

#6) To what extent did the decade of the 1950's deserve its reputation as an age of political, social, and cultural conformity?

Thesis



The Long Economic Boom of the 1950's- Mass

Stabilization



Social/Cultural Conformity



Cultural Conformity

- During the Fifties, mass culture began to dominate in the United States. This was the reason for little diversity in American culture. Television network executives in particular wanted to cater to the largest audience possible, so they shaped their programs to offend the least number of viewers. But mass culture also left room for diversity. The culture offered something for everybody. And if that something became popular, as rock n' roll certainly did, the engines of mass culture could make it huge. But the popularity of mass forms of entertainment did not mean that they crowded out other types of culture. Recordings of classical music still sold well during the Fifties. Many theater companies, art museums and symphony orchestras survived, despite migration from urban centers to the suburbs which shrank their audiences. Books sold well. And because of the G.I. Bill, which had paid for college for veterans, the country was increasingly well educated.

Political Conformity: McCarthy Era and the Fear of Looking Different

- * Similar to social and cultural conformity, political conformity also consists of the fear of the American public appearing different. The McCarthy Era began with the Great Fear and HUAC's leadership of blacklisting communists and suspecting outsiders. In 1951' Julius and Ethel Rosenberg were convicted and later executed of selling nuclear secrets to the Soviet Union. This case resulted in a highly publicized trial, which brought up a lot of sympathy for their two children. Eventually, the era of McCarthy ended. The fall of McCarthy solidified opposition to both anti-communism and societal conformity.

Effects of Conformity

- * Some of the effects of conformity can be seen in future events, such as the Youth Rebellion and the Civil Rights Movement. The result of the Youth Rebellion was counter-culture clashes of the 1960's. The Civil Rights Movement, on the other hand, began to gain more attention in the 1960's. Actions such as the Montgomery bus boycott and court case, Brown vs. Board of Education led the Civil Rights movement to be one of the most dynamic movements of its time.

Conclusion

- * While for white Americans, the idea of a conformist society was very real and achievable in the suburbs. However, the truth is that the 1950's were a time of boiling discontent with the nature of American society, as seen with the success of Civil Rights legislation.