

CHAPTER
27

GUIDED READING *Postwar America*

Section 1

A. As you read this section, describe the solutions offered to deal with postwar problems.

1. Problem: Millions of veterans thrown out of work as they return to civilian life.	
Solution offered by the Truman administration and Congress	
2. Problem: Severe housing shortage	
Solution offered by developers such as William Levitt	
Solutions offered by Congress under the Truman and Eisenhower administrations	
3. Problem: Runaway inflation	
Solution offered by the Truman administration and Congress	
4. Problem: Labor strikes that threaten to cripple the nation	
Solution offered by the Truman administration	
5. Problem: Discrimination and racial violence	
Solutions offered during the Truman administration	
Solutions offered during the Eisenhower administration	

B. On the back of this paper, explain the significance of **suburb**, **Dixiecrat**, and **Fair Deal**.



Section 2

GUIDED READING

The American Dream in the Fifties

A. As you read this section, write notes about how Americans were affected by various trends of the 1950s.

Trends	Effects
1. Business expansion: conglomerates and franchises	
2. Suburban expansion: flight from the cities	
3. Population growth: the baby boom	
4. Dramatic increase in leisure time	
5. Dramatic increase in the use of the automobile	
6. The rise of consumerism	

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B. On the back of this paper, briefly explain **planned obsolescence**. Then tell how **Dr. Jonas Salk** affected American society in the 1950s.

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GUIDED READING *Popular Culture*

Section 3

A. As you read this section, take notes to answer questions about innovations and trends in 1950s popular culture.

1. Television	a. What are some of the most popular shows produced?	b. What kinds of subjects did television tend to present?	c. What kinds of subjects did it tend to avoid?
2. Radio	a. How did radio change to compete with television?		b. What role did it play in popularizing African-American culture?
3. Film	How did movies change to compete with television?		
4. The beat movement	a. Who were the most famous beat writers?	b. What were the movement's chief characteristics?	
5. Rock 'n' roll	a. Who helped to popularize rock 'n' roll?	b. What were rock's chief characteristics?	

B. On the back of this paper, explain the purpose of the **Federal Communications Commission (FCC)**; then, define **beatnik**.



GUIDED READING *The Other America*

Section 4

A. As you read about problems faced by the “other” America of the 1950s, note the causes of those problems, the solutions that were offered, and the effects of those solutions. (Notice that two answers have been provided for you.)

Problem: Decaying Cities		
1. Causes:	Solution offered: <i>Urban renewal</i>	2. Effects of solution:
Problem: Discrimination Against Mexican Americans		
Causes: <i>Prejudice against Hispanics; hard feelings toward braceros who stayed to work in the U.S. after World War II; illegal aliens escaping poor conditions in Mexico</i>	3. Solutions offered:	4. Effects of solutions:
Problem: Economic Hardship for Native Americans		
5. Causes:	6. Solutions offered:	7. Effects of solution:

B. On the back of this paper, explain the terms **bracero** and **termination policy**.

CHAPTER
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Section 3

SKILLBUILDER PRACTICE *Primary Sources*

How did mainstream America in the 1950s react to rock 'n' roll? One way to find out is to look at the media reports of the time. Read this excerpt from a Time magazine article, then answer the questions at the bottom of the page. (See Skillbuilder Handbook, p. 1052.)

In Boston Roman Catholic leaders urged that the offensive music be boycotted. In Hartford city officials considered revoking the State Theater's license after several audiences got too rowdy during a musical stage show. In Washington the police chief recommended banning such shows from the National Guard Armory after brawls in which several people were injured. In Minneapolis a theater manager withdrew a film featuring the music after a gang of youngsters left the theater, snake-danced around town and smashed windows. In Birmingham champions of white supremacy decried it as part of a Negro plot against the whites. At a wild concert in Atlanta's baseball park one night, fists and beer bottles were thrown, four youngsters were arrested.

The object of all this attention is a musical style known as "rock 'n' roll," which has captivated U.S. adolescents as swing captivated prewar teen-agers and ragtime vibrated those of the '20s. It does for music what a motorcycle club at full throttle does for a quiet Sunday afternoon.

Rock 'n' roll is based on Negro blues, but in a self-conscious style which underlines the primitive qualities of the blues with malice aforethought.

Characteristics: An unrelenting, socking syncopation that sounds like a bull whip; a choleric saxophone honking mating-call sounds; an electric guitar turned up so loud that its sound shatters and splits; a vocal group that shudders and exercises violently to the beat while roughly chanting either a near-nonsense phrase or a moronic lyric in hillbilly idiom.

Sample:

*Long tall Sally has a lot on the ball
Nobody cares if she's long and tall
Oh, Baby! Yeh-heh-heh-hes, Baby
Whoo-oo-oo-oo, Baby! I'm havin' me
some fun tonight, yeah. . . .*

Does rock-'n'-roll music itself encourage any form of juvenile delinquency? . . . Pop Record Maker Mitch Miller, no rock 'n' roller, sums up for the defense: "You can't call any music immoral. If anything is wrong with rock 'n' roll, it is that it makes a virtue out of monotony." For the prosecution, the best comment comes indirectly from Actress Judy Holliday in *Born Yesterday*: It's just not couth, that's all.

from *Time* (June 18, 1956), 54.

