

Ch. 7 - THE AFFLUENT SOCIETY

# Learning Intentions

In this section, you should understand:

- Affluence and the consumer society.
- The role of leisure.
- The role of work.
- The changing role of women and the family.
- The role of Muhammad Ali, The Organization Man and Betty Friedan.

# *Affluence* **AND** *the consumer society*

# Affluence and Consumerism

Post-war US culture was characterised by a desire (demand) for **consumer goods**. This was based on the **affluence** (wealth) and **productivity** of the country. In the 1950s, US gross national product (GNP) grew from \$318 billion in 1950 to \$488 billion in 1966. Average household incomes were twice that of the 1920s, and a whole new middle class was created, amounting to 60 per cent of American families. In the 1940s and 1950s the average working week was reduced by 10 per cent while real wages rose. This increased wealth led to the growth of a **mass consumer culture**. But there were other factors involved as well.

The growth of **consumerism** was partly fuelled by the rapidly **rising population**. Between 1950 and 1960 the population grew by 29 million, boosted by the post-war **baby boom** which lasted into the 1960s. This increased demand for houses, schools, household appliances, cars and so on.

The increased spending was financed by **wartime savings**. But consumers were also encouraged to spend with **low-interest loans** or **instalment payments**; 'Buy Now, Pay Later' was the slogan. **Credit cards**, first introduced in 1950, also made money more easily available. Not surprisingly, private debt more than doubled in the 1950s.

**Advertising** persuaded people that they needed all these products for the **Good Life**. People were presented with a whole range of new goods - electric clothes dryers, Polaroid cameras, vacuum cleaners and refrigerators.

## KEY CONCEPT: CONSUMERISM

**Consumerism** is the stage in industrial society when a great deal of goods are bought and sold. It is also called the consumer society.



# Cars, Fast Food and Houses

There was a huge expansion in **car sales** because a car represented status and freedom, as well as being necessary for work and shopping. There were 2.1 million new car sales in 1946 but this increased to 8 million by 1956. By 1960, there were over 70 million cars registered in the US. By 1974, this increased to over 130 million. Only a small proportion were imported cars. The growth of the car industry led to the expansion of gas (petrol) stations, roadside motels and restaurants. It also contributed to expanding the suburbs and suburban shopping centres. The latter increased from eight in 1946 to over 4,000 by the end of the 1950s.

The growth of **fast-food outlets** also reflected the new consumer society. **McDonald's** created a food production line to increase efficiency and reduce costs. Their successful operation, begun in San Bernardino, California in 1955, was later franchised throughout the US. They were generally based in the new suburbs and along the new highways. They influenced the change in eating habits of Americans who, before this, rarely ate out because of the expense.

There was a also a huge expansion in **house construction**, partly to compensate for the lack of it during the war. The **GI Bill of Rights** guaranteed mortgages for veterans, and the **Housing Act 1949** committed the federal government to building subsidised housing for poorer families. Fifteen million houses were built in the US between 1945 and 1955 and many of these were in suburbs. By 1960, 60 per cent of Americans owned their own homes. They were aided by mass production techniques in housing, which created vast new towns but also reduced the cost of housing. The new houses had to be fitted out with **household goods**, increasing the demand for washing machines, dishwashers and furnishings as people's lives became more comfortable.

# REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What was consumerism and what caused it?
2. How and why did each of the following expand:
  - a. Car sales
  - b. Fast food
  - c. Houses

# Television

**Television** was part of the consumer demand, but it also caused it. By 1948, few Americans had seen television, as only 172,000 families had a set. But then a huge boom in television sales began. By 1952, there were over 15 million television sets and by 1960 over 90 per cent of houses owned at least one set. This expansion continued as colour replaced black and white, so that by 1970 almost 40 per cent of houses had colour sets.

Television dominated **home life**. Household activities stopped as families tuned into their favourite programmes. Forty-four million people saw an episode of I Love Lucy, a weekly comedy show in 1953. By 1960, 50 per cent of Americans listed television as their favourite leisure activity. It also contributed to the spread of the **consumer culture** or **consumerism** by advertising and standardising tastes. It helped create the **mass market** and thus reinforced the rising consumerism of the 1950s and 1960s. **Advertisers** saw the potential of television. They geared their ads in the 1950s to young, middle-class families. *'We are after a specific audience, the young housewife ... with two to four kids who has to buy clothing, the food, the soaps and the home remedies.'*

There was also a **new teenage market** for records, record players, jukeboxes and clothes. Teenagers earned money working part time in shops or fast-food outlets or got increased allowances from their more prosperous parents. Sales of records of the new rock 'n' roll jumped three times in six years between 1954 and 1960. But teenagers also wanted cars. By 1958, 6 million teenagers had licences to drive, and about 1.5 million of them owned cars.

# REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What role did television play in economic and social life?



# Critics of the Consumer Society

Critics of the new mass consumer culture said it was **tacky** and **showy**. They disliked the ugly roadside hoardings, criticised the mass entertainment of the movies and Disneyland and laughed at the huge **gas-guzzling** cars with their flashy designs - '*like jukeboxes on wheels*', they said. In his book *The Affluent Society*, J. K. Galbraith said Americans were too concerned with materialism. He said more money should be spent on improving the quality of life.

A more effective critic of **consumerism** and the **corporate capitalism** which gained from it was **Ralph Nader**. He was a graduate of Harvard Law School who began a one-man campaign against the giants of American business and industry. His book, *Unsafe at Any Speed*, highlighted defects in a General Motors car and led to improvements in motor safety. But this one-man operator was soon joined by his **Nader's Raiders** - young lawyers and researchers - as they investigated the food industry, federal commissions, pollution and much more. Their campaigns led to many laws to protect the consumer.

# Critics of the Consumer Society

Equally strong criticism came from Michael Harrington's book *Other America*, where he highlighted the **poverty** in the midst of affluence. Whatever the spending of the middle classes, he pointed out that more than 20 per cent of the US population lived below the **poverty line** (the amount of money needed to maintain a family at a minimum standard of living).

The consumer culture was rejected by the **Beat generation** of the 1950s and the **counter-culture** of the 1960s. The **Beats** (or Beatniks) rejected middle-class consumerism and followed a **bohemian** way of life. They were generally in their thirties and forties but their numbers were small - no more than What did critics of the consumer society say a thousand or so - and their movement didn't last long. But their message was spread wider through witty poems, books and songs. In the 1960s, the **hippies** rejected consumer culture by wearing army surplus gear and second-hand clothing.

# REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What did critics of the consumer society say about it?

# Yuppies of the 1980s

The consumer culture took a downturn as the American economy worsened in the late 1960s and 1970s. However, consumerism and the consumer culture were by then established trademarks of the American economy and an integral part of economic progress. Consumer spending revived again in the **1980s** when new wealth was created out of stock market speculation. More than 100,000 millionaires were created each year and this fuelled a new surge in consumer spending. The **yuppies** (young upwardly mobile professionals) of the 1980s spent their money on luxury goods such as imported quality cars, designer clothes, expensive hi-fi equipment or they fitted out a home gym. Their attitude was expressed in 1987 by Gordon Gekko in the film *Wall Street* when he said, '*greed is good*'. In spite of its critics, the consumer culture provided people with a more comfortable life, especially better food and housing than had existed before. It also increased employment to provide those products. All this encouraged even greater expectations that other aspects of the American way of life could be improved.

# *The* **ROLE** *of* **LEISURE**



# Leisure

In the 1950s, *Business Week* magazine said, 'Never have so many people had so much time on their hands - with pay.' This was the key to the huge expansion of the leisure industry, which had begun in the early twentieth century but expanded enormously after the Second World War.

# Sport

**Sport** benefited enormously from the greater demand for leisure time activities. Increased wealth, the greater amount of leisure time, the use of the car and the television increased the popularity of sport. It was estimated that 35 million attended football matches, including college football, in 1953; this was followed by 15 million at major league baseball matches and over 2 million at professional basketball matches. But television also popularised sport, just as radio had done in the 1920s and 1930s. Fifty million watched the football playoff in 1958 and the success of this, and later playoffs, gave rise to the launch of the **Super Bowl** in 1966 as a marketing device to heighten interest in football. By now, of course, many sportsmen were professionals, making a good living from their chosen sport.

