

The 1950s: Were they really the “Happy Days”?
United States History
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The 1950s in America are viewed as a happy, perfect decade of economic boom and family togetherness; a decade in which fathers were the breadwinners and mothers happily and dutiful took care of the home and the children. TV sitcoms, now in syndication, have help to create this image of perfect, peaceful suburban life.

Note to Teachers: It may be helpful to show an episode of a popular 1950s sitcom such as *Leave it to Beaver*, *Father Knows Best*, etc. Full episodes can be found at www.tvland.com.

Directions:

1. Analyze the documents and pictures below.
2. Answer the questions about each document.
3. Complete the Wrap-up Activity described here and at the end.

Write a 5 paragraph essay, answering the question: The 1950s: Were they really the “Happy Days?” Be sure to use evidence from the documents and pictures below to defend your position.

Document #1:

The good wife's guide was published in a popular women's magazine.

Housekeeping Monthly 13 May 1955



The good wife's guide

- Have dinner ready. Plan ahead, even the night before, to have a delicious meal ready, on time for his return. This is a way of letting him know that you have been thinking about him and are concerned about his needs. Most men are hungry when they come home and the prospect of a good meal (especially his favourite dish) is part of the warm welcome needed.
- Prepare yourself. Take 15 minutes to rest so you'll be refreshed when he arrives. Touch up your make-up, put a ribbon in your hair and be fresh-looking. He has just been with a lot of work-weary people.
- Be a little gay and a little more interesting for him. His boring day may need a lift and one of your duties is to provide it.
- Clear away the clutter. Make one last trip through the main part of the house just before your husband arrives.

Housekeeping Monthly 13 May 1955

- Gather up schoolbooks, toys, paper etc and then run a dustcloth over the tables.
- Over the cooler months of the year you should prepare and light a fire for him to unwind by. Your husband will feel he has reached a haven of rest and order, and it will give you a lift too. After all, catering for his comfort will provide you with immense personal satisfaction.
- Prepare the children. Take a few minutes to wash the children's hands and faces (if they are small), comb their hair and, if necessary, change their clothes. They are little treasures and he would like to see them playing the part. Minimise all noise. At the time of his arrival, eliminate all noise of the washer, dryer or vacuum. Try to encourage the children to be quiet.
- Be happy to see him.
- Greet him with a warm smile and show sincerity in your desire to please him.
- Listen to him. You may have a dozen important things to tell him, but the moment of his arrival is not the time. Let him talk first – remember, his topics of conversation are more important than yours.
- Make the evening his. Never complain if he comes home late or goes out to dinner, or other places of entertainment without you. Instead, try to understand his world of strain and pressure and his very real need to be at home and relax.
- Your goal: Try to make sure your home is a place of peace, order and tranquillity where your husband can renew himself in body and spirit.
- Don't greet him with complaints and problems.
- Don't complain if he's late home for dinner or even if he stays out all night. Count this as minor compared to what he might have gone through that day.
- Make him comfortable. Have him lean back in a comfortable chair or have him lie down in the bedroom. Have a cool or warm drink ready for him.
- Arrange his pillow and offer to take off his shoes. Speak in a low, soothing and pleasant voice.
- Don't ask him questions about his actions or question his judgment or integrity. Remember, he is the master of the house and as such will always exercise his will with fairness and truthfulness. You have no right to question him.
- A good wife always knows her place.

1. Where and when was this article published?
2. What is the purpose of this article?
3. What three tips do you find most interesting or odd?
4. If you are female, could you abide by these guidelines? If you are male, would you expect your future wife to abide by these guidelines? Provide a brief explanation of your answer.
5. How could you use this document to answer the main DBQ question?

Document #2:

Analyze the image. This is an advertisement published in major magazine publications in 1950.



Few are born beautiful . . .

All can achieve beauty

with the Elizabeth Arden Basic Ritual

This is a solemn promise from Elizabeth Arden! Keep an inner radiance . . . keep faith with the Elizabeth Arden Basic Ritual . . . and you will have beauty!

Miss Arden's "essential" preparations are like no others in the world.

