Chapter 1 Into the 1960s

1. Jack Gould, Elvis Presley on the Ed Sullivan Show, 1956

When Elvis Presley burst into mass American consciousness in 1956 with a series of best-selling records, an exhilarating live show, and several highly controversial appearances on network television, much of adult America recoiled in disgust and disbelief. Some were alarmed by Presley's lower-class southern origins; others saw the unwanted specter of race-mixing in his uninhibited fusion of black rhythm and blues and gospel influences with the nominally white sounds of country and pop. However, for most opponents of Presley and rock and roll more generally, it was Presley's perceived sexual threat that was most troubling. For many guardians of traditional standards, including the New York Times' *eminent television critic Jack Gould, the popularity of Presley's cacophonous and lewd rock and roll, coupled with his flamboyant, hyper-sexual performance style were indicative of declining moral values among the nation's youth – a trend that was exacerbated by the mass media and music industries as they relentlessly pursued a highly lucrative new youth market with little regard for taste or decency.*

While Gould chastised the entertainment industry for giving a platform to Presley and assumed that his popularity would quickly wane, huge numbers of teenaged Americans hailed the arrival of a new icon and embraced rock and roll music as performed by a whole raft of black and white acts such as Little Richard, Chuck Berry, and Buddy Holly as the sound of their generation. Increasingly, young Americans would use music to express their dissent not only from the musical culture of their parents, but also from some of the core values of mainstream society.

Television broadcasters cannot be asked to solve life's problems. But they can be expected to display adult leadership and responsibility in areas where they do have some significant influence. This they have hardly done in the case of Elvis Presley, entertainer and phenomenon.

Last Sunday on the Ed Sullivan show Mr. Presley made another of his appearances and attracted a record audience. In some ways it was perhaps the most unpleasant of his recent three performances.

Mr. Presley initially disturbed adult viewers – and instantly became a martyr in the eyes of his teen-age following – for his striptease behavior on last spring's Milton Berle program. Then with Steve Allen he was much more sedate. On the Sullivan program he injected movements of the tongue and indulged in wordless singing that were singularly distasteful.

At least some parents are puzzled or confused by Presley's almost hypnotic power; others are concerned; perhaps most are a shade disgusted and content to permit the Presley fad to play itself out.

Neither criticism of Presley nor of the teen-agers who admire him is particularly to the point. Presley has fallen into a fortune with a routine that in one form or another has always existed on the fringe of show business; in his gyrating figure and suggestive gestures the teen-agers have found something that for the moment seems exciting or important.

Void

Quite possibly Presley just happened to move in where society has failed the teen-ager. Certainly, modern youngsters have been subjected to a great deal of censure and perhaps too little understanding. Greater in their numbers than ever before, they may have found in Presley a rallying point, a nationally prominent figure who seems to be on their side. And, just as surely, there are limitless teen-agers who cannot put up with the boy, either vocally or calisthenically.

Family counselors have wisely noted that ours is still a culture in a stage of frantic and tense transition. With even 16-year-olds capable of commanding $20 or $30 a week in their spare time, with access to automobiles at an early age, with communications media of all kinds exposing them to new thoughts very early in life, theirs indeed is a high degree of independence. Inevitably it has been accompanied by a lessening of parental control.

Small wonder, therefore, that the teen-ager is susceptible to overstimulation from the outside. He is at the age when an awareness of sex is both thoroughly natural and normal, when latent rebellion is to be expected.

But what is new and a little discouraging is the willingness and indeed eagerness of reputable business men to exploit those critical factors beyond all reasonable grounds.

Television surely is not the only culprit. Exposé magazines, which once were more or less bootleg items, are now carried openly on the best newsstands. The music-publishing business – as *Variety* most courageously has pointed out – has all but disgraced itself with some of the "rock 'n' roll" songs it has issued. Some of the finest recording companies have been willing to go right along with the trend too.

Distinctive

Of all these businesses, however, television is in a unique position. First and foremost, it has access directly to the home and its wares are free. Second, the broadcasters are not only addressing themselves to the teen-agers but, much more importantly, also to the lower age groups. When Presley executes his bumps and grinds, it must be remembered by the Columbia Broadcasting System that even the 12–year-old's curiosity may be overstimulated. It is on this score that the adult viewer has every right to expect sympathetic understanding and cooperation from a broadcaster.

A perennial weakness in the executive echelons of the networks is their opportunistic rationalization of television's function. The industry lives fundamentally by the code of giving the public what it wants. This is not the place to argue the artistic foolishness of such a standard; in the case of situation comedies and other escapist diversions it is relatively unimportant.

But when this code is applied to teen-agers just becoming conscious of life's processes, not only is it manifestly without validity but it also is perilous. Catering to the interests of the younger generation is one of television's main jobs; because those interests do not always coincide with parental tastes should not deter the broadcasters. But selfish exploitation and commercialized overstimulation of youth's physical impulses is certainly a gross national disservice.

Sensible

The issue is not one of censorship, which solves nothing; it is one of common sense. It is no impingement on the medium's artistic freedom to ask the broadcaster merely to exercise good sense and display responsibility. It is no blue-nosed suppression of the proper way of depicting life in the theatre to expect stage manners somewhat above the level of the carnival sideshow.

In the long run, perhaps Presley will do everyone a favor by pointing up the need for earlier sex education so that neither his successors nor TV can capitalize on the idea that his type of routine is somehow highly tempting yet forbidden fruit. But that takes time, and meanwhile the broadcasters at least can employ a measure of mature and helpful thoughtfulness in not contributing further to the exploitation of the teen-ager.