1. What is the source of this information? _____

2. Is the source qualified to report on this subject? Explain. _____

3. What is the tone of the article? _____

4. Are there more statements of fact or of opinion? Underline all statements of opinion in the article.

5. Would this be a good source of information about attitudes toward rock 'n' roll in the '50s? Explain.

CHAPTER
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Section 2

GEOGRAPHY APPLICATION: HUMAN-ENVIRONMENT INTERACTIONS

The Baby Boom

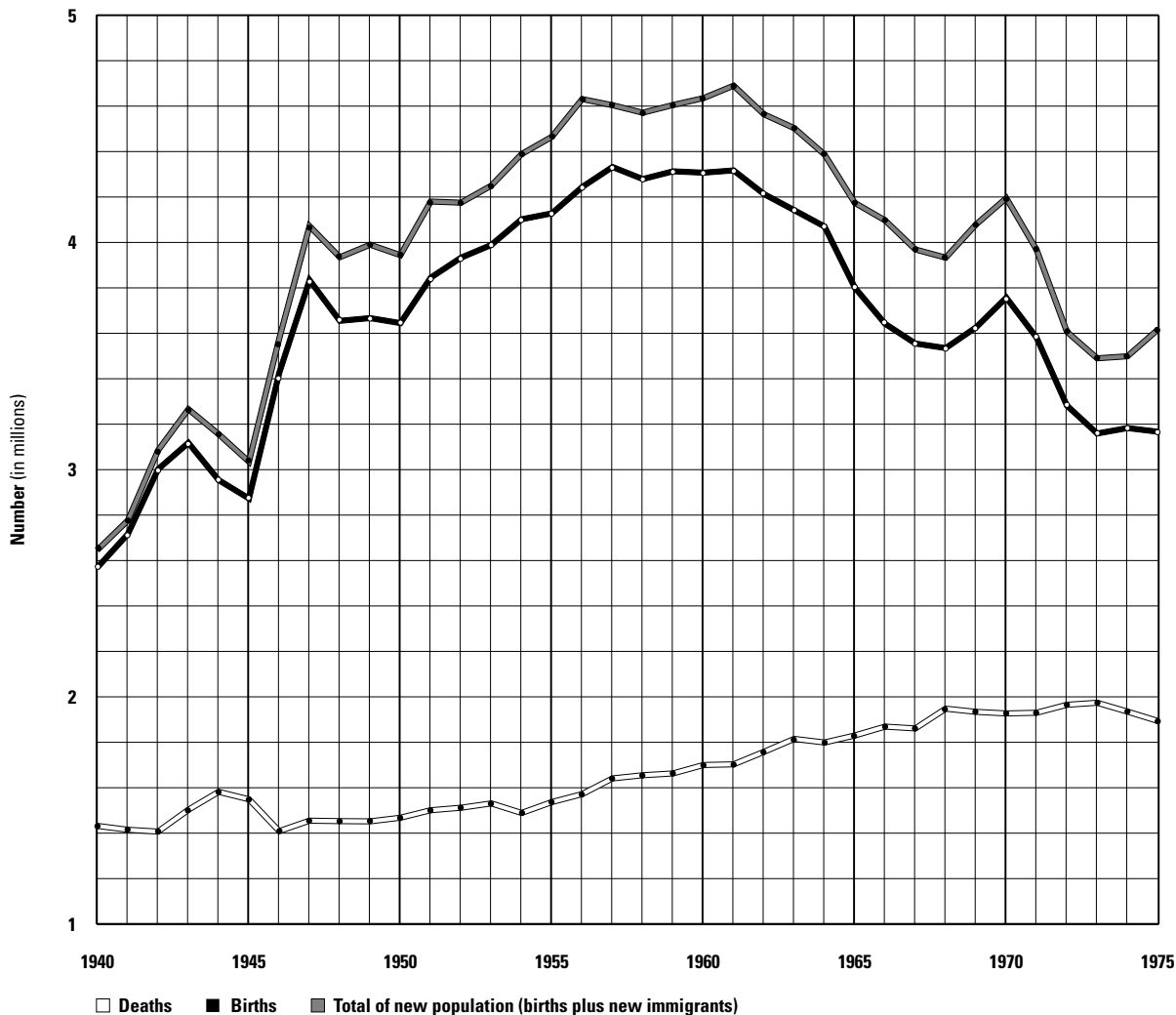
Directions: Read the paragraphs below and study the graph carefully. Then answer the questions that follow.

The term *baby boom* refers to the years 1946 to 1964 when the population of the United States soared due to a dramatic postwar increase in the annual birthrate. The birthrate had been declining fairly steadily for decades, falling below 20 births per 1,000 people for the first time in 1931. In 1941, however, the birthrate edged back up over 20 and stayed above that figure through 1964.

At the height of the baby boom, from 1954 to

1961, more than 4 million babies were born in the United States every year. Many women who might have stayed childless at other times decided to have children. One sociologist wrote about the “pro-child social values” that characterized the period: “Those who didn’t want children were an embarrassed and embattled minority. It [not having children] was almost evidence of a physical or mental deficiency.”

