



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. Game show contestants such as Columbia University professor Charles Van Doren were given answers in advance. Producers hoped to keep popular contestants on the air and thus keep ratings up. Some critics argued that the game-show scandal exposed the dangers of television and its corrupting effect on American values.

READING CHECK: Analyzing information In what ways did early television affect

Teenagers and Popular Culture

Concern about the impact of popular culture on teenagers. American teenagers were spending more money than any previous generation, American teenagers were spending more money than any previous generation, American teenagers were spending more money than any previous generation. These activities often

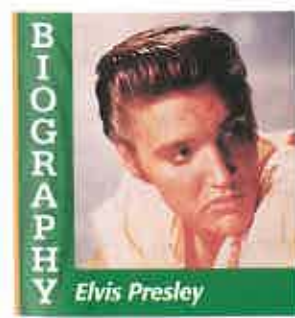
young people found meaning in literature and films that identified with Holden Caulfield, the main character in *The Catcher in the Rye*. Disgusted by the hypocrisy and "phony" of the adult world, some adults found its language and content to be banned from school libraries.

satirical comic books or magazines, making fun of everything associated with the adult world. *Life* magazine was one of the most widely read magazines. Some parents worried that reading such magazines could lead to antisocial behavior by the young.

Several of the decade's most popular films showed images of juvenile delinquency and young, angry rebels frustrated with life. Often their anger was directed not at any one particular thing, but at all of society in general. In the 1954 film *The Wild One*, a character asks the motorcycle-gang leader played by Marlon Brando what he is rebelling against. Brando snarls back, "Whadda ya got?"

This image of the rebel with no direction was reinforced in the 1955 movie *Rebel Without a Cause*. The film starred James Dean, Natalie Wood, and Sal Mineo as teenagers confused about the values of their suburban families. Many teenagers could identify with the characters' frustration. One teenager described his feelings when he saw the film. "I walked out of the movie house that day confirmed in my sense of isolation," he said, "but not without taking something precious with me: the feeling that others shared my pain." James Dean became an idol to many young people when the 24-year-old actor died in a car accident following the premiere of the film.

Rock 'n' roll. Teenagers also escaped from the conformity of suburbia through a new type of music called **rock 'n' roll**. This music reworked rhythm and blues, a style popular among African American performers and audiences that combined blues music with more energetic rhythms. Rhythm-and-blues music was particularly popular in dance halls. Rock 'n' roll took the music one step further and created a raw sound very different from other popular music of the time. Cleveland disc jockey Alan Freed made the term *rock 'n' roll* popular in 1951 when he started a rhythm-and-blues show aimed at young white audiences. Soon the sound caught on among teenagers across the country.



Elvis Presley emerged as rock's leading talent. Presley was born in 1935 to a poor family in Tupelo, Mississippi. He loved music, particularly gospel. When he was 13 years old, his family moved to Memphis, Tennessee, where he listened to and learned from numerous African American gospel and rhythm-and-blues musicians. After graduating from high school, Presley worked as a truck driver while occasionally singing professionally. In 1954 he made his first major record, "That's All Right, Mama." By 1955 he was one of the biggest music stars in the country.

Presley once said of his sudden popularity, "I just fell into it, really." Others recognized that this success came from his originality. His record producer noted that Presley sounded like no other singer he had ever heard. He also had a stage presence that electrified audiences. Shy in person, Presley came alive on stage. Journalist Jean Yothers was amazed by her own reaction when she reported on one of Presley's concerts in 1955. "I was awed," she said. "I got a tremendous boot out of this loud, uninhibited music that's sending the country crazy." Presley's many fans were



Teenagers as Consumers

Some scholars have argued that the modern teenager was "invented" by advertising agencies in the 1950s. This was the first time that advertisers recognized teenagers as potentially powerful consumers. Many teenagers received allowances from their families or earned money from after-school jobs. Previously, teenagers' earnings usually went to help their families survive. In the 1950s most teenagers were allowed to spend their earnings as they wanted. By 1956 teenagers' earnings represented some \$7 billion in purchasing power.



Advertisement from the 1950s

Businesses quickly went after this market, launching dozens of new products geared toward teenage tastes and desires. Advertising also shaped teenagers' desires, presenting ideal images of what a popular teenager should own and wear. If teenagers would buy their products, the advertisers implied, they would enjoy social success.

Research on the ROM

Free Find: Elvis Presley
After reading about Elvis Presley on the Holt Researcher CD-ROM, write a fictional article for a teen music magazine describing how Elvis Presley's early life influenced his music.