**Chapter 27, Section 3: Popular Culture of the 1950s**

**I. The New Mass Media** *(pages 820–823)*

**A.** The popularity of television increased as it became more affordable for consumers. In 1946 there were 7,000 to 8,000 television sets in the United States. By 1957 there were 40 million television sets. In the late 1950s, the television news became an important source of information. Advertising and sporting events became more common.

**B.** Television shows fell into the categories of comedy, action and adventure, variety-style entertainment, and quiz shows. **Ed Sullivan’s** variety show *Toast of the Town* provided a mix of comedy, popular song, dance, and acrobatics. In 1956 the quiz show *Twenty*- *One* caused an uproar after it was discovered that many of the show’s contestants were given the answers prior to the show.

**C.** With the increase in television viewing, the movie industry lost viewers. Moviemakers tried several ways to lure people away from their television sets, including the use of 3-D glasses and **cinemascope.** Movie roles for women were stereotypical, often dealing with marriage or the hope of marriage. Roles for African Americans were often stereotypical or one-dimensional.

**D.** Radio had to find ways to get television viewers to listen again. Recorded music, news, talk shows, weather, public-service programming, and shows for specific audiences were all used to encourage people to turn on their radios.

**Discussion Question**

What types of television shows were Americans watching in the 1950s? *(Television shows fell into the categories of comedy, action and adventure, variety-style entertainment, and quiz shows. Action shows like* Gunsmoke *and* Dragnet *were also hugely popular.)*

**II. The New Youth Culture** *(pages 823–824)*

**A.** Young Americans rebelled against the conformist ideals of adult society and looked to controversial styles in music and literature.

**B.** In 1951 radio disc jockey **Alan Freed** gained permission from his manager to play African American rhythm and blues on the radio. The listeners loved the new songs, and soon white artists were copying the sound to form a new style of music called **rock ‘n’ roll.**

**C.** In 1956 **Elvis Presley** became a rock ‘n’ roll hero for many teenagers. He eventually became known as the “King of Rock ‘n’ Roll.” The music was very popular with teens, but parents disliked this new music. Several cities banned rock ‘n’ roll. These varying opinions led to what became known as a **generation gap,** or cultural separation between children and parents.

**D.** A group of mostly white artists, who called themselves the **beats,** highlighted the values gap that existed in the United States in the 1950s. In 1957 beat writer **Jack Kerouac** published *On the Road*. This book described freewheeling adventures with a car thief and a con artist. The book shocked readers but went on to become a classic in American literature.

**Discussion Question**

Who were the beats? *(This was a group of mostly white artists who chose an unconventional lifestyle, which highlighted the values gap in the 1950s. The word may have come from the group feeling beat down by American culture.)*

**III. African American Entertainers** *(pages 824–825)*

**A.** African American entertainers tried to find a way to fit into a country that often treated them like second-class citizens. Most were shut out by television. African American rock ‘n’ roll singers had an easier time gaining acceptance. African Americans like **Chuck Berry, Ray Charles,** and **Little Richard** recorded hit songs.

**B.** African American women’s recording groups, including the **Crystals,** the **Chiffons,** and the **Shirelles,** paved the way for future women’s groups.

**Discussion Question**

Which groups were left out of the American dream in the 1950s? *(The country’s minorities, rural poor, and African Americans were left out of the American dream.)*