The U.S. Baby Boom in Perspective, 1940–1975



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Interpreting Text and Visuals

1. What happened to the number of births in the two years prior to 1946? _____

2. What was probably the major cause of the beginning of the baby boom? _____

3. Look at the graph's 1959 totals. What does the 4.30 level indicate? _____

What does the level of 4.60 indicate? _____

What does the level of 1.66 indicate? _____

By how much did the U.S. population increase in that year? _____

4. Nearly 60,000 more people immigrated to the United States in 1965 than in 1964.

Why then does the top line in the graph dip down between those years? _____

5. What is significant about the number of births in 1972? (Hint: Look at the number of births for the first year of the baby boom.) _____

Why do you think 1964 is considered the final year of the baby boom? _____

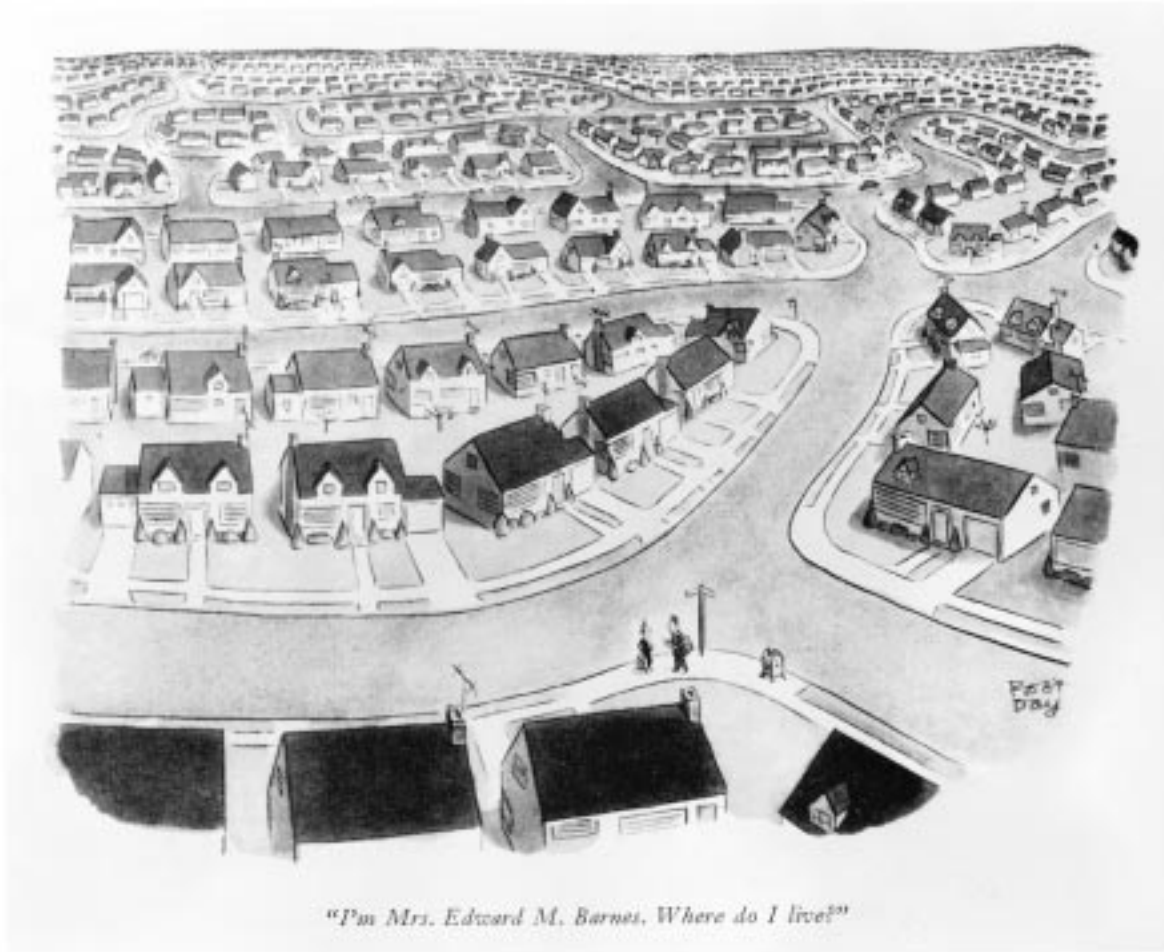
6. Contrast the patterns of births and deaths during the years 1940–1975. _____

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Section 1

PRIMARY SOURCE **Cartoon**

This cartoon spoofs the housing developments of the 1950s that gave Americans the cookie-cutter homes and neighborhoods they craved. According to the cartoon, what was one negative aspect of postwar suburban developments?



Copyright © 1954 Drawing by Robert Day/New Yorker Magazine, Inc.

Discussion Questions

1. What words or phrases would you use to describe the housing development depicted in this cartoon?
2. How do you think the woman in the cartoon, Mrs. Edward M. Barnes, feels about living in a suburban development?
3. Why do you think Americans in the 1950s wanted to live in a housing development like this one? Cite evidence from your textbook to support your opinion.

CHAPTER
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Section 2

PRIMARY SOURCE *from The Organization Man*

Through the “looking glass” of the typical suburban community of Park Forest, Illinois, William H. Whyte, Jr., examined 1950s beliefs and values. As you read this excerpt from Whyte’s study, think about his concept of the organization man.

This book is about the organization man. If the term is vague, it is because I can think of no other way to describe the people I am talking about. They are not the workers, nor are they the white-collar people in the usual, clerk sense of the word. These people only work for The Organization. The ones I am talking about *belong* to it as well. They are the ones of our middle class who have left home, spiritually as well as physically, to take the vows of organization life, and it is they who are the mind and soul of our great self-perpetuating institutions. Only a few are top managers or ever will be. In a system that makes such hazy terminology as “junior executive” psychologically necessary, they are of the staff as much as the line, and most are destined to live poised in a middle area that still awaits satisfactory euphemism. . . .

The corporation man is the most conspicuous example, but he is only one, for the collectivization so visible in the corporation has affected almost every field of work. Blood brother to the business trainee off to join Du Pont is the seminary student who will end up in the church hierarchy, the doctor headed for the corporate clinic, the physics Ph.D. in a government laboratory, the intellectual on the foundation-sponsored team project, the engineering graduate in the huge drafting room at Lockheed, the young apprentice in a Wall Street law factory.

