**Learning Objective:**

Explain how mass culture has been maintained or challenged over time.

**Thematic Focus:**

*Creative expression, demographic change, philosophy, religious beliefs, scientific ideas, social mores, and technology shape national, regional, and group cultures in America, and these varying cultures often play a role in shaping government policy and developing economic systems.*

1. New demographic and social developments, along with anxieties over the Cold War, changed U.S. culture and led to significant political and moral debates that sharply divided the nation.
2. Mass culture became increasingly homogeneous in the postwar years, inspiring challenges to conformity by artists, intellectuals, and rebellious youth.
   1. Television, advertising, and the middle-class movement to the suburbs contributed mightily to the growing homogeneity of American culture. Large corporations of the 1950s promoted teamwork and conformity, including dress codes for workers.
   2. Social commentators criticized the conformity of postwar culture. Critics lambasted most television programs, calling the new medium a “vast wasteland.”
   3. Led by Jack Kerouac, Beat Generation writers, or Beatniks, rejected middle class culture and conformity. In his book *On the Road,* Kerouac expressed the alienation and disillusionment he felt toward mainstream American culture.
   4. Rock and roll first emerged during the 1950s. Rock and roll music was inspired and strongly influenced by Black musical traditions, especially rhythm and blues. Key musicians included Little Richard, Chuck Berry, and Elvis Presley.
   5. Abstract expressionist art emerged in New York City in the late 1940s and early 1950s. Led by Jackson Pollock, abstract expressionist artists abandoned paintings that represented reality. Instead, they created works of art that expressed their state of mind.
   6. Movies stars such as James Dean and Marlon Brando symbolized youthful rebellion.