With congested schools, early dating, the appeals of the car, military service, acceptance by the right crowd, sex and the normal parental pressures, the teen-ager has all the problems he needs.

Mercenary

To resort to the world's oldest theatrical come-on just to make a fast buck from such a sensitive individual is cheap and tawdry stuff. At least Presley is honest in what he is doing. That the teen-ager sometimes finds it difficult to feel respect for the moralizing older generation may of itself be an encouraging sign of his intelligence. If the profiteering hypocrite is above reproach and Presley isn't, today's youngsters might well ask what God do adults worship.

2. Martin Luther King, Jr., "Our Struggle," 1956

The African American freedom struggle occupied a preeminent place in the culture and politics of the 1960s. However, the dramatic events of the 1960s represented just the latest phase in a centuries-long battle for racial justice in America that quickened in the decade or so after World War II. Attuned to the possibilities created by America's Cold War desire to promote its democratic credentials abroad, African Americans intensified their demands for full citizenship rights at home. When it became apparent that an obdurate white South had little intention of abandoning its commitment to white supremacy by actually complying with federal court rulings such as the Brown *decision that declared segregated schools unconstitutional, African Americans and their allies turned to direct-action tactics to protest the continuing denial of black rights.*

The most significant of this new wave of mass demonstrations was the year-long Montgomery Bus Boycott. Sparked on December 1, 1955 by the

arrest of Mrs. Rosa Parks, who refused to obey a white driver's order to move to the back of a segregated bus, the campaign was founded on a well-established network of activists and the organizational power of the city's black churches. One clergyman, Martin Luther King, Jr., was chosen to head the Montgomery Improvement Association, an organization of organizations that coordinated the protest. Although King lacked experience as a movement leader and initially had no overarching philosophy of social change, under the tutelage of visiting activists such as Bayard Rustin he came to appreciate both the practical efficacy and moral appeal of nonviolent direct-action tactics.

"Our Struggle" was originally drafted by Rustin and appeared in the second issue of Liberation*, a new journal edited by Rustin and other radical pacifists. The article focused on the details of the boycott and on the psychological changes evident among African Americans that made such mobilizations not just possible, but inevitable. In a theme that would be repeated by just about every black leader of the 1960s, Rustin and King announced the emergence of a "new Negro" who was no longer willing to settle for second-class status.*

The segregation of Negroes, with its inevitable discrimination, has thrived on elements of inferiority present in the masses of both white and Negro people. Through forced separation from our African culture, through slavery, poverty, and deprivation, many black men lost self-respect.

In their relations with Negroes, white people discovered that they had rejected the very center of their own ethical professions. They could not face the triumph of their lesser instincts and simultaneously have peace within. And so, to gain it, they rationalized – insisting that the unfortunate Negro, being less than human, deserved and even enjoyed second class status.

They argued that his inferior social, economic and political position was good for him. He was incapable of advancing beyond a fixed position and would therefore be happier if encouraged not to attempt the impossible. He is subjugated by a superior people with an advanced way of life. The "master race" will be able to civilize him to a limited degree, if only he will be true to his inferior nature and stay in his place.

White men soon came to forget that the Southern social culture and all its institutions had been organized to perpetuate this rationalization. They observed a caste system and quickly were conditioned to believe that its social results, which they had created, actually reflected the Negro's innate and true nature.

In time many Negroes lost faith in themselves and came to believe that perhaps they really were what they had been told they were – something less

than men. So long as they were prepared to accept this role, racial peace could be maintained. It was an uneasy peace in which the Negro was forced to accept patiently injustice, insult, injury and exploitation.

Gradually the Negro masses in the South began to re-evaluate themselves – a process that was to change the nature of the Negro community and doom the social patterns of the South. We discovered that we had never really smothered our self-respect and that we could not be at one with ourselves without asserting it. From this point on, the South's terrible peace was rapidly undermined by the Negro's new and courageous thinking and his ever-increasing readiness to organize and to act. Conflict and violence were coming to the surface as the white South desperately clung to its old patterns. The extreme tension in race relations in the South today is explained in part by the revolutionary change in the Negro's evaluation of himself and of his destiny and by his determination to struggle for justice. We Negroes have replaced self-pity with self-respect and self-depreciation with dignity.

When Mrs. Rosa Parks, the quiet seamstress whose arrest precipitated the non-violent protest in Montgomery, was asked why she had refused to move to the rear of a bus, she said: "It was a matter of dignity; I could not have faced myself and my people if I had moved."

The New Negro

Many of the Negroes who joined the protest did not expect it to succeed. When asked why, they usually gave one of three answers: "I didn't expect Negroes to stick to it," or, "I never thought we Negroes had the nerve," or, "I thought the pressure from the white folks would kill it before it got started."

In other words, our non-violent protest in Montgomery is important because it is demonstrating to the Negro, North and South, that many of the stereotypes he has held about himself and other Negroes are not valid. Montgomery has broken the spell and is ushering in concrete manifestations of the thinking and action of the new Negro.

We now know that:

We can stick together. In Montgomery, 42,000 of us have refused to ride the city's segregated busses since December 5. Some walk as many as fourteen miles a day.

Our leaders do not have to sell out. Many of us have been indicted, arrested, and "mugged." Every Monday and Thursday night we stand before the Negro population at the prayer meetings and repeat: "It is an honor to face jail for a just cause."

Threats and violence do not necessarily intimidate those who are sufficiently aroused and non-violent. The bombing of two of our homes has made us more resolute. When a handbill was circulated at a White Citizens Council meeting stating that Negroes should be "abolished" by "guns, bows and arrows, sling shots and knives," we responded with even greater determination.

