Name: _____

Culture after 1945

Theme: American and Regional Culture

Learning Objective 8.F: Explain how mass culture has been maintained or challenged over time.

Mass Culture

KC-8.3.II.A: Mass culture became increasingly homogeneous in the postwar years…

- _____ became more widespread (1 for nearly every 3 Americans)
    - Programming included suburbs, white families, stay-at-home mom
    - _____ on TV reached more people
- Mass production of _____, _____
- _____ encouraged conformity
    - Dissatisfaction with "ideal" life growing
- _____ (1958) sheds light on ways US falling short despite economic growth

Mass Culture

KC-8.3.II.A: …inspiring challenges to conformity by artists, intellectuals, and rebellious youth

- Writers
    - _____'s *Catcher in the Rye* writes against conformity
    - Joseph Heller's _____ pokes fun at rigidity of military
- Beat Movement (1950s)
    - Jack Kerouac (_____), Allen Ginsberg ("Howl") promote spontaneity, drugs, rebellion
- Hippies (1960s)
    - Ken Kesey (_____*)* bridges movements
    - Built on the beatniks, add rock and roll

Recap

- Due to technological changes like the television, American culture became homogeneous
- The picturesque "Leave it to Beaver" suburban life was not the reality for all
- Rebellion or counterculture arises in opposition to conformity
- Beatniks and hippies yielded cultural contributions in their rebellion against conformity

Name: _____

Part II

Short Answer Questions

Answer the following in AT LEAST three sentences.

1. Explain how mass culture has been maintained or challenged over time.

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Name: _____

Secondary Source Document Analysis

Read the essay and fill in the chart below. Identify one claim for each subsection of the essay and provide a piece of evidence that corresponds to the claim.

Title:	
Author:	
Historical Period and Topic:	
Thesis:	
Claims	Evidence
Identify an alternative viewpoint to the author's thesis.	
Does the author address this viewpoint by refuting or conceding to it?	

Name: _____

The Fifties

The years from the end of World War II to the end of the 1950s were dominated by four powerful changes in American life. The first was the birth of the Cold War, and the great fears that it created. The second was the dramatic growth of affluence, which transformed the lives of many, but not all, Americans. The third was a growing anxiety among many Americans who felt that their lives were too constricted by the staid culture of the era. And the fourth was the emergence of a new subversive culture growing beneath the smooth, stable surface of the decade that would explode in the 1960s.

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Fifties Society

Many Americans in the 1950s considered their era as a time of affluence, community, and unity. Today—a half century later—many people still see those years as a golden era that has now been lost. Even the most sophisticated chroniclers of its time believed in the great successes of the 1950s. The renowned historian Richard Hofstadter wrote at the time:

> The jobless, distracted and bewildered men of 1933 have in the course of the years found substantial places in society for themselves, have become homeowners, suburbanites, and solid citizens.

The French writer Simone de Beauvoir said of America in the 1950s:

> Class barriers disappear or become porous; the factory worker is an economic aristocrat in comparison with the middle class clerk; even segregation is diminishing; consumption replaces acquisition as an incentive. America . . . as a country of vast inequalities and dramatic contrasts is ceasing to exist.

Many middle-class Americans in these years believed in the idea that the American people, for all their diversity, were becoming more and more alike—and could expect to continue to do so in the future. Few ideas became more pervasive in popular culture than the sense that America was becoming a middle-class nation—a society in which everyone was either already part of the middle class, soon to become part of it, or aspiring to become part of it. And there was some evidence for in this powerful idea.

There was rapid growth in the number of people able to afford what the government defined as a "middle-class" standard of living—60 percent of the American people. Home ownership rose from 40 percent in 1945 to 60 percent in 1960. By 1960, 75 percent of all families owned cars; 87 percent owned televisions; 75 percent owned washing machines. But these figures also show the survival of a substantial minority (25 to 40 percent) that remained outside the middle class. More than 23 percent of Americans still lived in poverty, and African American poverty was far higher.

American politics in the 1950s was dominated by Dwight D. Eisenhower, who emerged from the war as the military man with the most political appeal, largely because of his personality. There were other generals who had performed with at least equal brilliance and effectiveness. But none of them had Eisenhower's personal qualities: his public warmth and friendliness and geniality; his dazzling, highly photogenic smile, which became his political trademark; his comforting, unthreatening public image. It helped him become president in 1953, and it helped him remain popular until he left the White House in 1961.

