

## **Call for Papers: Individuality and Community in Mid-Century American Culture (1945-1968)**

One-day symposium, October 27, 2023  
Lund University, Sweden

Mid-century US culture tends to be described in both simplified and paradoxical terms. On the one hand, it is thought of as a period of ‘containment’ culture, ‘Red-Scare’ rhetoric, and McCarthyism: a time when norms were strong, and it was difficult to be different. On the other hand, it is a period romanticized as the great era of American exceptionalism and industry. As today’s politicians from left to right increasingly rely on nostalgia for an idealized past, it becomes relevant to ask questions about the culture and values of mid-century America, and to challenge stereotypical images of this time, especially that of the white, churchgoing nuclear family, which has become an almost indelible image of the ‘long’ 1950s.

At this pivotal moment in American history, the individual was often seen as being in conflict with society. Early Cold-War culture saw an increased focus on the negative effects of social conformity on the individual, whether in the form of Holden Caulfield’s restless depression in Salinger’s *Catcher in the Rye* (1951) or Guy Montag’s awakening from totalitarianism in Bradbury’s *Fahrenheit 451* (1953). Elsewhere, individualism and self-expression were celebrated, as can be seen, for example, in the Beat Generation’s rebellion against conformity and in the deep subjectivity in some of the work of the so-called Confessional Poets.

Conformity was not necessarily only a negative aspect of social life in post-war US, however; the period was also characterized by a very real sense of community and the importance of ‘sticking together’ through thick and thin, especially in the early post-war period. A sense of community can also be noted in how the rights and needs of individual groups of people began to be emphasized, which is clearly seen in how the Civil-Rights movement gained traction and in the burgeoning feminist movement. While some cultural groupings dominated the cultural scene and appear to have been impermeable, marginal groups developed their own literature and arts scene. In *American Literature in Transition*, Stephen Belletto writes that ‘one reason the 1950s can still seem bland and white bread, with a literature to match, is because at the time the same kind of writers tended to be celebrated while whole groups of others were seen as unlitrary’ (4). Further research into alternative cultural output is needed in order to paint a more inclusive and accurate picture of the 1950s, moving beyond WASP culture and the image of the white, nuclear family.

We seek papers that address the topic of individuality and community in mid-century American culture, inviting explorations of the literature, film, art, and thought of the period. We are interested in papers that approach these topics and the period more broadly, but also in papers that focus on individual writers, artists, and thinkers. Topics include but are not limited to:

- Individualism and conformity culture
- Individual and community
- Individual works/authors/artists/thinkers
- Literary groups or movements
- Mainstream or avantgarde perceptions of literature and culture
- The political influence on cultural output
- National or transnational cultural relations and exchanges
- The legacy of mid-century American culture and values

- The legacy of colonialism in mid-century US
- The commercialization of literature and culture
- Cultural representations of family
- Religion
- LGBTQIA+ culture and mid-century America

We invite you to send a 300-word proposal and a short biographical note to [annika.lindskog@englund.lu.se](mailto:annika.lindskog@englund.lu.se) by August 1, 2023. Acceptances will be notified by early September.

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