They are all, as they so often put it, in the same boat. Listen to them talk to each other over the front lawns of their suburbia and you cannot help but be struck by how well they grasp the common denominators which bind them. Whatever the differences in their organization ties, it is the common problems of collective work that dominate their attentions, and when the Du Pont man talks to the research chemist or the chemist to the army man, it is these problems that are uppermost. The word *collective* most of them can’t bring themselves to use—except to describe foreign countries or organizations they don’t work for—but they are keenly aware of how much more deeply beholden they are to organization than were their elders. They are wry about it, to be sure; they talk of the “treadmill,” the “rat race,” of the inability to control one’s direction. But they have no

great sense of plight; between themselves and organization they believe they see an ultimate harmony. . . .

[My concern in this book] is the principle impact that organization life has had on the individuals within it. A collision has been taking place—indeed, hundreds of thousands of them, and in the aggregate they have been producing what I believe is a major shift in American ideology.

Officially, we are a people who hold to the Protestant Ethic. . . . [T]here is almost always the thought that pursuit of individual salvation through hard work, thrift, and competitive struggle is the heart of the American achievement.

But the harsh facts of organization life simply do not jibe with these precepts. This conflict is certainly not a peculiarly American development. . . .

It is in America, however, that the contrast between the old ethic and current reality has been most apparent—and most poignant. Of all peoples it is we who have led in the public worship of individualism. . . . We kept on, and as late as the twenties, when big organization was long since a fact, affirmed the old faith as if nothing had really changed at all.

Today many still try, and it is the members of the kind of organization most responsible for the change, the corporation, who try the hardest. It is the corporation man [who] . . . honestly wants to believe he follows the tenets he extols, and if he extols them so frequently it is, perhaps, to shut out a nagging suspicion that he, too, the last defender of the faith, is no longer pure. Only by using the language of individualism to describe the collective can he stave off the thought that he himself is in a collective.

from William H. Whyte, Jr., The Organization Man (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1956), 3–5.

Discussion Questions

1. What characteristics defined an organization man?
2. What conflict does Whyte see between the American value of individualism and the fact of organization life?
3. Do you think the conflict Whyte identifies for the 1950s still exists today? Explain.



Section 4

PRIMARY SOURCE *from The Other America*

Sociologist Michael Harrington studied the plight of the “invisible” poor. His shocking report spurred Presidents John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson to fight the war on poverty. As you read this excerpt from Harrington’s study, compare “other” Americans with those who realized the American dream in the 1950s.

There is a familiar America. It is celebrated in speeches and advertised on television and in the magazines. It has the highest mass standard of living the world has ever known.

In the 1950s this America worried about itself, yet even its anxieties were products of abundance. The title of a brilliant book [John Kenneth Galbraith’s *The Affluent Society*] was widely misinterpreted, and the familiar America began to call itself “the affluent society.” There was introspection about Madison Avenue and tail fins; there was discussion of the emotional suffering taking place in the suburbs. In all this, there was an implicit assumption that the basic grinding economic problems had been solved in the United States. In this theory the nation’s problems were no longer a matter of basic human needs, of food, shelter, and clothing. Now they were seen as qualitative, a question of learning to live decently amid luxury.

While this discussion was carried on, there existed another America. In it dwelt somewhere between 40,000,000 and 50,000,000 citizens of this land. They were poor. They still are.

To be sure, the other America is not impoverished in the same sense as those poor nations where millions cling to hunger as a defense against starvation. This country has escaped such extremes. That does not change the fact that tens of millions of Americans are, at this very moment, maimed in body and spirit, existing at levels beneath those necessary for human decency. If these people are not starving, they are hungry, and sometimes fat with hunger, for that is what cheap foods do. They are without adequate housing and education and medical care.

The Government has documented what this means to the bodies of the poor, and the figures will be cited throughout this book. But even more basic, this poverty twists and deforms the spirit. The American poor are pessimistic and defeated, and they are victimized by mental suffering to a degree unknown in Suburbia.

This book is a description of the world in which these people live; it is about the other America.

Here are the unskilled workers, the migrant farm workers, the aged, the minorities, and all the others who live in the economic underworld of American life. In all this, there will be statistics, and that offers the opportunity for disagreement among honest and sincere men. I would ask the reader to respond critically to every assertion, but not to allow statistical quibbling to obscure the huge, enormous, and intolerable fact of poverty in America. For, when all is said and done, that fact is unmistakable, whatever its exact dimensions, and the truly human reaction can only be outrage. . . .

There are perennial reasons that make the other America an invisible land.

Poverty is often off the beaten track. It always has been. The ordinary tourist never left the main highway, and today he rides interstate turnpikes. He does not go into the valleys of Pennsylvania where the towns look like the movie sets of Wales in the thirties. He does not see the company houses in rows, the rutted roads (the poor always have bad roads whether they live in the city, in towns, or on farms), and everything is black and dirty. And even if he were to pass through such a place by accident, the tourist would not meet the unemployed men in the bar or the women coming home from a run-away sweatshop.

from Michael Harrington, The Other America: Poverty in the United States (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1962), 9–11.

Research Options

1. According to Harrington’s study, 40 to 50 million Americans were poor in the 1950s. Use a resource such as *The World Almanac and Book of Facts* to find out how many Americans are poor today. Has the number of poor people in the United States increased or decreased since the 1950s?
2. Research the government programs that were initiated under the Kennedy and Johnson administrations to help the poor in the United States. Then make a chart to share your findings.