Our church is becoming militant. Twenty-four ministers were arrested in Montgomery. Each has said publicly that he stands prepared to be arrested again. Even upper-class Negroes who reject the "come to Jesus" gospel are now convinced that the church has no alternative but to provide the non-violent dynamics for social change in the midst of conflict. The $30,000 used for the car pool, which transports over 20,000 Negro workers, school children and housewives, has been raised in the churches. The churches have become the dispatch centers where the people gather to wait for rides.

We believe in ourselves. In Montgomery we walk in a new way. We hold our heads in a new way. Even the Negro reporters who converged on Montgomery have a new attitude. One tired reporter, asked at a luncheon in Birmingham to say a few words about Montgomery, stood up, thought for a moment, and uttered one sentence: "Montgomery has made me proud to be a Negro."

Economics is part of our struggle. We are aware that Montgomery's white businessmen have tried to "talk sense" to the bus company and the city commissioners. We have observed that small Negro shops are thriving as Negroes find it inconvenient to walk downtown to the white stores. We have been getting more polite treatment in the white shops since the protest began. We have a new respect for the proper use of our dollar.

We have discovered a new and powerful weapon–non-violent resistance. Although law is an important factor in bringing about social change, there are certain conditions in which the very effort to adhere to new legal decisions creates tension and provokes violence. We had hoped to see demonstrated a method that would enable us to continue our struggle while coping with the violence it aroused. Now we see the answer: face violence if necessary, but refuse to return violence. If we respect those who oppose us, they may achieve a new understanding of the human relations involved.

We now know that the Southern Negro has come of age, politically and morally. Montgomery has demonstrated that we will not run from the struggle, and will support the battle for equality. The attitude of many young Negroes a few years ago was reflected in the common expression, "I'd rather be a lamp post in Harlem than Governor of Alabama." Now the idea expressed in our churches, schools, pool rooms, restaurants and

homes is: "Brother, stay here and fight non-violently. 'Cause if you don't let them make you mad, you can win." The official slogan of the Montgomery Improvement Association is "Justice without Violence" . . .

We Southern Negroes believe that it is essential to defend the right of equality now. From this position we will not and cannot retreat. Fortunately, we are increasingly aware that we must not try to defend our position by methods that contradict the aim of brotherhood. We in Montgomery believe that the only way to press on is by adopting the philosophy and practice of non-violent resistance.

This method permits a struggle to go on with dignity and without the need to retreat. It is a method that can absorb the violence that is inevitable in social change whenever deep-seated prejudices are challenged.

If, in pressing for justice and equality in Montgomery, we discover that those who reject equality are prepared to use violence, we must not despair, retreat, or fear. Before they make this crucial decision, they must remember: whatever they do, we will not use violence in return. We hope we can act in the struggle in such a way that they will see the error of their approach and will come to respect us. Then we can all live together in peace and equality . . .

We do not wish to triumph over the white community. That would only result in transferring those now on the bottom to the top. But, if we can live up to non-violence in thought and deed, there will emerge an interracial society based on freedom for all.

Source: *Liberation*, April 1956, pp. 3–6. Copyright 1956 Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.; copyright renewed 1986 Coretta Scott King.

3. Nora Johnson, "Sex and the College Girl," 1957

In this article Smith College alumnus Nora Johnson uses the story of "Susie" and her boyfriend "Joe" to capture the complex and often confusing rituals surrounding appropriate sexual activity for young heterosexual middle-class women in the 1950s. During the postwar era, traditional patterns of female and male expectations regarding sex and gender roles more generally remained largely intact, with marriage and children the primary ambition for most American women. The sexual – and sexist – "double standard" was certainly alive and well: most young men and women continued to distinguish between "good" girls who remained chaste until marriage and "bad" girls who did not, although pre-marital sexual experimentation by men rarely carried any such stigma. And yet, as Johnson's article reveals, these norms were already coming under strain from a variety of powerful social and cultural forces, including the

expansion of opportunities for women in higher education. The article wryly observes how many young women forged an often frustrating compromise with their bodies, consciences, and boyfriends by adhering to elaborate codes of acceptable sexual activity short of full intercourse; others reserved intercourse only for those to whom they were "pinned" or engaged; others simply decided that there was nothing immoral or shameful about sex and moved towards the kind of sexual freedom that would be an important, if often caricatured and exaggerated, part of the "sexual revolution" of the 1960s.

Ever since Gertrude Stein made her remark about the Lost Generation, every decade has wanted to find a tag, a concise explanation of its own behavior. In our complicated world, any simplification of the events around us is welcome and, in fact, almost necessary. We need to feel our place in history; it helps in our constant search for self-identity. But while the Beatniks travel about the country on the backs of trucks, the rest of us are going to college and then plunging – with puzzling eagerness – into marriage and parenthood. While the Beatniks are avoiding any signs of culture or intellect, we are struggling to adapt what we have to the essentially nonintellectual function of early parenthood. We are deadly serious in our pursuits and, I am afraid, non-adventurous in our actions. We have a compulsion to plan our lives, to take into account all possible adversities and to guard against them. We prefer not to consider the fact that human destinies are subject to amazingly ephemeral influences and that often our most rewarding experiences come about by pure chance. This sort of thinking seems risky to us, and we are not a generation to take risks. Perhaps history will prove that we are a buffer generation, standing by silently while our children, brought up by demand-feeding and demand-everything, kick over the traces and do startling things, with none of our predilection for playing it safe . . . .

