



The 50s: The Story of a Decade

The New Yorker Magazine

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Including contributions by **Elizabeth Bishop • Truman Capote • John Cheever • Roald Dahl • Janet Flanner • Nadine Gordimer • A. J. Liebling • Dwight Macdonald • Joseph Mitchell • Marianne Moore • Vladimir Nabokov • Sylvia Plath • V. S. Pritchett • Adrienne Rich • Lillian Ross • Philip Roth • Anne Sexton • James Thurber • John Updike • Eudora Welty • E. B. White • Edmund Wilson**

And featuring new perspectives by **Jonathan Franzen • Malcolm Gladwell • Adam Gopnik • Elizabeth Kolbert • Jill Lepore • Rebecca Mead • Paul Muldoon • Evan Osnos • David Remnick**

The 1950s are enshrined in the popular imagination as the decade of poodle skirts and “I Like Ike.” But this was also a complex time, in which the afterglow of Total Victory firmly gave way to Cold War paranoia. A sense of trepidation grew with the Suez Crisis and the H-bomb tests. At the same time, the fifties marked the cultural emergence of extraordinary new energies, like those of Thelonious Monk, Sylvia Plath, and Tennessee Williams.

The New Yorker was there in real time, chronicling the tensions and innovations that lay beneath the era’s placid surface. In this thrilling volume, classic works of reportage, criticism, and fiction are complemented by new contributions from the magazine’s present all-star lineup of writers, including Jonathan Franzen, Malcolm Gladwell, and Jill Lepore.

Here are indelible accounts of the decade’s most exciting players: Truman Capote on Marlon Brando as a pampered young star; Emily Hahn on Chiang Kai-shek in his long Taiwanese exile; and Berton Roueché on Jackson Pollock in his first flush of fame. Ernest Hemingway, Emily Post, Bobby Fischer, and Leonard Bernstein are also brought to vivid life in these pages.

The magazine’s commitment to overseas reporting flourished in the 1950s, leading to important dispatches from East Berlin, the Gaza Strip, and Cuba during the rise of Castro. Closer to home, the fight to break barriers and establish a new American identity led to both illuminating coverage, as in a portrait of Thurgood Marshall at an NAACP meeting in Atlanta, and trenchant commentary, as in E. B. White’s blistering critique of Senator Joe McCarthy.

The arts scene is here recalled in critical writing rarely reprinted, whether it’s Wolcott Gibbs on *My Fair Lady*, Anthony West on *Invisible Man*, or Philip Hamburger on *Candid Camera*. The reader is made witness to the initial response to future cultural touchstones through Edmund Wilson’s galvanizing book review of *Doctor Zhivago* and Kenneth Tynan’s rapturous response to the original production of *Gypsy*.

As always, *The New Yorker* didn’t just consider the arts but contributed to them. Among the audacious young writers who began publishing in the fifties was one who would become a stalwart for the magazine in both fiction and criticism for fifty-five years: John Updike. Also featured here are great early works from Philip Roth and Nadine Gordimer, as well as startling poems by Theodore Roethke and Anne Sexton, among others.

Completing the panoply are insightful and entertaining new pieces by present day *New Yorker* contributors examining the 1950s through contemporary eyes. The result is a vital portrait of American culture as only

one magazine in the world could do it.

Praise for *The 50s*

“Superb: a gift that keeps on giving.”—*Kirkus Reviews* (starred review)

“[A] magnificent anthology.”—*Literary Review*

From the Hardcover edition.

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William Kirby:

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