Alan Brinkley Lecture Notes – Culture and Politics in the Age of the Cold War

June 27 – July 1, 2011

America in 1945

* Population 140 million – today 312 million
* Over 1/3 population lived on *farms or small rural communities* – today around 10%
* Half living in rural areas (25m roughly) had no electricity, no indoor plumbing – much *less affluent*
* GNP under $200b – over $9t today
* Nearly 1/3 lived in *poverty* (defined in harsher terms – more than 1/3 in today’s measures)
* 2008 saw the beginning of an increase in poverty rates – 13%, now up to 15%
* Median family Y under $2800 per year – around $50000 today
* Much *less racially diverse* – 90% white, slightly under 10% African-Americans
* 8% were immigrants
* Today – 65% white, 16% Hispanic (mostly Mexican), 12% AA, 5% Asian
* Today 40m immigrants – 13% of population
* 1945 – fewer than 10% college-age enrolled in college
* 10% health insurance – today over 70%
* Average life expectancy 65 years – 78 today
* Social security system covered less than 50% population, today over 90%
* 90% no health insurance or govt support for health care, today over 70% - almost 80%
* Boundaries of social inequality more tightly drawn – legalized racial segregation in the south, less formal segregation and exclusion in the north. Women still barred from most professions and public office. GLBT, disabled, Jews, minorities stigmatized and excluded from national life.
* Suffused with ‘a sense of it’s own impending greatness’. War helped create an expectation that America would now attain an unimagined power and wealth, and social justice.
* Legacy of WWII – new age of abundance – began during the war and continued in the post-war era, transformed American life in the 30 years after WWII.
* John Keegan, prologue to ‘Six Armies in Normandy’ – writes of his own wartime experiences as a child in the English countryside when the Americans arrived. “bottomless riches of the American economy”. Perception of unprecedented prosperity abroad and at home.
* War ended the Depression – by 1945 wartime investment created unprecedented abundance. Huge contrast in 10 years between Depression-era and post-war abundance.
* Democracy represented by America in a war fought to defeat tyranny – highlighted the injustice felt by African Americans.
* 2m AA fled the rural South in the 1940s to seek industrial jobs in the North where labour was scarce (especially during the war).
* Growing concentration of AA in urban areas made collective action easier – began in the 1940s. Picketing of discriminatory employers, rioting. Anger of white soldiers who didn’t want to share facilities, but also of African-American soldiers.
* Movement of Africa-Americans into white neighbourhoods (eg Detroit) sparked riots.
* WWII had multiple meanings to AA – opportunity, chance to demonstrate patriotism and commitment, but also changed the way many black men and women thought – changed their vision of America. Began to think about America differently. Black men and women talked often of the ‘Double V’ – simultaneous goals of victory over the Axis powers, but also victory over racial injustice. Two goals seen as equally important, and also inseparable – victory over the Axis meant victory over tyranny, which included segregation.
* 1941 March on Washington – organized by Eleanor Roosevelt and A Phillip Randolph. FDR persuaded them to cancel the demonstration due to fears of what might happen. FDR created the Equal Opportunity (FEPC) – to allow AA to get jobs in the defense industry. Expected 60-70000 to march. Some progress during the war but minimal.
* Some white Americans also making the connection between democracy and segregation. Early 1944 publication of a book by Gunner Merdall (?), examination of America’s race issues: “The American Dilemma”. In part an economic problem – failure to extend American riches to black community, but also a moral problem – borne of the impossible attempt to reconcile the commitment to freedom and democracy with denial of freedoms to one set of its citizens. Had enormous impact on white Americans, contributed to growth of the civil rights movement and extension of jobs and opportunities to African Americans.
* War opened some Americans up to the idea of extending rights to African Americans, but for others they simply wanted to return to their old ways – democracy meant segregation and the ability to live in the way they wished to for some Americans.
* War laid the groundwork for civil rights, but also for the brutal resistance the movement would face in the 1950s and 60s.
* Beginning of an era of challenging racial norms after a long period of relatively static racial norms.
* Other normative structures also challenged by the war – experience of women. Total number of working women increased by 60% during the war.
* Many new women workers took traditionally male jobs (left for the military) – eg Rosie the Riveter. Some women found this new experience transformative – many women were living, working and travelling alone for the first time. Some unionized, for many unprecedented freedom.
* Propaganda was that women were eager to return to the home at the end of the war, but most women wanted to stay in the paid workforce or looked for work elsewhere. The number of women in the workforce never declined to pre-war levels and continued to grow in the 1950s. Today more women than men work.
* New expectations among women was one of the results of the war. Also confirmed traditional expectations among many men. Many GIs who returned wanted a world where women would play the same role as before the war – source of tension among families.
* At the front, fighter pilots gave planes female names, painted pictures of girls on the planes, etc. Pin-ups – Jane Russell, Betty Grable – Grable’s picture held by over 5m fighting men by the end of the war. Fairly wholesome sexual figure – model at the front for the modest, genteel girlfriend or wife that servicemen dreamed of finding on their return.
* For many men one of the meanings of the war was the right of men to return to healthy, heterosexual love – women who were prepared to make a home for them.
* Contradiction in American social history in the first decade after the war. One hand – new reality of women moving into the paid workforce (by the end of the 1950s more women working than ever before). Other side, a more traditional image of women as wives, mothers, homemakers in the suburbs, taking care of the children. Reality is that women were moving into the workforce in increasing numbers as the culture was suggesting that they needed to stay at home and raise children. Men returning from the war believed they had a ‘claim’ on women after fighting to protect a ‘way of life’ – symbolized by famous Times Square VJ day kiss photo.
  + Post-war paradox a continuation of the contrary experiences of women and men during the war – women’s exhilaration of new experiences, men’s expectations of traditional family life.
* For Americans, WWII a paradoxical experience – exciting and terrifying.
* Anxiety about what the war had revealed about humanity’s capacity for evil – WWII revealed a kind of evil previously unknown – against tyranny, eventually genocide. So unprecedented some Americans refused to believe the Holocaust. Led to a new *fear of state power* – US should not have a powerful state as powerful states in Germany, Japan etc had led to great evil. Americans wanted to define itself by what it wasn’t – not Germany (should not have a powerful state because Germany was). Expansive government programs (like New Deal) lost favour. Skepticism about whether the expansion of government in the 1930s should be maintained or a return to pre-GD small government. For many people, post-war the government was seen to be part of the tyranny represented in the war.
* Powerful voices after the war arguing that the war had introduced a ‘dark cloud of doubt and despair’ about human society, and Americans had to resist the temptation to think of themselves as above the capacity for evil – the ‘dangers of the deep layer of messianic consciousness in the mind of America’ - Reinholdt Niebuhr. Warning against Americans trying to play the role of God in history – no nation is unique in the world, ‘we too are part of history’s seamless web’. Not a popular view, but indicates how shaken Americans were by the war experience.
* Many returning Americans were exhilarated by their war experience, but others saw the carnage and death and this caused great anxiety – not a vision of a glowing future.
* Alternate view developed and grew of America during this period as an ‘anointed’ nation – a special moral force in the world, a unique mission borne of its righteousness – great contrast to the views of Niebuhr. A nation that stands outside of history, protected from history by strength and virtue. These views not created by WWII, but greatly enhanced by the war. War made these views as active and powerful as they had been at any other time in the nation’s history – national self-aggrandizement.
* Not just the contrast with German/Japanese autocracy, also a sense that the US had something ‘worth sharing’ and could be a model for the rest of the world. Eg Henry Luce, Life Magazine, 1941 (founder and publisher of Time and Life), The American Century, sketched a picture of the nation’s destiny. Duty to share democracy, bill of rights, economy etc – an indefinable prestige – faith in the good intentions and strength of the whole of the American people. A vision of America as a world power had to include a passionate devotion to American ideals – self-reliance, cooperation, justice, truth, charity. Needed to spread these ideals throughout the world to “lift the life of mankind from the level of the beast to a little lower than the angels”. Belief that America had a special destiny to serve as a model to other nations penetrated deep into American culture.
* Allure of the new and modern gave rise to the growth of the movement of ‘modernism’. Explosive growth in innovative and iconoclastic art world.
* Inspired Americans to imagine a new era of success, progress, growth – sense of a boundless future – everything seemed possible.

Cold War Fears – The Nuclear Age

* How has the world managed to avoid using nuclear weapons for 60-odd years – self-deterrence?
* 2 related ways in which the existence of atomic weapons shaped post-war history – impact on culture, and impact on foreign policy.
* Impact has been a complex and divided one.
* Culturally, Americans responded with a kind of ambivalence – a signal of progress, but at the same time a fear, as if progress had ‘run amuck’ – the first step towards the apocalypse.
* Raised the stakes in the conflict between the great powers and produced more rather than less antagonism.
* Einstein: ‘Atomic bomb changed everything except the way men thought”. Believed should have forced a fundamental re-evaluation, instead produced reactions that moved in familiar patterns.
* Concerns of the physicists were on the margins of American perceptions of the significance of the atomic bomb. Einstein lamented the fact that most people tried to fit their understanding of atomic weapons into their worldview – eg, lawyers believed that the existence of atomic weaponry should enhance the importance of lawyers in public life. Many Americans believed they could control nuclear weapons – not a danger but a great thing with great potential to be used and manipulated.
* Religious leaders saw atomic weapons as giving new importance to faith.
* Reactions to atomic weapons reveals some alarm but also pervasive optimism – nuclear age could be ‘managed’, thus not so dangerous after all.
* Response to the bomb predictable and conventional. Bomb raised a challenge to one of the most powerful assumptions in American culture – the idea of progress. Nothing was more basic to America’s self-definition than the belief that history is progressive and ever-improving. Faith that science and technology would lead the way to a better world.
* After Hiroshima Americans faced the situation that technology might lead to destruction rather than improvement – could knowledge not be inevitably good? Could progress be a double-edged sword?
* Faith in progress had survived other challenges in the C20th – WWI, WWII, Great Depression, rise of fascism, etc. Some Americans’ faith in progress was shattered by the bomb, but not many.
* Faith in atomic energy strongest 1945-49 – shaken by 1949 USSR.
* Rapid development of belief that benefits of atomic energy far outweigh the negatives – fevered optimism that the secret of the atom would bring prosperity and an unparalleled richness and opportunities for all, set man on the road to the millennium.
* Idea that atomic energy would ‘re-make the world’ – usher in a new day of peace and plenty and carry to the most backward places of the earth the means of developing their human and economic resources. – Idea that atomic energy would be too cheap to metre.
* 1949 Gallup poll 2/3 believed that in the long run, atomic energy would do more good than harm.
* Optimism and faith in progress (denial of danger) the dominant response to the bomb in American culture.
* 1949 introduced new responses – awareness of the danger of a nuclear exchange. Soviets and Americans were proceeding with the development of new and more powerful bombs – hydrogen bombs (first tested by the Americans in the Pacific rather than in the desert in New Mexico – nowhere on the mainland was safe for these new weapons).
* Response post-1949 is darker, there was an awareness of the danger of Russian and new forms of more powerful weapons.
* Civil defense became more prominent in state and local governments – sense of a need to be prepared for an atomic attack (public education programs, fallout shelters, etc).
* Kennedy implemented Civil Defense Program in 1961 as a response to fears of nuclear weapons – less concern about Civil Defense in the 1950s as Eisenhower believed the power of nuclear weapons would be that they would not be used.
* Understanding of the great danger of the power of atomic weapons – a struggle to find a way to survive an atomic war.