But Eisenhower was also appealing because he seemed to embody the stability and the desire for unity that characterized so many other areas of American culture in the 1950s. Eisenhower's approach to leadership was based on two fairly simple assumptions. He had a deep aversion to conflict and confrontation. He leaned instinctively toward consensus and conciliation; and he tried to avoid doing anything that would disrupt the harmony that he liked to believe prevailed in American society. And he was deeply committed to capitalism, and to capitalists; a champion of free

enterprise; a cheerleader for the business community in this hour of its great economic triumph. Eisenhower's presidency was an embodiment of the middle-class yearning for stability and consensus.

Eisenhower became, in effect, the cautious, prudent, conciliatory paternal figure presiding over the heyday of middle-class dominance of American life. He seemed to embody the era's apparent stability and unity and homogeneity. He epitomized the American middle class's idealized image of itself. And not incidentally, he presided over an era of almost unbroken prosperity and unbroken peace that reinforced the power of the stable, consensual public culture of the time.

The 1950s were good times for middle-class white Americans who were content with their era. But it was not a good time for dissent. The most obvious explanation for that is the Cold War and the fear of communism—fanned by opportunistic and demagogic politicians—that accompanied it. It was also a result of a homogeneous popular culture that had little patience with divergent views. The growing intolerance of non-conformity helped produce the staunching of dissent at many levels of society. Hollywood studio executives blacklisted writers and actors not just because of the Red Scare but also because of their own dislike of their politics. Newspaper and magazine publishers banished writers who were too stridently critical of the political and economic orthodoxy of their time. Television and radio executives refused to allow even mildly dissenting voices access to the air. The revered Edward R. Murrow, the first great television newscaster, found his career at CBS derailed after he broadcast a program in 1954 attacking Joseph McCarthy—even though by then McCarthy's influence was already in decline.

In 1953, the political writer I. F. Stone—also a harsh critic of McCarthyism and of conservative politics—found it necessary to found his own political journal, I. F. Stone's Weekly, because none of his previous employers, including the Nation, would publish his work any longer. Years later, in the early 1980s, he published a collection of his writings from those years. He titled it The Haunted Fifties.

For Stone, and for many others, the fifties seemed haunted because the public culture of the time was so resolutely self-congratulatory and so stifling to alternative views; because the problems and injustices and dislocations of the time often seemed hidden under a haze of bright, cheerful, affirmative images of a prosperous middle-class nation happily embarked on a new period in its history—enthroned as the richest and most powerful nation in the world.

But beneath the shining surface of the public nation of the 1950s lived another America—a shadow nation or, as I. F. Stone sometimes called it, a subversive nation, which was gradually building up a critique of American society and politics that would burst into the center of national consciousness in the 1960s and beyond. That critique took many forms. African Americans demonstrated in Montgomery and elsewhere, firing the first shots of the Civil Rights Movement. The restive left was struggling to reveal the persistence of poverty in the midst of prosperity. There was increasing resistance by women to the obstacles they faced in the workplace and in the larger culture when they attempted to move out of their roles as wives and mothers. There was the growing concern about the environment among scientists and ecologists who saw, much earlier than most Americans did, the dangers of heedless economic growth.

But equally important were critiques that expressed a series of anxieties and thwarted desires that were particular to the white male culture of the time. There was a growing fear that the modern world threatened their autonomy, their independence, their authenticity.

Employees of large corporate organizations, the critics of the 1950s and early 1960s argued, learned to dress alike, to pattern their lives in similar ways, to adopt similar values and goals, to place a high value on "getting along" within the hierarchical structure of the corporation. In fact, complaints about the conformity, the homogeneity of the culture of organization became one of the staples of social criticism in the 1950s, as social scientists came to see in this culture a challenge to the capacity of individuals to retain any psychological autonomy. The organization, they argued, was a debilitating force, creating alienated conformists afraid to challenge prevailing norms. They were people who would take no risks; people who feared to be different.

Corporate workers, critics argued, faced constant pressures to get along by going along. The sociologist David Riesman wrote in his influential book, The Lonely Crowd (1950), that modern society was giving birth to a new kind of man. In earlier eras, most men and women had been "inner-directed" people, defining themselves largely in terms of their own values and goals, their own sense of their worth. Now, the dominant

personality was coming to be "other-directed" man, defining himself in terms of the opinions and goals of others, or in terms of the bureaucratically established goals of the organization.

