

## 1950s Society DBQ

### US History

Use the following documents and questions to help answer the following DBQ prompt:

In what ways did the 1950s change American society? Explain each way in detail and include impact on average Americans

Step 1: Answer the questions from each document

Step 2: Complete the DBQ writing guide and get it approved

Step 3: Write your DBQ answer

Step 4: Grade yourself based on the DBQ rubric

### Document A



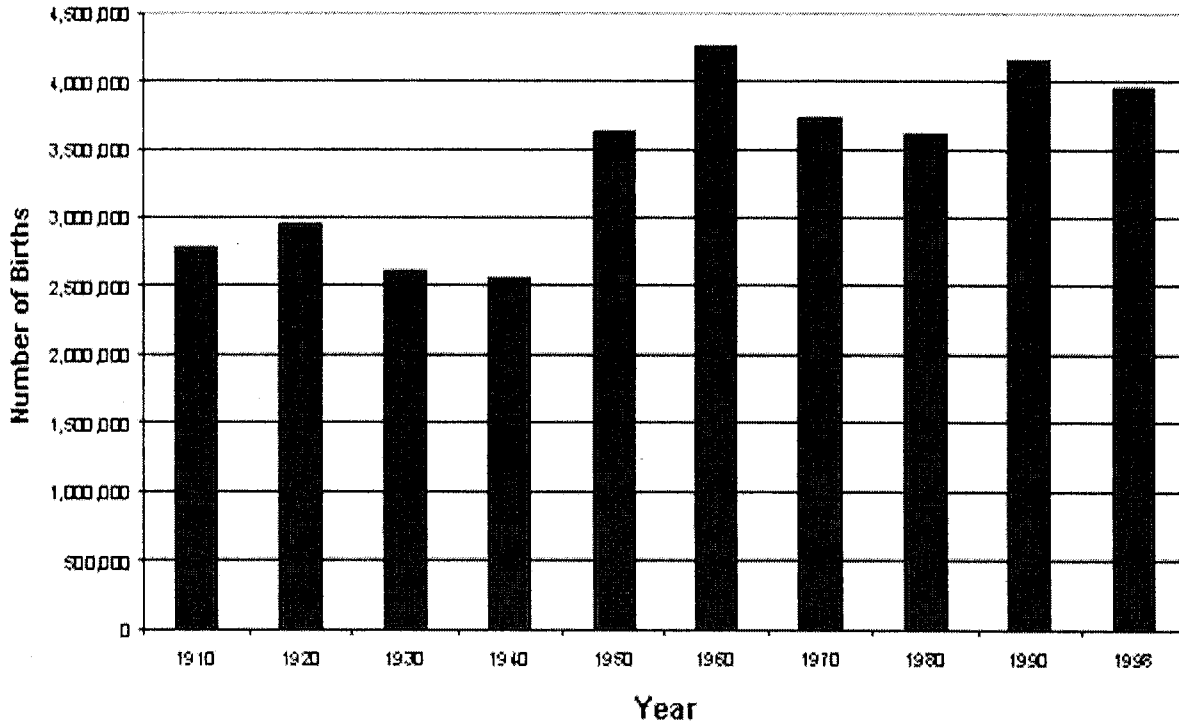
Levittown, NY from air. Photographer unknown

1. What is this picture showing?

2. What change do you think existed in the 1950s based on this picture?

Document B

U.S. Births, 1910-1998



3. What is this graph showing?

4. What was the big change in 1950s and 1960s?

## Document C

First: Each year, more than 36 thousand people are killed and more than a million injured on the highways. To the home where the tragic aftermath of an accident on an unsafe road is a gap in the family circle, the monetary worth of preventing that death cannot be reckoned. But reliable estimates place the measurable economic cost of the highway accident toll to the Nation at more than \$4.3 billion a year.