Section 4

PRIMARY SOURCE

The Voluntary Relocation Program

During the 1950s and 1960s, the federal government's Bureau of Indian Affairs subsidized the resettlement of some 35,000 rural Native Americans in urban areas. This voluntary relocation program, begun in response to the federal government's plan to "terminate" the tribes, ultimately failed. Native Americans encountered discrimination and a lack of adequate housing and jobs. As Watt Spade and Willard Walker indicate in their account of a visit to Chicago in this period, many of those who moved to the cities did not choose to stay.

One time I went up there to Chicago where my brother lives. Rabbit is his name. He was right there when I got off the bus. We were a little hungry so we stopped to eat on the way across town. This restaurant we stopped at was all glass on the outside, like one big window. You could see all the people eating inside. They weren't sitting down either; they were all standing up at a counter that wound all around through the place. They were standing along both sides of this counter, but they didn't seem to be talking to each other or looking at each other. It was like they were all looking at the wall.

My brother and I decided to eat at a place called Wally's Bar over near where he lives at Fullerton and Green. There were a lot of people in that place and they were all very friendly. They all seemed to know my brother too, but they called him "Indian Joe." I hadn't ever heard him called that.

Rabbit told me he didn't have any place where I could stay. He had an apartment, but they'd had a fire there a few days before. We went over to look at it, and I guess he hadn't been there for a few days because there was a letter from Momma on the stairs right where you come in. There was black soot on the stairs all the way up to the fourth floor, where his apartment was; and there were some Puerto Rican guys up there cleaning the place up. They had the radio turned on real loud playing some kind of Puerto Rican music. The whole place smelled like charcoal and burnt furniture.

We went back to that place where they all called Rabbit "Indian Joe" and I told him about the news from home. Then he told me all about the

city and about Chicago Rawhide, where he works. Finally I said I didn't think I was ready to settle down there just yet. We went on back to the bus station and waited around for the bus back to Oklahoma. There were a couple of Indian guys there, and they were telling this story. They said the government wanted to put a man on the moon and it could be done alright, but nobody knew how to get the guy home again after he landed on the moon. These guys said all the government had to do was put an Indian in that rocket ship and tell him he was being relocated and then, after he got to the moon, that Indian would find his own way home again and the government wouldn't have to figure that part out at all.

Rabbit and I sure liked that story. I wonder what ever happened to those two Indian guys.

from "Relocation" in *Cherokee Stories* by the Reverend Watt Spade and Willard Walker (Middletown: Wesleyan University Laboratory of Anthropology, 1966).

Discussion Questions

1. What were the narrator's first impressions of Chicago after he arrived by bus from Oklahoma?
2. What kind of life did Rabbit lead in Chicago?
3. Why do you think the narrator decided not to stay in Chicago with his brother?
4. Think about the story that the two Native Americans told at the bus station. Does the story reflect the success or the failure of the voluntary relocation program? Explain your response.

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Section 2

LITERATURE SELECTION *from The Man in the Gray
Flannel Suit* by Sloan Wilson

Tom Rath, the main character of this novel, married Betsy when he was 21 and then served as a paratrooper during World War II. After the war, the Raths settled down to life in a Connecticut suburb; Tom commutes to his job in Manhattan, while Betsy stays at home to raise their three children. As you read this excerpt, think about how the Raths feel about the pursuit of the American dream.

By the time they had lived seven years in the little house on Greentree Avenue in Westport, Connecticut, they both detested it. There were many reasons, none of them logical, but all of them compelling. For one thing, the house had a kind of evil genius for displaying proof of their weaknesses and wiping out all traces of their strengths. The ragged lawn and weed-filled garden proclaimed to passers-by and the neighbors that Thomas R. Rath and his family disliked “working around the place” and couldn’t afford to pay someone else to do it. The interior of the house was even more vengeful. In the living room there was a big dent in the plaster near the floor, with a huge crack curving up from it in the shape of a question mark. That wall was damaged in the fall of 1952, when, after struggling for months to pay up the back bills, Tom came home one night to find that Betsy had bought a cut-glass vase for forty dollars. Such an extravagant gesture was utterly unlike her, at least since the war. Betsy was a conscientious household manager, and usually when she did something Tom didn’t like, they talked the matter over with careful reasonableness. But on that particular night, Tom was tired and worried because he himself had just spent seventy dollars on a new suit he felt he needed to dress properly for his business, and at the climax of a heated argument, he picked up the vase and heaved it against the wall. The heavy glass shattered, the plaster cracked, and two of the laths behind it broke. The next morning, Tom and Betsy worked together on their knees to patch the plaster, and they repainted the whole wall, but when the paint dried, the big dent near the floor with the crack curving up from it almost to the ceiling in the

shape of a question mark was still clearly visible. The fact that the crack was in the shape of a question mark did not seem symbolic to Tom and Betsy, nor even amusing—it was just annoying. Its peculiar shape caused people to stare at it abstractly, and once at a cocktail party one of the guests said, “Say, that’s funny. Did you ever notice that big question mark on your wall?”

“It’s only a crack,” Tom replied.

“But why should it be in the form of a question mark?”

“It’s just coincidence.”

“That’s funny,” the guest said. Tom and Betsy assured each other that someday they would have the whole wall replastered, but they never did. The crack remained as a perpetual reminder of Betsy’s moment of extravagance, Tom’s moment of violence, and their inability either to fix walls properly or to pay to have them fixed. It seemed ironic to Tom that the house should preserve a souvenir of such things, while allowing evenings of pleasure and kindness to slip by without a trace.