Her beauty ritual is a secret of women who have become legends . . . because they seem never to age. It can be the secret of *your* beauty, too!

So startlingly effective, the Elizabeth Arden Basic Ritual

Cleanse . . . Ardena Cleansing Cream for dry or normal skin, 1.00 to 6.00
Milky Liquid Cleanser for oily skin, 2.00

Refresh . . . with Ardena Skin Lotion, 1.00 to 9.50

Smooth . . . Ardena Velve Cream for normal skin, 1.00 to 6.00
Ardena Orange Skin Cream for dry skin, 1.00 to 8.00
Ardena Astringent Cream for oily skin, 2.00, 3.75
Over 30? Use Special Salon Treatment Lotion, 5.00 to 10.00
and Special Salon Treatment Oil, 3.75, 10.00,
with Ardena Perfection Cream, 3.25 to 18.00

For slight skin irritation, or chapping, use wonder-working Eight-Hour Cream, 1.50, 2.50 All prices plus tax



Elizabeth Arden
691 FIFTH AVENUE, NEW YORK 22, PLaza 9-2500

1. What product is being advertised?

2. Who is the ad aimed at?

3. What does the ad promise?

4. What does this ad tell you about beauty in the 1950s?

5. How could you use this document to answer the main DBQ question?

Document #3:

Analyze the advertisement published in popular magazines.



1. What product is being advertised?

2. Who is the ad aimed at?

3. What does the ad promise?

4. What does this ad tell you about families in the 1950s?

5. How could you use this document to answer the main DBQ question?

Lucky Dad to watch TV, read, relax . . . in the comfort cradle so exclusively Stratolounger's! Hours of heart-easing, tension-releasing scientific rest in minutes! There's only one Stratolounger! Many styles, sizes, featuring care-free *Boltaflex*. Value-priced from \$59.50 (Stratoresters) to \$189.50 at fine stores everywhere.



STRATOLOUNGER DIVISION • FUTURIAN STRATFORD FURNITURE COMPANY • CHICAGO 11, ILLINOIS

Document #4:

Analyze the image of 50s sitcom families. Answer the questions that follow.

The Cleaver Family (l to r) Beaver, Wally, June, Ward Cleaver



The Cleaver Family gathers for a reading



All Cleaver images from tvland.com



Source: "Father Knows Best" (1954-1963) with Robert Young, Jane Wyatt, Elinor Donahue, Billy Gray, and Lauren Chapin, Culver Pictures, Inc.



Ozzie and Harriet

http://www.usatoday.com/life/movies/reviews/2007-05-28-DVD-watch_N.htm

1. How do these sitcom images portray the family of the 1950s?
2. What lessons could families of 1950s learn from these sitcoms?
3. How could you use this document to answer the main DBQ question?

Document #5:

Read the passage below found on page 39 of Stephanie Coontz book, *The Way We Really Are: Coming to Terms with America's Changing Families*.

..., the 1950s sitcoms were aimed at young couples who had married in haste, women who had tasted new freedoms during World War II and given up their jobs with regret, veterans whose children resented their attempts to reassert paternal authority, and individuals disturbed by the changing racial and ethnic mix of postwar America. The message was clear: Buy these ranch houses, Hotpoint appliances, and child-raising ideals; relate to your spouse like this; get a new car to wash with your kids on Sunday afternoons; organize your dinners like that—and you too can escape from the conflicts of race, class, and political witch-hunts into harmonious families where father knows best, mothers are never bored or irritated, and teenagers rush to the dinner table each night, eager to get their latest dose of parental wisdom.

Many families found it possible to put together of this way of living during the 1950s and 1960s. Couples were often able to construct marriages that were much more harmonious than those in which they had grown up, and to devote far more time to their children. Even when marriages were deeply unhappy, as many were, the new stability, economic security, and educational advantages parents were able to offer their kids counted for a lot in people's assessment of their life satisfaction. And in some matters, ignorance could be bliss: The lack of media coverage of problems such as abuse or incest was terribly hard on the casualties, but it protected more fortunate families from knowledge and fear of many social ills.

