

Source: *The Malvina Reynolds Songbook*, 4th edn. (Berkeley, CA: Schroder Music Company, 1984), pp. 44–5.

Study: Lizabeth Cohen, *A Consumer's Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* (New York: Knopf, 2003).

Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York: Basic Books, 1990).

3. Consumer Culture and the Home (1947)

Because of the demands of World War II, over a third of American women were in the paid labor force by 1945. Many, like the famed "Rosie the Riveter," even entered the high-paying jobs of heavy industry. But these advances proved temporary. After the war, employers were required to rehire returning male veterans, and women were encouraged to cede their places. The vast educational and housing benefits of the GI Bill went largely to men, contributing to a widening gender gap. Advertising, especially in women's magazines, contributed to this drive to move women back into the home. What messages are conveyed by the following 1947 advertisement from Good Housekeeping?

No, Mother . . .
 "I didn't forget to 'phone . . . but I never knew just how much work went with a wedding ring. Seems to me there's always something . . . Oh, my goodness! that's what you used to say, isn't it . . . ?"

Yes, Mother . . .
 "I'm doing my own cleaning and washing. Our place is so tidy . . . and everything's so new and bright, I can't bear to let anyone else touch it—or my beautiful linens and towels either . . ."

Of course, Mother!..
 "Fels-Naptha Soap? . . . I never use anything else. That's one thing I did remember . . . By the way, Mother, *how* does a man get so much dirt in his collars and cuffs? . . . All you've learned is how to get it out? I see what you mean, darling. Fels-Naptha Chips? . . . I have plenty—I think. Soon as I hang up I'll make sure . . . 'bye!'"

Fels-Naptha Soap
 BANISHES TATTLE-TALE GRAY
 June 1947 Good Housekeeping 73

Figure 1 Consumer culture and the home, 1947.
 Source: *Good Housekeeping*, June 1947, p. 75.

4. Women's Roles

Agnes E. Meyer, "Women Aren't Men," August 1950

Agnes Ernst Meyer came of age in the early part of the twentieth century during the first wave of feminism. After graduating from Barnard College in 1907, Meyer became one of the first woman reporters for the New York Sun. She went on to have a prolific career as a writer and activist, publishing countless articles and two books. During World War II, as a member of the President's Commission on Higher Education, she was an outspoken advocate

for federal aid to education. In 1909 she had married investment banker Eugene Meyer, who became owner and publisher of the Washington Post. They raised five children, including Katherine Graham, who later served as publisher of the Washington Post during the Watergate scandal. According to Agnes Ernst Meyer's 1950 article, entitled "Women Aren't Men," what important challenges did American society face in the postwar world? What role did she think women have in addressing these issues? Given her education and accomplishments, what could explain Meyer's views?

Women have many careers but only one vocation – motherhood. As a result their most successful careers are motherhood substitutes such as teaching, nursing, social work, as well as medical, psychiatric, and other scientific professions that protect the child and the family. A woman confronting the world has no greater resources than those she finds within herself. Education can do no worse than to destroy those instinctive resources. It can do no better than to enhance them. When woman sublimates her mother-instinct in a career, she can achieve a rich, beneficent, and rewarding life. But only if she follows her vocation can she live in the fullest sense of the word. It is for woman as mother, actual or vicarious, to restore security in our insecure world – not the economic security on which we now lean far too much, but the emotional security for which the world longs as much as it longs for its daily bread.

We should look critically at woman's evolution in our industrial society, for the record that confronts us on every side as to woman's influence is not reassuring. The mounting divorce rate, the appalling number of youthful crimes, the deliberate neglect of children in many homes, and the looseness of sexual morality among young and old – these are merely some of the inescapable signs of a decaying moral structure in areas for which women have a prime responsibility.

The industrial revolution which has transformed our whole society created a transformation in the life of women far more profound than in the life of men. Two world wars and a depression have uprooted family life and created a nation-wide turmoil whose disorders our public and private welfare agencies have tried in vain to counteract. At the same time woman's traditional responsibilities were augmented by challenging social and political demands. She fought successfully for the vote, for equal rights in every field of endeavor. She was forced through economic necessity and through choice into the competitive maelstrom of our free-enterprise system. About 17 million women now have daily jobs and many more are doing part-time work. . . .

Source: Agnes E. Meyer, "Women Aren't Men," *Atlantic Monthly*, 186 (August 1950), pp. 32-6.

Study: William H. Chafe, *The Paradox of Change: American Women in the 20th Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991).

Brett Harvey, *The Fifties: A Women's Oral History* (New York: HarperCollins, 1993).

Joanne Meyerowitz, ed., *Not June Cleaver: Women and Gender in Postwar America, 1945-1960* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994).

