

Objectives

- Summarize the arguments made by critics who rejected the culture of the fifties.
- Describe the causes and effects of urban and rural poverty.
- Explain the problems that many minority group members faced in the postwar era.



Terms and People

- **beatniks** – small group of writers and artists, in the 1950s and early 1960s, who were critical of American society
- **inner city** – the older, central part of a city with crowded neighborhoods in which low-income, usually minority, groups live
- **urban renewal** – government programs for redevelopment of urban areas
- **termination policy** – ended all programs monitored by the Bureau of Indian Affairs; ended federal responsibility for the health and welfare of Native Americans

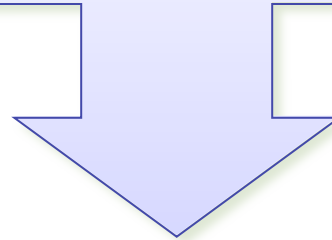


Why were some groups of Americans dissatisfied with conditions in postwar America?

“Hidden” poverty and discrimination plagued some Americans, while others criticized the conformity of middle-class life.

The discontents of the 1950s would manifest the first signs of the dissent that would dominate the 1960s.

Some Americans believed that while material conditions were better in the 1950s, the *quality* of life had not improved.



- Many social critics complained about **the emphasis on conformity** in 1950s America.
- They also criticized **the power of advertising** to mold public tastes.
- The **theme of alienation** dominated a number of popular books of the era.

Important Books of the Postwar Era

| Title | Author(s) | Subject |
|---|---------------------------------|---|
| <i>The Lonely Crowd</i> | David Riesman and Nathan Glazer | <ul style="list-style-type: none">Americans' sacrifice of individuality |
| <i>The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit</i> | Sloan Wilson | <ul style="list-style-type: none">a World War II veteran who could not find meaning in life |
| <i>The Catcher in the Rye</i> | J.D. Salinger | <ul style="list-style-type: none">the phoniness of adult life |
| <i>The Feminine Mystique</i> | Betty Friedan | <ul style="list-style-type: none">the plight of the 1950s suburban housewife |

The **beatniks**, or **beats**, insisted that **conformity stifled individualism.**

The beats lambasted what they saw as the **crass materialism and conformity** of the American middle class.

Important beat literature included Allen Ginsberg's poem "**Howl**" and Jack Kerouac's novel ***On the Road***



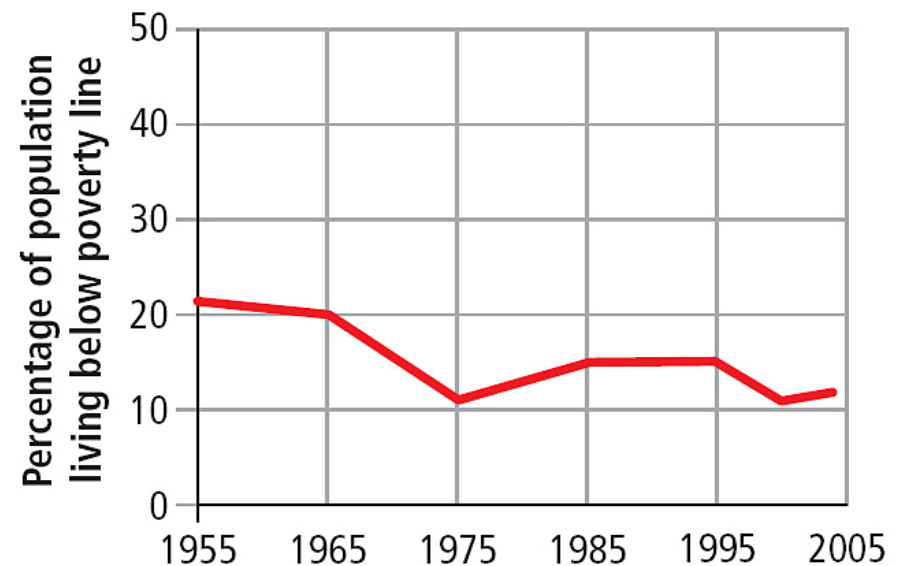
Many Americans were **outraged by their behavior.**

Beyond the suburbs was a very different America.

It was a nation of urban slums, desperate rural poverty, and discrimination.