Nuclear Policy

* Early 1960s – issue of nuclear weapons more central to American life than any other time before or since.
* Nuclear tensions of the early 1960s produced a search for accommodation to lower the temperature of tensions between nations, but also produced deeper levels of suspicion and belligerence between the superpowers. Neither side trusted the other, but both had huge aversion to atomic use.
* Eisenhower – relied heavily on threat of nuclear retaliation, Kennedy believed this was a flawed policy – dangerous, no options in a crisis, and also excessively limiting – only good for preventing things but no good for doing things – didn’t fit with Kennedy’s image of being active.
* Kennedy devised flexible response – rested on the assumption that US needed to do more than just react to events, needed to cause events to happen, so needed diverse options.
* Meant rejecting Eisenhower’s over-reliance on nuclear weapons (reject over-reliance on massive retaliation (Dulles)). Determined to find a way short of a holocaust to stop communist aggression.
* Eisenhower avoided local confrontations and relied on threat of massive retaliation, often did not make enough impact – few issues were important enough to risk nuclear war, so America didn’t take initiative except in huge issues. Flexible response designed to allow new kinds of military strategies to use, especially in third world (major arena between the west and communism). America must learn to fight the new kinds of wars that communists were fighting in under-developed countries – guerilla wars (can’t use nukes).
* Kennedy expanded the Special Forces – Green Berets – counter-insurgency forces. Expanded the actions of the CIA – believed would not be constrained by red tape. Johnson less enamored by the CIA, especially once knew of plots to murder Castro (using Mafia) – no love lost between the Kennedys and Johnson.
* Eisenhower used the CIA but not in military actions – created coups like Iran and Guatemala.
* Flexible response also meant new methods of exerting American economic and ideological influence in the world, expanded more flexible foreign aid programs, international development, food for peace, the peace corps – all part of Flexible Response. Designed to create good will in the 3rd world as well as preparedness for military action if necessary. Shows the importance of the Third World. Idea of using atomic weapons was receding into the background in the 1960s except as a deterrent to stop the Soviets from using nukes. Talk of the ‘nuclear deterrent’ rather than the ‘nuclear arsenal’.
* Most Presidents except Reagan have tried to downplay the significance of atomic weapons.
* Eisenhower did threaten the use of nukes in North Korea after his election, but backed down.
* Flexible response meant a greater attempt to seek accommodation with the Soviets – worked to find avenues to détente under both Kennedy and Johnson. Kennedy – Test Ban Treaty, then Non-Proliferation Treaty, trade agreements, more frequent summit meetings – all ways in which the relationship between the US and Soviets became less tense during the 1960s.
* Flexible Response less doctrinaire, less rigid, less dangerous than massive retaliation – rested on a belief in the need for more vigorous and flexible use of American power. Kennedy et al felt that they had learned from Korea – if all you had was nukes how would you fight that kind of war. Need for a bigger and better military.
* Bay of Pigs: Use of Cuban émigrés to attempt to overthrow Castro. CIA assumption that everyone in Cuba hated Castro and were waiting for liberation – thought would spark a spontaneous revolution to overthrow Castro. Worst military failure in modern American history yet gave boost to Kennedy’s popularity – up to 83%.
* June 1961 – Vienna meeting with Khrushchev over Berlin (2 months after Bay of Pigs), Kennedy pressured for a quick resolution for Berlin issue – thought Berlin was where war was most likely to break out. Khr hostile to Kennedy – shook Kennedy who thought Soviets might risk a military move against West Berlin, instead Soviets built the wall in August 1961. Biggest problem for East Berlin was flood of refugees to West Berlin (3m people already left). Wall avoided a war.
* Most dangerous confrontation of the Cold War – Cuban Missile Crisis – 2 reasons for Khrushchev’s moves: trying to make domestic moves at home, under enormous pressure from hardliners, to overcome the advantage in nuclear weapons. He didn’t want to spend all the money on long-range missiles, so he thought that it would make sense to have small missiles in Cuba with small weapons attached as a cheap and dramatic way to shift the balance of atomic power. Khrushchev believed missiles on Cuba would be a cheaper way to achieve practical nuclear parity with the USA. Argued to the Cubans that this would also be a deterrent to an American invasion of Cuba (seen as plausible by Bay of Pigs). Also justified by noting the existence of American missiles in Turkey (closer to USSR than Cuba is to USA). Kennedy’s aides believed air strikes on Cuba the only real option, but Kennedy chose the quarantine. Throughout the crisis the high point of bomb shelters – great fear. Both backed down. In the US seen as an unambiguous American victory – this step back from the brink of the apocalypse, two opposing impulses in American policy clear
  + Search for accommodation – de-escalation of nuclear tensions, trying to build a more conciliatory relationship with the Soviets; on the other hand
  + Concern about damage to American status and influence in the world – the sense that American power had been cowed by the previous two years.
* Kennedy wanted to accommodate the Russians but also confront and challenge the Soviets to ensure American status and power.
* After CMC, gave speech at American university that was very conciliatory, then gave another one two weeks later in Berlin – powerful anti-communist message – one of his most militant speeches.
* Two speeches characteristic of double-edged character of US foreign policy in the nuclear age. In age of unthinkable danger of nuclear war, need for accommodation, but also a need to reinforce American strength and not appear weak.
* In Foreign Policy as in Culture, an almost manic swinging back and forth between compromise and confrontation – linked together by the power and the horror of nuclear weapons.

Tuesday 28 June, 2011 – The 50s

* Abundance – shaped Cold War post-WWII life – continued without interruption for nearly 30 years
* 1945-65 – greatest and most dramatic economic expansion in American history. Often described at the time as ‘The American Economic Miracle’ – ‘The crossing of a great divide in the history of humanity’.
* America as a land of economic contrast and inequality perceived to be ‘ceasing to exist’ – Mary McCarthy
* Belief that America had become a society in which class divisions and fundamental social conflicts were disappearing – once jobless men were now ‘middle-class suburbanites’, unity of values shared by all Americans.
* Pervasive belief that Americans were becoming more and more alike in values and economic wealth – becoming a middle class nation – everyone either in the middle class or at least aspiring to become middle class. Seen in popular culture – middle class suburban images.
* Powerful imagery of a united middle class nation, yet untrue. Assumption of a culturally unified nation was a myth – unresolved conflicts that still exist today.
* How did the illusion of unity become so accepted when so clearly untrue?
* Many scholars attribute this unity to the Cold War – fear of the other led to conformity and convention. Partially true but inadequate.
* Three developments in the middle class:
  + Middle class growing in absolute and relative terms

Occupationally, white-collar workers outnumbered blue-collar workers. More people were able to afford what was defined as a ‘middle class’ standard of living – 1945: 31%, by 1955, 60%. Middle class consumption patterns becoming more common – home ownership increased, car ownership, televisions, washing machines. Change in material lifestyle was indicative of a change in self-image – people identifying with the middle class even if not securely in it yet. Raised class consciousness.

Still survival of a substantial minority (25%+) that remained outside that category. False conclusion being drawn that everyone was participating in the middle class.

* + Middle class growing more homogenous – culturally unified.

More self-conscious, more pervasive images of the middle class, ideas and values created by MC in American culture – seen in changes that occurred in the media in the 1950s.

Most important change during the 1950s is the emergence of television. 1946 – 17000 tvs in 160m population, by 1960: 87% of American homes had televisions. Within a decade, TV had gone from a curiosity to a central and essential part of life in America. The most important force in American media, perhaps in American culture. Provided a common cultural experience for virtually everyone. Offered a relatively homogenous image of American life, dominated by middle class lifestyle and values. Programming dominated by relatively few people – little local programming, programming determined by economic realities of the industry – perceived need to make programming attractive to sponsors. Less the case today as sponsors can no longer dictate programming – so many potential sponsors. In the 1950s programmers had to court sponsors who could use direct control over programs – programs often bore the names of the sponsors (eg, Pepsi Cola Playhouse). Corporations’ identities were tied closely to particular programs – unwilling to allow the programs to become controversial or even diverse. Advertisers wanted to appeal to everyone and alienate no one. Needed to have the broadest possible appeal.

Tended to be westerns, variety shows, quiz shows and situation comedies – the quintessential expression of the middle class view of American life.

Early 1950s some sit-coms based on working class settings (eg The Honeymooners) – these were exceptions. By the mid-1950s almost all sit-coms were set in the suburbs – white, middle class, stable families living in identical, prosperous (not too prosperous) suburban homes. Exemplified in I Love Lucy – 1951-1960. Began as an urban, multi-racial, apartment-dwelling childless couple, with Lucy trying to get a job, but in the mid-1950s changed into a conventional sit-com suburban couple with a child – moved to the suburbs.

Sit-coms a placid, middle class world – constant confirmation of what Americans liked to think of as their own experiences, allowed a belief that these were common cultural experiences. Common feeling of failure because own families were not as happy and unified as the sit-coms.

Frank Rich – wrote about growing up in the suburbs in 1950s – ‘a sparkling, hopeful world where ignorance really was bliss’. Homogeneity and insulation from reality – conflation of middle class reality with the images shown on television.

Television also worked to undermine that homogeneity and unity in two ways:

* TV showed everyone how the middle class lived, vividly and graphically – affluence, consumerism. Served as a reminder to those Americans who did not share this lifestyle of their own relatively unfavourable position in society – the gap between the middle and other classes. Created and entrenched a sense of inequality for many other groups.
* TV broke down that homogeneity. News grew throughout the 1950s, by 1961 was the major source of information for the public – had the capacity to reveal with greater force than any other media the social problems and imperfections of society.

A two-edged sword – capable of strengthening unity, but equally committed to projecting an image of conflict. Quiz show scandals of the early 1960s created disillusionment with the medium – damaged the image of network television and created the image of fraud. Led to the creation of a more energetic FCC.

* + Middle class becoming increasingly isolated from the rest of society.

Growth of the suburbs one of the most important demographic and economic changes in the history of America, also an important cultural development affecting the middle class and its relationship with the rest of society.

Standardisation of the lives of those who lived in the suburbs. All suburbs not alike, but suburban communities more similar to one another than other forms of social organization. Within individual suburbs a striking level of uniformity and conformity – communities built all at once, usually a single developer, homes of same cost, size and appearance. Architecturally, suburban developments often built by a single architect, similar to identical houses – eg Levittowns.

Single family homes, ¼ acre lots, backyards, driveways, lawns, etc. Residents cut off from the cities, turned gaze inward, preoccupied with home ownership. ‘No one who owns his own house can be a communist – he has too much to do’ (Levit).

Cultural uniformity in the suburbs – sociologists often critical of the conformity and uniformity in suburbs like Levittowns. ‘A belief in belongingness as the ultimate need of the individual’.

Suburbs did not so much create conformity, but a product of a desire for conformity.

Suburbs allowed people to escape the troubling and often threatening diversity of urban areas. Car culture – drive-in McDonalds, theatres.

Economic profile of the suburbs – a wide economic spectrum of suburbia, spanned the range of the middle class and mostly excluded everyone else. Not an economic melting pot – moved in to a suburb with people of the same economic level that they had been.

Not a racial melting pot – many suburbs were ethnically diverse because residents had shed ethnic identification, but few were racially diverse. Some black suburbs, some Hispanic suburbs but took longer to emerge.

Suburbanisation a result of the desire for exclusivity – people could isolate themselves from the diversity and conflict of urban society. William White – “the suburb is classless, or at least it’s people want it to be”. In the real world diversity existed, but the suburb protected its residents from it. Not a force for uniting the world at large but a force for dividing it – bringing the middle class together and excluding everyone else.

