

The Fifties: The Way We Really Were. By Douglas T. Miller and Marion Nowak. (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1977. Pp. 444. Notes, illustrations, selected bibliography, index. \$10.95.)

In the wake of Vietnam, Watergate, and other disruptions of the late 1960s and early 1970s, a nostalgic view of the 1950s has emerged. The prevailing notion is of an era of innocence and simplicity untarnished by the fear and violence of the ensuing years. Miller and Nowak, in a thorough and evocative social history of the decade, take issue with this perception. They argue persuasively that the pleasant image of the 1950s can better be described as tired, dull, cautious, and anxious. In their opinion the search for security through conformity was the essence of the decade.

A number of factors contributed to this conclusion. Of these, none was more important than the Cold War and its accompanying anticommunism, which the authors see as only the latest manifestation of the nation's deep rooted antiradicalism. Thus, Senator Joseph McCarthy did not create the hysterical fear of a red menace; rather, he capitalized on it. What is most significant, however, is that the impact of anticommunism, far from disappearing with the demise of McCarthy, was felt throughout the decade in a number of ways. Anticommunism caused or affected the search for security, the return to religion, the celebration of family, the absence of an effective left, the disunity of labor unions, the quietness of college students, the widespread political apathy, the arms race, and the reliance on nuclear superiority.

Later chapters expand on these and other important characteristics of the decade, including the use of massive advertising, credit buying, and planned obsolescence to stimulate high levels of consumption, the growth of suburbia (the natural habitat of organization men and their ideal helpmates), the impact of the automobile, the intimidation of women (especially those with aspirations toward education or work), the failure to face realistically the problems of America's minorities, the unwillingness of most intellectuals to criticize the world in which they lived, and the attack on progressive education. While these themes and many others are presented with skill and grace, Miller and Nowak are at their best in dealing with the music, movies, and television of the 1950s. From Johnny Ray, through Alan Freed, to Bill Haley and the Comets and Elvis ("Had Sam Phillips not discovered Elvis Presley in Memphis, it would have been necessary to invent him." [p. 300]), the

authors trace the evolution of rock and roll from a suspect genre favored by black artists to its domestication as symbolized by the success of American Bandstand. In a similar fashion Miller and Nowak describe the development of the television industry and its programming during the decade. They conclude sadly that the quality of the latter, at least in terms of originality and creativity, declined during the 1950s in part because the real point of the medium became not entertainment but the commercial pitch. Thus, television's vast potential disappeared as Milton Berle was replaced as Mr. Television by a corporation executive.

Miller and Nowak have written a fascinating and thought provoking book. Their research, which ranges from scholarly journals to comic books and from intellectual treatises to the late show, is impressive, and they use anecdotal material well. They do not hesitate to take advantage of their own personal experiences with the decade, which adds an additional degree of legitimacy to the result. At times they try to force events or facts to conform to those characteristics of the decade already identified as significant. But this is a minor concern. *The Fifties* is intellectually sound, well written, and a most pleasant guide through ten years of American history which well deserve the skeptical and serious treatment that this book provides.

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Agricultural Literature: Proud Heritage-Future Promise. A Bicentennial Symposium, September 24-26, 1975. Edited by Alan Fusonie and Leila Moran. (Washington: Associates of the National Agricultural Library, Inc., and the Graduate School Press, U.S. Department of Agriculture, 1977. Pp. 371. Illustrations, notes, maps, graph, index. Clothbound, \$13.50; paperbound, \$9.95.)

It appears that the intention of the promoters of the bicentennial meeting at the National Agricultural Library in Beltsville, Maryland, was to focus "upon the historical as well as the continual importance of American agricultural literature" (p. 1), but few of the twenty-seven participants had much to say on the subject; some never even mentioned it. Only one paper, "Agriculture with Hoof and Horn: An Analysis of the Historical Literature of the Cattle Industry," by Walter Rundell, Jr., and Anne M. Butler, is thoroughly satisfactory, and it is restricted to developments on the Great Plains. Another