5. Men's Roles

William H. Whyte, *The Organization Man*, 1956

In 1950s television sitcoms such as Leave it To Beaver and Father Knows Best, viewers glimpsed the life of the ideal American housewife. But the cameras rarely followed the typical American husband as he went off to work. Journalists and sociologists studying these men began to see new patterns of behavior. In the 1950 book The Lonely Crowd, sociologist David Riesman addressed the problem of the power of large corporate and government bureaucracies over these men. He argued that peer pressure and social conformity were transforming America from an "inner-directed" to an "other-directed" society. In a similar study, William H. Whyte, an editor for Fortune magazine, conducted research on men in the postwar suburban development of Park Forest, Illinois. The resulting best-selling book, The Organization Man, is considered one of the most influential books of the twentieth century. Who is the "organization man"? What is the new ideology he constructed? What did it replace?

This book is about the organization man. If the term is vague, it is because I can think of no other way to describe the people I am talking about. They are not the workers, nor are they the white-collar people in the usual, clerk sense of the word. These people only work for The Organization. The ones I am talking about *belong* to it as well. They are the ones of our middle class who have left home, spiritually as well as physically, to take the vows of organization life, and it is they who are the mind and soul of our great self-perpetuating institutions. Only a few are top managers or ever will be. In a system that makes such hazy terminology as "junior executive" psychologically necessary, they are of the staff as much as the line, and most are destined to live poised in a middle area that still awaits a satisfactory euphemism. But they are the dominant members of our society nonetheless. They have not

joined together into a recognizable elite – our country does not stand still long enough for that – but it is from their ranks that are coming most of the first and second echelons of our leadership, and it is their values which will set the American temper.

The corporation man is the most conspicuous example, but he is only one, for the collectivization so visible in the corporation has affected almost every field of work. Blood brother to the business trainee off to join Du Pont is the seminary student who will end up in the church hierarchy, the doctor headed for the corporate clinic, the physics Ph.D. in a government laboratory, the intellectual on the foundation-sponsored team project, the engineering graduate in the huge drafting room at Lockheed, the young apprentice in a Wall Street law factory.

They are all, as they so often put it, in the same boat. Listen to them talk to each other over the front lawns of their suburbia and you cannot help but be struck by how well they grasp the common denominators which bind them. Whatever the differences in their organization ties, it is the common problems of collective work that dominate their attentions, and when the Du Pont man talks to the research chemist or the chemist to the army man, it is these problems that are uppermost. The word *collective* most of them can't bring themselves to use – except to describe foreign countries or organizations they don't work for – but they are keenly aware of how much more deeply beholden they are to organization than were their elders. They are wry about it, to be sure; they talk of the "treadmill," the "rat race," of the inability to control one's direction. But they have no great sense of plight; between themselves and organization they believe they see an ultimate harmony and, more than most elders recognize, they are building an ideology that will vouchsafe this trust.

It is the growth of this ideology, and its practical effects, that is the thread I wish to follow in this book. America has paid much attention to the economic and political consequences of big organization – the concentration of power in large corporations, for example, the political power of the civil-service bureaucracies, the possible emergence of a managerial hierarchy that might dominate the rest of us. These are proper concerns, but no less important is the personal impact that organization life has had on the individuals within it. A collision has been taking place – indeed, hundreds of thousands of them, and in the aggregate they have been producing what I believe is a major shift in American ideology.

Officially, we are a people who hold to the Protestant Ethic. Because of the denominational implications of the term many would deny its relevance to them, but let them eulogize the American Dream, however, and they virtually define the Protestant Ethic. Whatever the embroidery, there is almost always

the thought that pursuit of individual salvation through hard work, thrift, and competitive struggle is the heart of the American achievement.

But the harsh facts of organization life simply do not jibe with these precepts. This conflict is certainly not a peculiarly American development. In their own countries such Europeans as Max Weber and [Emile] Durkheim many years ago foretold the change, and though Europeans now like to see their troubles as an American export, the problems they speak of stem from a bureaucratization of society that has affected every Western country.

It is in America, however, that the contrast between the old ethic and current reality has been most apparent – and most poignant. Of all peoples it is we who have led in the public worship of individualism. One hundred years ago De Tocqueville was noting that though our special genius – and failing – lay in cooperative action, we talked more than others of personal independence and freedom. We kept on, and as late as the twenties, when big organization was long since a fact, affirmed the old faith as if nothing had really changed at all.

... The organization man seeks a redemption of his place on earth – a faith that will satisfy him that what he must endure has a deeper meaning than appears on the surface. He needs, in short, something that will do for him what the Protestant Ethic did once. And slowly, almost imperceptibly, a body of thought has been coalescing that does that.

I am going to call it a Social Ethic. With reason it could be called an organization ethic, or a bureaucratic ethic; more than anything else it rationalizes the organization's demands for fealty and gives those who offer it wholeheartedly a sense of dedication in doing so – *in extremis*, you might say, it converts what would seem in other times a bill of no rights into a restatement of individualism.