* Character of national politics in the 1950s. In late 1940s and early 1950s American public life a bitter contest – acrimony over loss of China, Soviet atomic bomb, Korean war, McCarthyism. Beginning in 1953, political climate began to change – Stalin died, Korean war settled, Joe McCarthy censured by the Senate in 1954, January 1953 Eisenhower inaugurated. Very successful President – elected easily in 1952. Popularity enormous – both parties tried to recruit him as a candidate (never seriously considered Dems), victory seemed fore-ordained once he decided to run. Emerged as the most appealing military man after WWII largely because of his personality – most likable General. Public warmth and geniality, dazzling, highly photogenic smile was his political trademark, characterized by ‘I like Ike’. Comforting, non-threatening public image (contrast to MacArthur – imperious, not well liked), Eisenhower not a television President (Kennedy the first great TV President), but was a media President, owed much of his success to an attractive personal image. Eisenhower’s appeal: unthreatening, embodied desire for unity and stability that characterized America in the 1950s.
* Leadership based on two assumptions:
  + Deep aversion to conflict and confrontation – leaned towards consensus and conciliation, avid anything that would disrupt the harmony he believed prevailed in America (despised McCarthy)
  + Deeply committed to capitalism and capitalists. A champion of free enterprise, the business community – Presidency an embodiment of the middle class yearning for stability and consensus.
* One example of this was his approach to the task of managing the economy – role of govt. to promote economic stability and prosperity by encouraging the elements of the community to cooperate with one another to create economic harmony. Government remained primarily concerned with the concerns of business – was a business-orientated administration, showed no real interest in the concerns of any other group. Most of his Cabinet were successful businessmen. Social connections and unofficial advisers almost all wealthy businessmen. Economic policies rejected anything that might smack of coercion – not really a tool of the business community, tried to convince business to weigh self-interest with national interest. Rejected any forceful role in compelling the business community to do anything.
* Most important domestic program of his Presidency was the interstate highway program – 1956, largest appropriation for any domestic program in American history to that point - $25billion. Larger than any New Deal program – twice as large as the entire Federal budget for any year of the ND. Principal champions the oil, construction and automobile industries. Few critics – so many Americans drove so much.
* Second example was his approach to federal social programs. To him, the challenge facing the government was not big programs to deal with social problems but didn’t attempt to roll them back – wanted slow the progress of liberal government. Knew he couldn’t touch the core of New Deal programs (social security, labour laws, farm programs, employment insurance etc). Even expanded social security. Believed the President should avoid controversies, attacking popular programs, avoid new and divisive social programs (eg civil rights).
* His instinct for stability and constraint and eagerness to avoid division and conflict can also be seen in foreign policy. Maintained commitment to containment but more restrained approach. Feared large-standing military would threaten the political order – feared military-industrial complex, warned in exit speech. Agreed to new strategy of containment, known as ‘New Look’ – reduced substantially spending on conventional military forces and made first line of defense the nuclear arsenal. Under Eisenhower, US less willing to go to the brink of war than under Truman or Kennedy and Johnson. Willing to support covert military and political campaigns – Iran, Guatemala. On occasion used American troops to quell potential communist influence eg troops in Lebanon. Pattern of intervention that reflected his belief that communism was invisible, zero-sum-game, also reflected his cautious approach to interventionism – sanctioned only when likely to not be dangerous.
* Agreed to settlement of Korean War that was not very favourable for US but extricated America from a costly war. Vietnam settlement in 1954 – pattern of restraint that reflects his aversion to excessive risk. Became the cautious, prudent, conciliatory, paternal figure that presided over the heyday of the predominance of middle class life. Epitomised the American middle class’ idealized image of itself, period of almost unbroken prosperity and peace.
* Eisenhower and the culture he represents were only one side of America in the 1950s.

The Subversive 50s

* Not a good time for dissent – Cold War, fear of communism, homogenous popular culture with little patience for divergent views – film studios who sacked people with opposing views, newspapers and networks promoted unified vision.
* 1953, I F Stone (leftist) founded his own political journal as none of his previous employers would publish his work – too radical. 1980s published a collection of his writings from this time, called ‘The Haunted 50s’. The 50s seemed haunted because public culture so self-congratulatory that problems of society often seemed hidden under the haze of bright affirmative images of a middle class nation. Beneath the surface lived another America – the haunted nation.
* Critique of the mainstream was building – beginning of the civil rights movements, restiveness of the left struggling to reveal the persistence of poverty, increasing movement of women attempting to move out of traditional roles, growing concerns about the environment by scientists and ecologists who saw the dangers of heedless economic growth.
* Critiques did emerge among white male culture – even in such unlikely places as situation comedies, eg Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet – one episode where Ozzie has an argument with Harriet where she defeats and humiliates him, he complains about his loss of authority in his own home. Bewilderment of men dealing with the changing paradigm of work, home and even masculinity itself in the new middle class world – ‘What has happened to the American male?’ (Schlesinger, 1958). The ‘American male’ was becoming ‘unmanned’, losing a full sense of his identity, a sense of purpose. Gender lines were blurring – inner sense of what they must be was evaporating. ‘Why do women dominate him? Why does he work so hard? Why is he afraid to be different?’ Answer felt to be the loss of authority and control at home and work.
* ‘Rebel Without a Cause’ a commentary on the loss of male sexual authority. Defined by relationship with his emasculated father. Anxiety about male sexuality dominated this film and many others of the 1950s – James Dean is sexually confused in the film, only able to re-assert his heterosexuality after Plato’s death. Fear at the time that ineffectual fathers create homosexual sons.
* Kinsey Reports – huge body of data, reported widespread homosexual impulses among American men (50% reported homosexual arousal) – evidence of sexual confusion among disoriented men rather than of homosexuality.
* Tremendous success of Playboy magazine – 1953, by 1959 circulation of over 1million – largest of any men’s magazine in America. Hefner saw mag would compensate for loss of traditional symbols and supports for male sexuality. Designed to counteract the fears of emasculation that were threatening the psychic health of men.
* Critique of the culture of organization a direct result of growing number of white collar workers that outnumbered blue collar during the 1950s – more working in offices rather than factories and shops. Highly structured and bureaucratized organisations that valorized conformity. Employees learned to dress alike, pattern their lives in similar ways, adopt similar values and goals, value getting along within hierarchical structure of the corporation. Complaints about the conformity of these organisations abounded – challenged capacity for workers to create individual identities. People created who would take no risks, feared being different. William White: ‘The Organisation Man’ published in the 1950s. Workers becoming victims of a social ethic which makes morally legitimate the pressures of society against the individual. C Wright Mills – sociologist at Columbia made a more radical critique in book called ‘White Collar’ – ‘in a society of employees dominated by the marketing mentality, it is inevitable that a personality market should arise … employees became commodities in the market … one makes an instrument of himself and is estranged from it also’.
* David Reeseman ‘The Lonely Crowd’, 1950 – ‘a new kind of man’. Most people had in the past been ‘inner-directed people’, defined by own values and goals and sense of worth. Now, dominant personality was coming to be the ‘other-directed man’, defining himself in terms of the values and goals of others. People (men especially) were losing direction and becoming automatons in the modern world.
* Organisational culture leading to increasing disenchantment, growing concern about the alienation of the individual in this modern hierarchical world.
* Also a common theme in novels written during the period – lonely frustrated white middle class protagonists struggling to find a way to find fulfillment in a meaningless life.
* The struggle to ‘keep holding up’ not a new concern but in the post-war era concerns directed towards suburbs, work, faceless homogeneity of post-war society.
* Clearest example came from the Beat movement – ridiculed middle class society, stood outside middle class suburbia. Viewed by many mainstream Americans with condescension and amusement. Openly challenged conventional values and views of middle class society, adopted alternative lifestyles emphasizing rootlessness, anti-materialism, drugs, sexual freedom, despair about the nature of modern society. Most of all, in search of what they called ecstasy – a relief from modern society.
* Kerouac – On The Road 1957. Freedom but also a gloomy lament about the state of American life – people living unredeemable lives.
* Heart of Beat critique – saw mainstream American life as repressed, numbing. Attraction to non-white culture – wanting to be anything but a white male.
* William Burroughs – Naked Lunch – 1959. Life of a homosexual heroin addict, dark indictment of a culture which makes everyone addicted to something. Expressed utter disenchantment of mainstream American society without the potential optimism of Kerouac.
* Most alienated people who had rejected bourgeois world were homosexual and lived on the margins of mainstream life, many addicted to drugs.
* Beat language a rejection of mainstream as well – wrote free-form, contemptuous of convention. Burroughs claimed could only write while on drugs. Show an alternative world, but also a kind of personal and sexual freedom at the centre of Beat culture. Burroughs a pre-cursor of the gonzo journalism of the 1960s and beyond.
* Freedom to the Beat writers meant being able to escape from what they saw as a kind of prison of the middle class world.
* Gainsberg – 1955 poem that would become the anthem for the Beat writers and generation – illustrated the extent of alienation behind Beat philosophy – ‘Howl’. Attacked virtually every aspect of modern society as corrupt and alienating. Howl expressed a new kind of attack on militarism, suburbs, the very idea of progress – an attack on all the underpinnings of the modern middle class culture and society, even on rationality itself. Made Beats seem so frightening and subversive to many Americans in the 1950s – rejection of the disciplined, ordered life of the post-war world, rejection of culture they found alienating that most were lionizing, rejection of conventional divisions of race and middle class values – similar to rock musicians who gave vent to sexual impulses (eg Elvis, Buddy Holly, Chuck Berry). Musicians considered subversive themselves. Also popular images of James Dean (not a Beat but a romantic frustrated by the humdrum world of middle class life), Lenny Bruce – dark, purposely offensive angry comedian, harshly critical view of American culture. Beats attracted relatively little mainstream attention except as objects of ridicule and contempt, but significant for two reasons:
  + Clear antecedents for 1960s counter-culture of the New Left.
  + Expressed most extreme form of an anxiety and disenchantment that extended beyond their own ranks even in the 1950s. Stretched across the way many writers, academics, intellectuals characterized American culture in the 1950s.
* Another more powerful critique came from feminism – did not become widely visible in American life until the late 1960s, but problems to which feminism was a response were very evident in the 1950s. 1963 – publication of Betty Friedan’s *The Feminine Mystique*, written and researched largely in the 1950s. By 1957 was living in the suburbs with children but a freelance writer, travelled around the country interviewing her classmates for soft article on women’s lives. Women were all married, children, prosperous middle class suburbs, living ‘the mystique of feminine fulfillment’, acting out the expected role of wives, mothers and homemakers, yet as she pressed further she found that behind the mystique in all the women she interviewed lay a fundamental sense of uneasiness, frustration and vague unhappiness that most women had difficulty articulating – the problem that has no name. Part of the problem was the nature of the suburbs – isolation, emphasis on privacy, bred boredom and loneliness – more acute in affluent suburbs than in more modest suburbs where neighbourliness was quite strong (at times too strong). Real problem embedded in the nature of the gender roles that society had embedded on women. Women had nothing to do that offered any real challenge or intellectual stimulation – educated women with no outlet for their talents. No way for these women to break out of their comfortable concentration camps. Friedan astonished at deluge of mail from women who identified with this after publication.
* Spock etc – emphasized importance of childcare, cult of marriage and domesticity that shaped women’s expectations – women felt guilty if didn’t stay home with their children. Powerful cultural assumptions that contrasted with many experiences.
* Feminine mystique hid unhappiness of many women – stifled capacity of women to experience fulfillment.
* Growing belief that the modern organizational society was making it difficult for anyone to find fulfillment – American society plagued by a suffocating conformity, bleak mass culture, rampant commercialism, erosion of freedom and the repression of women. Friedan applying elements of this social critique to women. For many women the problem was not only in the home but active gender discrimination in the workplace. Fastest increase in employment was among middle class American women. Friedan’s message in fact rather moderate and slightly naïve – message of her book not about discrimination but that the problem facing women was a problem created by women – they had chosen a comfortable domestic life that led to boredom, isolation and self-delusion. The answer was for them to move into the workplace – solution that women could seize by themselves, they could choose to move out of their situation.
* Problem of discrimination could not be solved by individual women themselves, they were deeply rooted premises that American society was based upon. Emergent feminism did not recognize how difficult and divisive these problems would be to overcome.
* 1950s were in many ways genuinely stable and prosperous, but divisions and critiques did exist – can’t accept the popular image at face value. Need to recognize the degree to which the consensual middle class worldview was not accepted even by all members of the middle class itself, and was not shared by large segments of society excluded from the middle class altogether.