Since so many of us are going to college, a great many of our decisions about our lives have been and are being made on the campuses, and our behavior in college is inevitably in for some comment. Two criticisms rise above the rest: people in college are promiscuous, for one thing, and, for another, they are getting married and having children too early. These are interesting observations because they contradict each other. The phenomena of pinning, going steady, and being monogamous-minded do not suggest sexual promiscuity. Quite the contrary – they are symptoms of our inclination to play it safe . . .

Susie has, on the whole, kept her chastity. She is no demimondaine, and she wants to be reasonably intact on her wedding night. She had an unfortunate

experience at Dartmouth, when she and her date were both in their cups, but she barely remembers anything about it and hasn't seen the boy since. She has also done some heavy petting with boys she didn't care about, because she reasoned that it wouldn't matter what they thought of her. She has been in love twice (three times, if you count Joe), once in high school and once in freshman year with the most divine Yale senior, whom she let do practically anything (except have intercourse) and who disappeared for no reason after two months of torrid dating. It still hurts her to think about that.

She has kept Joe fairly well at arm's length, giving in a little at a time, because she wanted him to respect her. He didn't really excite her sexually, but probably he would if they had some privacy. Nothing was less romantic than the front porch of the house, or Joe's room at the fraternity with his roommate running back and forth from the shower, or in the back of someone's car with only fifteen minutes till she had to be in. Anyway, it might be just as well.

Susie and Joe have decided that they will sleep together when it is feasible, since by now Joe knows she is a nice girl and it's all right. But they will be very careful. Susie, like all her friends, has a deep-rooted fear of pregnancy, which explains their caution about having affairs. They have heard that no kind of birth control is really infallible. And, today, shotgun weddings are looked down upon and illegal abortions sound appalling. It simply isn't worth the worry. She will sleep with Joe, if they become engaged, because he wants to, and if she becomes pregnant, they can get married sooner. But they will do everything possible to prevent it.

Obviously, Susie is hardly in love with Joe in the way one might hope. But she is sincerely fond of him, she feels comfortable with him, and, in some unexplained way, when she is with him life seems much simpler. The decision about her life keeps her awake at night, but when she is with Joe things make more sense. The prospect of marrying Joe gradually becomes more attractive . . .

If Susie becomes engaged, she can, in a way, stop trying so hard. She can let go. For college (though it may not sound it from this account) hasn't been easy. Her liberal education has had the definite effect of making her question herself and some of her lifelong ideas for the first time, sometimes shatteringly. She has learned to think, not in the proportions of genius, but intelligently, about herself and her place in the world. She realizes, disturbingly, that a great many things are required of her, and sometimes she can't help wondering about the years beyond the casserole and playpen. The beginnings of maturity are taking place in her.

The Eastern women's colleges (and I can speak with authority only about Smith) subtly emanate, over a period of four years, a concept of the ideal

American woman, who is nothing short of fantastic. She must be a successful wife, mother, community contributor, and possibly career woman, all at once. Besides this, she must be attractive, charming, gracious, and good-humored; talk intelligently about her husband's job, but not try to horn in on it; keep her home looking like a page out of House Beautiful; and be efficient, but not intimidatingly so. While she is managing all this, she must be relaxed and happy, find time to read, paint, and listen to music, think philosophical thoughts, be the keeper of culture in the home, and raise her husband's sights above the television set. For it is part and parcel of the concept of liberal education to better human beings, to make them more thoughtful and understanding, to broaden their interests. Liberal education is a trust. It is not to be lightly thrown aside at graduation, but it is to be used every day, forever.

These are all the things that a liberally educated girl must do, and there has been in her background a curious lack of definition of the things she must not do. Parents who have lived in the Jazz Age can not very well forbid adventurousness, nor can they take a very stalwart attitude about sex. Even if they do, their daughters rarely listen. What or what not to do about sex is, these days, relative. It all depends. This is not to say that there are no longer any moral standards; certainly there are – the fact that sex still causes guilt and worry proves it. But moral generalizations seem remote and unreal, something our grandparents believed in.

Today girls are expected to judge each situation for itself, a far more demanding task. A man recently told me that he had found girls rather inept at this, since taking a square view of a new relationship at the beginning, before sex has entered it, requires more maturity and insight than most college girls have. He said he had found such girls inconsistent in their attitude toward him – sexual sirens at first (when they wanted to attract him), promising everything, then becoming more and more aloof and more and more anxious to discuss the relationship step by step, when logically their behavior should be quite reversed; he had thought that as they got to know and like him they would be more relaxed about sex.

The fact is that, lacking a solid background of Christian ethics, most girls have only a couple of vague rules of thumb to go by, which they cling to beyond all sense and reason. And these, interestingly enough, contradict each other. One is that anything is all right if you're in love (romantic, from movies and certain fiction – the American dream of love) and the other is that a girl must be respected, particularly by the man she wants to marry (ethical, left over from grandma). Since these are extremely shaky and require the girl's knowing whether or not there is a chance of love in the relationship, sex, to her, requires constant corroborative discussion while

she tries to plumb the depths of a man's intentions. Actions alone are not trustworthy. After all, a prostitute can arouse a man as well as (and probably better than) a "nice" girl. But if a man loves her for herself, and not just her body, he will augment his wandering hands with a few well-placed words of love. Clinging to her two contradictory principles, she tries to be a sexual demon and Miss Priss at tea at the same time; she tries not to see what strange companions love and propriety are.