The changing pattern of **golf** playing illustrated how sport responded to the greater demand. Before the Second World War, golf was played by the **privileged few** in private clubs. But in the 1950s, spurred on by television and the example of President Eisenhower, who loved to play golf, the sport was taken over by the **middle classes**. From the late 1950s to the 1970s there was a huge **construction boom** in golf courses. Six thousand golf courses were built in those years to cater for the new participants. In the process, too, golf had to gradually open its doors to **black people**. However, the building of new golf courses slowed down due to increased construction and land costs. But in 1988 - the centenary year of golf in America - 20 million people played over 400 million rounds of golf on over 12,000 courses.

# Sport

**Changing work practices** influenced the forms of leisure people enjoyed. Before the Second World War, workers experienced hard labour with longer working hours. Leisure time was relaxing, watching a game or listening to radio. After the war, **mechanisation** made tasks easier and more routine, which did not offer enough stimulation for workers; *'I felt so stifled, my brain wasn't needed anymore,'* said one. This led to greater participation in sports. In addition to just watching the popular sports, there was also increased **participation** in more extreme sports such as skiing, skydiving, mountain biking, surfing as well as mountain and rock climbing. The new work practices also led to the growth of fitness clubs and the sale of sports equipment.

# KEY PERSONALITY: MUHAMMAD ALI

Muhammad Ali was born **Cassius Clay** in Louisville, Kentucky in 1942. He took up boxing at 12, and over the next six years fought 108 fights as an amateur. In 1960, at the age of 18, he won an **Olympic gold medal** in Rome. He returned to a victory parade in Louisville.

However, Louisville was then part of the **segregated** south and so even though he was an Olympic champion, Clay was refused service at a local restaurant. Clay was openly critical of the treatment of his fellow blacks or African-Americans - some time later he threw his Olympic medal in the river as a protest.

Soon after his Olympic victory, Clay became a **professional heavyweight boxer**. His success depended on dedicated training, his **dancing** style of boxing and his constant talk. He used his speed and mobility to dance his way to victory - it was said that *'he floated like a butterfly and stung like a bee'*. He invented what was later called the **Ali Shuffle**, a rapid foot movement which confused his opponents. His constant talking both inside and outside the ring was also part of his style - he even predicted the rounds in which he would defeat opponents: *'To prove I'm great he will fall in eight.'* He became known as the **Louisville Lip** which got him great publicity, but it also turned some people against him.

In 1964, Clay defeated **Sonny Liston** to become **Heavyweight Champion of the World** for the first time. Also, at this time he came under the influence of **Malcolm X**, the black Muslim leader. After the Liston fight, Clay announced he was converting to the Muslim religion and becoming a member of the **Nation of Islam**. He changed his name to **Cassius X**, to signify the former slave status of blacks, and later to **Muhammad Ali**. When Malcolm X left the Nation of Islam, or Black Muslims as they were also called, Ali did not follow him.



# KEY PERSONALITY: MUHAMMAD ALI

Ali continued his successful career as heavyweight champion by defending his title against all-comers. In 1967, however, his career changed dramatically when he was called up for the **draft** (military service) in **Vietnam**. He refused to go on religious grounds, as a practising Muslim minister. *'I ain't got no quarrel with the Vietcong,'* he said. Ali's refusal to join the army caused huge controversy. His boxing licenses were revoked, he was stripped of his title and his passport was taken away. He was jailed, but let out on bail while he appealed against his conviction through to the Supreme Court.

Public opinion began changing against the war, and Ali made his comeback after two and a half years. In 1970, he defeated **Jerry Quarry**, the Great White Hope. However, he lost to the champion, **Joe Frazier**, as a result of his long layoff. But, soon after, the **Supreme Court** reversed his conviction and upheld his position as a conscientious objector.

Ali continued to fight. His most famous victories were the **Rumble in the Jungle** against **George Foreman**, who had beaten Frazier; this was followed by his great fight - the **Thrilla in Manila** - against Frazier. Ali then lost his title to **Leon Spinks** before winning it back a third time. He retired at 38 in 1979, probably the greatest heavyweight boxer of all time.

Ali was also involved in politics - he supported Jimmy Carter's presidential campaign in 1980 and worked for the release of four US hostages captured in Lebanon. Ali was diagnosed with **Parkinson's disease** in 1982.