Gilder Lehman – Wednesday

The Affluent Society & the Other America

* Two great forces that shaped the character of post-war society – the Cold War and abundance.
* GDP (in billions)
  + 1940: 100
  + 1950: 287
  + 1960: 515
  + 1965: 691
  + 1970: 1015
  + 1980: 2732
  + 1990: 5567
  + 2000: 10,553
  + 2010: 13,000
* Nearly 700% increase in GDP from 1940 to 1965
* Population
  + 1945: 139.9
  + 1950: 152.3
  + 1955: 165.9
  + 1960: 180.7
  + 1965: 194.3
* Population growth nowhere near as strong as GDP – increased prosperity shared.
* Inflation very low during most of this period – remarkable economic growth throughout the period.
* GNP growing 14x as fast as population, 7x the rate of inflation
* 1940 – 1965 average income per family per year grew from $2200 to just under $8000, adjusted for inflation – almost tripled
* Unemployment averaged about 4.6% through the 1950s (includes two recessions, so ordinarily lower) – low of 2.9% (1953). Significantly lower than since the 1960s.
* Significant decrease in poverty in America
  + 1950: 30%
  + 1960: 22.2%
  + 1970: 12.6%
  + 1980: 13%
  + 1990: 13.5%
  + 1993: 15.1%
  + 1998: 12.7%
  + 1999: 12.6%
  + Since 1965: low 1973 – 11.1%
  + Since 1965: high 1994 – 14.5%
* Wealth and income distribution another key indicator. Claims that America becoming wealthier and also more equal – not true. No significant redistribution of wealth in the 1950s and 60s, just an increase in the total amount of wealth.
* Wealthy and poor experienced roughly the same rates of growth in wealth during the 1950s and 60s, however income inequality has expanded hugely between early 1970s and today – huge gap between rich and poor by 2000.
* What caused remarkable growth in the post-war period? No real agreement among economists but several factors that most agree upon – lack of agreement of which is the most important factor.

1. Government spending: growing federal budget
   1. 1940: 9.5billion – -2.9 deficit
   2. 1945: 92.7 – 47.6 deficit
   3. 1950: 42.6 – 3.1 deficit
   4. 1960: 92.1 – 0.3 surplus
   5. 1970: 195.6 – 2.8 deficit
   6. 1980: 590.9 – 73.8 deficit
   7. 1990: 1251.8 – 220 deficit
   8. 1999: 1704.5 – 122.7 surplus

* Much expenditure during the war, then the Korean war, then the Interstate Highway program. Growth in veteran’s benefits, mortgage assistance, government sponsored research (military and space)

1. Population Growth:
   1. 1945: 139.9
   2. 1950: 152.3 – 8.8%
   3. 1955: 165.9 – 8.9%
   4. 1960: 180.7 – 8.9%
   5. 1965: 194.3 – 7.5%
   6. 1970: 205.1 – 5.6%

* Meant increased demand and consumption, therefore spurred economic growth.

1. Suburbs – promoted economic growth. 18m people moved to the suburbs in the 1950s (10% population). Population as a whole grew 19%, suburban population grew 47% (during 1950s).

* Came to be called the ‘New American Frontier’ – created a vast new market, provided an important boost to some of the most important sectors of the economy – housing, automobile, oil, consumer industries

1. Lack of competition from abroad:

* Most global economic capacity either underdeveloped or devastated by the war. Other industrial nations were rebuilding.
* America’s industrial capacity which grew during the war was stronger.
* Success in selling goods abroad – healthy balance of trade until the late 1960s (1969 the last favourable balance of trade).
* International trade a relatively small part of the economy until the 1970s – less than 10%.
* Real effect of lack of competition meant that American industry did not have to compete for access to raw materials, or to share the American market with other countries. Almost everything that people in the US bought was made in the US until after the 1970s. All domestic demands for cars, steel, electronics, etc were built and sold by American corporations.

1. Labour Relations

* Immediate change after WWII in relationship between employers and labour – change in attitudes and behaviours on both sides because of the ‘post war contract’.
* Transformation in labour relations – a set of major unions largely abandoned demands for a share of power in their industries, gave up their goal of controlling the workplace, gave up effort to create a political base for labour.
* Instead, organized labour worked largely on behalf of better wages and benefits for members – gave up power and got money in return. In the process, embraced Keynesian ideal of consumption as the principal goal of economic life – believed a healthy salary for workers would strengthen the economy.
* Employers made more generous wage settlements with unions, offered new benefits and eventually offered guaranteed annual wage and cost of living increase. In return, received free hand to run industry as they wished and got a promise of labour peace from the unions.
* Many effects on labour – some positive and some damaging. Membership of unions increased between 1950 and 1980, although percentage of workforce declined.
  + 1945: 35.5%
  + 1970: 27.3%
  + 1990: 16.1%
  + 1999: 13.9%
* Cumulative economic effect of all of these changes was a change in the way Americans thought – came to consider affluence a norm – came to be seen as a basic right. Material abundance – the reality and expectation of it, came to be one of the ways in which most Americans defined their world.
* Abundance shaped many aspects of life, culture and politics: two in particular:
* High level of complacency in many areas of American life; especially in white middle class that was benefiting so much. Reduction in anxiety, retreat from social activism. Helped to produce serenity and calm that is often associated with the 1950s.
  + Economic growth affected both popular and elite ideas about capitalism. Throughout C20th, substantial numbers of Americans had remained skeptical about industrial capitalism (especially during 1930s).
  + Concerns over fragility of capitalism that existed in 1930s disappeared in 1950s. Gradually it became possible to believe that there were no limits to economic growth.
  + Galbraith – 1952, American Capitalism – one comment about capitalism: “it works”. In the US, there need not lurk behind social programs the dilemma which paralyses the will of economic man – ie, you could have it both ways – increasing the income of the masses did not come at the expense of investment, they would reinforce one another. This is in contrast to earlier economic theory. Keynesianism now made it clear that you could in fact keep wages high while maintaining investment – real income of the masses could increase, poverty could be eliminated, social problems could be solved not through income redistribution but through growth.
  + New faith in capitalism had significant impact on intellectuals – emergence of ‘consensus ideology’. Assumption about the core values of American culture – what motivated Americans in the conduct of their lives and pursuit of goals, what formed the core was one thing: material ambition. All Americans were at heart liberals (free market) and capitalists. What drove them was a commitment to individual freedom and the hope of individual economic advancement through capitalist success. One expression came from Richard Hofstadter – 1948 – The American Political Tradition. Argued that historians had misunderstood American society when tried to explain America in terms of conflict between groups – there were conflicts but recognizing what divided groups was less important than recognizing the ‘common climate of opinion in which these conflicts occurred’ – the consensus more important than the conflicts. Everyone wanted security and wealth. However much at odds on specific issues, the major political traditions had shared a belief in the rights of property, the philosophy of economic individuals, the values of competition – the virtues of capitalism as the virtues of man. Indicates the importance of abundance.
  + Intellectuals did not always admire these values, but recognized their importance – the alternative seemed worse (communism). May not be ennobling traditions, but ‘safe’ traditions – protected America from ideologies that had been responsible for the great tragedies of the C20th – fascism, communism. Dissent seen as dangerous, threatening.
  + Consensus idea helps explain why in the early and mid 1950s there was a decline in political activism. Anti-radical liberalism can be seen in the American Committee for Cultural Freedom – gathered to discuss issues and prescribe a course for the future. Founders very influential intellectuals in public life of the 1950s. Principal purpose was the battle against communism – discussed why American institutions and values were superior to Soviet, and harsh denunciation of Americans who did not seem committed to opposing communism. Heavily subsidized by the CIA.
  + While assumptions of consensus ideology may not be correct, they were very influential. Liberals left with little purpose due to the level of complacency coming out of the idea that everyone had the same views of the world.
* Creation of traditions that would permit social activism and commitment in the 1960s
  + Belief that Keynesian economics gave governments the power to ensure continued prosperity and growth – now had the tools to safeguard the economy from fluctuations. Keynesianism became less effective the more international the economy became.
  + Economic vision based on Keynes – a modern, scientific way to manage the economy. Keynesianism would manage the economy indirectly by manipulating fiscal and monetary levers rather than by direct involvement.
  + Paul Samuelson – Economics – 1948 – became the ‘bible’ for managing the economy throughout the world – dominant textbook well into the 1970s.
  + Keynesianism provided the key to economic management in the post-war world – the secret of permanent growth and stability. Made it possible to turn capitalism into the most effective agent of change and progress in the world – a genuine revolutionary force without the unpleasantness of social revolutions.
  + “Keynes, not Marx, is the prophet of the new radicalism” (Schlesinger)
  + “The new economics really does work. Wall Street knows it, Main Street knows it, you can bet that the statisticians in the Kremlin know it.” Samuelson
  + Gradual chipping away at some of the inhibitions that had traditionally stood in the way of liberal programs for social reform.
  + Galbraith – 1958 – The Affluent Society. Call on Americans to escape from obsessive preoccupation with accumulating private wealth for private use and give some attention to public needs. Poverty no longer a problem, so can see new tasks – prosperity made it possible for society to not only make individuals rich but to address larger social needs in society. Advocated major spending on schools, parks, scientific research, public wealth – less to private covetousness – less private affluence and public squalor.
  + Promotion of government spending partly spurred by Sputnik (1957) – fear of falling behind, calls for massive social investment in an effort to catch up, especially science and tech. education.
  + Sputnik created growing impatience and ambition, reassessment of the Presidency.
  + Eisenhower in many ways a personification of the risk-averse consensus era, but by 1957 coming under increased attack for his perceived passivity and indifference to social problems, indifference to rivalry with Soviets. Frequent complaint of Eisenhower was ‘drift’ – sense of ‘drift’ gave rise to idea that US needed a ‘national purpose’.
  + New conception of the Presidency as the one person capable of defining and articulating a ‘national purpose’. Books about Presidential power emphasizing the desirability of the need for Presidential activism – Eisenhower shown as what a President should not be like.
  + President seen as the potential ‘seat of action’ without which America would not progress – had to set the course for the country. Eisenhower believed that the goals of the state should remain modest, yet this was in contrast to growing popular view that the President should be the seat of activism.