Second: The physical condition of the present road net increases the cost of vehicle operation, according to many estimates, by as much as one cent per mile of vehicle travel. At the present rate of travel, this totals more than \$5 billion a year. The cost is not borne by the individual vehicle operator alone. It pyramids into higher expense of doing the nation's business. Increased highway transportation costs, passed on through each step in the distribution of goods, are paid ultimately by the individual consumer.

Third: In case of an atomic attack on our key cities, the road net must permit quick evacuation of target areas, mobilization of defense forces and maintenance of every essential economic function. But the present system in critical areas would be the breeder of a deadly congestion within hours of an attack.

**Dwight D. Eisenhower**

**Special Message to the Congress Regarding a National Highway Program**

**February 22, 1955**

5. Who gave this message?

6. What was this message about?

7. What reasons does the speaker give for having a good highway system in America?

Document D



After you've got your discharge and button, you'll find things back home have changed some. Your family and friends and neighbors have had to make some changes because of the war, and some of the changes are being continued until we shift back into peacetime gear safely.

Two of the things you'll meet are **price and rent control**. They are **for your own protection** —so you won't be stung when you buy a car, or a suit of clothes, when you rent a house or apartment, when you buy food, and some other things. It will pay you to know about them.

**This leaflet is written to tell you what the score is. Read it and keep it, and save yourself money and extra trouble.**

Dear Mr. Veteran Pamphlet published by U.S. Government  
1950

8. Who do you think this advertisement is meant for?

9. What is the message of this advertisement?

10. What changes are associated with this advertisement?

## Document #1:

*The good wife's guide* was published in a popular women's magazine.

*Housekeeping Monthly* 13 May 1956

*Housekeeping Monthly* 13 May 1955



### *The good wife's guide*

- Have dinner ready. Plan ahead, even the night before, to have a delicious meal ready, on time for his return. This is a way of letting him know that you have been thinking about him and are concerned about his needs. Most men are hungry when they come home and the prospect of a good meal (especially his favourite dish) is part of the warm welcome needed.
- Prepare yourself. Take 15 minutes to rest so you'll be refreshed when he arrives. Touch up your make-up, put a ribbon in your hair and be fresh-looking. He has just been with a lot of work-weary people.
- Be a little gay and a little more interesting for him. His boring day may need a lift and one of your duties is to provide it.
- Clear away the clutter. Make one last trip through the main part of the house just before your husband arrives.

- Gather up schoolbooks, toys, paper etc and then run a dustcloth over the tables.
- Over the cooler months of the year you should prepare and light a fire for him to unwind by. Your husband will feel he has reached a haven of rest and order, and it will give you a lift too. After all, catering for his comfort will provide you with immense personal satisfaction.
- Prepare the children. Take a few minutes to wash the children's hands and faces (if they are small), comb their hair and, if necessary, change their clothes. They are little treasures and he would like to see them playing the part. Minimise all noise. At the time of his arrival, eliminate all noise of the washer, dryer or vacuum. Try to encourage the children to be quiet.
- Be happy to see him.
- Greet him with a warm smile and show sincerity in your desire to please him.
- Listen to him. You may have a dozen important things to tell him, but the moment of his arrival is not the time. Let him talk first - remember, his topics of conversation are more important than yours.
- Make the evening his. Never complain if he comes home late or goes out to dinner, or other places of entertainment without you. Instead, try to understand his world of strain and pressure and his very real need to be at home and relax.
- Your goal: Try to make sure your home is a place of peace, order and tranquillity where your husband can renew himself in body and spirit.
- Don't greet him with complaints and problems.
- Don't complain if he's late home for dinner or even if he stays out all night. Count this as minor compared to what he might have gone through that day.
- Make him comfortable. Have him lean back in a comfortable chair or have him lie down in the bedroom. Have a cool or warm drink ready for him.
- Arrange his pillow and offer to take off his shoes. Speak in a low, soothing and pleasant voice.
- Don't ask him questions about his actions or question his judgment or integrity. Remember, he is the master of the house and as such will always exercise his will with fairness and truthfulness. You have no right to question him.
- A good wife always knows her place.