But there is a real moral imperative behind it, and whether one inclines to its beliefs or not he must acknowledge that this moral basis, not mere expediency, is the source of its power. Nor is it simply an opiate for those who must work in big organizations. The search for a secular faith that it represents can be found throughout our society – and among those who swear they would never set foot in a corporation or a government bureau. . . .

Let me now define my terms. By social ethic I mean that contemporary body of thought which makes morally legitimate the pressures of society against the individual. Its major propositions are three: a belief in the group as the source of creativity; a belief in "belongingness" as the ultimate need of the individual; and a belief in the application of science to achieve the belongingness.

... [F]or the moment I think the gist can be paraphrased thus: Man exists as a unit of society. Of himself, he is isolated, meaningless; only as he

collaborates with others does he become worth while, for by sublimating himself in the group, he helps produce a whole that is greater than the sum of its parts. There should be, then, no conflict between man and society. What we think are conflicts are misunderstandings, breakdowns in communication. By applying the methods of science to human relations we can eliminate these obstacles to consensus and create an equilibrium in which society's needs and the needs of the individual are one and the same. . . .

Each year the number of business-administration majors has increased over the last year – until, in 1954, they together made up the largest single field of undergraduate instruction outside of the field of education itself. Personality testing? Again, each year the number of people subjected to it has grown, and the criticism has served mainly to make organizations more adept in sugar-coating their purpose. . . .

This book is not a plea for nonconformity. Such pleas have an occasional therapeutic value, but as an abstraction, nonconformity is an empty goal, and rebellion against prevailing opinion merely because it is prevailing should no more be praised than acquiescence to it. Indeed, it is often a mask for cowardice, and few are more pathetic than those who flaunt outer differences to expiate their inner surrender. . . .

We must not let the outward forms deceive us. If individualism involves following one's destiny as one's own conscience directs, it must for most of us be a realizable destiny, and a sensible awareness of the rules of the game can be a condition of individualism as well as a constraint upon it. The man who drives a Buick Special and lives in a ranch-type house just like hundreds of other ranch-type houses can assert himself as effectively and courageously against his particular society as the bohemian against his particular society. . . .

I speak of individualism *within* organization life. This is not the only kind, and someday it may be that the mystics and philosophers more distant from it may prove the crucial figures. But they are affected too by the center of society, and they can be of no help unless they grasp the nature of the main stream. Intellectual scoldings based on an impossibly lofty ideal may be of some service in upbraiding organization man with his failures, but they can give him no guidance. The organization man may agree that industrialism has destroyed the moral fabric of society and that we need to return to the agrarian virtues, or that business needs to be broken up into a series of smaller organizations, or that it's government that needs to be broken up, and so on. But he will go his way with his own dilemmas left untouched.

I am going to argue that he should fight the organization. But not self-destructively. He may tell the boss to go to hell, but he is going to have

another boss, and, unlike the heroes of popular fiction, he cannot find surcease by leaving the arena to be a husbandman. If he chafes at the pressures of his particular organization, either he must succumb, resist them, try to change them, or move to yet another organization.

Every decision he faces on the problem of the individual versus authority is something of a dilemma. It is not a case of whether he should fight against black tyranny or blaze a new trail against patent stupidity. That would be easy – intellectually, at least. The real issue is far more subtle. For it is not the evils of organization life that puzzle him, *but its very beneficence*. He is imprisoned in brotherhood. Because his area of maneuver seems so small and because the trapping so mundane, his fight lacks the heroic cast, but it is for all this as tough a fight as ever his predecessors had to fight.

Source: William H. Whyte, *The Organization Man* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1956), pp. 3–12.

Study: Lary May, ed., *Recasting America: Culture and Politics in the Age of Cold War* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988).

Stephen J. Whitfield, *The Culture of the Cold War*, 2nd edn. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996).

6. The Beat Generation

Allen Ginsberg's *America*, 1956

Despite – or perhaps because of – the push toward conformity and containment in Cold War American culture, pockets of rebellion emerged during the 1950s. Hells Angels took to the road with their leather jackets and motorcycles. Rock 'n' roll singers like Elvis Presley offered a new, erotized sound to the nation's youth. And a group of young writers known as the Beats launched a frontal assault on mainstream culture. Allen Ginsberg gained a national reputation in 1957 when City Lights Bookstore in San Francisco, the publisher of his epic poem Howl, was tried for obscenity and won. He and fellow Beat writers Jack Kerouac and William Burroughs became cultural heroes of the disaffected. Ginsberg's celebration of spontaneity, sexuality, and hallucinogenic drugs later made him a central figure in the counterculture of the 1960s. In his 1956 poem America, Ginsberg wrote about two Americas, one reflected in the dominant culture and one represented by the author. How do the concerns of mainstream America and those of Ginsberg differ? What are their contrasting visions of war, communism, and consumer society?
