

1950s American Society and Conformity



Est. Time: 60-90 minutes

Subjects: History, Social Studies

Age Range: High School

See the full lesson [here!](#)

★ TEACHROCK ★

How did the presence of Latin American artists challenge the image of 1950s American society seen in popular media?

In this lesson you will:

- Explore 1950s American society in terms of post-war life, the Red Scare, and conformity
- Analyze how 1950s American society was portrayed in popular television shows
- Understand the role television played in 1950s American society
- Investigate how Latin American artists challenged the image of 1950s American society seen in popular television shows and films

Nuclear Family: A family group that consists only of parents and children.

-Merriam-Webster

Examine the definition of “nuclear family”.

Consider or ask a partner:

- What sort of families are included in the definition of a nuclear family? Which sorts of families are not?
- Do you think a nuclear family represents the “normal” or “ideal” family in America? Why or why not?
- Where might people see depictions of the nuclear family?

Examine the images in [this document](#).

Consider or ask a partner:

- What is the first thing you notice about each image?
- Describe what you see in each image.
- What do these images imply about what the “nuclear family” was in the 1950s?



Fill out [this graphic organizer](#) as you watch [this clip](#) about 1950s American society.

After viewing the video, consider or ask a partner:

- What does the word “conformity” mean?
- How did Americans conform to societal norms in the 1950s?
- How do the images you examined in the Slide 4 document support what you saw in the video about the 1950s?



Using the internet, conduct research into two television shows from the 1950s, *Leave it to Beaver* and *I Love Lucy*.

Use [this handout](#) to write down what you discover about the two shows.



Choose one of the following people to investigate and complete the attached handout.

- [Desi Arnez](#)
- [Rita Moreno](#)
- [Ritchie Valens](#)

Consider or ask a partner:

- How did the presence of the person you investigated challenge the idea of American society seen in 1950s television and film?



SUMMARY

Life in the 1950s was characterized by the end of World War II in the 1940s, soldiers returning home to civilian life, and a baby boom.

White Americans moved to suburban communities and the white middle class grew due to an economic boom post-war but Americans of color were living under Jim Crow laws, customs, and practices.

The Red Scare and McCarthyism lead to paranoia and conformity in society.

Many Americans had more leisure time and the television became a part of home life but most television shows and films depicted white middle class nuclear families.

The presence of Desi Arnez, Ritchie Valens, and Rita Moreno provided a contrast to the American society that was depicted in television and film.

BE CURIOUS

- Learn more about Ritchie Valens and the song “La Bamba” with the TeachRock lesson, [Ritchie Valens](#).
- Discover how Latin Music became popular in the United States with the TeachRock lesson, [Latin Music and Puerto Rican Migration to New York City](#).
- Watch the Rita Moreno documentary, [Rita Moreno: Just a Girl Who Decided to Go For It](#).
- Explore how American Bandstand became desegregated.

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