

# The 1950's: An Era of Complacency and Conformity?

## **Do Now:**

What is complacency?

What is conformity?

# Conformity

- behavior in accordance with socially accepted standards (parents, government, schools, and society)

# Complacency

- a feeling of uncritical satisfaction

# 1950s

- <https://archive.org/details/DateWith1950>

Why have some seen the 1950s  
as a time period of conformity?

- YouTube - Pete Seeger Little Boxes

malvina reynolds - little boxes - YouTube

# Suburban Living

**Levittown, L. I.:** "The American Dream"

1949 → **William Levitt** produced  
150 houses per week.



\$7,990 or \$60/month with no down payment.

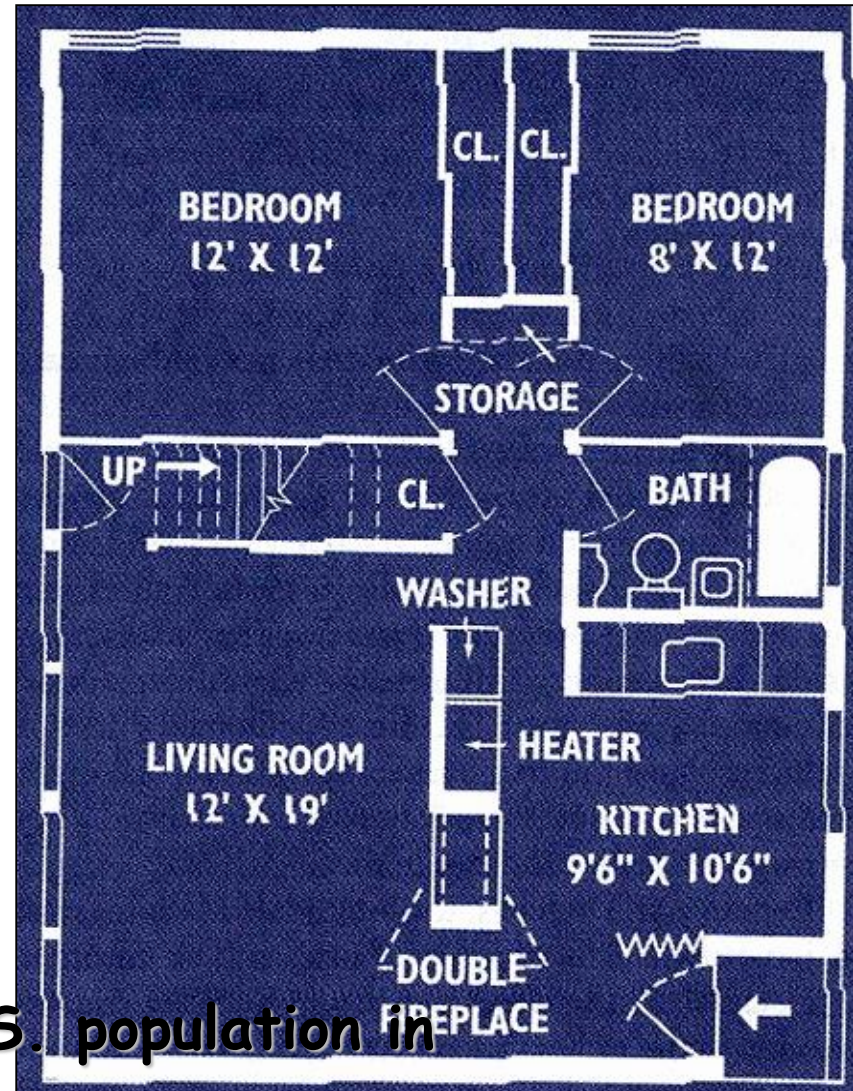




# Suburban Living:

The New "American Dream"

- k 1 story high
- k 12'x19' living room
- k 2 bedrooms
- k tiled bathroom
- k garage
- k small backyard
- k front lawn



By 1960 → 1/3 of the U. S. population in the suburbs.

