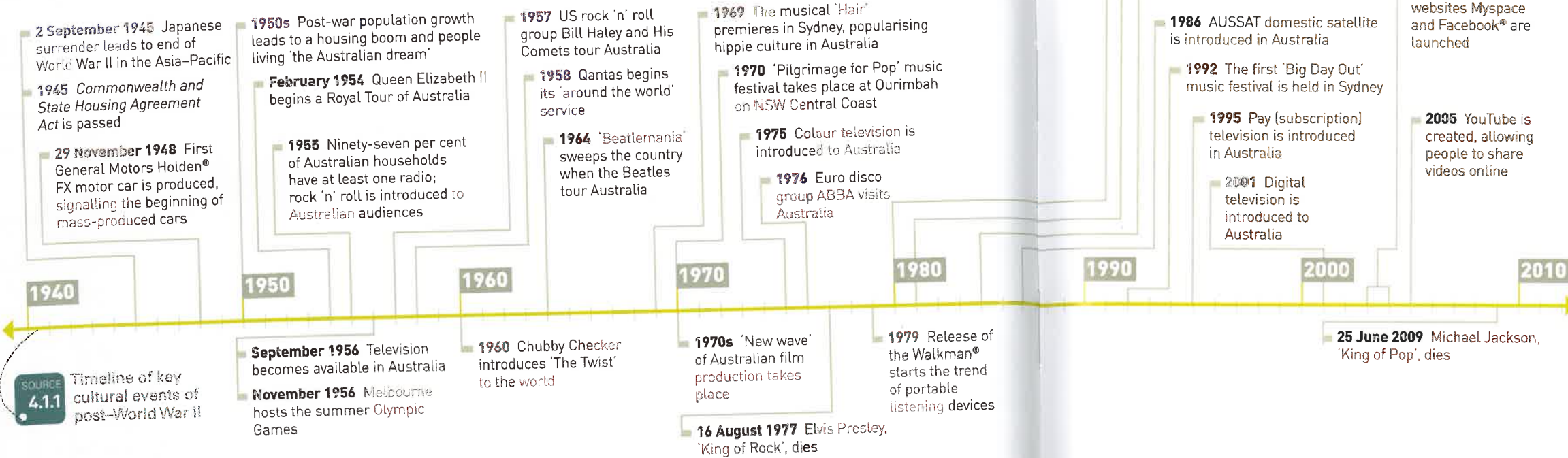


SNAPSHOT 1945–the present



DEFINING 'POPULAR CULTURE'

The term 'popular culture', sometimes called 'mass culture', was used in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as a way of distinguishing the social habits of ordinary people of the lower classes from the 'high culture' pursuits of the more privileged, educated classes. Yet by the mid-twentieth century, this distinction was already becoming meaningless. In the Western world, the impact of consumerism, the mass media and technological change in the second half of the twentieth century was felt by society as a whole. This resulted in many shared interests and activities across all classes.

'POPULAR CULTURE' TODAY?

Popular culture can be seen as a set of behaviours and values shared by a large group or groups within society at a particular period of time. These behaviours and values are displayed in a range of forms, including music, sport, film and television, fashion, and anything else in the public sphere. Popular culture can therefore be seen as largely to do with people's leisure time. However, because popular culture is both produced and consumed, it is directly tied to the economy and the world of work.



SOURCE 4.1.2 Engaging with modern popular culture involves taking advantage of all available communications mediums. The Australian version of the talent television program *The Voice* (2012–) encourages viewers to buy contestants' songs online via Apple iTunes and vote for them by phone, SMS and through social networking websites Facebook and Twitter.

Popular culture is continually evolving; that is, it changes over time. Its dynamic nature can be because of generational change, as one generation challenges the practices and beliefs of previous generations. For that reason, popular culture is often associated with 'youth culture'. Popular culture can also be influenced by changes in the ways people relate to each other. For instance, the arrival of television and later the internet has had profound effects on modes of popular communication. Major world events have also had their part to play in shaping popular culture. For example, the Vietnam War (1955–75) led many people to question some long-held beliefs about the place of war in society and this partly surfaced in popular culture.

Popular culture develops at local, national and international levels, with each level feeding into and affecting the others. For example, rock music emerged in the United States in the late 1950s. By the mid-1960s, the English rock group the Beatles were a national and international success. Their popularity and influence around the world inspired the establishment of similar music groups in other countries, including Australia.



SOURCE 4.1.3 When Bill Haley and His Comets toured in 1957 they introduced Australia to live rock 'n' roll from the United States.

POPULAR CULTURE IN AUSTRALIA

The focus of this chapter is the post-World War II history of popular culture in Australia and how this relates to the evolution of popular culture in an increasingly globalised world. This is different from a focus on what might be called Australia's 'national culture' or 'national identity', or the Australian 'way of life'. However, popular culture in Australia has been influenced by and has influenced the national culture, identity and way of life. Similarly, various aspects of popular culture have been important in redefining, or have been used to redefine, what it means to be 'Australian'.