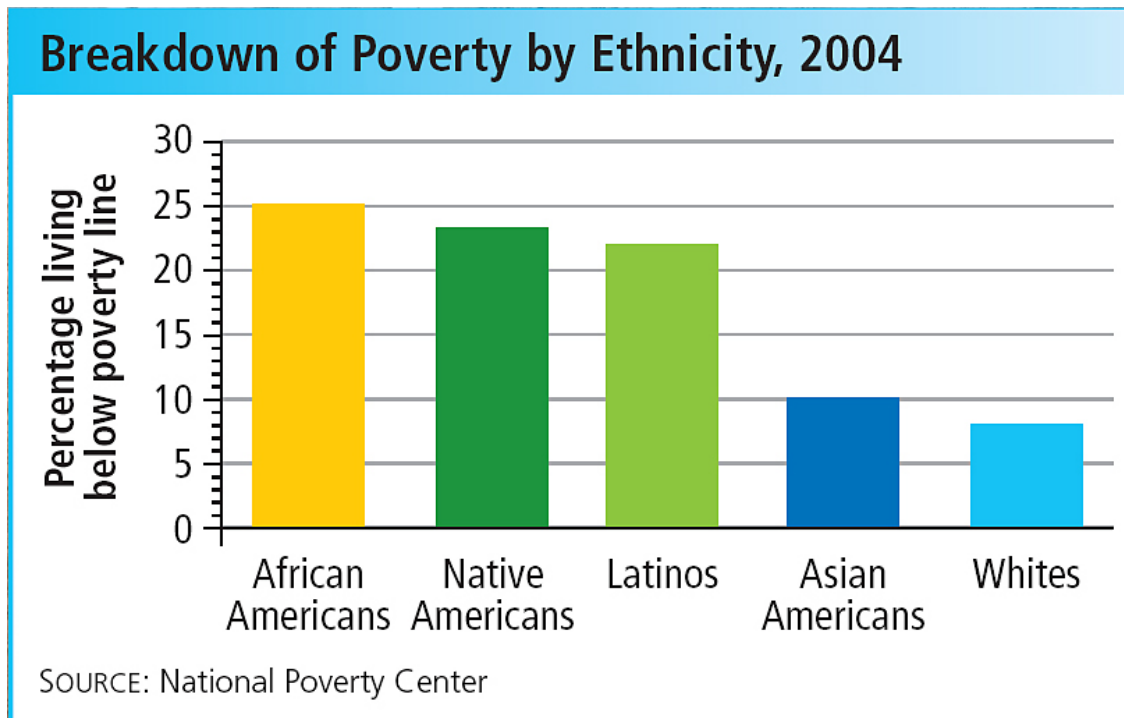
People who were poor and dispossessed were well hidden.

Poverty in the United States, 1955–2005



SOURCE: U.S. Census Bureau

In the influential 1962 book *The Other America*, Michael Harrington shocked many Americans by claiming that 50 million Americans—one-fourth of the nation – lived in poverty.



In the postwar years, many African Americans and other minorities moved to the cities in search of jobs.

At the same time, many middle-class white families left the cities for the thriving suburbs.

Population shifts affected the standard of living in many cities.

The loss of the middle class hurt cities economically and politically.



- The middle class **paid a large share of the taxes**, so without them, **cities were poorer**.
- When much of the middle class moved to the suburbs, they took their **congressional representatives** with them.
- **City services declined** with the loss of economic and political power.

As conditions worsened and crime increased in what was now called the **inner city**, more of the middle class moved to the suburbs.

Government leaders tried to revitalize American cities by developing **urban renewal** projects.

But urban renewal **drove people from their homes** to make room for the new projects and highways.

The federal government tried to ease the housing shortage by building public housing.

At first, public housing residents were happy with their new homes.

But in time, such projects led to **an even greater concentration of poverty**, which led to other problems, **such as crime**.



Many rural people also lived in poverty.



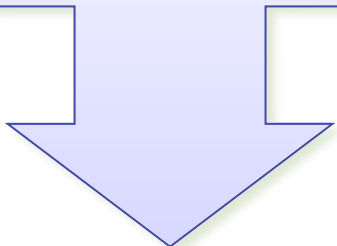
The **economic situation** of Mississippi Delta sharecroppers, Appalachian coal miners, and farmers **got worse as time passed.**

A major transformation in farming was taking place, as corporations and large-farm owners came to dominate farm production.

Small farm-owners found it hard to compete, and they slipped into poverty.

Many farmers left rural areas and moved to the cities, while others stayed behind, hoping for economic improvement.

African Americans and other minorities faced housing and employment discrimination in the urban north and west.



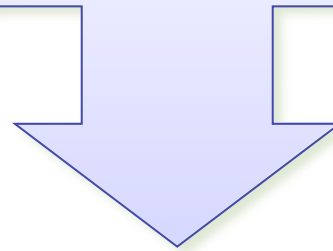
- Puerto Rican migrants to New York City were grouped in inner city neighborhoods where discrimination limited job opportunities.
- Because English was not their native language, they had little political power and received little help from city governments.

By 1964, **3 million Mexicans** had worked in the United States under **the bracero program**, most of them as farm laborers.

Many were exploited and cheated by their employers, but they did not complain because they feared deportation.

One champion of the rights of Mexican migrant workers, **Ernesto Galarza**, joined the effort to **organize unions for Mexican farm laborers**.

In 1953, the federal government enacted the **termination policy**, which sought to end Native American tribal government.



- The policy sought to **relocate Native Americans to cities** and **ended federal responsibility** for them.
- Proponents of the policy argued that it would free Native Americans **to assimilate** into U.S. society, but in reality, **it made conditions worse for them.**

Section Review

QuickTake Quiz



Know It, Show It Quiz