The Other America

* The Other America – poor, oppressed, racial minorities.
* Two aspects – poverty and race.
* Concern for the poor and trying to ensure public attention had existed in the early C20th and during the GD, attempts to chronicle the lives of the poor to bring public attention.
* Photographers like Russell Lee, Walker Evans (Let Us Now Praise Famous Men – with Agee) during the 1930s documented rural poverty in particular to portray it to the world.
* With emergence of ‘national purpose’ in late 1950s growing attention on the poor as part of desire to remove poverty.
* Discovery of poverty in the 1960s – 1962 ‘The Other America’ by Michael Harrington. Described poverty in different terms to what Americans were accustomed to hearing. Most Americans believed poverty to be a transitory situation – few people who were permanently poor. True – only about 20% of poor people remain poor over an extended period of time. Harrington drew attention to this 20% - drew attention to structural poverty, built in to the economic and social system, hit certain regions and groups far more than others from which there was no easy escape. Focused mostly on places – Appalachians, parts of the South. A ‘system designed to be impervious to hope’ – failures, those driven from the land and bewildered by the city, old people, minorities facing a wall of prejudice.
* Oscar Lewis ‘La Vida’, 1968 – similar study of poverty mostly in third world countries. Introduced a phrase ‘the culture of poverty’ – particular kind of poverty that included about 20% of the poor. This structural or cultural poverty would not simply whither away in good times, a kind of hard core poverty, requiring drastic remedies, would have to be fought to be eliminated.
* While such value was placed on stable nuclear families, the existence of broken family structures seemed especially alarming, especially with rise in crime rates. Among young people, juvenile delinquency – one of the most discussed problems of the era.
* Rising cost of welfare – in the 1950s began to support rising numbers of people – suggested that poverty was not withering away as people suggested it should.
* Also attracted attention because it came to be associated with African-Americans. Harrington made no special point of racial profile of poverty – noted that poverty prevalent among African Americans but made no special point of that. White poverty in Appalachia given just as much attention.
* Similarly, many early civil rights leaders paid no attention to poverty, but the two issues could not remain separated.
* Struggle for racial justice did not begin in the 1950s but the question of race took a major decisive step onto the national agenda in the 1950s, partly because substantial numbers of white Americans began to embrace the issue (especially NE liberals). Also because many AA learned to overcome fear and powerlessness that had prevented them from mounting a challenge to the racist regime in the South.
* Why did the changes occur at this time after so many years of relative stasis? Convergence of a number of events and social forces.
  + The war – the double V: changed the way many AA thought and what they were willing to accept. The ‘Double V’ – victory over the Axis abroad and racism at home. Goals seen as inseparable. In the 1940s AA expected more – needed democratic freedoms at home if were to be expected to die for democracy abroad.
  + Ideological climate of the 1950s – shaped in large part by the Cold War. Racial injustice in America a much-publicized phenomena in communist nations. Racism, like poverty, an affront to the triumphant image that America was promoting abroad.
  + Long-term demographic changes, esp. move of AA from rural to urban areas – formed a critical mass where lives were less directed and controlled by white people.
  + Expansion and maturing of an urbanized black middle class. Education people, 2nd & 3rd generation educated, could provide leadership to a civil rights movement. One of the first examples – Greensboro, NC sit-ins.
  + Rise of television – programming in the 1950s overwhelmingly dominated by white middle class images, when AA were visible were shown as domestics or objects of ridicule. Constant reminders to AA of relatively unfavourable position in American life – prompted greater activism. Black college graduates finding a world of segregation was increasingly unacceptable.
  + Erosion of scholarly and intellectual support for racial discrimination. Cultural anthropology in the 1930s began to debunk claims of racial superiority, sociologists destroyed ideas that blacks and Jews were intellectually inferior.
* Converging social and economic forces that conspired to stimulate the growth of the civil rights movement.
* Also events that helped mobilise white liberals to demand change, as well as those that mobilized African Americans. Forces to mobilise white Americans:
  + 1948 – Truman announced de-segregation of the Armed Forces
  + 1948 – de-segregation of baseball (Jackie Robertson first black man to play in major leagues)
  + Democratic party introduced a civil rights plank to platform.
  + 1954 – Brown v Board of Education of Topeka Kansas – single most important decision of the court in the C20th. Declared racial segregation in schools unconstitutional. Negated Plessy v Ferguson (1896) which had sanctioned ‘separate but equal’. Plessy had created the world of ‘Jim Crow’. Plessy was not a schools decision but included schools, also parks, transportation etc. Civil Rights act of 1964 could never have happened without Brown – overturned idea of separate but equal. Brown the culmination of legal challenges to segregation by a group of talented black lawyers under the aegis of the NAACP (Thurgood Marshall et al). Invented the field of civil rights law, began attempting legal challenges in the 1930s – main focus was segregated education, first target was graduate schools. Many states had no grad schools at all for African Americans, began efforts by arguing that segregation of grad schools violated even the Plessy decision because no separate but equal for law schools. 1947 began recruiting parents to file suits against segregated school systems, culminated in the Brown case – 1954. Decision moved outside the law and used psychology and sociology as part of the decision for the case. Result of many things, but above all the personal, moral inclinations of the court.
  + Brown also showed the limits of even the most committed white leaders in this issue. Showed how eager they were to avoid conflict and believed that it could be avoided. Unanimous in declaring segregation illegal but also that any assault on segregation had to be slow – very fearful of white responses to precipitous action. “All deliberate speed” – didn’t set a timeline for segregation. Were segregated schools all over the country, some of the most vicious battles over desegregation were in places like Chicago, Denver, Boston etc – in the 1970s.
  + Responses to Brown: Little Rock, AK – local citizens tried to block integration, aided by the Governor – Little Rock 9. Governor withdrew the National Guard from the school, leaving no protection for the black students, so finally Eisenhower sent federal troops into Little Rock – same troops, Eisenhower federalized them. Authorised to protect the students getting into the High School. A limited victory – next year, shut the school down rather than integrate. Only the most dramatic example of widespread, massive resistance to Brown throughout the South. Several states outlawed the NAACP, white citizens councils mobilized resistance, schools were closed, white families subsidized to send children to academies. Efforts to undermine Brown not seriously challenged for over ten years. Brown not fully implemented for over 20 years.
  + Without Brown later successes would not have happened, and without white liberal support. But nothing would have been possible without AA commitment and mobilization.
  + 1942: James Farmer Junior founded the Committee on Racial Equality (CORE) – pacifist resistance to segregation. In 1947 sent group of bus riders through the upper south to challenge segregated bus travel, most arrested very quickly.
  + CORE’s efforts unsuccessful, but a precursor to later black resistance.
  + July 1944 at Port Chicago Naval Base in California, AA soldiers assigned to load explosives, two were killed in an explosion. Naval investigation could not determine the cause but loaders ordered back to work without any real investigation. Of the 300 survivors, 258 refused to go back without assurance of safety, and were jailed, some court-martialed for mutiny. NAACP defended them, naval court found guilty in 80 minutes, sentenced to 6-12 years in jail (released after less than one year at the end of the war).
  + Most important event in awakening black southerners – Montgomery Bus Boycott in 1955-56. NAACP had been waiting for a case such as Rosa Parks – no evidence that she planned on being arrested, but local activists ready to promote a boycott and she was respectable enough to spark a movement.
  + Boycott lasted over a year despite attempts by whites (legal and extra-legal) to block. Hurt bus companies and also stores downtown. Began with moderate demands – greater courtesy, more black drivers, flexible seating; but demands grew more serious as movement grew – called for complete end to discrimination and major changes to hiring practices.
  + Night of the end of the boycott, KKK rode through black communities expecting to terrorise blacks, but instead AA came out onto sidewalks to watch, jeer and heckle – Klansmen didn’t know what to do.
  + End of 1956 Supreme Court ruled discrimination in public transportation was illegal – bus company relented which ended the boycott.
  + Boycott important not so much for the gains (largely symbolic):
    - One of the first examples of successful black protest, widely publicized, significant in emergence of civil rights.
    - Beginning of a new strategy of black resistance – non-violence (not completely new – James Farmer, CORE). Based on teachings of Ghandi, Thoreaux – non-violence could be capable of eliciting support not only among the black community but outside. Generated support in the white liberal community – first step in building that alliance.
    - Marked the emergence of MLK – new minister at Dexter Ave Baptist Church in Montgomery. Discovered his leadership and oratorical abilities.
  + Showed the limits of this initial moderate approach to the issue of racial equality – boycott a largely passive and reactive form of defiance. Effective because of bus company dependence on black customers, but of limited use in other situations – segregated hotels or restaurants wouldn’t care about boycotts. In other situations there would be a need for more direct assaults and open defiance of the law. By the end of the 1950s new organisations were being formed that advocated more direct action, like Southern Christian Leadership Coalition. Working to find new ways to challenge segregation and force change.
  + Sit-ins, increasingly confrontational tactics that led to violence not seen in Montgomery. Marked the beginning of a process that would soon generate enormous momentum and change across America.
* Early civil rights about segregation and disenfranchisement, not economics, but did not stay that way – white Americans had begin to discover poverty and make it part of the agenda. African Americans also found that improvement in material conditions of their lives would not come simply through desegregation – by mid-1960s the civil rights movement shifting focus away from symbols and towards economic issues. Once civil rights movement became about more than just voting and access to public facilities and focused on jobs, housing and economic opportunities, the movement ceased to be as broadly acceptable to Americans and ceased to be as popular as it had once been. No longer simply a morally unassailable assault on racism but rather a challenge to the distribution of power, wealth and privilege in all areas of the US, therefore more divisive, more of a challenge to the dominant culture.

