

1950's nostalgia



1950s Nostalgia Real and Imagined Stephanie Coontz is a professor of Family History at the Evergreen State College in Olympia Washington. She is a nationally recognized expert on the family and an award winning writer. In her 1997 book “ The Way We Really Are: Coming to Terms with America’s Changing Families”, Stephanie Coontz wrote an essay entitled “ What We Really Miss about the 1950s”. In Stephanie Coontz’s “ What We Really Miss about the 1950s”, she argues that we as a country collectively remember the 1950s with a nostalgic tone, but we are not remembering this era in its entirety, nor are we completely accurate.

She explains that the family and economic life that we remember and long for does not represent the whole truth of that era by any means. Coontz keeps a semi-formal tone throughout this essay. She begins by acknowledging the nostalgia that America feels toward the 1950s era. She continues by reminding us that there are also things that we do not miss about that time period in America. She elaborates on several points that we do specifically miss about the 1950s, such as the nuclear focus of family life and the profound wage increases.

Coontz talks about how in the 1950s, employers and the government did a lot to help families prosper, including offering housing and employment assistance, as well as offering the GI Bill to armed services veterans who wanted to go back to school. Booming economic prosperity and the downturn in the economy that occurred in the 1970s, these were, she states, the real reasons behind the end of the 1950s family experiment.

People sometimes reminisce on the past with nostalgia, remembering the “ Good Old Days” and how values and ethics have seemed to disappear. In the

1950's, like in no other decade, people became homeowners; prosperity was plentiful and bad times were thought to be something of the past. Capitalism was working and it was working well, to have a better life than one's parents was only matter of willingness. Clearly it is evident why " Americans chose the 1950's than any other single decade as the best time for children to grow up. " (Coontz, 32).

In the essay " What We really Miss About the 1950's" Stephanie Coontz has made several observations that " The Golden Age" was not brought by a thriving free-market competition but by large government spending to provide jobs and benefits to millions of Americans that which resembled a socialistic nation. Coontz implies that Americans miss high taxes and large government spending, because of the prosperity they brought. " 40 percent of young men were eligible for veteran's benefits, and these benefits were far more extensive than those available to Vietnam-era vets. (Coontz, 42). Apart from these benefits people began to have high paying jobs, many provided by government programs. The government also made it easier for Americans to finance a house by " creating two new national institutions to facilitate home loans, allowed veterans to put down payments as low as a dollar on a house, and offered tax breaks to people who bought homes"(Coontz, 42, 43). WWII brought the highest level of taxation the United States has ever experienced; " top earning Americans paid 87 percent of their income while corporate taxes were 52 percent" (Coontz, 42). These rates were kept well thru the 1950's. Coontz argues that this extra revenue made it possible for many veterans to go to college almost tuition-free, doubling the percentage of college students from prewar levels.

Throughout the 20th Century, families have radically changed. After WWI, a large transitional phase began and all the women that worked to support the war effort now had their jobs stripped from them. During the 1950's, there was a lifestyle in America that was essentially set in stone from birth. Television portrayed an image that women were to stay to home with the children.

Shows such as, Leave it to Beaver, and Father Knows Best displayed a stereotypical way of life and structure in a family. " The sitcoms were simultaneously advertisements, etiquette manuals, and how-to lessons for a new way of organizing marriage and child rising" (Coontz, 39). Although television shows of the 1950's were not true reality, it seemed to be a good model at the time. Family life in the 50's era differs greatly from today's family unit. Children of that generation didn't have many choices when they were growing up. They typically followed the " blueprint" presented to them by their family and societal norms.

Boys and girls went to school together throughout their youth, and upon completion, they would typically follow in their families' footsteps. They were mainly interested in marriage. Starting a " functional" family was considered successful. An idle family to them was not only getting along, but focused also on appearance. Like the show Leave it to Beaver where the mother is " decked out in earrings and a pearl necklace. " (Soto, 29). The children and father also had to look prim and proper with their hair neatly combed and their clothes ironed.

Women would stay at home caring for the children and household duties, while men would go to work and insure the family's financial stability. The

father would have full demeanor of the family and women were not expected to work outside. The issue that the “ perfect” family is present in an important part of the advertisement, represent the idea that the people still want to live in that way, because the reality as Gary Soto show us is very different and difficult, and in the other hand as Coontz explain the ideal of this perfect family represented in the 50s generate more nostalgic and desire of any other idea if family lived in other decade.

The perfect family is different of the real family in that the perfect family live in a scenario in which are no major problems with a very structured routine as Gary Soto explain, living a life which is not affected by external variables, and the real family in the other hand has different nuances in which are observed everyday problems and where it has be to solved, besides being a participant in a number of variables that affect daily living.

There is a trend to idealize the past as Coontz says, being idealized the decade of the 50s by the presence of this perfect family, however, this perfect family hide problems as serious as sexism, racism and intolerance among others, being exposed that the existence of the perfect family is nothing more than a myth. At present, the perfect family is idealized because it offers a utopian alternative in which people can live better, although there is evidence that even in the best case in the pursuit of the perfect family are presented important collateral effects in other topics.

The publicity that is currently being developed provides recurring images of the perfect family, showing that the idealization of the perfect family and the aspirational sense that it represents remains as a constant in the advertising in time as an effort to associate products with the perfect family because it is

an important driver of purchase. Stephanie Coontz mention a show called Leave it to Beaver. They watched them to see how families were suppose to live – and also to get a little reassurance that they were headed in the right direction” (Coontz 39). This image led to the most common dream myths about America that, most people seem to be in agreements is that everyone can achieve the dream, everyone has equal playing field to obtain the dream, and the American dream is obtainable no matter what race the person is. This is not the case once here; many people soon find this out in their race for happiness.