On the other side of the coin, men do little to clarify the situation. Some, at least, are simple-minded about it. They divide girls into two categories, bad and good: the bad ones have obvious functions, and the good ones are to be married; but good ones, once pinned or engaged (and the official definition of being pinned is "being engaged to be engaged") must loosen up immediately or run the risk of being considered cold or hypocritical. This would require the girl to be an angel of civilized and understanding behavior at first, pacifying her man by a gentle pat on the knee at just the right time and keeping him at bay and yet interested – in a way both tactful and loving (the teen-age magazines devote a lot of space to this technique and recommend warding off unwise passes by asking about the latest football scores), and then, once the pin has been handed over, to shed her clothes and hop into bed with impassioned abandon.

Even more complicated to deal with is the intellectual-amoral type of man, who has affairs as a matter of course and doesn't (or says he doesn't) think less of a girl for sleeping with him. He is full of highly complicated arguments on the subject, which have to do with empiricism, epicureanism, live today, for tomorrow will bring the mushroom cloud, learning about life, and the dangers of self-repression, all of which are whipped out with frightening speed and conviction while he is undoing the third button on his girl's blouse. . . .

A girl, then, by the end of college is saddled with enough theories, arguments pro and con, expectations, and conflicting opinions to keep her busy for years. She is in the habit of analyzing everything, wondering why she does things, and trying to lay a pattern for her life. Her education, which has laid such a glittering array of goals before her as an educated American woman, has also taught her to be extremely suspicious of the winds of chance. She has been told that she is a valuable commodity, that only efficiency will allow her to utilize all her possibilities, and that to get on in this risky and nerve-racking world she must keep what a disillusioned male friend of mine calls "the safety catch." There must always be something held in reserve, a part of her that she will give to no one, not even her husband. It is her belief in herself, modern version, and the determination to protect that belief. It is the vision of possibility which remains long

after she is mature enough to accept the eventual, gradual limitation of the things that will happen to her in life. It is the dream of the things she never did. . . .

Source: *The Atlantic*, November 1957.

4. *Time*, "The Roots of Home," 1960

Suburbs began to emerge on the periphery of America's cities during the second half of the nineteenth century and flourished with the development of streetcars and other mass transit systems around the turn of the early twentieth century. However, it was in the post-World War II era, with the rapid expansion of America's middle-income families and a similarly impressive escalation in car ownership, that they became a dominant factor in the political, social, economic, and cultural life of the country. Serving as a conspicuous site of middle-class affluence and as an important stimulus to the booming economy of the late 1950s and early 1960s, the suburbs, as this Time *cover story explained, became almost synonymous with the idea of the American Dream: a place where traditional values associated with hard work, good citizenship, and the centrality of family, school, and religion were celebrated, and where leisure, recreation, and consumerism – the spoils of abundance – could flourish in communities of generally like-minded, predominantly white, Americans. And yet, the suburbs were not without their internal tensions, nor beyond criticism, even from suburbanites themselves. While recognizing that suburban living remained a coveted symbol of material progress and social status for many Americans, the* Time *report foreshadowed some of the critiques of suburbia as the centre of vacuous consumerism, superficial community, cultural conformity, and stultifying gender norms that would become even more prominent during the 1960s.*

For better or for worse, Suburbia in the 1960s is the U.S.'s grassroots. In Suburbia live one-third of the nation, roughly 60 million people who represent every patch of democracy's hand-stitched quilt, every economic layer, every laboring and professional pursuit in the country. Suburbia is the nation's broadening young middle class, staking out its claim across the landscape, prospecting on a trial-and-error basis for the good way of life for itself and for the children that it produces with such rapidity. It is, as Social Scientist Max Lerner (*America as a Civilization*) has put it, "the focus of most of the forces that are remaking American life today."

If Suburbia's avid social honeybees buzz from address to address in search of sweet status, Suburbia is at the same time the home of the talented and

distinguished Americans who write the nation's books, paint its paintings, run its corporations and set the patterns. If its legions sometimes march into frantic activity with rigorous unison, they march for such causes as better schools, churches and charities, which are the building blocks of a nation's character. If Suburbia's ardent pursuit of life at backyard barbecues, block parties and committee meetings offends pious city-bred sociologists, its self-conscious strivings to find a better way for men, women and children to live together must impress the same observers.

Suburbia is a particular kind of American phenomenon, and its roots lie in a particular kind of American heritage. In a casual, ill-planned way it is the meeting ground between the growing, thriving city and the authentic U.S. legend of smalltown life. Says Sociologist Alvin Scaff, who lives in Los Angeles' suburban Claremont: "If you live in the city, you may be a good citizen and interest yourself in a school-board election, but it is seldom meaningful in human terms. In a suburb, the chances are you know the man who is running for the school board, and you vote for or against him with more understanding." Says Don C. Peters, president of Pittsburgh's Mellon-Stuart Co. (construction) and chairman of the board of supervisors of suburban Pine Township: "The American suburb is the last outpost of democracy, the only level left on which the individual citizen can make his wishes felt, directly and immediately. I think there's something idealistic about the search for a home in the suburbs. Call it a return to the soil. It's something that calls most people some time in their lives." . . .

The key figure in all Suburbia, the thread that weaves between family and community – the keeper of the suburban dream – is the suburban housewife. In the absence of her commuting, city-working husband, she is first of all the manager of home and brood, and beyond that a sort of aproned activist with a penchant for keeping the neighborhood and community kettle whistling. With children on her mind and under her foot, she is breakfast getter ("You can't have ice cream for breakfast because I say you can't"); laundress, house cleaner, dishwasher, shopper, gardener, encyclopedia, arbitrator of children's disputes, policeman ("Tommy, didn't your mother ever tell you that it's not nice to go into people's houses and open their refrigerators?").