Gilder Lehman – Thursday

Cold War Fears

* Cold War as a force in American political life – seemed to become the single most important issue in American life.
* CW had big impact on the distribution of power within central institutions of American life – military industrial complex, the ‘iron triangle’ – military working to expand and improve arsenal of weapons and a network of govt agencies designed to serve the needs of the cold war (eg CIA, NSA), and then group of private companies designed to serve these needs – iron triangle.
* Impact on universities – funding, research and development.
* Helped create wealth – when economy beginning to sag at the end of WWII production CW military needs pumped billions into the economy.
* Military & scientific research created huge technological advances.
* CW created wars – small military actions in other places (Iran, Guatemala, Lebanon, Cambodia, Nicaragua, Korea, Vietnam).
* CW created fear: of communism, and above all of nuclear war.
* Fears created by the CW escalated dramatically when Korean War began. Within weeks, North Korean army had occupied almost all of South Korea. Within days, US belief of containment meant that US under aegis of UN decided to intervene under leadership of MacArthur. MacArthur invaded at Incheon rather than moving in from Pusan (south) and pushing north, he landed in central Korea, cutting off North Korean troops. Drove N Korean troops back over the border.
* Some debate over whether South Korean important enough to justify invasion. Before invasion, US had publicly stated that Korea was not within the US ‘Defense perimeter’, but once war began, everyone agreed could not allow a communist country to conquer a non-communist country.
* MacArthur not satisfied by restoration of independence of South Korea – moved UN forces into North Korea beyond the 38th Parallel, his goal (for a while, Truman’s goal), was to push all the way to the Chinese border and re-unify Korea under a Western government.
* As movement north began, combination in Washington of unease and excitement. Acheson: “utter madness and folly of what MacArthur was doing” – self-serving, as Acheson was also enchanted by idea of conquering North Korea.
* December, Chinese troops entered, reversing the balance of power – pushed back beyond the 38th parallel, conquered Seoul. Acheson: ‘The greatest disaster of the Truman era’.
* American forces gradually fought back, by March 1951 had pushed Chinese north across 38th again, little movement over next 2 years – battles along the armistice line.
* Controversy over the war began to accelerate with the stalemate – Americans began to lose patience with the conflict, question its purpose, question failure of the US to move more aggressively against the enemy – including MacArthur who questioned why not able to move the war back into North Korea and into China. Belief that MacArthur should not only push back into North Korea but also into China and overturn the Chinese government. MacArthur criticized administration for not allowing him to do this, and began to criticize Truman often and openly. Truman ordered him to stop criticizing decisions, still did it, so in 1951 Truman relieved him of his command – most Americans sided with MacArthur, at least at first.
* War, and the Truman/MacArthur conflict, raised doubts about loyalty in Cold War, raised fears about domestic subversion and dissent – fears that communists within who threatened the safety of the nation.
* Crusade against domestic subversion coincided with heavy criticism of Korean War – couldn’t understand why America wasn’t winning the war, why it was dragging on. Coincided with Red Scare – 1951-1953 the years of the great Red Scare.
* Rested on belief that American society and government riddled with communist subversives who were working to undermine the values of the nation. Symbolised by Senator Joseph McCarthy, but he was only one agent of many.
* Evident in education, media, movies, labour, corporations etc. Even ACLU stopped defending accused too much for fear of being accused of being a communist organization. Huge imposition on liberties.
* Primarily a phenomena of government and politics. Produced and sustained by government, spread beyond. Anti-communist was official government policy at almost every level of government – 44 out of 48 state governments passed laws between 1949 and 1955 designed to root out subversives and communists. State and local courts pursued and punished communists – eg Florida judge tried to have disbarred all lawyers who appeared before him who refused to answer questions about their political beliefs.
* Hard to say when began exactly, but 1947 House Un American Activities Committee began investigating Hollywood. At this stage a relatively obscure committee (established in WWII to look into domestic support for fascism), had a reputation of doing almost nothing, attracted little attention until investigation of communist infiltration of the film industry in 1947. Drawn to this by right-wing opposition to Hollywood – believed was dominated by New Dealers and communists.
* HUAC called ‘friendly’ witnesses to name names, then ‘unfriendly witnesses’ – the Hollywood 10 – believed to have been members of the communist parties. Screenwriters did not cooperate, but refused to invoke the 5th – believed would be an admission of guilt. Cited for contempt, jailed for terms ranging from 6months to a year, when released blacklisted and barred from working. Trials generated enormous publicity.
* Next important event came a year later, partly out of HUAC – case of Alger Hiss. 1948 another House Committee heard testimony from Chambers who revealed that in 1937 he had acted as a conduit for passing classified state department documents to the Soviets – said Alger Hiss (high ranking State Dept official who also attended Yalta) passed him the documents. Hiss then sued Chambers for libel, Chambers responded by inviting reporters to his home in Maryland, led reporters into his vege garden, pulled out a container with a reel of microfilm inside a pumpkin – claimed were photos of the documents Hiss had given him. Traced to a typewriter once owned by Hiss. Vigorous pursuit of Hiss by Richard Nixon (young member of Congress) – made his career.
* Hiss convicted of perjury (state of limitations run out on espionage), imprisoned for a short time, spent the rest of his life fighting to prove his evidence. Lived long enough to see the Soviet evidence that he had in fact been a spy – Soviet archives did show that he was a spy.
* What made Hiss case so alarming to many Americans was the identify of Hiss – friend of Acheson, friend of Supreme Court judge – if a man like Hiss could be a spy, then the entire govt establishment could be suspect. Confirmed a growing belief on the right that the line dividing liberalism and the New Deal from communism was indistinct and easily crossed. Chambers was expressing fears that were shared by many others – became a great hero to and significant figure on the right.
* Chambers horrified by how far subversive liberalism had extended its grip over American life. Many people concluded that there was little difference between communism and liberalism. Many liberals began to arm themselves with strong anti-communist views.
* 1950 Claus Heux (?) turned himself in (English scientist) and said he had been passing on all his secrets to the Soviets, led many Americans to conclude (erroneously) that stolen atomic secrets had enabled Soviets to develop their own atomic bomb.
* Led to accusations against Rosenberg couple – charged with having been conduit through whom Heux’ secrets had been passed to the Soviets. Rosenberg’s were communists, so sympathy was limited. Tried in an atmosphere of near-hysteria and confronted with great legal irregularities, convicted of treason and sentenced to death. Judge called the crime ‘worse than murder’ – ‘you have altered the course of history to the detriment of your country’.
* After appeals and public protests, were executed in 1954 – martyred. Soviet archives in the 1990s confirmed at least some of the charges.
* Rosenberg and Hiss cases became touchstones of deep convictions on these issues especially among the left. Assault on the left the defining political event for a generation of left-wing intellectuals and politicians. Article of faith that the crusade was unjust, but also that all targets were innocent (not really true).
* 1947 HUAC – same year as the Federal Employee Loyalty Program – designed to prove that administration was not soft on communism and communism had not infiltrated the government.
* Next two years, Czechoslovakia, China, Soviet bomb, Rosenberg cases – can see the drama of these years and the passions that emerged out of these controversies and the fears that it created.
* Two weeks after Rosenberg case broke, Joe McCarthy travelled to Wheeling, WV and made first major speech attacking communists in government. Claimed to have a list of 205 members of the State Dept known to Sec of State to be communists. A few months later, invasion of South Korea came – frenzy of fear.
* Once McCarthy entered the fray, dynamics of the Red Scare changed – four-year rampage through American politics. Kept alive by inventing cases and investigating, destroying reputations of citizens – did not reveal a single case of genuine subversion. Became a hero, especially among Irish Americans – anti-establishment, coarse, uninhibited by the truth. Political career most beholden to campaign against subversives – the only thing he had that made him significant.
* Because he was so reckless (and odious to his critics) helped to discredit the very campaign he helped to create. Anti-communist effort became much more difficult to defend and easier to discredit – 1954 Army McCarthy hearings. A product of his recklessness – began making charges against members of the military in 1953, including high-ranking. Too much for Eisenhower. Congress created a set of hearings in which McCarthy and other members of the military were investigated to see who was right and wrong – McCarthy discredited.
* What caused the Red Scare? Many factors.
* Simplest explanation – a reflection of real and legitimate concerns. There were communists in the US, some were engaged in treason, others engaged in other forms of subversion – certainly true, although numbers quite small. These communists were the principle victims – McCarthy didn’t discover any but other investigations did. Was illegal to be a member of the communist party. Was a part of the Red Scare.
* Second explanation – socio-cultural anxieties. Most prominently associated with Hofstadter – alarmed by hysterical dimensions of anti-communism and irrationality of anti-communism. Fears so exaggerated as to bear little relation to reality. According to Hofstadter, radical anti-communism represented something deeper than communism – the result of social and cultural anxieties that had only an indirect connection with the actual world. People were alienated, disenchanted, felt a sense of powerlessness and thus used communism as a target.
* Third explanation – partisan competition. Anti-communism became a political tool that both parties used to win support or undermine and discredit the government. Republicans far more successful, especially after Korean War began – exploited any apparent vulnerabilities. Strong correlation between support for McCarthy and party affiliation. Made a large contribution to the rise of the Red Scare – political football
* Another explanation – existence of powerful bureaucratic institutions with history of anti-communism, eg HUAC. Most important institution was the FBI – single most important institutional force fanning this great fear. J Edgar Hoover a passionate anti-communist who had been disproportionately interested in communism for decades, well before political climate allowed him to do anything about it. He had begun his career with the Palmer Raids and the 1920 Red Scare, carried this with him to the 1950s.
* One more explanation – failure of established elites (politicians, journalists etc) to challenge the Red Scare. McCarthy and others spread lies and distortions but very few people dared to challenge it. Why did so few stand up against it? Fear – not of communism but fear of anti-communism, fear among elites that if they dared to oppose the Red Scare they would open themselves to McCarthyite attacks. Much of the public believed that the nation had been carried away by a passionate, irrational frenzy – feared could not be reasoned with. No politician who hoped to remain in office, no journalist who wanted to preserve reputation, none would dare to stand up against the anti-communist movement, no matter how unjustified it might be. Was this fear justified? There was a deep and substantial anti-communism in America in these years, understandable that there would be a reaction to warnings against from reputable people. Many people of stature were constantly re-stating that communist subversion was a threat. McCarthyism could have been challenged earlier than it was – as soon as it was challenged (1953-54) it collapsed. Behaviour of elites paralysed by fear of an American public run amok.
* Can see the Red Scare as really the intellectuals being deeply afraid of the American people – afraid of being seen as soft on communism.

