



INTERPRETING THE VISUAL RECORD

Television stars. Television stars like the cast of *I Love Lucy* (top) and *The Honeymooners* (bottom) were beloved by their millions of fans. **Can you name any of the actors in the images above? Why might they look familiar?**

program of the decade was the situation comedy *I Love Lucy*, starring real-life wife and husband Lucille Ball and Desi Arnaz. Thousands of fans tuned in every week to witness Lucy's crazy antics.

Television grew in popularity but remained a selective mirror, showing primarily white, middle-class, suburban experiences. Poverty, if shown at all, was treated as a minor problem. Working women, ethnic minorities, and inner-city life rarely appeared. When they were shown, it was usually in a way that reinforced stereotypes. One of the era's most controversial programs was *Amos 'n' Andy*, a comedy about African American urban life. The show was based on a popular radio program that had featured two white men providing the voices of African American characters. When the show moved to television, African American actors took over the roles. Still, for many viewers the characters represented white stereotypes of the African American community. The NAACP launched a protest against the program. Others joined in the protest, and *Amos 'n' Andy* was taken off the air. In 1966 it was banned from being shown in reruns.

Some critics also complained that television advertising reinforced materialism. Game shows in which contestants competed for prizes met with particular criticism. A congressional investigation revealed that some game shows were rigged. Popular contestants such as Columbia University professor Charles Van Doren were given the answers in advance. Producers hoped to keep popular contestants on the show and thus keep ratings up. Some critics argued that the game-show scandal revealed the dangers of television and its corrupting effect on American values.

✓ **READING CHECK: Analyzing Information** In what ways did early television affect American life?

Teenagers and Popular Culture

Some parents expressed concern about the impact of popular culture on teenagers. With more free time and spending money than any previous generation, American teenagers in the 1950s sought new leisure-time activities. These activities often seemed to glamorize rebellion against suburban conformity.

Fictional rebels. Many young people found meaning in literature and films that featured discontented rebels. Some identified with Holden Caulfield, the main character of J. D. Salinger's 1951 novel, *The Catcher in the Rye*. Disgusted by the hypocrisy of the adult world, Caulfield declares it "crummy" and "phony." Although the book was very popular with young readers, some adults found its language and content offensive. Some groups demanded that it be banned from school libraries.

Many young people also enjoyed reading satirical comic books or magazines, such as *MAD*. The magazine dedicated itself to making fun of everything associated with "the American way of life." *MAD* soon rivaled *Life* as the most widely read magazine among young people. Many parents worried that reading such magazines would increase **juvenile delinquency**—antisocial behavior by the young.