If she is not pregnant, she wonders if she is. She takes her peanut-butter sandwich lunch while standing, thinks she looks a fright, watches her weight (periodically), jabbers over the short-distance telephone with the next-door neighbor. She runs a worn track to the front door, buys more Girl Scout cookies and raffle tickets than she thinks she should, cringes from the suburban locust – the door-to-door salesman who peddles

everything from storm windows to potato chips, fire-alarm systems to vacuum cleaners, diaper sendee to magazine subscriptions. She keeps the checkbook, frets for the day that her husband's next raise will top the flood of monthly bills (it never will) – a tide that never seems to rise as high in the city as it does in the suburbs.

She wonders if her husband will send her flowers (on no special occasion), shoos the children next door to play at the neighbor's house for a change, paints her face for her husband's return before she wrestles with dinner. Spotted through her day are blessed moments of relief or dark thoughts of escape . . .

In Suburbia's pedocracy huge emphasis is placed on activities for the young (Washington's suburban Montgomery County, Md. – pop. 358,000 – spends about $34 million a year on youth programs). The suburban housewife might well be a can-opener cook, but she must have an appointment book and a driver's license and must be able to steer a menagerie of leggy youngsters through the streets with the coolness of a driver at the Sebring trials; the suburban sprawl and the near absence of public transportation generally mean that any destination is just beyond sensible walking distance. Most children gauge walking distance at two blocks. If the theory of evolution is still working, it may well one day transform the suburban housewife's right foot into a flared paddle, grooved for easy traction on the gas pedal and brake.

As her children grow less dependent on her, Suburbia's housewife fills her newfound time with a dizzying assortment of extracurricular projects that thrust her full steam into community life. Beyond the home-centered dinner parties, Kaffeeklatsches and card parties, there is a directory-sized world of organizations devised for husbands as well as for wives (but it is the wife who keeps things organized). In New Jersey's Levittown, a projected 16,000 – unit replica of the Long Island original, energetic suburbanites can sign up for at least 35 different organizations from the Volunteer Fire Department to the Great Books Club, and the Lords and Ladies Dance Club, not to mention the proliferating list of adult-education courses that keep the public school lights glowing into the night. "We have a wonderful adult-education program," says Suburbanite (Levittown, L.I.) Muriel Kane (two children), "where women can learn how to fix their own plumbing and everything." . . .

Since Suburbia was conceived for children (and vice versa), the Suburban housewife is the chief jungle fighter for school expansion and reform. Beyond that the path leads easily to the thickets of local politics. Only recently, after the Montgomery County manager whacked $11 million from the 1961 school budget, the county council was invaded by an

indignant posse of 1,000 P.T.A. members. The council scrambled to retreat, not only restored the cuts, but added a few projects of its own for good measure. The tax rate jumped 5¢ per $100 valuation as a result, but there was scarcely a whimper . . .

The suburbanite has been prodded, poked, gouged, sniffed and tweaked by armies of sociologists and swarms of cityside cynics, but in reality he is his own best critic. Organized suburban living is a relatively new invention, and already some of its victims are wondering if it has too much organization and too little living. The pressure of activity and participation in the model suburb of Lakewood, for example, can be harrowing. The town's recreation league boasts no boys' baseball teams (2,000 players), 36 men's softball teams, ten housewives' softball teams. In season, the leagues play 75 boys' and 30 men's basketball teams, 77 football teams, all coached by volunteers, while other activities range through drama, dance and charm classes, bowling, dog-training classes, "Slim 'n' Trim" groups, roller skating, photography, woodcraft, and lessons in how to ice a cake. Says Joy Hudson, 35, mother of three children: "There is a problem of getting too busy. Some weeks my husband is home only two nights a week. My little boy often says, 'Anybody going to be home tonight?'" Suburbia, echoed Exurbanite Adlai Stevenson (Libertyville, Ill.) recently, is producing "a strange half-life of divided families and Sunday fathers." . . .

In those suburbs where families, income, education and interest are homogenized, suburbanites sometimes wonder whether their children are cocooned from the rest of the world. "A child out here sees virtually no sign of wealth and no sign of poverty," says Suburbanite Alan Rosenthal (Washington's Rock Creek Palisades). "It gives him a tendency to think that everyone else lives just the way he does." Suburbanite-Author Robert Paul ("Where Did You Go?" "Out." "What Did You Do?" "Nothing.") Smith (New York City's Scarsdale), complains that Scarsdale is "just like a Deanna Durbin movie: all clean and unreal. Hell, I went to school in Mount Vernon, N.Y., with the furnace man's son – you don't get that here." . . .

And what of the grownups themselves? For some, the suburban euphoria often translates itself into the suburban caricature. The neighborhood race for bigger and better plastic swimming pools, cars and power mowers is still being run in some suburbs, and in still others, the chief warm-weather occupation is neighbor watching (Does she hang her laundry outside to dry? Does he leave his trash barrels on the curb after they have been emptied?). In Long Island's staid, old Garden City, observes Hofstra Assistant Sociology Professor William Dobriner, "they don't care whether you believe in God, but you'd better cut your grass." In close-by Levittown, a poll of householders some time ago showed that the No. 1 topic on people's

minds was the complaint that too many dogs were running unleashed on the lawns. Topic No. 2 was the threat of world Communism . . . .