1960s

* Early and mid 1960s American government embarked on ‘great national projects’ to deal with desire for a national purpose.
* Kennedy & Johnson
* Kennedy
  + Historical reputation paradoxical. Served less than 3 years, modest tangible accomplishments, seems relatively undistinguished.
  + Richard Newstadt remarked in 1970s: ‘he will be just a flicker … I don’t think history will have much space for John Kennedy’. Very far from true.
  + Remains very near the centre of the American political imagination – a lost moment of idealism.
  + Allure of Kennedy, romantic associations survive and flourish.
  + Even while he lived, already becoming a national obsession. Elected by the narrowest margin in modern history, but by 1963 59% of the public claimed to have voted for him (only received 49.7% of the vote). After death, nearly 70% claimed they had voted for him.
  + After his death, this left indelible marks on society. His death turned the him into something like a religious figure. Reflected in continuing popular interest in the assassination and conspiracy theories, became an event of mythic proportions.
  + His funeral one of the things that made his death so iconic.
  + What made him so important in the eyes of so many people not only in America but all over the world?
    - Youth: youngest President ever, symbolized changing of the guard, the coming of a new generation – first born in the C20th. Represented a generational imperative – need for youth to carry on the battles the older generations were no longer capable of. ‘Ask not what your country can do for you’ etc. Many conservatives felt that this idea of sacrifice made the Presidency more important than individuals.
    - Public presence and personal charm: A man built for the television age, gifted, articulate speaker. Cool, unruffled, witty (contrast from Nixon & Eisenhower, even from Johnson). Even those who have become disillusioned by Kennedy are struck by how charismatic he was as a speaker.
    - Image of what many people have come to call ‘grace’: Not only a man who had grace, but a man who many felt seemed to be graced. Handsome, seemingly athletic, wealthy, his father one of the richest men in the country, beautiful wife, attractive family, cultured, seemed to be an intellectual, had written books, gone to Harvard, had Harvard professors in his administration.
  + All of these qualities created his popularity and have sustained his image since his death.
  + Have also been the cause of some reassessment of Kennedy since his death. There is the myth, and the counter-myth. The ‘Shadow legacy’. Kennedy’s strength came to be considered a weakness – came to see him as a fraud, because:
    - Youth: to many critics, appeared as recklessness and impetuosity (eg Bay of Pigs). Some saw as a rich playboy whose father bought his office. Lacking in depth or seriousness of purpose – a certain vacuousness.
    - Charm and poise, media skills: Quite a few people came to see this as dark and manipulative. Used the media carefully and calculatedly, press conferences were exercises in manipulation and evasion. Freedman saw Kennedy’s ‘Ask not’ as placing the government as the deity to the detriment of the free man.
  + Much of his image based on illusion and deception. Was in fact a man with very serious health problems – in and out of hospital, required to take drugs for the rest of his life. Not the happy family man – led a squalid personal sexual life both before and during his marriage and Presidency. Not much interested in high culture, cultivated the image of being cultured but in fact more attracted to more prosaic cultural figures like Iain Fleming (James Bond). Was intelligent and literate but not much of an intellect or writer. Some question over his role in the writing of *Profiles in Courage* – many believe his aide Sorenson wrote much of it.
  + These realities illustrate what an important historical phenomena he has become – his image swings between two extremes – a god-like superman, to an irresponsible libertine who manipulated his way into the Presidency. Seen as both much more and much less than he was, with historical revisions.
  + Kennedy family complicit in creating the myth, but also a result of his ability to embody the growing desire for national activism – national purpose. He was the man who ‘would get the country moving again’ at a time when much of the country wanted to move.
  + Centrality of action and dynamism clear in many of his own statements especially during campaign. Acceptance speech at 1960 Democratic Convention criticized ‘drift’ in national course.
  + Since end of WWII a kind of ideological momentum had been building in the US, fueled by Cold War and economic boom – desire for a national purpose.
  + Desire for change still cautious and tentative, but was there and growing – Kennedy seemed to have seized the moment, grasped the mission even though not entirely clear what that was.
  + The US ‘needs a grand objective’ – Kennedy was a bright beckoning embodiment of commitment and action, but one who initially had few ideas of how he wanted the nation to move.
* Difficult to imagine a less likely successor than Johnson.
  + Johnson grew up poor and isolated in Texas hill country, father a failed alcoholic politician.
  + Kennedy never lost an election or had to struggle to get ahead, Johnson had had to fight every step of the way.
  + Deeply immersed in the Senate, became majority leader – very effective.
  + Biggest contrast – personalities and styles. Kennedy: youth and vigor, Johnson seemed to be of a different generation (not many years between them). Gangly, poor speaker, did not convey the sense of grace. A man of at times almost unbelievable vulgarity and boorishness. Talked of himself and his conquests, bullied his employees, had a chip on his shoulder about the Kennedies, resentful and suspicious that the ‘Kennedy-types’ were sitting around laughing at him.
  + Determined to force those he considered part of ‘Kennedy’s world’ to acknowledge him as their master.
  + Not at first unpopular, elected in 1964 by greatest landslide in American history. Never acquired the sort of popularity of Kennedy.
  + Not very good at winning public affection on his own – ‘why don’t people like me?’
  + Despite these differences, presided over an administration that was substantially continuous of Kennedy – ended up being a far more successful Kennedy than Kennedy had been.
  + Johnson was able to get through Congress a legislative program that Kennedy had tried to – Kennedy’s ‘New Frontier’, Johnson called ‘Great Society’. Most of the great liberal triumphs of the 1960s were Johnson’s successes, not Kennedys.
  + Johnson was at least as committed to the active use of power as Kennedy had been. Kennedy had been talented at building consensus for ideas, but not good at nuts and bolts. Johnson less good at inspiring the public, but a much stronger political operator. Controlled congress more effectively than any other President. Partly through attention to detail (Kennedy not good at), brilliant at negotiating and striking deals, flattering, cajoling, bullying, giving ‘the Johnson treatment’ (getting up in someone’s face to convince them).
  + Kennedy and Johnson, as different as they were, represented two sides of the same activist coin. Kennedy and Johnson ended up complementing one another remarkably well. Kennedy the ideological catalyst, helping to define goals; Johnson taking the goals, implementing them, expanding them.
* Many things came out of the Kennedy/Johnson era, Civil Rights, Vietnam War etc. Specifically, the assaults on domestic social problems that began under Kennedy and crested under Johnson – the Great Society.
* Great Society a phrase that came out of a 1964 speech at University of Michigan: “we are going to assemble the best thought and broadest knowledge from all over the world to find the best answers … education, cities, emerging challenges… set our course towards the Great Society”. Ambitious. Designed not just to solve a particular social problem but to solve or address all social problems:
  + Rebuild cities
  + regions
  + arts and humanities
  + education and research
  + improve mass transit
  + clean air
  + clean water
  + built public housing
  + provide job training
  + improve medical care
  + combat poverty
* Crucial of the post-war era in constructing the modern state, nothing like it has happened since.
* Vision of a great society partly a reflection of the ego of Johnson – aspired to be greatest domestic President; also a reflection of the ambition of post-war liberalism.
* Johnson: Great Society would be a civilization where leisure is a welcome chance to build and reflect … address the desire for beauty, men are more concerned with the quality of their goals than the quantity of their possessions.
* Most important achievements were Medicare and Medicaid – first universal health care programs in American history. Now somewhat embattled, remain among most popular programs of the last half century.
* For Johnson, most auspicious was the war on poverty – Kennedy began to plan, Johnson launched soon after Kennedy’s death. Nurtured, tried to expand to ‘drive poverty from this land forever’.
* Unlike Civil Rights movement, was on the whole an elite initiative – no anti-poverty movement that pushed this effort along.
* Less a result of demands from below than initiatives at the top, legislators in a position of almost unprecedented power after 1964 landslide election.
* War on poverty never truly unconditional – shaped by political and ideological obstacles, and Johnson wanted to avoid imposing political or economic costs on anyone. Had to avoid anything that smacked of income redistribution. Had to avoid the terms ‘inequality’ or ‘redistribution of income and wealth’. Chose to fight poverty by providing training and empowerment to the poor – ‘a hand up, not a hand out’. Network of training programs, community action organizations to allow the poor to seize control of the institutions that shaped their lives and find their way out of poverty.
* The triumph of liberalism in these years in part a result of the implicit promise that liberal campaigns would be painless – no sacrifices would be expected, could be sustained by goodwill and economic growth. When shown to be false, broad support for these programs collapsed quickly.
* What did the war on poverty accomplish? Many of the goals ended up with little impact at all, but did it make things any better?
  + Between 1960 and 1970, poverty declined from 22% to around 13% of the population – lowest level in American history before or after the 1960s and 1970s (got slightly lower at one point in the 1970s). War on poverty not the only or principle cause, mostly from economic growth.
  + Is clear that many war on poverty programs were failures and contributed little to the lives of the poor, some programs did make a significant difference to the lives of the poor, even if inadvertently.
    - Food stamps contributed to the real reduction and almost elimination of hunger
    - Medicaid contributed to real, measurable increase in healthcare available to the poor. 1963, 22% of the poor had never seen a doctor, by 1970 only 8%
    - Public housing, rent subsidies, increase in minimum wage, income tax credits
  + Important contributions to alleviating poverty.
* Great society proved that using govt to solve social problems is not easy or cheap, some problems cannot be solved by govt at all. As a result, many on the right and left have resolved that these sorts of programs have no value at all – right sees as meddling, left sees as tokenistic.
* Middle way does exist – government can be used to promote social welfare without falling to communism and this emerged during the 1960s.
* Great Society was far from valueless. Boldness of the idea behind it, even if not matched by reality, and more importantly significant if limited achievements which provided and still provide important social assistance and dignity to people who are the most in need.

Gilder Lehman – Friday

The New Left

* Need to question how and why the radicalism of the New Left emerged? Why did it grow so unable to effect the changes it aspired to make.
* New Left always a young phenomenon – college and university students primarily.
* In part a result of the civil rights movement and the formative experience of people who spent time in the Deep South and became radicalized.
* Grew to full dimensions as a result of the war in Vietnam. Many came to see the war not only as a mistake but as a moral and political crime.
* Not the only reason – other countries also experiencing radicalism (without civil rights or Vietnam – eg France). Suggests the origins were more fundamental and less ‘American’ grievances.
* Part of the formation of the New Left the particular experiences of middle class men and women in industrialised nations who came of age in the 1960s. Part of a distinctive generation, grown up in the shadow of the Cold War, unprecedented prosperity and had absorbed the expectations this prosperity created. Many had come to believe that those in the developed world would be blessed by both prosperity and personal freedom – distinguished the West from communist nations. Should have opportunity to pursue abundance and personal fulfillment and freedom.
* In no previous age had so many people come of age expecting so much, and with such an inflated and self-congratulatory vision of their own nation.
* Neither the expectations of fulfillment or of their nation could stand up against social reality.
* New Left in part a result of the gap between expectations and reality. As they came of age they discovered that conservative institutions still remained in their way – patriarchal and repressive institutions, govt discriminatory laws and institutions, less altruistic than Cold War ideology suggested. World not yet fluid or idealistic enough to match the expectations of a generation of men and women.
* Men and women came of age unusually impatient with what older people saw as normal institutions.
* Young people wanted to seize control of the future.
* Borrowed some ideas from the ‘Old Left’ of the 1930s.
* Early leaders had emerged from the university world of the 1950s, including Professors.
* Goal of the new radicalism should be to challenge the alienation and indifference that these institutions were creating, instead to offer an alternative politics. Goal should be to create (Kaufman) ‘a participatory democracy’. The key to the future was getting individuals involved directly with decisions that affected their lives. This gave the New Left extraordinary allure in the mid 1950s and 1960s. Idea that the search for political commitment could be a vehicle for personal fulfillment.
* New Left borrowed ideas and had direct connections with the Old Left.
* Created a student wing of the League for Industrial Democracy. Michael Harrington (The Other America) helped organize a group of students – Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) – a group to ‘formulate radical alternatives to the inadequate society today’.
* Port Huron statement – 1962 – SDS goals articulated. Disillusioned by civil rights, the Cold War, the threat of the bomb. Denounced the impersonal, dehumanizing nature of university life, smugness of students and faculty. Called on students to break the alienation that defined university life. Called for participatory democracy.
* Much of early SDS activism occurred at University of Michigan. Debated theory, attempted to define new goals around participatory democracy.
* SDS not particularly radical in these early years – did not denounce capitalism. Wanted to achieve goals through mainstream politics.
* Economic Research and Action Project – liberal effort, much like war on poverty. Moved into ghettoes, tried to organize residents to demand better public services.
* SDS and general student left became steadily more radical as the 1960s progressed and the racial battles and the Vietnam War became more intense.
* SDS also grew larger. By late 1965, 10 000 members approximately. By fall of 1968, claimed over 100 000 members.
* UC Berkeley – spearhead of campus radicalism, the first campus to erupt politically, most traumatised by student politics, most influential to students elsewhere in America.
* First radical eruption at Berkeley (first major eruption on any campus) fall of 1964, at first a direct result of the civil rights movement. Occurred after the Freedom Summer in which more students at Berkeley had participated than any other campus in Northern USA. Group of students organized to protest against a newspaper that they claimed was engaged in racially discriminatory hiring policies. Picketed the paper, paper complained to Berkeley administration, administration then banned political recruitment. A few days later, a student member of CORE set up a recruitment table in defiance of the ban, was arrested, then within minutes groups of students staged a sit-in that lasted 32 hours, involved over 2000 students. Administration eventually relented, released the students and the protest ended. The beginning of the Berkeley Free Speech movement.
* 2 months later, Chancellor of university, threatened to expel a number of student radicals for continuing to flout recruitment ban.
* Mario Savio (student organizer): ‘there is a time when the operation of the machine becomes so odious you can’t take part, you can’t even passively take part … you’ve got to make it stop … you’ve got to indicate to the people who run it, the people who own it, that unless you’re free, the machine will be prevented from working at all.’ (Speech in front of over 6000 students at protest).
* Immediately after, police used to clear protest, arrested Savio. Students then called general strike – included even students who had previously not been radicalized). Finally administration repealed political recruitment ban.
* Free Speech movement the first stage of the radicalization of the Berkeley campus. Not long after, became first campus with an active anti-war movement.
* 1969 – most prolonged and traumatic conflict on any campus in the 1960s (except Kent State and Jackson State) over ‘people’s park’. Student newspaper protested against a garage being built on a park. Administration initially allowed student control over the park, agreed not to move in to re-take the land. Then, administration ordered police in to clear the park in the middle of the night. Next day, violent confrontations on the campus – one student killed. Ronald Reagan (governor of California) called in the National Guard, violent confrontation ensued.
* By end of People’s Park confrontation (lasted over a week), campus very polarized – student radicalism won large audiences for rhetoric linking university administration, police and the larger institutions in society – oppressive forces.
* Many major universities experienced some version of this radicalization – Berkeley the most obvious, but also Columbia (occupation of Lowe Library after administration attempted to build a gymnasium on a public park in Harlem). Following year, protests at Harvard.
* Harvard protests characteristic of the New Left – strike for personal freedom, diffuse and unclear goals, not about the war but general anti-establishment.
* Kent state – four students killed by National Guardsmen during anti-war protest.
* Spring of 1970 the high-water mark of campus radicalism in the 1960s – the moment when things seemed closest to unraveling. In fact, the 1970 strikes marked the end rather than the beginning of the New Left. By 1970, the left already in decline, spinning out of control, careening towards destruction.
* As important as the question of how the left grew, also have to look at how and why the left unraveled.
* New Left had great influence for a time on American life in the 1960s, but in the end by own standards has to be judged a failure. Did not achieve a significant restricting of society, transform politics or create a revolution. Made it’s mark but did not take root.
* One reason, the growing extremism – wild and destructive, discredits even the radicals who did not share it.
* In some circles, frustrated radicals were drive by a kind of mindless rage and hatred, produced the final stage of SDS – the Weathermen. Some Weathermen died in bomb factory where they were trying to create bombs to blow up library at Columbia.
* June 1969, members of the Progressive Labour Party seized control of SDS national leadership, harsh critiques of liberalism. Liberals, according to Marcusa, had to promote themselves in the intellectual marketplace, but the marketplace would not allow liberals to succeed. He believed there was a higher law than liberal tolerance, that ideas that were ‘radically evil’ should not be tolerated. By the late 1960s, ideas that were radically evil became a large umbrella. Drew the New Left into a much more radical force.
* Larger problem for the New Left one which liberalism has faced for decades – difficulty of recruiting a large enough constituency to challenge the mainstream with any degree of success.
* Working class did not join the New Left – New Left did not try to recruit. Many working class were pro-Vietnam war, and opposed to student radicalism. No solidarity between working class and New Left.
* New Left also failed to recruit African Americans.
* Left only the middle class – a small proportion of the middle class that could be recruited – college students. Remained primarily within the middle class. Appeal to members of the middle class and almost total lack of appeal to anyone else not only a reason for its failure, but a consequence of one of it’s most basic characteristics – commitment to the idea of politics as a vehicle for personal fulfillment and empowerment. The dream of changing oneself by changing the world is a characteristic of almost all radical movements, but members of the New Left often made changing oneself more important than changing the world. ‘self-cultivation, self-empowerment’ etc.
* Search for personal fulfillment always at the core of the New Left’s ‘participatory democracy’. Democracy an end in itself through which individuals could feel empowered and enrich their own lives. Participatory democracy less a vehicle to achieve economic or political goals than a way to feel political personal power.
* Richard Flax (important SDS theorist) warned in 1965 of the movement’s excessive emphasis on personal gratification and fulfillment/freedom, warned would lead to a breakdown of the radical community.
* By early and mid-1970s clear that the Left as a movement had largely died. Student radicalism in search for self-fulfillment had become confused with narcissistic goals with little macro purpose – saw ‘themselves as the oppressed – not the poor, minorities, etc. Came to see themselves as America’s rejects, ‘homeless outcasts searching for a new and more congenial world’.
* A small step that separated people’s park protests from others who abandoned politics altogether. Some took that step – Sharon Jeffrey for example – strived for ‘personal authenticity’.
* New Left became less a vehicle for the liberation of groups or classes oppressed by the majority, than a vehicle for the liberation of the middle class itself. Certainly some within the New Left that cared about the war, class etc. But on the whole, the New Left became a personal movement rather than a political one.