# EXAM QUESTION

1. What did Muhammad Ali contribute to American culture? (2011)

# Television as Leisure

But in spite of the growth of sports and other leisure activities, **television was the main source of leisure** - *'the piece of furniture that stares back at you,'* said comedian Bob Hope. Record audiences watched *I Love Lucy* and 65 million people watched *Peter Pan* in 1955. Successful radio programmes moved over to television, such as the *\$64,000 Question* (a quiz show) and *Gunsmoke* (a Western series). The first **soap operas** appeared in 1956 and they were targeted at women. Many shows portrayed middle-class families in suburban homes. To ease the burden on the working mother, inside or outside the home, companies produced **TV dinners** and 25 million were sold in 1955.

But not everybody was happy with these developments. Critics said television was *'chewing gum for the mind'*. Some blamed increased violence and changing behaviour patterns on television.

# Movies, Books and Musicals

**Movies** went into decline in the 1950s and 1960s. The weekly audience was down to 36 million from a high of 86 million in 1946. The rise of television - entertainment at home - and the movement of people from the city centres where the cinemas were located contributed to the decline. Movies fought back with new **technological advances** - widescreen format, improved colour, the drive-in cinema and **epics** such as *Ben Hur* and *The Ten Commandments*. But they failed to stop the decline. Movies had to wait until the 1970s before they experienced rising numbers again as teenagers and those in their twenties increased its popularity.

**Book publishing** boomed, helped by the **paperback revolution**. Americans bought 50 per cent more books in the 1950s compared to the previous decade. Publishers put their success down to television. They said Americans stayed at home to watch their favourite programmes and when the show was over, it was *'too late to go out and too early to go to bed'*. So they read books ranging from *Peyton Place* (a mixture of adultery, drunkenness, greed and murder) to self-help guides such as *The Power of Positive Thinking*.

# Movies, Books and Musicals

**Musicals** were also popular in the 1950s. They packed theatres to see *Guys 'n' Dolls*, *The King and I*, *West Side Story* and the most successful of all, *My Fair Lady*. All these became successful films in later decades. But the costs of production, the movement of the middle classes from the city centres and the attraction of other forms of entertainment contributed to the **decline of theatre and musicals** in the 1960s and 1970s.

The leisure industry also catered for **younger people**. The television stations had children's shows in the mornings. The Disney company used television to promote its first **Disneyland**, built in California in 1955. It created Fantasyland, Frontierland and Main Street USA, as well as attracting 4 million visitors in its first seven weeks. Later, **Walt Disney World** was built in Florida on the same successful pattern. There were also new fads or gimmicks aimed at the youth market and some of these, such as Frisbees and hula-hoops, were very successful. By the late 1970s and the 1980s **computer games** became a huge attraction which fuelled a new industry.

# REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Why did the leisure industry grow in the 1950s and 1960s?
2. How did changing work practices influence leisure?
3. How important was television as a source of leisure?



# *The* **ROLE** *of* **WORK**

# The Role of Work

Work was highly valued in American society in the 1950s and 1960s. Some said America's success was based on the **work ethic** - a code of behaviour which valued thrift, discipline, hard work and individualism. Work was important for a good life. *'Work made men useful.'*

The work ethic was part of the **American Dream** – work provided the means of improving a person's life. Americans believed that individuals were rewarded for their work according to their merits and not according to their birth, family ties or length of service.

# Unemployment

For 20 years up to the end of the 1960s there was plenty of work for everybody. Unemployment remained low, and there was much part-time work available for students. It was not until the **1970s** that unemployment became a serious issue in America. As the economy declined due to the impact of the Vietnam War and the two oil crises of the 1970s, US unemployment grew to 10 per cent.

Unemployment in the US was higher among women than men, higher among blacks than whites, higher among young than adults and higher among less educated and skilled compared to more educated and higher skilled.

# Decline of Manufacturing Work

But the **nature of the work** also changed. In the 1950s, manufacturing industry (blue-collar work) was an important part of US employment - in steel mills, factories and engineering works. But this began to change as the service industry (white-collar work) became more important. By the 1960s and 1970s, the service industry occupied three-quarters of the labour force. This change in the type of work opened up opportunities for women in the workforce their numbers increased.

The **structure** of the workforce also changed:

- By 1947, 28 per cent of the US labour force was **female**. This expanded in the 1950s and 1960s until it reached over 40 per cent by 1977. They were mainly older women returning to the workforce after their children reached school age.
- Workers became **younger** with a growing population. The under-35 age group grew from 37 per cent of the workforce in 1960 to 50 per cent by 1977.
- The workforce was also better **educated**. Between 1958 and 1977 the percentage of college graduates in the workforce more than doubled. But black male participation in the workforce fell - from 85 per cent in 1954 to 71 per cent in 1977.

# REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What was consumerism and what caused it?
2. How and why did each of the following expand:
  - a. Car sales
  - b. Fast food
  - c. Houses



# The Assembly Line

Work in the American manufacturing industry followed the **assembly line system** devised in the early twentieth century by **Henry Ford** to produce his Model T cars. This involved the production of many identical parts and their assembly into finished products. His system cut the time involved in manufacturing goods and their cost. This increased worker **productivity** (output per worker).

It also meant the replacement of skilled workers by cheaper unskilled labour. The production was dictated by the speed of the assembly line, which caused conflict between workers and management. It also created dull, repetitive work on the assembly line, and this bored the workers. Managers reported **absenteeism** and **poor workmanship** on the assembly line.

By the 1950s the manufacturing industry was divided into unskilled workers, a large body of supervisors and production managers and an office management staff of accountants, engineers and chemists, as well as distribution and sales staff.

# The Organisation of Work

A **scientific approach** to the organisation of this work developed. It was based on the ideas of **Frederick Taylor**, an American mechanical engineer. He emphasised the job of **management**.

His view was that the job of management was to decide the best way for the worker to do the job and to provide incentives for good work. Out of his ideas, **time and motion studies** developed.

These ideas led to the development of **industrial psychology**. This said that the attitudes of workers to their jobs and toward the company was just as important as the assembly line. The managers should try to improve motivation by rotating jobs and making them more challenging. This led to the new study of industrial relations to ensure that management and workers sorted out their problems.

# Automation

Throughout the post-war period there was increased **mechanisation** and **automation**. Some argued that the introduction of automatic machinery would cause mass unemployment. But the alarm and panic caused by these predictions was eased as time went by and other industries grew to provide employment for displaced workers.

**Automation** increased efficiency and quality control. It also provided the basis for higher wages and more leisure time. The increased production changed worker-employer pay negotiations as productivity was now included to the advantage of the worker.

The role of the **manager** also changed. Originally managers were often recruited from the factory floor or supervisory staff, but now more and more managers were recruited from university graduates. This frequently involved further on-the-job training. Management promotion often meant moving to another city in the US.

# Automation

**Blue-collar workers** often changed jobs. On average over a 25-year period of working, they changed to very different jobs five times. The most skilled and the least skilled workers were the most mobile - the skilled because they could avail of higher pay elsewhere, the least skilled because they did not have any particular attachment to their work.

**Migrant work** also played its part, though at a declining rate. About 600,000 were involved annually in the 1950s; this declined to about 400,000 in the 1960s. This was largely because of improvements in the economy and the demand for permanent labour. Migrant workers were mainly young, male and often from the southern states of the US. They were usually employed in agricultural work and followed the ripening of the crops from citrus fruits in Florida to vegetables further north. Their work was casual, hard and badly paid.

## KEY CONCEPT: TECHNOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENT

**Technological Development** is the application or use of scientific discoveries in industry.

# REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. How was the work ethic part of the American Dream?
2. How and why did the nature of work change?
3. What role did the assembly line play?
4. How did the role of each of the following change:
  - a. Managers
  - b. Blue-collar workers
  - c. Migrant workers?

# EXAM QUESTION

1. What were US attitudes to work and changes in the role of work in the post-war decades?



# Criticisms of Work

In the 1950s, there were criticisms of the changing nature of work. In *The Organization Man*, William Whyte said that corporations were forcing **middle managers** to conform to the values of the company. He said that this was getting rid of individuality and experimentation. Instead, loyalty and obedience to the corporation had become more important.

# Trade Unions

Union members grew in the US during the Second World War. The workers were organised by the **American Federation of Labor (AFL)** and by the **Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO)**, which merged in 1955. But unions faced difficulties after the war. The **Taft-Hartley Act 1947** gave greater government control of unions:

- Closed shop agreements in which employers only hired union labour were outlawed.
- Workers' right not to join a union was protected.

While the numbers joining unions increased up to the early 1960s, the percentage of workers who belonged to unions declined throughout the post-war years. Thirty-five per cent of workers were unionised in 1954, but this started to decline, reaching 27 per cent by 1970. There was a more rapid decline in the 1980s during the economic recession. By the early 1990s only 15 per cent of workers were in unions.