Suburbia's clergymen tend to be most keenly aware of Suburbia's disappointments and Suburbia's promise. "Many people," complains Kansas City Rabbi Samuel Mayerberg, "mistake activity for usefulness." Says Dr. Donald S. Ewing, minister of Wayland's Trinitarian Congregational Church near Boston: "Suburbia is gossipy. So many of the people are on approximately the same level economically and socially. They're scrambling for success. They tend to be new in the community and they're unstable and insecure. When they see someone else fail, in work or in a family relationship, they themselves feel a rung higher, and this is a great reason for gossip. I think socially we're flying apart – we don't meet heart to heart any more, we meet at cocktail parties in a superficial way. We value smartness rather than depth, shine rather than spirit. But I think people are sick of it; they want to get out of it."

In Chicago's suburban Elk Grove Village, busy Lutheran Minister Martin E. Marty, who writes for the *Christian Century*, and who devotes much of his time to patching up corroding marriages, sighs wearily: "We've all learned that Hell is portable. I think we're seeing a documentable rebellion going on against the postwar idea of mere belongingness and sociability. We all agree that Suburbia means America. It's not different, but it's typical. Solve Suburbia's problems and you solve America's problems." . . .

The fact surrounding all the criticism and self-searching is that most suburbanites are having too good a time to realize that they ought to be unhappy with their condition.

Source: *Time*, June 20, 1960.

5. Dwight D. Eisenhower, Farewell Address, 1961

As President Eisenhower left office in 1961, he reflected on his eight years in the White House and proudly declared America "the strongest, the most influential and most productive nation in the world." Yet, the tone of his Farewell Address as a whole was less triumphant. The Cold War had occupied much of the Eisenhower administration's time and energies. A firm believer in the doctrine of Containment and the "Domino Theory" of geopolitics, whereby the fall of one state to communist influence would lead inevitably to the contamination and fall of its neighbors to the same red creed, Eisenhower had steadily increased the US commitment to halting the spread of communism across the globe by diplomacy and economic power if possible, but by military force if necessary. This was certainly true in Southeast Asia,

where he sent economic aid and military "advisors" to help bolster the pro-US regime of Ngo Dinh Diem in South Vietnam against threats from nationalist insurgents supported by the communist regime of Ho Chi Minh in North Vietnam.

Yet if Eisenhower was in many respect a quintessential Cold War Warrior, his Farewell Address expressed grave concerns about the ways in which America might choose to use its military and economic muscle on the global stage. Eisenhower, himself a distinguished soldier who had been the Supreme Commander of the Allied troops in Europe during the final years of World War II, warned his fellow countrymen to beware the enormous and largely unchecked power of the nation's military-industrial complex. In particular, he urged vigilance against the combined efforts of arms manufacturers, the scientific-technological elite, and the military establishment to influence the making of foreign and domestic policy decisions for their own ends.

My fellow Americans:

Three days from now, after a half century of service of our country, I shall lay down the responsibilities of office as, in traditional and solemn ceremony, the authority of the Presidency is vested in my successor.

This evening I come to you with a message of leave-taking and farewell, and to share a few final thoughts with you, my countrymen.

Like every other citizen, I wish the new President, and all who will labor with him, Godspeed. I pray that the coming years will be blessed with peace and prosperity for all.

Our people expect their President and the Congress to find essential agreement on questions of great moment, the wise resolution of which will better shape the future of the nation.

My own relations with Congress, which began on a remote and tenuous basis when, long ago, a member of the Senate appointed me to West Point, have since ranged to the intimate during the war and immediate post-war period, and finally to the mutually interdependent during these past eight years.

In this final relationship, the Congress and the Administration have, on most vital issues, cooperated well, to serve the nation well rather than mere partisanship, and so have assured that the business of the nation should go forward. So my official relationship with Congress ends in a feeling on my part, of gratitude that we have been able to do so much together.

We now stand ten years past the midpoint of a century that has witnessed four major wars among great nations. Three of these involved our own country. Despite these holocausts America is today the strongest, the most influential and most productive nation in the world. Understandably proud

of this pre-eminence, we yet realize that America's leadership and prestige depend, not merely upon our unmatched material progress, riches and military strength, but on how we use our power in the interests of world peace and human betterment.

Throughout America's adventure in free government, such basic purposes have been to keep the peace; to foster progress in human achievement, and to enhance liberty, dignity and integrity among peoples and among nations. To strive for less would be unworthy of a free and religious people. Any failure traceable to arrogance or our lack of comprehension or readiness to sacrifice would inflict upon us a grievous hurt, both at home and abroad.

Progress toward these noble goals is persistently threatened by the conflict now engulfing the world. It commands our whole attention, absorbs our very beings. We face a hostile ideology global in scope, atheistic in character, ruthless in purpose, and insidious in method. Unhappily the danger it poses promises to be of indefinite duration. To meet it successfully, there is called for, not so much the emotional and transitory sacrifices of crisis, but rather those which enable us to carry forward steadily, surely, and without complaint the burdens of a prolonged and complex struggle – with liberty the stake. Only thus shall we remain, despite every provocation, on our charted course toward permanent peace and human betterment.

Crises there will continue to be. In meeting them, whether foreign or domestic, great or small, there is a recurring temptation to feel that some spectacular and costly action could become the miraculous solution to all current difficulties. A huge increase in the newer elements of our defenses; development of unrealistic programs to cure every ill in agriculture; a dramatic expansion in basic and applied research – these and many other possibilities, each possibly promising in itself, may be suggested as the only way to the road we wish to travel.

But each proposal must be weighed in light of a broader consideration; the need to maintain balance in and among national programs – balance between the private and the public economy, balance between the cost and hoped for advantages – balance between the clearly necessary and the comfortably desirable; balance between our essential requirements as a nation and the duties imposed by the nation upon the individual; balance between the actions of the moment and the national welfare of the future. Good judgment seeks balance and progress; lack of it eventually finds imbalance and frustration.