But perhaps the clearest example of disenchantment with and alienation from the middle class was not the work of these mainstream writers and intellectuals. The clearest example came instead from a group of younger writers and artists who emerged largely from the middle class but chose to stand outside the mainstream of middle class culture. They held that culture in contempt—they ridiculed and repudiated not just the personal anxieties of organizational life, but many of the fundamental premises of middle-class society. There were the men and women who called themselves "the Beats." They openly challenged the conventional values of middle-class American society: material success, social values, political habits. Many of them adopted an alternative lifestyle for themselves that emphasized rootlessness, anti-materialism, drugs, antagonism to technology and organization, sexual freedom, and a dark, numbing despair about the nature of modern society. But most of all the Beats were in search of "ecstasy," of a release from the rational world, of a retreat from what they considered the repressive culture of their time.

The poet Allen Ginsberg became the most influential figure in the Beat world, the man many people considered the founder of the movement. In 1955, he wrote a poem that became something of a credo for their generation. The poem was entitled Howl, and it attacked virtually every aspect of modern society as corrupt and alienating:

> I saw the best minds of my generation destroyed by madness, starving, hysterical, naked, dragging themselves through the negro streets at dawn looking for an angry fix, angelheaded hipsters burning for the ancient heavenly connection to the starry dynamo in the machinery of night. . . .

It was an attack on American materialism, on American technology, on organization, on suburbs, on militarism, on the very idea of progress; an attack on all the underpinnings of modern middle-class culture and society; even an attack on rationality itself.

This is what made the Beats seem so frightening and subversive to many more conventional Americans in the 1950s—their frank rejection of the disciplined, ordered life of the postwar middle class; their open alienation from a culture that most people were lionizing; the way in which some, at least, ignored the careful boundaries of race that mainstream society still observed and made connections with black culture; their celebration of the sensual as opposed to the rational.

The Beats themselves attracted relatively little attention from the American mainstream in the 1950s and early 1960s—except as the objects of ridicule and contempt. But they were significant because they were the clear antecedents of the counterculture that emerged in the late 1960s.

Another, ultimately more powerful and influential critique of the middle-class culture of the 1950s came from feminism. That critique did not become widely visible in American life until the late 1960s, and its influence did not become profound until even later than that. But the problems and discontents to which feminism was a response were, of course, very much a part of the culture of the 1950s. One of those signs was the publication in 1963 of a book that is generally regarded as a landmark in the rebirth of contemporary feminism: Betty Friedan's The Feminine Mystique—written and researched largely in the late 1950s. Friedan had graduated from Smith College in 1942; and in 1957, fifteen years later, married with children, living in suburban New York and working as a freelance writer, she traveled around the country to interview her Smith College classmates about the state of their lives for what was supposed to be a soft article for a women's magazine. Almost without exception, she claimed, the women she encountered were married, with children, living in prosperous, upper-middle-class suburbs. They were living out the dream that affluent bourgeois society had created for women in the postwar years, what Friedan called the "mystique of feminine fulfillment," by acting out the expected roles of wives, mothers, and homemakers. They responded to questions about their lives with forced, chirpy reports of contentment—proud talk of husbands, children, and homes. And yet, as Friedan pressed further, she found that behind this mystique, in virtually all the women she interviewed, lay a fundamental sense of uneasiness, frustration, vague unhappiness that most women had great difficulty articulating. Friedan dubbed this the "problem that has no name," a problem that even women themselves had been unable to identify or explain.

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But the real problem, Friedan said, was embedded in the nature of the gender roles society had imposed on women. The women she met were intelligent, educated, talented; and yet they had no outlets for their talents except housework, motherhood, and the companionship they offered their husbands. "The feminine mystique," she wrote, "has succeeded in burying millions of women alive."

Our retrospective image of the "fifties" as the age of Ozzie and Harriet is not entirely false. It was the image that many middle-class Americans accepted at the time, and a reflection of the way many of them in fact lived. But it would be a mistake to accept the middle-class interpretation of American life in the 1950s at face value. Because to understand the realities of society in the 1950s, it is important to understand that the consensual middle-class worldview that seemed so powerful at the time was not fully accepted even by many members of the middle class itself.

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