The crack in the living room was not the only reminder of the worst. An ink stain with hand

marks on the wallpaper in Janey’s room commemorated one of the few times Janey ever willfully destroyed property, and the only time Betsy ever lost her temper with her and struck her. Janey was five, and the middle one of the three Rath children. She did everything hard: she screamed when she cried, and when she was happy her small face seemed to hold for an instant all the joy in the world. Upon deciding that she wanted to play with ink, she carefully poured ink over both her hands and

The crack remained as a perpetual reminder of Betsy’s moment of extravagance, Tom’s moment of violence, and their inability either to fix walls properly or to pay to have them fixed.

made neat imprints on the wallpaper, from the floor to as high as she could reach. Betsy was so angry that she slapped both her hands, and Janey, feeling she had simply been interrupted in the midst of an artistic endeavor, lay on the bed for an hour sobbing and rubbing her hands in her eyes until her whole face was covered with ink. Feeling like a murderess, Betsy tried to comfort her, but even holding and rocking her didn't seem to help, and Betsy was shocked to find that the child was shuddering. When Tom came home that night he found mother and daughter asleep on the bed together, tightly locked in each other's arms. Both their faces were covered with ink. All this the wall remembered and recorded.

A thousand petty shabbinesses bore witness to the negligence of the Rathes. The front door had been scratched by a dog which had been run over the year before. The hot-water faucet in the bathroom dripped. Almost all the furniture needed to be refinished, reupholstered, or cleaned. And besides that, the house was too small, ugly, and almost precisely like the houses on all sides of it. The Rathes had bought the house in 1946, shortly after Tom had got out of the army and, at the suggestion of his grandmother, become an assistant to the director of the Schanenhauser Foundation, an organization which an elderly millionaire had established to help finance scientific research and the arts. They had told each other that they probably would be in the house only one or two years before they could afford something better. It took them five years to realize that the expense of raising three children was likely to increase as fast as Tom's salary at a charitable foundation. If Tom and Betsy had been entirely reasonable, this might have caused them to start painting the place like crazy, but it had the reverse effect. Without talking about it much, they both began to think of the house as a trap, and they no more enjoyed refurbishing it than a prisoner would delight in shining up the bars of his cell. Both of them were aware that their feelings about the house were not admirable.

"I don't know what's the matter with us," Betsy said one night. "Your job is plenty good enough. We've got three nice kids, and lots of people would be glad to have a house like this. We shouldn't be so *discontented* all the time."

"Of course we shouldn't!" Tom said.

Their words sounded hollow. It was curious to believe that that house with the crack in the form of a question mark on the wall and the ink stains on the wallpaper was probably the end of their personal road. It was impossible to believe. Somehow something would have to happen.

Tom thought about his house on that day early in June 1953, when a friend of his named Bill Hawthorne mentioned the possibility of a job at the United Broadcasting Corporation. Tom was having lunch with a group of acquaintances in The Golden Horseshoe, a small restaurant and bar near Rockefeller Center.

"I hear we've got a new spot opening up in our public-relations department," Bill who wrote promotion for United Broadcasting said. "I think any of you would be crazy to take it, mind you, but if you're interested, there it is. . . ."

Tom unfolded his long legs under the table and shifted his big body on his chair restlessly. "How much would it pay?" he asked casually.

"I don't know," Bill said. "Anywhere from eight to twelve thousand, I'd guess, according to how good a hold-up man you are. If you try for it, ask fifteen. I'd like to see somebody stick the bastards good."

It was fashionable that summer to be cynical about one's employers, and the promotion men were the most cynical of all.

"You can have it," Cliff Otis, a young copywriter for a large advertising agency, said. "I wouldn't want to get into a rat race like that."

Tom glanced into his glass and said nothing. Maybe I could get ten thousand a year, he thought. If I could do that, Betsy and I might be able to buy a better house.

"I don't know what's the matter with us," Betsy said one night. . . . "We shouldn't be so discontented all the time."

Discussion Questions

1. What condition is the Rathes' house in?
2. What is their attitude toward the house after they have lived there for seven years?
3. Betsy Rath does not understand why they are not satisfied with what they have, why they are so discontented. What do you think is their problem?
4. Do you think the Rathes' problem is characteristic only of the post-World War II era, or is it characteristic of other times as well? Explain.



LITERATURE SELECTION *from 1959*
by Thulani Davis

Section 3

Set in the South, 1959 is narrated by a 12-year-old African-American girl named Willie Tarrant. As you read this excerpt from the novel, pay attention to aspects of late '50s popular culture such as fashion, music, dances, and TV programs.

That evening [my brother] Preston shined his loafers with the tassels, slapped on the Aqua Velva, left the collar button open on his shirt, and split before anyone could find out where he was headed. Naturally I had to wonder if he'd gone over to Ulysses Grant Street, yet I was inclined to dismiss the whole idea. It was obvious, first of all, that he was too young for Cassie. On the other hand, Preston was cute, in the pretty-boy way. But then he dressed like a college kid, not like the slick pretty boys with their high-waters, tight black socks, and close-cut hair with the part on the side. Jack Dempsey had been more like them, even though he wasn't skinny like most of the cool boys. They didn't go out for athletics—they went in for wine.

When he'd left, I went in his room to play some 45s. I laid the Elvis Presleys to the side—that was his stuff. I stuck pretty strictly to the old and fast ones. "I'm searchin' . . . searchin' every whiiiiitcha way . . ." Actually, Jack Dempsey had been really cool. It was obvious Cassie would have liked him, everybody did. She must be heartbroken. I'd seen him outside the high school, even in the paper. He had a *Quo Vadis* cut and wore a black leather over his varsity sweaters. And even though I thought Preston could be cool, he was still Preston, too nice to be really cool. He wasn't ever going to be really cool, just like I knew I wouldn't ever really be cool. Too straight. And as for me, there was just too much stuff I didn't know. I was always late on the pickup. . . .

