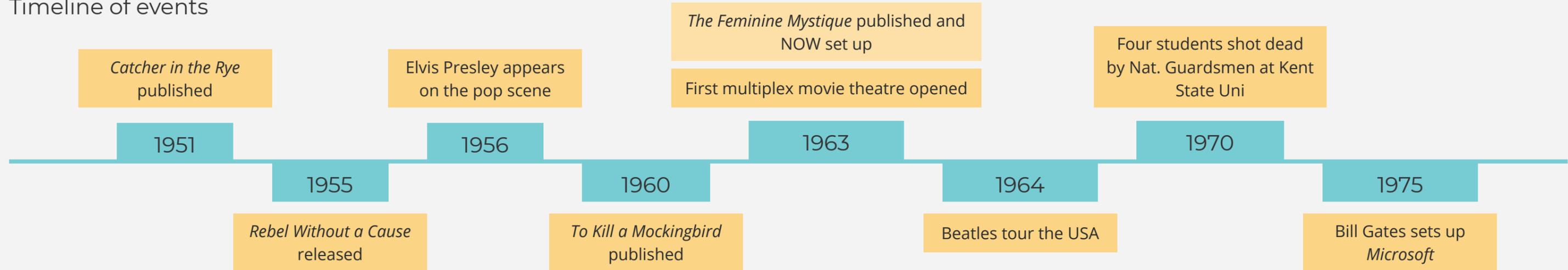


Key Question 5 : How did American society change between 1950 and 2000?

Timeline of events



Key words

| | |
|---------------------------|---|
| Anti-hero | character in a film lacking the qualities of the norm |
| Counterculture | way of life opposed to that regarded as normal |
| Beatnik | a member of the Beat Generation |
| Hippy | someone who rejects convention |
| Women's Liberation | a radical movement demanding female equality |
| Feminist | a supporter of equal rights of women |
| NOW | National Organisation for Women |
| Drive-in | a cinema where films can be watched from a car |
| SDS | students for a Democratic Society founded in 1959 |

Changes in music, entertainment, media and literature

Society was greatly influenced by changes in popular culture in the second half of the 20th century.

Music

1950s – Rock and roll took the US by storm with Elvis Presley and Little Richard popularising the new genre.

1960s – British groups such as the Beatles and the Rolling Stones and US bands like the Beach Boys were widely popular.

1970s/80s – Heavy metal, disco and rap and hip-hop were popular.

Entertainment and the media - Cinema – drive-ins became popular and the first multiplex theatre opened in 1963.

1970s - Blockbusters such as *Jaws (1975)* and *Star Wars (1977)* dominated the movie scene. 1980s - Video players encouraged the hire of videos for home entertainment.

Television – By 1970 virtually every home had a television. In the 1960s Westerns were popular along with soap operas in the 1980s and chat shows in the 1990s.

Literature – landmark books such as *Catcher in the Rye (1951)* dealt with teenage angst, *To Kill a Mockingbird (1960)* covered sensitive issues of the time, *On the Road (1957)* challenged the conventions of society and *Black Boy (1971)* focused on the issue of segregation.

Changes in youth culture

Arguably the biggest change in the 1950s was the emergence of a distinct youth culture.

1950s –teenagers had more money and leisure time than ever before and felt the need to express themselves in music, fashion and behaviour.

- “Beatniks” - dropped out of society.
- Teenagers became influenced by cult heroes such as **James Dean** who rebelled against their parents in particular and society in general.
- Music – stars such as Elvis influenced dress and behaviour in the **1950s** and in the **1960s** some dropped out of society and followed **hippy** lifestyles. They grew their hair, wore ethnic clothes, experimented with drugs and engaged in “free love”. Many settled in communes and San Francisco became the hippy capital of the USA.

Important concept

Society was influenced greatly by changes in popular culture with perhaps the most dramatic effect being the emergence of the teenager. The period was a time of experimentation and excess and important advances were made in music and literature along with the changing rights of women.

If you want to keep your memories you first have to live with them. - Bob Dylan

Key Question 5 : How did American society change between 1950 and 2000?

Student protest

1951 – the first student protest group – **Students for a Democratic Society (SDS)** was set up and campaigned for more say in how courses and institutions should be run.

- During the 1960s many students became involved in various protest movements taking part in marches, freedom rides and sit-ins.
- At the time, young people were gaining a sense of freedom and were more prepared to express themselves.
- They were influenced by musicians of the time such as **Bob Dylan, Jimi Hendrix** and **Janis Joplin** who used their music to protest against injustice and war.
- Many opposed the draft for service in Vietnam and anti-war protest became a feature of the late 1960s.
- **1970** – student protest at **Kent State University, Ohio** resulted in the deaths of four protesters, shot dead by National Guardsmen.

The changing role of women

The Second World War had a liberating effect for many women but as the war ended many returned to roles as homemakers and to “traditional” occupations.

1950s – boredom with routine together with the introduction of labour saving devices encouraged some women to seek careers.

1960s – by 1960 women represented 50% of the workforce but a report of 1963 showed that they only received between 40 and 50% of the wages of men for doing the same job.

1963 – **Betty Friedan** published *The Feminine Mystique* which called for women to abandon traditional roles and seek careers.

1966 – Friedan and others set up the **National Organisation for Women (NOW)** which demanded equal rights for women.

The more radical **Women's Liberation Movement** became active in challenging discrimination.

Laws such as the **Civil Rights Act (1964)** and the act of 1973 which legalised abortion helped secure more freedom.

Women continued to make progress in the 1980s but by 1995 the earnings of women were 75% of that of men.