1. Where and when was this article published?
2. What is the purpose of this article?
3. What three tips do you find most interesting or odd?
4. If you are female, could you abide by these guidelines? If you are male, would you expect your future wife to abide by these guidelines? Provide a brief explanation of your answer.
5. How could you use this document to answer the main DBQ question?

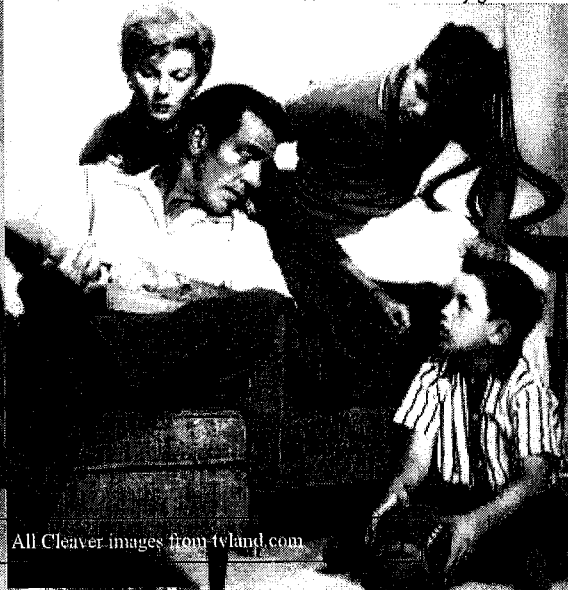
**Document #4:**

**Analyze the image of 50s sitcom families. Answer the questions that follow.**

The Cleaver Family (l to r) Beaver, Wally, June, Ward Cleaver



The Cleaver Family gathers for a reading



All Cleaver images from tvland.com



Source: "Father Knows Best" (1954-1963) with Robert Young, Jane Wyatt, Elinor Donahue, Billy Gray, and Lauren Chapin, Culver Pictures, Inc.



[http://www.usatoday.com/life/movies/reviews/2007-05-28-DVD-watch\\_N.htm](http://www.usatoday.com/life/movies/reviews/2007-05-28-DVD-watch_N.htm)

1. How do these sitcom images portray the family of the 1950s?
2. What lessons could families of 1950s learn from these sitcoms?
3. How could you use this document to answer the main DBQ question?

**Document #5:**

**Read the passage below found on page 39 of Stephanie Coontz book, *The Way We Really Are: Coming to Terms with America's Changing Families*.**

..., the 1950s sitcoms were aimed at young couples who had married in haste, women who had tasted new freedoms during World War II and given up their jobs with regret, veterans whose children resented their attempts to reassert paternal authority, and individuals disturbed by the changing racial and ethnic mix of postwar America. The message was clear: Buy these ranch houses, Hotpoint appliances, and child-raising ideals; relate to your spouse like this; get a new car to wash with your kids on Sunday afternoons; organize your dinners like that—and you too can escape from the conflicts of race, class, and political witch-hunts into harmonious families where father knows best, mothers are never bored or irritated, and teenagers rush to the dinner table each night, eager to get their latest dose of parental wisdom.

Many families found it possible to put together of this way of living during the 1950s and 1960s. Couples were often able to construct marriages that were much more harmonious than those in which they had grown up, and to devote far more time to their children. Even when marriages were deeply unhappy, as many were, the new stability, economic security, and educational advantages parents were able to offer their kids counted for a lot in people's assessment of their life satisfaction. And in some matters, ignorance could be bliss: The lack of media coverage of problems such as abuse or incest was terribly hard on the casualties, but it protected more fortunate families from knowledge and fear of many social ills.

1. Who were the sitcoms aimed at?
2. What was the message?
3. What counted for a lot in "people's assessment of their life situation?" In contrast, what was not as important to people?
4. What made it easy for people to be ignorant of social ills of the day?
5. How could you use this document to answer the main DBQ question?