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**1950’s Conformity, Consumerism, and Counter-culture**

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| **Review: Define subversion and describe the (collective) American fear of communism and nuclear war-** |

**Federal Highway Act and the growth of the Suburbs**

On March 19, the House Ways and Means Committee reported out a bill, developed by Rep. Hale Boggs of Louisiana that contained the financing mechanism. The Highway Revenue Act of 1956 proposed to increase the gas tax from two to three cents per gallon and to impose a series of other highway user tax changes. Acting on a suggestion by Secretary of Treasury George Humphrey, Rep. Boggs included a provision that credited revenue from highway user taxes to a Highway Trust Fund to be used for the highway program.

The Committee on Public Works combined the Fallon and Boggs bills as Title I and Title II, respectively, of a single bill that was introduced on April 21. On April 27, the Federal Highway Act of 1956 passed the House by a vote of 388 to 19.

On May 28 and 29, the Senate debated the Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1956 before approving it by a voice vote. The House and Senate versions now went to a House-Senate conference to resolve the differences. The conference was difficult as participants attempted to preserve as much of their own bill as possible. On June 25, the conferees completed their work.

The Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1956 that emerged from the House-Senate conference committee included features of the Gore and Fallon bills, as well as compromises on other provisions from both.

The interstate system was expanded, but only by 1,600 km to 66,000 km. To construct the network, $25 billion was authorized for Federal years 1957 through 1969. During the first three years, the funds would be apportioned as provided for in the Gore bill (mileage, land area, and population). In succeeding years, apportionments would be made on the cost-to-complete basis provided for in the Fallon bill. The added 1,600 km were excluded from the estimate. The Federal share of project costs would be 90 percent.

The 1956 act called for uniform interstate design standards to accommodate traffic forecast for 1975 (modified in later legislation to traffic forecast in 20 years). Two lane segments, as well as at-grade intersections, were permitted on lightly traveled segments. (However, legislation passed in 1966 required all parts of the interstate highway system to be at least four lanes with no at-grade intersections regardless of traffic volume.)

Access would be limited to interchanges approved as part of the original design or subsequently approved by the secretary of commerce. Service stations and other commercial establishments were prohibited from the interstate right-of-way, in contrast to the franchise system used on toll roads.

Toll roads, bridges, and tunnels could be included in the system if they met system standards and their inclusion promoted development of an integrated system.

On June 26, 1956, the Senate approved the bill by a vote of 89 to 1. (The one "no" vote was cast by Sen. Russell Long of Louisiana who opposed the gas tax increase.) That same day, the House approved the bill by a voice vote.

Earlier that month, Eisenhower had entered Walter Reed Army Medical Center after an attack of ileitis, an intestinal ailment. He was still in the hospital on June 29, when a stack of bills was brought in for signature. One of them was the Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1956, the landmark bill for which he had fought so hard. He signed it without ceremony or fanfare.

Biographer Stephen E. Ambrose stated, "Of all his domestic programs, Eisenhower's favorite by far was the Interstate System." Eisenhower's 1963 memoir, Mandate for Change 1953-1956, explained why:

More than any single action by the government since the end of the war, this one would change the face of America. ... Its impact on the American economy - the jobs it would produce in manufacturing and construction, the rural areas it would open up - was beyond calculation.

The next 50 years would be filled with unexpected engineering challenges, unanticipated controversies, and unforeseen funding difficulties. Nevertheless, the president's view would prove correct. The interstate system, and the Federal-State partnership that built it, changed the face of America.

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| What was the Federal Highway Act, and how did it affect American society? |

**Define Conformity:**

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| **Housing Conformity (write ideas based on the images you see):**  **List the pros of housing conformity-**  **List the cons of housing conformity-**  **Conformity in the workplace:** |

**Define Consumerism:**

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| **Television-**  **The Automobile-**  **Music-** |

**Define Counter-Culture:**

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| **Beat Generation-** |

**The Beatnik Generation**

"I saw the best minds of my generation destroyed by madness, starving hysterical naked, dragging themselves through the negro streets at dawn looking for an angry fix . . ."