The overall decline in union membership was due to:

- A shift from blue-collar to white-collar work
- Anti-union laws in the states.
- Union corruption in the late 1950s.
- Regulations on picketing tightened.
- Inter-union squabbles.
- Growth in part-time work.

# REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What did the Taft-Hartley Act do?
2. What proportion of workers were trade union members by the 1990s?

# KEY PERSONALITY: THE ORGANIZATION MAN

In 1956, **William H. Whyte** wrote *The Organization Man*. Whyte was a journalist with Fortune magazine and he was critical of many developments in US society. Whyte was an admirer of the spirit and freedom of the **individual**. The (Protestant) work ethic valued hard work, thrift and a competitive struggle. He was concerned that it was being crushed by organisations.

Whyte was concerned about the impact of the organisation on the individual. His views highlighted the role of **corporate culture** (the values, ideas and ways of doing things) in the operation of companies and other organisations. The corporate culture brought pressures on the managers to conform for the good of the company.

Whyte's typical organisation men were **middle managers** in large organisations (especially companies). The **organisation man** did not only **work** for the organisation, he also **belonged** to it. The organisation man conformed to the culture of the company, mainly to get **promoted** in his career.

The organisation man believed that his own well-being was linked to the well-being of the company. Many assumed that they would work for the company all their lives. **Loyalty**, **reliability** and **obedience** were important characteristics of the organisation man. These guaranteed job security and long-term careers.

# KEY PERSONALITY: THE ORGANIZATION MAN

**Top managers** worked very long hours - 50 to 60 hours a week - and more in work-related entertaining and reading. They looked on this as part of the job and promoted those who thought like themselves. *'We have, in sum, a man who is so completely involved in his work that he cannot distinguish between work and the rest of his life - and is happy that he cannot.'*

The organisation had layers of **bureaucracy**. Each layer had certain power and the organisation man knew his place in this set-up. He knew he had to **conform**. He could not show creativity, experimentation, enterprise or independence.

In the world of organisation man, he was the breadwinner and his wife kept house. He lived in the suburbs and took the train to work each day. *'This is the new suburbia, the packaged villages that have become the dormitory of the new generation of organisation men.'* He wore a suit to work - he was also The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit. His wife availed of new **household appliances** which speeded up housework. This gave time for coffee mornings with friends the so-called *Kaffeeklatsch*.



# *The* **CHANGING** *role* **OF** *women* **AND** *the* **FAMILY**

# The Role of Women

In the 1940s and 1950s the **traditional role** of women was still popular. This was the role of woman as wife and mother. This view was reinforced by television programmes and films. However, at the same time **economic and social influences** were at work which eventually changed the traditional role.

# Women at Work

In 1940, only 25 per cent of women over 14 were at work - this was the same as in 1910. They were mostly young, unmarried and poor. Many were blacks or foreign-born whites. The Second World War and the post-war era changed all that. By 1970, there were over 31 million women at work, 43 per cent of the workforce. Married women now outnumbered single women, and a large proportion were over 35. The greatest growth was among well-educated, middle-class wives. These changes were partly **caused** by the growth of the tertiary (or service) industry, labour-saving devices in the home and cultural change (**the feminist movement**).

But women were still a **depressed class** as they continued to experience prejudice. There was still the view that *'For the sake of every member of the family, the family needs a head. This means Father, not Mother.'* *The Atlantic Monthly* expressed the view that *'What modern woman has to recapture is the wisdom that being just a woman is her central task and greatest honour.'* They were still discriminated against in employment and wages. Relatively few were in skilled crafts or the professions. In 1973, 34 per cent had clerical jobs and 22 per cent were in service occupations. These were generally low-paid and low-prestige jobs. They were also paid much less than men doing the same job.

# The Women's Movement

The civil rights movement provided the spur to the **women's movement**. In 1963, **Betty Friedan** published *The Feminine Mystique*. This attacked the idea that women could only get satisfaction and fulfilment when rearing children and minding the house. Her views sparked off a national debate.

Friedan took a further step when she founded the **National Organization for Women (NOW)** in 1966 '*to take action to bring American women into full participation in American society*'. Its main aim was to end sexual discrimination in employment. It later developed other issues such as child care centres, legal abortion and paid maternity leave. It sponsored the **Equal Rights Amendment (ERA)**, which guaranteed sexual equality. NOW depended on legislation and the law to improve the position of women. It publicised its message with demonstrations and protests. In 1977, thousands of women took part in a 2,610-mile marathon walk from New York to Houston, Texas to publicise the first National Women's Conference.

