. factories built during war to auto industries

military-industrial complex

c. oil reserves to corporations

d. air transportation system

e. atomic energy system

B. New social environment -- Building the "burbs"

1. suburbanization

a. one of largest demographic movement

b. 40-50 million middle class moved to suburbs

2. mass production of suburbs

a. Private developers constructed huge suburban

housing developments, Levittown

i. largest housing project in history, 18,000

ii. two types, Cape Cod $7900 and ranch

$9500

b. Owning a house, in the suburbs, a central

figure was William J. Levitt (132)

i. 1944 114,000 housing starts, 1950 1.7m

ii.17,000 in first Levittown, 180 a week, 36 each day, 18 in

the morning, 18 in the afternoon

iii. no down payments, no closing costs, no secret extras

iv. there was criticism of the homogenization

Lewis Mumford: "a multitude of uniform, unidentifiable house, lined up inflexibly, at uniform distances on uniform roads, in a treeless command waste, inhabited by people of the same class, the same incomes, the same age group, witnessing the same television performances, eating the same tasteless prefabricated foods, from the same freezers, conforming in every outward and inward respect to a common mold manufactured in the same central metropolis. Thus the ultimate effect of the suburban escape in our time is, ironically, a low-grade uniform environment from which escape is impossible." *The Invasion of the Body Snatchers*

3. Low interest FHA and VA loans

a. VA $1 down, FHA

b. 2 to 3% interest rate

c. private institutions banks and insurance companies made loans

and provided ins for homes and businesses in suburbs

2. federal revenue to suburban infrastructure

1. money was directed towards developing the infrastructure for the suburbs, sewage, power, schools

b. highways

D. The Car Culture

1. Much of this was due to Henry Ford and the method of mass production called Fordism
2. Ford developed the Model T with which saturated the market, one model, one color, black

3. however, it was GM that put the car in the center of the American

dream

a. GM was the richest and largest corporation in the world, a universe unto itself,

i. small cars make small profits

ii. safety doesn't sell

b. Alfred P. Sloan, his dream, a super corporation to exploit the consumer society

c. a brand for every strata of society

i. Chevy by far the largest branch, 75% of profit was for

blue collar and young couples

ii. Pontiac was for those more secure who wanted a slightly

sportier car, Olds - more sedate, Buick - town doctor,

Cadillac - top executive or owner of local factory

1. Sloan and GM’s policy to create and encourage dreams - identity,

freedom, independence

a. emphasis on status and style, and changing style each year

b. art departments, and advertising became central.

"We design a car to make a man unhappy with his 1957 Ford 'long about the end of 1958."

5. planned obsolescence, "dynamic obsolesce"

"Fins, the most famous automotive detail of the era, represented no technological advance; they were solely a design element whose purpose was to make the cars seem sleeker, bigger, and more powerful." Harley Earl, 'visible prestige marking for an expensive car."

6. It is estimated that 68-70 million cars were sold in the 50s, GM sold

over half of these, and 4.5 million were scrapped each year, many just

because new models came out

7. In one year $65 billion was spent on motor vehicles, 1/5 of the gross

national product, the year of the '55 Chevy 265 cubic inch V8 with 160

horsepower, then 250, 325, 410.

8. The cost of cars rose twice as fast during the decade than the rest of the

wholesale cost index

9. of course they had to make cars a necessity

a. US had best mass transit in the world

1. GM, Greyhound, Firestone used a dummy holding company

New City Lines

i. bought and tore up mass transit in most major US cities

ii. fined $5000

D. The suburban landscape, malls, fast foods, vast networks of interstate, and

motels

1. McDonald's "fast foods" for a fast country

1. Dick and Mac built a hamburger stand in San Bernardino on

$5,000 loan from Bank of America

b. It was a success, but they thought they needed "speed"

1. American's had less time because of commuting and family,

young families needed a inexpensive meal

d. Fordism to fast foods - mass production, efficient,

and standardized

i. introduced paperware instead of hardware

ii. hamburgers smaller,10 per pound

iii. standardized condiments

iv. machine to make consistent patties

v. new grills to cook more hamburgers, new shake machine

vi. production line assembly, modified shake machine –

McJob

1. enter Ray Kroc, who saw that McDonald's was taking advantage

of the "instant suburbs"

1. Kroc - highly standardized- everything consistent: food to

service to location -- the perfect hamburger stand

1958, to the MC brothers: "We have found out, as you have, that we cannot trust some people who are nonconformists. We will make conformists out of them in a hurry. Even personal friends who we know have the best of intentions may not conform. . . You cannot give them an inch. The organization cannot trust the individual; the individual must trust the organization or he shouldn't go into this kind of business."

E. By the early 50s American had already begun organizing their leisure time

around their favorite TV shows 'toilets flushed all over the city at the same time."

1. In 1949 there were only 1 million sets; by 1953: 20 million

2. 1000 stores opened each month selling TV sets

3. selling 16,000 a day. 5 million/yr

4. technology and social change

a. stores closed on the night I Love Lucy was on

b. shattered movie industry

i. 50s 1/3 of theaters closed

ii. Between 46 and mid 50s audience decline one-half

iii. movie companies began producing TV shows

iv. gimmicks - Cinerama, Three D, smellavision

c. destroyed radio as it was

d. decrease in reading, library use, and buying books

e. new family ritual for dinner

1. increase in fast foods restaurants and decrease in family

restaurants

g. advertising in the home

h. changed politics

G. early examples, Milton Berle and I Love Lucy

1. Berle, first TV superstar, cover of Time and Life, long term contract,

popular with urban viewers, falling down, coaxial cable and rural and suburban

2. Lucy, by 1954, more than 50 million viewers for some episodes

E. Television and advertising and the American dream

1. Television was a much more powerful tool for selling "dream machine"

a. products advertised on TV soared

b. 90% of all American homes by 1960

Rosser Reeves: "We could take the same advertising campaign from print or radio and put it on TV, and even when there were very few sets, sales would go through the roof."

2. Television advertising billings: 1949 $12.3 million, 1951 $128 million

1. Advertising agencies went from $40 million in sales to $235 million in

15 years, 1945-1960.

Yale historian David Potter in People of Plenty: "Advertising now compares with such long-standing institutions as the school and the church in the magnitude of its social influence. It dominates the media, it has vast power in the shaping of popular standards and it is really one of the very limited groups of **institutions which exercise social control."**

F. Advertising

1. shows us product, how it works but

2. creates and sells dreams and desires

1. advertisers discovered that how a product was marketed, designed, and presented was as or more important than what it did, or how well it worked

4. influence on the development of autos

"Some auto executives later decided that television advertising tilted the balance within their companies, making marketing and sale gradually more important than engineering and manufacturing . . . if the styling was half way decent and the ad campaign good enough, the marketing department could sell them,"

5. Target identity through symbolic meanings and associations

1. Chevy's ads, see the USA in a Chevrolet, the son going to the

prom, people with old car

6. Marlboro and Philip Morris, not a major player, a women's cigarette

7. Advertising, ferocious consumerism, credit, and the Puritan ethic

G. Rock and Roll

Elvis and Rock and Roll, James Dean, films like,

The Wild One, Rebel without a Cause, The Blackboard

Jungle