Preston's record collection wasn't keeping up. He hadn't gotten my new song, "Personality." I could pull it out at the record store and take it in the booth and listen to it, but I almost never had money when I got to go down there. The Coasters and Chuck Willis would do. I practiced the stroll back and forth to "Betty and Dupree" in his room. Everybody had been doing the slop, but this new line dance was on TV, and now it was the thing. Black kids made the stroll look colored, better than on *Bandstand*. We put an easy rock on it, like a walk with a dip, casual—the same as we did with all the dances. . . .

Saturday was dedication day on WRAP—Rrap Radio—and we had put the radios on in the living room and our bedrooms. The colored station was nonstop, rapid-fire jokes, plus a lot of commentary from the DJs on why they were great. On Sundays, though, we listened to the white stations because WRAP did church from can-do to can't. That involved a lot of dial flipping because the other stations only played r&b every tenth song. Every Sunday I counted to see if they would ever play more than two an hour, or even two an hour twice in a row.

Fat Freddie was running his mouth and reading out the plays. All the Busters and Judys and Cookies and Marvins were on the waves in love. Preston and I could never understand how come we never knew any of them. Of course, Preston maintained he was too cool to call in to a radio show. All the same, with all the Negro kids going to three schools, it seemed as though we should at least have *heard* of anybody calling in. Just how many colored kids were out there anyway? We made the old man keep it on in the car. If we did hear some familiar names, it would be something to talk about.

Activity Options

1. Rewrite this passage, giving it a '90s twist. Use contemporary references to popular culture instead of references to 1950s clothes, music, dance, and so forth. Then read your passage aloud to classmates.
2. Listen to music by performers who were popular in the fifties, including Elvis Presley, the Coasters, and Chuck Willis. Discuss with your classmates some of the similarities and differences between '50s music and popular music today.
3. Find out how to do the stroll, the slop, or another dance that was popular in the 1950s and then demonstrate it for the class.



Section 1

AMERICAN LIVES Jackie Robinson

Driven to Break Barriers

"There were [in 1949] other blacks in baseball—and we suffered much abuse ourselves—but [Jackie] was still the man who integrated baseball, and he lived under more pressure than any human being I met in my life (and that includes Martin Luther King, Jr.)."—former Dodger teammate Don Newcombe (1994)

All his life, Jackie Robinson struggled to break down racial barriers. In 1947, he did so in a spectacular way by becoming the first African American to play major-league baseball. His will to win baseball games made him one of the top stars of the sport.

Robinson (1919–1972) was a star athlete in high school and college, where he excelled in seven sports. When World War II broke out, he entered the army. He applied for officer training school but was refused because of his race. Robinson protested the injustice and won: he and other African Americans were admitted to the school. Later in his army career, he refused to move to the back of a bus simply because he was black. He was court-martialed but acquitted.

After the war, Robinson began to play professional baseball. However, he played for a team in the Negro Leagues, because regular major-league baseball had a ban on African-American players. At about this time, though, Branch Rickey, co-owner of the Brooklyn Dodgers, decided to end that ban, and he started looking for just the right African-American ballplayer to break the color line. He had to be talented, with a background beyond criticism—including smoking and drinking. He had to have unshakable self-control. He had to have a “must-win” attitude. Rickey felt that Jackie Robinson would be ideal—if he would take the responsibility.

Rickey asked for a meeting with Robinson. To test Robinson’s response to what he would hear from fans and opposing players, Rickey heaped verbal abuse and confrontations on him for nearly three hours. Robinson finally asked Rickey if he wanted “a ballplayer who’s afraid to fight back.” Rickey answered, “I want a player with guts enough not to fight back.” Robinson accepted the terms and promised there would be no incidents. Rickey then signed him to play second base for the 1946 season with the Montreal Royals, a Dodgers team in the International League.

Robinson’s performance in the minor leagues was sensational. He had the highest batting average

in the league and led his team to the Junior World Series Championship.

In 1947, Robinson joined the Dodgers. Throughout the season, he endured hate mail and threats from strangers, foul names and taunts from fans, and close pitches and hard slides from opponents. Remembering his promise, he responded simply by outplaying his opponents. With timely hitting, bold baserunning, and steady fielding, he became a leader. Some of his teammates were reluctant to play with him at first. However, his talents changed their minds. As one recalled, he was accepted “because everybody wanted to win.” Win they did. Robinson helped lead the Dodgers to a National League pennant in 1947 and won baseball’s award as rookie of the year.

Robinson continued to play winning baseball. Daring baserunning was his trademark. Nineteen times he stole home, a difficult feat. In ten years, he led the Dodgers to six league pennants and a world championship.

Robinson retired in 1957, and in 1962 he was voted into the Baseball Hall of Fame. He died from complications of high blood pressure and diabetes at age 53, a few weeks after his uniform number was retired by the Dodgers, now based in Los Angeles. As a tribute for the 50th anniversary of his milestone, major-league baseball dedicated its 1997 season to Robinson. All players and umpires wore a “Breaking Barriers” arm patch, and all teams used special baseballs with the commemorative logo in their home openers.

Questions

1. Many people agree that Robinson was not the best player in the Negro League in the mid-1940s. If so, why did Rickey choose him?
2. Do you think professional sports would be the same today if it had not been for Robinson?
3. Do you think Robinson’s success with the Dodgers had any impact beyond sports?