**Radical feminists** were more aggressive than Friedan. They wanted to overthrow society, which they saw as male dominated. They burned bras, attacked advertising that '*demeaned women*' and insisted that men help with housework. They invaded men's bars and restaurants or picketed the Miss America Pageant. They developed feminist opportunities. publishing houses, health organisations and child care centres. These were women-run organisations. Some disliked all men. They expressed this in bumper stickers - '*Don't Cook Dinner Tonight, Starve a Rat Today*'. They were a small number but they got a great deal of publicity.

# Success of The Women's Movement

The women's movement had considerable **success**. The **Civil Rights Act 1964** outlawed discrimination on the basis of sex. The federal and state governments passed equal opportunities laws, and presidential Executive Orders did away with the legal basis for discrimination. President Johnson signed an Executive Order requiring employers on federal contracts to take **affirmative action** to ensure more women and underprivileged minorities were hired. Skilled trades, such as carpenters and electricians, as well as professions were opened up to women; the numbers of women accountants grew more rapidly than men.

Greater participation in education was the key to success. **Yale and Princeton**, two of America's most prestigious universities, opened their doors to women. In 1950, from 5 per cent to 8 per cent of students in medical, law and business schools were women - by the mid-1980s this had grown to 40 per cent.

Legalised **abortion** was a very controversial issue. Seventeen states made abortion easier. As a result, in 1970 there were 200,000 legal abortions, which was 10 times greater than in 1968. In 1973, the Supreme Court, in the Roe v. Wade decision, upheld a woman's right to abortion in the early stages of pregnancy. Women also became more successful in **politics**. There were women mayors elected in Chicago, San Francisco and San Jose (California). The first woman governor was elected in Connecticut.



# KEY PERSONALITY: BETTY FRIEDAN

Betty Friedan was born in 1921 and graduated from Smith College, Massachusetts in 1942 with a degree in **psychology**. It was at Smith that she developed a questioning of authority and a belief in social change. In 1949, she married Carl Friedan becoming a housewife, mother of three children and an occasional freelance writer.

In 1963, Friedan published *The Feminine Mystique*, which sold 3 million copies in a year. She based her ideas on a questionnaire which she issued in 1957 to fellow graduates of Smith College at a 15-year reunion. She discovered that they were as unhappy with their lives as she was with her own. This led her to a series of studies resulting in *The Feminine Mystique*. This book inspired the women's movement.

The 1950s was the period of growing suburbanisation and the baby boom. The *Feminine Mystique* concentrated on the white middle-class wife who lived in the suburbs. The main idea of the book was that women were victims of a set of values and culture (the feminine mystique) which said they would find their fulfilment through their husbands and children. Friedan said women were in a trap and to escape they must finally exercise *'their human freedom and recapture their sense of self'*.

Friedan said women were not being given a chance to develop their talents. Women were expected to stay in the kitchen and nursery, get involved in voluntary community work, look pretty and get frustrated. She called it **The Problem That Has No Name** *'which is simply the fact that American women are kept from growing to their full human capacities'*. Friedan said that the media (press, TV, radio and cinema) manipulated women in order to keep them at home to sell them their vacuum cleaners and dishwashers.

# KEY PERSONALITY: BETTY FRIEDAN

*'The feminine mystique has succeeded in burying millions of American women alive.'* She felt women were not complete in themselves. 'The problem lay buried, unspoken, for many years in the minds of American women... Each suburban wife struggled with it alone. As she made her beds, shopped for groceries, matched slipcover material, ate peanut butter sandwiches with her children, chauffeured Cub Scouts and Brownies, lay beside her husband at night - she was afraid to ask even of herself the silent - *"Is this all?"*

She claimed that suburban women were **frustrated and unhappy**, comparing them to the prisoners of a Nazi concentration camp - they had become *'Dependent, passive and childlike'*. She criticised the second-class status of women. She emphasised that women could find happiness in careers outside the family.

More recent critics have questioned her account of her own life in *The Feminine Mystique*, claiming it is unreliable and misleading. Some claimed she was bad-tempered, selfish and arrogant. Her 21-year marriage was troublesome; *'Although her marriage was violent, ... she and Carl were a match; she egged him on, and she gave as good as she got...'* Their marriage ended in divorce in 1969.