When Allen Ginsberg performed these first lines of *Howl* in the crowded Six Gallery in San Francisco, the 150 people in the audience began cheering. As Kenneth Rexroth remembers, Americans were feeling oppressed by what he called "an undeclared military state," a government that seemed out of control, and a culture that seemed more interested in mass consumerism than morals or aesthetics. Ginsberg's voice immediately became a voice of hope and change. Poet Michael McClure describes the immediate visceral response to *Howl*: "Everyone knew at the deepest level that a barrier had been broken, that a human voice and body had been hurled against the harsh wall of America and its supporting armies and navies and academies and institutions and ownership systems and power-support bases." By the time Ginsberg reached the end of *Howl*, the cheers were so loud that it was difficult to hear him read, but when he had finished, history had been made. The Beat movement had become an officially recognized force in the literary and cultural landscape.

The Beat Generation, as it came to be called, claims a number of well-known writers, including Jack Kerouac, William Burroughs, and Lawrence Ferlinghetti, the founder of City Lights Bookstore in San Francisco. The Beat authors covered in this unit include Allen Ginsberg, Gary Snyder, and Amiri Baraka (Baraka dropped his allegiance to the Beats as he began to emphasize the African American roots of his poetic voice). These writers looked to unconventional role models, or "Secret Heroes" as Ginsberg labeled them, like Charlie Parker, Dizzy Gillespie, Arthur Rimbaud, and Dylan Thomas. What all these earlier artists shared was noncanonical status, experimental artistic style, and a fast-paced, unorthodox lifestyle. The word "beat" was a slang term used by postwar jazz musicians to mean down and out, or poor and exhausted. It also suggested "dead beat" or "beat-up." The adoption of the word "beat" to describe this generation of poets is generally credited to Jack Kerouac and Allen Ginsberg, who claimed that the word meant "exhausted, at the bottom of the world, looking up or out, sleepless, wide-eyed, perceptive, rejected by society, on your own, streetwise." Kerouac later credited the term with a philosophical dimension, meaning beatitude or beatific. Proclaiming themselves the Beat Generation ironically helped these writers gain a sense of identity as outsiders. Although Ginsberg, Kerouac, and other early members of the group met in New York City, San Francisco eventually became the hub of the Beat movement. San Francisco, even more than New York City, was home to a thriving alternative culture, where radical ideas and lifestyles were welcomed.

When Ginsberg's *Howl* was eventually published in a collection, a court trial over its alleged obscenity only heightened its popularity, and the publicity it generated along with the publication of Jack Kerouac's *On the Road* (1957) brought word of the movement into the American heartland. The Beat Generation became synonymous with counterculture, rebellion, and bohemian living. These writers refused to conform to traditional middle-class values; they rejected materialism and organized religion, and searched instead for alternative ways to find spiritual understanding. The Beats looked to Eastern religion, with its emphasis on meditation and communion with nature. Some of them experimented with mind-altering drugs. Many of the Beat poets were openly homosexual, and their candor on the taboo subject of same-sex relationships helped pave the way for the gay rights movement in the 1970s.

Beat literature is characterized by a vigorous rejection of traditional social, sexual, political, and religious values. Although much writing of the time could be described as experimental, Beat writing shares a set of recognizable features, including spontaneity, a penchant for surreal imagery, juxtaposition, long lines, aggressive individualism, an interest in the writing process, the practice of automatic writing, a fascination with drug-induced states, and a general interest in life on the edges of society.

**Use the source above to answer the following questions.**

1. What are some of the features that characterize Beat poetry?
2. What kinds of values did the Beat Generation uphold?
3. Ginsberg's poem *Howl* is often taken as a kind of manifesto for the movement. What features, formal and thematic, seem to characterize both this poem and the Beat movement as a whole?
4. What does Baraka's poetry share with the Beat movement? How does race complicate his association with this group?
5. How does Snyder's attitude toward nature fit in with the Beat Generation's outlook?

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| **How did the Beatniks feel about conformity and consumerism? Which 1950’s and 60’s group would you relate to most? Explain.** |