CHAPTER
27**AMERICAN LIVES** Milton Berle*The Rise and Fall of a Television Star***Section 3**

"In a sense, [the comedy-variety television show] all goes back to Berle."
—*Variety magazine (1958)*

Milton Berle has spent almost his entire life in show business. A wild comedian known for his crazy visual humor, he became famous as the first major star of television. However, his star fell almost as quickly as it rose, and to people under forty, he is virtually an unknown name today.

Born in 1908, Berle was entertaining people in his New York City neighborhood as a five-year-old. He soon appeared in movies and became part of a vaudeville act. Vaudeville was a popular stage entertainment that thrived from about 1900 to the 1920s. It combined singing, dancing girls, and rowdy comedians. Comedy became Berle's life. He told jokes. He wore funny costumes. He took a fall or had someone in the cast throw a pie in his face. As long as it got a laugh, Berle would do it.

He became a headliner—the top draw in the roster of acts in a vaudeville show. He also became the master of ceremonies at New York's Palace Theater, the most famous vaudeville house of all. Often, when he heard another comedian's funny line, he used it in his own act. For his habit of taking other people's material, he was called "The Thief of Bad Gags," a pun on *The Thief of Baghdad*, a popular movie of the day.

Starting in the late 1920s, radio became a popular mass entertainment. Berle tried to take advantage of the new medium. He had six different shows, searching for a formula that would work. However, while a studio audience might laugh uproariously at his craziness on stage, people at home, of course, could not see what he was doing. Each show was canceled.

In the late 1940s, Berle got another chance. He sensed that television was the perfect vehicle, giving the home audience the chance to see his gags. In 1948 he signed to host a variety show. That year he rotated with six other hosts, but his physical humor attracted viewers like nobody else. More than 90 percent of all homes with a television set watched when he was host. At the time, those homes were still very few—only 1 percent of the

country. Berle, though, helped change that. Sales of television sets shot up—200,000 a month in 1948 and 1949.

In 1949, Berle became the sole host of the show. *Variety* magazine, which reports on the entertainment industry, said that on Tuesday nights, when Berle's show was broadcast, attendance at theaters and night clubs dropped. Berle was hailed as "Mr. Television." *Time* and *Newsweek* both did cover stories about him. Fearing he might go elsewhere, his network signed him to a contract for 30 years.

However, just as quickly, Berle's popularity fell. At first televisions were owned mostly by people living in cities in the East and Midwest. More and more, in the early 1950s, television owners lived in the South and West and in rural areas. Berle's humor had less appeal to them. They found his insider jokes about New York City unfunny. Also, his loud pranks grew stale. As another early television star later noted, "I don't care who you are. Finally you'll get on people's nerves if they get too much of you." So, Berle's ratings slipped. He fell to third place in the 1951–1952 season and did not even reach the top ten in 1954–1955. Within a couple years, he was off the air. Two attempts to revive his show failed.

Though his show had ended, Berle kept on entertaining. He appeared on variety shows and situation comedies and even acted in dramatic roles—one time winning an Emmy award. He made a few movies in the 1970s and 1980s and continued to work night clubs. In the 1990s he has only rarely appeared on television—mostly at celebrity roasts and award shows.

Questions

1. Why did Berle not succeed in radio?
2. What two factors led to Berle's declining popularity on television?
3. What does the rise and fall of Berle's career suggest about celebrity?

CHAPTER
27
Project

LIVING HISTORY *Planning a Fifties Party*

BRAINSTORMING IDEAS As you read Chapter 27, study the images and the text, noting 1950s trends in fashions, food, and entertainment. Here are some other sources of information that might trigger ideas for your party.

Tips for Getting Ideas

Read: Locate 1950s magazines and newspapers in the library.

Talk: Interview relatives and friends who were teenagers during the 1950s.

Look: Watch videos or reruns of television shows set in the 1950s.

Listen: Play recordings of popular music from the 1950s.

Video Picks

- *Jailhouse Rock* (1957) starring Elvis Presley
- *Rebel Without a Cause* (1955) starring James Dean
- *Rock Around the Clock* (1956) featuring rock 'n' roll legends, such as Bill Haley and the Comets, Little Richard, and the Platters

DESIGNING YOUR INVITATION Use a form similar to the one below to help organize the details of your invitation.

Title or theme of your party _____

Date, time, and place _____

Suggestions for clothing to wear _____

Descriptions of the entertainment, decorations, and refreshments

A schedule of events _____

RSVP information _____

Tips for Illustration

Decorate your invitations with images from the 1950s, such as

- bobby socks
- electric guitars
- cars with fins and lots of chrome

CREATING YOUR RADIO ADVERTISEMENT As you and your partner review each other's party invitations, choose those elements that would most likely have the greatest appeal to a radio audience. Think of sound effects and lively background music that best complement the elements you both have selected. Then work together to write the advertising copy, rehearse the radio broadcast, and make the audiotape.

**Tips to Keep
the Audience Listening**

- Open with a catchy slogan.
- Write short, simple sentences.
- Include vivid descriptive details.
- Give clear information about the time and place.
- Indicate pauses for dramatic effect.



LIVING HISTORY *Standards for Evaluating
a Radio Ad*

IDEAS AND CONTENT	Exceptional	Acceptable	Poor
1. Reflects an understanding of 1950s popular culture			
2. Includes lively music as background			
3. Uses catchy slogans and sound effects			
4. Identifies the time and place of the party			
5. Includes a clear audiotape of the radio ad			
INDIVIDUAL PERFORMANCE			
6. Captures the audience's attention			
7. Is thoughtfully planned			
8. Shows evidence of sufficient rehearsals			

Comments _____

Overall Rating _____