Some have also raised doubts about her **sources** and the questionable research methods of the sources she used. They said the experts she quoted were unreliable. However, Friedan and her book helped to change not only the thinking but also the lives of many American women. Her book coincided with other developments which were making women reconsider their role in society.

# KEY PERSONALITY: BETTY FRIEDAN

In 1966, Friedan co-founded the **National Organization of Women (NOW)**, which campaigned to achieve equality of opportunity for women. She was also a founding member of the **National Women's Political Caucus** in 1971, which fought to ratify the **Equal Rights Amendment**, but lost. Ten years later, she wrote *The Second Stage*, which assessed the current state of the women's movement. She said that feminists must reclaim the family and deal with child care, maternity leave and flexible work arrangements. She disagreed with the extreme feminists - *'the disrupters of the women's movement'*, she called them - who were advocating *'lesbianism and the hatred of men'*.

# REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What criticism did Betty Friedan make of US society?

# The Limits of Success

But women still held few of the **top jobs**. In 1970, only 5 per cent of the country's 3 million managers and executives were women. The **ERA** passed Congress but there was stiff opposition in the states and it failed to get ratified before its deadline.



# Poorer Women

The benefits of the women's movement were confined mainly to middle- and upper-class women. Hardly any of the benefits trickled down to poorer women. **Race, class** and **gender** operated against them. Poor, black or Hispanic women still suffered. A third of black families were headed by women who apart from being single were also jobless. Women without skills or training were usually stuck in dead-end, low-paying jobs; but so were men in a similar situation. Between 1955 and 1981, women's earnings fell from 64 per cent to 59 per cent of men's, and even by the late 1980s only climbed back to 62 per cent. 80 per cent of all women workers were employed in the lowest-paying jobs and women comprised 70 per cent of the adult poor.

# Traditionalists

Some women were still **traditionalists**. They believed that women's place was in the home as wife and mother. They attacked the women's liberation movement. They were part of the rising new political force in the 1970s and 1980s - the conservative New Right which developed in response to the social problems of the time. **Phyllis Schlafly** headed this movement, whose main aim was to '*Stop the ERA*' - and they did.

# REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What was the traditional role of women?
2. How did the proportion of women in the workforce change?
3. What was the women's movement?
4. What were the limits to their success?
5. How were poorer women affected?
6. Who were the traditionalists?

# EXAM QUESTION

What were the success and failures of the women's movement in the US between the 1950s and the 1980s?

# The Family

**Marriage rates** grew and remained high after the war. Many married young in the 1950s - the average age for men was 22 and 20 for women. Public opinion polls showed that young people expected to marry and raise children. Divorce rates dropped sharply after 1947. Despite more liberal divorce laws in the 1950s, the divorce rates remained lower in the 1950s and early 1960s than since 1942. Illegitimacy rates also remained stable.

The **change in family life** came in the 1960s. Family life changed as the role of mother and father changed. With more women at work outside the home, fathers had to take a greater share of family and housekeeping duties. Increased social pressures led to the break-up of families. Families also became more isolated due to **mobility** - from city centre to suburbs, or from state to state. Connections to the extended family of grandparents and uncles and aunts were weakened or broken.

# Divorce and Illegitimacy

In these circumstances, **divorce** and **illegitimacy rates** rose sharply. The divorce rate rose from 9.2 per 1,000 married couples in 1960 to 11.2 per 1,000 married couples in 1968. This was partly caused by more women at work who now had the resources to break away from unhappy marriages. The instability of marriage and the sexual revolution contributed to the rise of **trial** marriages or partnerships.

Illegitimacy rates also rose quickly after 1963. In 1963, 23 per cent of births among blacks were illegitimate and 2 per cent among whites. This rose to 30 per cent among blacks and 3 per cent among whites by 1970. By 1990, almost 30 per cent of all births were illegitimate. The sexual liberation of the 1960s and the increased use of drugs and alcohol were blamed for the change.

By the 1970s and 1980s there were concerns that the break-up of family life would cause **further social problems** in the years ahead. In 1965, the **Moynihan Report** argued that the biggest single cause of poverty in the US was the instability of black marriages, as black husbands abandoned their families. He argued that government policy should help to establish a '*stable family structure*'.



# REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. How did the nature of the family change in the 1960s?