The record of many decades stands as proof that our people and their Government have, in the main, understood these truths and have responded

to them well in the face of threat and stress. But threats, new in kind or degree, constantly arise. I mention two only.

A vital element in keeping the peace is our military establishment. Our arms must be mighty, ready for instant action, so that no potential aggressor may be tempted to risk his own destruction.

Our military organization today bears little relation to that known by any of my predecessors in peacetime, or indeed by the fighting men of World War II or Korea.

Until the latest of our world conflicts, the United States had no armaments industry. American makers of plowshares could, with time and as required, make swords as well. But now we can no longer risk emergency improvisation of national defense; we have been compelled to create a permanent armaments industry of vast proportions. Added to this, three and a half million men and women are directly engaged in the defense establishment. We annually spend on military security more than the net income of all United States corporations.

This conjunction of an immense military establishment and a large arms industry is new in the American experience. The total influence – economic, political, even spiritual – is felt in every city, every Statehouse, every office of the Federal government. We recognize the imperative need for this development. Yet we must not fail to comprehend its grave implications. Our toil, resources and livelihood are all involved; so is the very structure of our society.

In the councils of government, we must guard against the acquisition of unwarranted influence, whether sought or unsought, by the military-industrial complex. The potential for the disastrous rise of misplaced power exists and will persist.

We must never let the weight of this combination endanger our liberties or democratic processes. We should take nothing for granted. Only an alert and knowledgeable citizenry can compel the proper meshing of the huge industrial and military machinery of defense with our peaceful methods and goals, so that security and liberty may prosper together.

Akin to, and largely responsible for the sweeping changes in our industrial-military posture, has been the technological revolution during recent decades.

In this revolution, research has become central, it also becomes more formalized, complex, and costly. A steadily increasing share is conducted for, by, or at the direction of, the Federal government.

Today, the solitary inventor, tinkering in his shop, has been overshadowed by task forces of scientists in laboratories and testing fields. In the same

fashion, the free university, historically the fountainhead of free ideas and scientific discovery, has experienced a revolution in the conduct of research. Partly because of the huge costs involved, a government contract becomes virtually a substitute for intellectual curiosity. For every old blackboard there are now hundreds of new electronic computers.

The prospect of domination of the nation's scholars by Federal employment, project allocations, and the power of money is ever present – and is gravely to be regarded.

Yet, in holding scientific research and discovery in respect, as we should, we must also be alert to the equal and opposite danger that public policy could itself become the captive of a scientific-technological elite.

It is the task of statesmanship to mold, to balance, and to integrate these and other forces, new and old, within the principles of our democratic system – ever aiming toward the supreme goals of our free society.

Another factor in maintaining balance involves the element of time. As we peer into society's future, we – you and I, and our government – must avoid the impulse to live only for today, plundering for, for our own ease and convenience, the precious resources of tomorrow. We cannot mortgage the material assets of our grandchildren without asking the loss also of their political and spiritual heritage. We want democracy to survive for all generations to come, not to become the insolvent phantom of tomorrow.

Down the long lane of the history yet to be written America knows that this world of ours, ever growing smaller, must avoid becoming a community of dreadful fear and hate, and be, instead, a proud confederation of mutual trust and respect.

Such a confederation must be one of equals. The weakest must come to the conference table with the same confidence as do we, protected as we are by our moral, economic, and military strength. That table, though scarred by many past frustrations, cannot be abandoned for the certain agony of the battlefield.

Disarmament, with mutual honor and confidence, is a continuing imperative. Together we must learn how to compose differences, not with arms, but with intellect and decent purpose. Because this need is so sharp and apparent I confess that I lay down my official responsibilities in this field with a definite sense of disappointment. As one who has witnessed the horror and the lingering sadness of war – as one who knows that another war could utterly destroy this civilization which has been so slowly and painfully built over thousands of years – I wish I could say tonight that a lasting peace is in sight.

Happily, I can say that war has been avoided. Steady progress toward our ultimate goal has been made. But, so much remains to be done. As a private citizen, I shall never cease to do what little I can to help the world advance along that road.

So – in this my last good night to you as your President – I thank you for the many opportunities you have given me for public service in war and peace. I trust that in that service you find some things worthy; as for the rest of it, I know you will find ways to improve performance in the future.

You and I – my fellow citizens – need to be strong in our faith that all nations, under God, will reach the goal of peace with justice. May we be ever unswerving in devotion to principle, confident but humble with power, diligent in pursuit of the Nations' great goals.

To all the peoples of the world, I once more give expression to America's prayerful and continuing aspiration:

We pray that peoples of all faiths, all races, all nations, may have their great human needs satisfied; that those now denied opportunity shall come to enjoy it to the full; that all who yearn for freedom may experience its spiritual blessings; that those who have freedom will understand, also, its heavy responsibilities; that all who are insensitive to the needs of others will learn charity; that the scourges of poverty, disease and ignorance will be made to disappear from the earth, and that, in the goodness of time, all peoples will come to live together in a peace guaranteed by the binding force of mutual respect and love.

Source: *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Dwight D. Eisenhower, 1960–61* (Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1961), pp. 1035–40.

Discussion Questions

1. How do the documents in this chapter challenge or reinforce popular images of the 1950s as an era of social, cultural and political conservatism?
2. From the evidence in these documents what were the main anxieties and problems confronting America at the dawn of the 1960s?
3. Nora Johnson refers to the co-eds she profiles in her article as a "buffer generation." How useful is this concept for thinking about the 1950s more generally?