1. Who were the sitcoms aimed at?
2. What was the message?
3. What counted for a lot in "people's assessment of their life situation?" In contrast, what was not as important to people?
4. What made it easy for people to be ignorant of social ills of the day?
5. How could you use this document to answer the main DBQ question?

Document #6:

Read the two passages and answer the following questions.

Friedan on Women and Tranquilizers in the 1950s

Thus terrible tiredness took so many women to doctors in the 1950's that one decided to investigate it. He found, surprisingly, that his patients suffering from "housewife's fatigue" slept more than an adult needed to sleep -as much as ten hours a day- and that the actual energy they expended on housework did not tax their capacity. The real problem must be something else, he decided-perhaps boredom. Some doctors told their women patients they must get out of the house for a day, treat themselves to a movie in town. Others prescribed tranquilizers. Many suburban housewives were taking tranquilizers like cough drops. You wake up in the morning, and you feel as if there's no point in going on another day like this. So you take a tranquilizer because it makes you not care so much that it's pointless."

<http://www.colorado.edu/AmStudies/lewis/2010/fried.htm>

HEROIN ADDICTS MOUNT

U.S., Canada and Britain Report 'Graduation' From Marijuana

LAKE SUCCESS, Dec. 2 (AP)-- The United States, Canada and Britain today reported a sharp increase in dope addicts-- victims who have "graduated" from marijuana to heroin.

Postwar prosperity, a desire for "kicks," international tension, and a greater availability of heroin because of increased smuggling from Italy and Turkey were responsible, the United Nations Commission on Narcotics was told.

In the United States one in every 3,000 of the general population-- or an estimated total of 53,000 persons-- is a heroin addict, Harry J. Anslinger, Federal Narcotics Commissioner, reported.

"Most of them are young hoodlums," he said. "All started by smoking marijuana cigarettes."

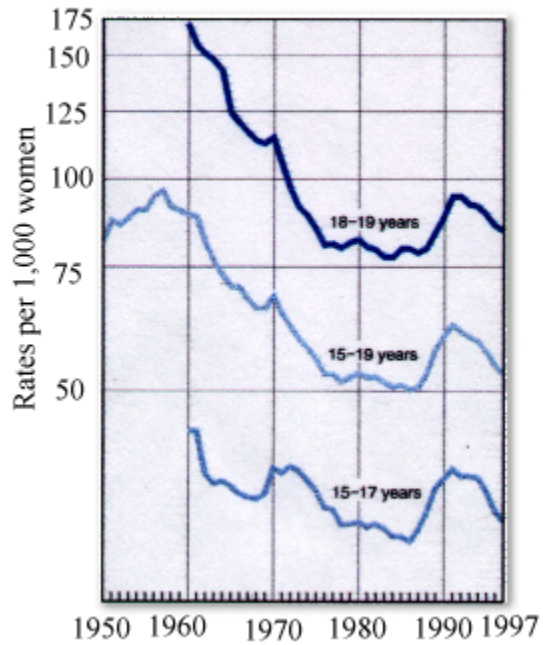
Samuel Hoare of Britain said that 326 new drug addicts had been recorded in his country during 1949, but that the great majority were past thirty years of age.

Col. C.H.L. Sherman of Canada told the commission that never before had the heroin traffic been so prevalent, with street peddlers now selling as much as half a pound at a time instead of merely a few grains.

1. What are the two articles stating is an issue during the 1950s?
2. Does this issue match up with the image of family and home in other 1950s materials such as sitcoms?
3. What are some of the causes or reasons the issue exists?
4. How could you use this document to answer the main DBQ question?

Document #7:

**Birth rates for teenagers by age in the US
1950 - 1997**



<http://parentingteens.about.com/library/sp/nbirthrate1.htm>

1. What statistic does this graph illustrate?
2. What trend occurs during the 1950s?
3. What seems to be the overall trend?
4. Is there a possible explanation for this trend?
5. How could you use this document to answer the main DBQ question?

Wrap-up Activity:

**Use the space below and the back of this page to complete the activity.
Correct grammar and structure are necessary.**

Write a 5 paragraph essay, answering the question: The 1950s: Were they really the "Happy Days?" Be sure to use evidence from the documents and pictures below to defend your position.