# Suburban Living: The Typical TV Suburban Families



*The Donna  
Reed Show*  
1958-1966



*Leave It  
to Beaver*  
1957-1963



*Father Knows Best*  
1954-1958

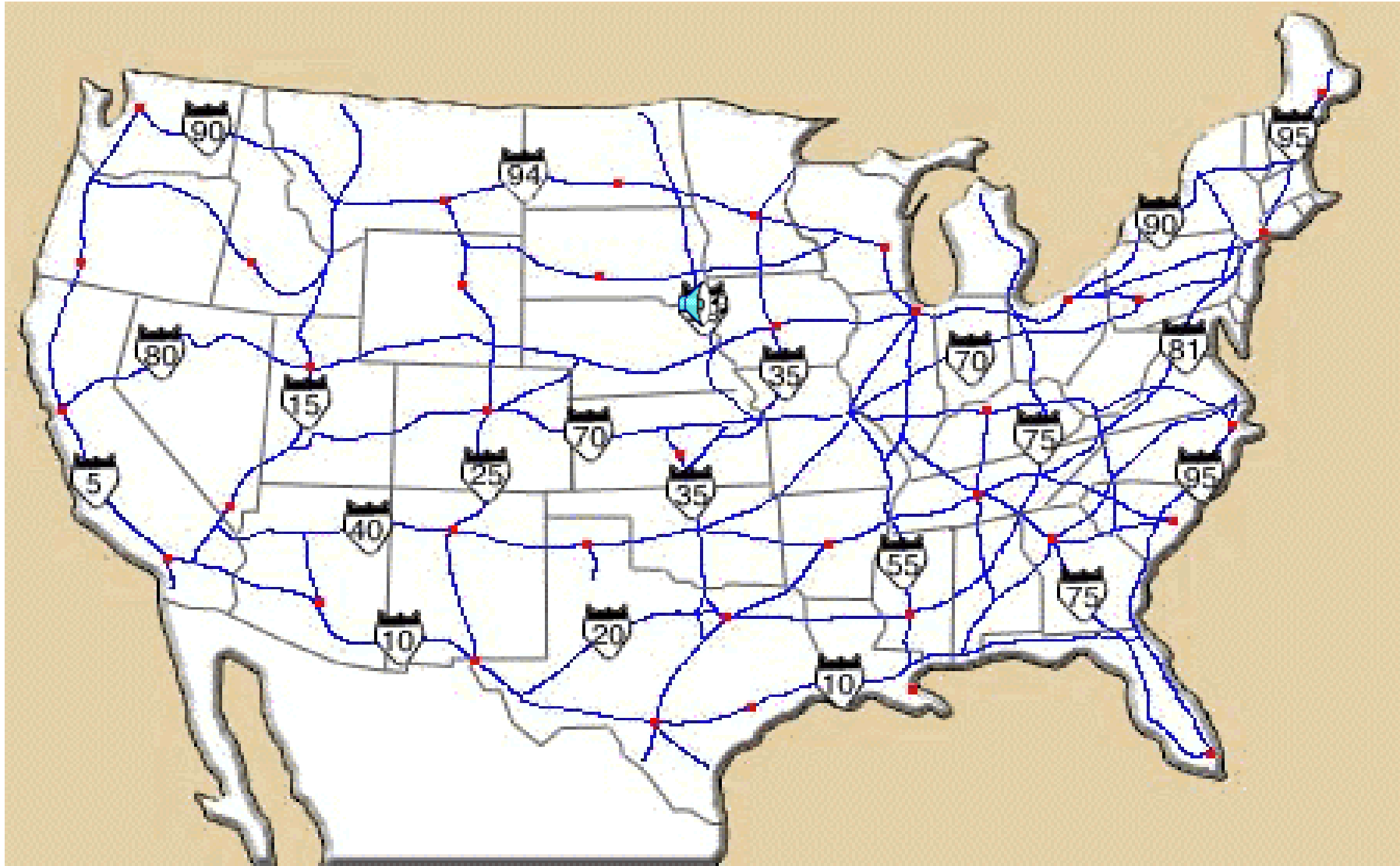


*The Ozzie & Harriet Show*  
1952-1966

# Factors Encouraging Suburbanization

- Mass-produced low-cost housing (Levittown)
- G.I. Bill – low interest, 0% down loans
- Post-war economic prosperity → Consumerism
- Baby Boom - 1957 → 1 baby born every 7 seconds
- Interstate Highway System

## Federal Highway Act (Interstate Highway System)



# Television and Gender Roles

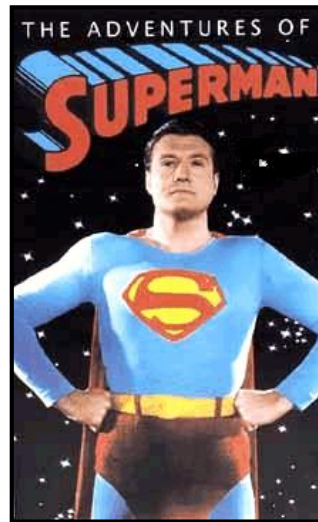
- [YouTube - leave it to beaver](#)
- [YouTube - folgers coffee ad](#)

# Television

1946 → 7,000 TV sets in the U. S.

1950 → 50,000,000 TV sets in the U. S.

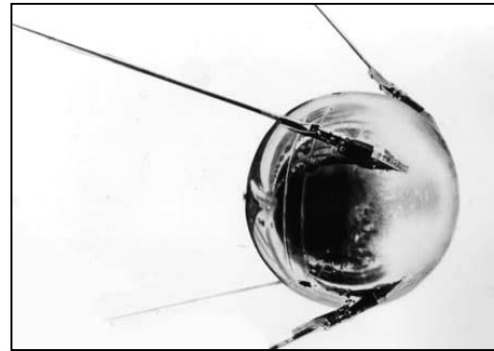
Mass Audience → TV celebrated traditional  
American values.



*Truth, Justice, and the American way!*

# Progress Through Science

1957 → Russians launch **SPUTNIK I**



1958 → **National Defense Education Act** - funding to improve American schools (**Science & Technology**)

# Progress Through Science

## Atomic Anxieties:

→ “Duck-and-Cover Generation”



## Atomic Testing:

→ 1946-1962 → U. S. exploded 217 nuclear weapons over the Pacific and in Nevada.





# Well-Defined Gender Roles

*The **ideal modern woman** married, cooked and cared for her family, and kept herself busy by joining the local PTA and leading a troop of Campfire Girls. She entertained guests in her family's suburban house and worked out on the trampoline to keep her size 12 figure.*

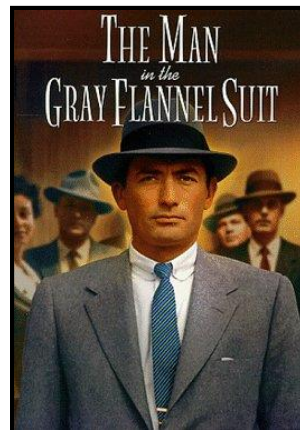
-- *Life magazine, 1956*



Marilyn  
Monroe

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*The **ideal 1950s man** was the provider, protector, and the boss of the house. -- *Life magazine, 1955**



1956 → William H. Whyte, Jr. → *The Organization Man*

A a middle-class, white suburban male is the ideal.