The War At Home

* 1968 – year of political, social and cultural upheavals – all erupted at the same time.
* Why was 1968 so pivotal? Cumulative effect of a number of things:
  + Crisis in Vietnam war – Tet Offensive: Began January 31, 1968, did more than any other event to persuade public opinion that the war could not be won. First step in a string of events in 1968 that led to LBJ’s withdrawal from the Presidential campaign. Galvanised campus protests against the war.
  + Crisis in the American economy began. 1968 American economy, after 20 years of strength, was beginning to show signs of weaknesses. Erosion in the world, unfavourable balance of trade, decline in the dollar, beginning of serious inflation (would plague economy for 15 years), federal reserve board chairman said ‘worst financial crisis since 1931’. Much of this attributed to the war – inflation created by Johnson’s decision to pay for the war and the war on poverty at the same time.
  + Crisis associated with race- April 4, 1968 – assassination of MLK in Memphis. Assassination triggered a week of some of the worst racial violence in American history, all over the country – riots in over 100 cities, in which 40 people died, 3000 people injured. Almost everyone shaken by MLK’s death and the violence that followed.
  + Crisis of the universities – galvanizing, radicalizing moment for the left that raised hopes that a new generation of radical students emerged who did not express social commitments by joining the Peace Corps or working in government programs but were working to build a revolution.
  + Crises emerging out of the Presidential campaign of 1968 – June 5, 1968 – assassination of Robert Kennedy in LA just after victory in the California primary. Much of the public interpreted RFK’s death differently to JFK – gives a sense of how much the culture and what America was like had changed from 1963. Assassination of JFK was thought at the time, perhaps incorrectly, as a kind of aberration – a single crazy person who shot the President. When RFK was killed, most people believed from the beginning that it was part of a general tendency towards violence and corruption endemic in American life. RFK assumed from the beginning to be a victim of a sickness at the heart of American culture. 1968 a Commission into American violence held in response to RFK’s assassination.
  + Chicago 1968 Democratic convention more violence – convention preparing to nominate Hubert Humphrey. An air of ugliness and bitterness in the convention hall – nominating Humphrey without enthusiasm. Protests in Chicago planned against America’s participation in the Vietnam War during the Convention – huge protests in Grant Park, violent opposition from the police. Media reacted with horror to the actions of the police – police advanced on the protestors shouting ‘kill, kill’ – protestors chanted ‘the whole world is watching’. Chicago police provoked by some members of the New Left – wanted a confrontation. New Left ‘wanted to create a situation in which the police and administration and government would self-destruct’ wanted to show that ‘America ruled by force’. An era of horror and unreality in Chicago which, when combined with all other events that occurred in America in 1968, made it seem that America was in the midst of an irrevocable breakdown. Whole country seemed to be in crisis – seemed was about to fall apart.
* What was the cumulative effect of these crises on national politics? Until at least 1966 post-war politics had been essentially centrist. Except for the divisions over race, little real division among the people, even to do with the war – not unpopular until 1968. By 1968, other kinds of politics had emerged alongside centralist liberalism, emerged out of the increasingly radical challenges to the centre- from the New Left, the poor, African Americans, women, LGBT, Native Americans. Small proportion of the population but visibility gave a disproportionate impact.
* Result was two new approaches to politics:
  + Expansion of and redefinition of liberalism, most notably by Robert Kennedy – had gone well beyond liberalism of JFK to a new and almost radical approach to social problems. Outspoken critic of LBJ’s foreign and domestic policies. Became more aggressive and assertive in speaking out against urban poverty, critical of cutbacks in Great Society programs. Campaigned with blacks, young black children, poor – things Presidential candidates don’t normally do. Visited the homes of sharecroppers, ghettoes, developed highly visible alliance with Cesar Chavez, among the first major national politicians to recognize Hispanics as a significant political voice. In part doing this to improve his political prospects – position himself as the principal liberal of the democratic party, but also to express conviction. Took the deep reverence felt for the memory of JFK and identified it with a range of issues that JFK had not embraced and probably not considered. RFK’s new martyrdom pushed these issues onto the national agenda – the Kennedy Agenda shaped as much by RFK as JFK. Liberalism now included a much more expansive agenda – identification of the Dem party with the most dispossessed elements of the American population.
  + More common popular response to 1968 was not a search for more progressive approaches to social problems, instead a search for order and stability. The great turning point in the liberal world. The political story of 1968 in the end was not the story of revolution, the story of what came to be known as backlash – a powerful conservative reaction. Almost all events the left interpreted as the sickness of American society, other Americans, probably most Americans, interpreted differently. Racial disorders were evidence not of social distress, the result of criminality – the rise of law and order as an issue. Stalemate in Vietnam the result of unjustified restraint – should have been fighting harder. Violence in NY not because of police brutality but student radicalism – strong backlash against students, anti-war movement, the press defending demonstrators.

1964 election was a warning of this – Goldwater received nomination for Republican party – was a very conservative figure, shows how the right was beginning to create power. Left perceived this as the weakness of the right. By 1968 difficult to dismiss the power of the right, shown in Presidential campaign of George Wallace of Alabama – staunch defender of segregation in Alabama, personification of the backward, reactionary Southerner – running as independent. 1968, Wallace launched a campaign for the Presidency. Started as a Democrat but created a third party candidacy after failing to win Democratic candidacy. Was attracting 22% of public in opinion polls, up to 35% of workers. Wide support in all regions of the country. Seen by liberals as white backlash on issue of race and nothing more, but was more and deeper than that – disillusion with liberalism, fear and hatred of the left. Rested on the sense of large numbers of working class and lower-middle class Americans that the liberal mainstream of politics had left them behind and was focused only on the poor and minorities, the average American was being exploited. Wallace spoke to this sense of alienation – “liberals have run this country for too long”. His constituency was the “average man on the street, the worker, the little business man”. Wallace was convincing people that the source of their discontent was the federal government that only looked after the poor and minorities. Got 13.5% of the vote – best showing of any third party candidate since the early C20th. His problem was not just his own extremism but the Republicans had a candidate who appeals to many of the same grievances – Nixon.

* Nixon had been resurrected from political oblivion – had retired from politics after losing Governorship of California. By 1964 had re-emerged, working for Republican candidates in 1964 and 1966, presented himself as someone who had grown, learned and mellowed. 1968 campaign described him as ‘a new Nixon’ – smoothed the rough edges, become statesmanlike and mature. 1968, won the Republican nomination, premised campaign on assumption that the average American was sick and tired of the liberals and radicals, wanted to return to stability, order and traditional values. Nixon appealed to ‘the silent majority’ – middle American. Talked about the elite groups, the establishment, proposed to restore law and order, talked up the issue of crime, claimed the Democrats had not embraced the tough anti-crime language that most Americans wanted. Tied crime to public violence and disorder (riots, student uprisings). Began campaign with apparently insurmountable lead over Humphrey (crippled by association with Johnson and the war), Democrats very divided. In last weeks, Humphrey began to stage a comeback – made a speech that distanced himself from LBJ and the war. Nixon won the election by a margin almost as small as his loss in 1960 – 500 000 votes. Would be misleading to make too much of the closeness of his victory. 1968 election as a whole shows how far public opinion had shifted in 4 years.
* 1964, 61% of the American people had voted for Johnson (Dem), firmly identified with optimistic liberal assumptions that had gained ground since WWII. Even the one Republican administration (Eisenhower) was relatively liberal.
* 1968, 57% voted for two candidates calling openly for a repudiation of what liberalism seemed to have become (Nixon and Wallace) – enormous political shift. Enormous liberal lead over the country has never been revived.
* What did this reversal of liberal fortunes mean? A ‘permanent and lasting shift’ in political fortunes, due to shift in demography – move from the Northeast towards the Sunbelt (south, southwest) – more conservative and becoming more populous. Also the growing self-consciousness of the American middle class, and belief that liberal government was too pre-occupied with African Americans and the poor and that the middle class was losing out. In fact, middle class was losing out not because of the poor, but the rich. Belief that Liberals had lost touch with the majority – seen as a privileged elite with no constituency. (articulated by Kevin Phillips).
* 1964 Liberalism had seemed untouchable, but now a new politics emerged that demystified liberalism and put it on the defensive where it has remained every since.
* 1924 National Origins Act not repealed until 1965 – until then, very little immigration and almost all white European.