

Postwar America at Home, 1945–1960



The post–World War II years saw tremendous suburban development, which reflected the more general economic growth and economic prosperity of the period. (*Robert Bechtle, '58 Rambler, 1967. Gift of Mrs. McCauley Conner in memory of her father, Barklie McK. Henry, Brauer Museum of Art, 72.03, Valparaiso University*)

American Stories

An Entrepreneur Franchises the American Dream

Ray Kroc, an ambitious salesman, headed toward San Bernardino, California, on a business trip in 1954. For more than a decade he had been selling “multimixers”—stainless steel machines that could make six milkshakes at once—to restaurants and soda shops around the United States. On this trip, he was particularly interested in check-

ing out a hamburger stand run by Richard and Maurice McDonald, who had bought eight of his “contraptions” and could therefore make 48 shakes at the same time.

Always eager to increase sales, Kroc wanted to see the McDonalds’ operation for himself. The 52-year-old son of Bohemian parents had sold everything from real estate to radio time to paper cups before peddling the multimixers but had enjoyed no stunning success. Yet he was still on the alert for the key to the fortune that was part of the American dream. As he watched the lines of people at the San Bernardino McDonald’s restaurant, the answer seemed at hand.

The McDonald brothers sold only standard hamburgers, french fries, and milkshakes, but they had developed a system that was fast, efficient, and clean. It drew on the automobile traffic that moved along Route 66. And it was profitable indeed. Sensing the possibilities, Kroc proposed that the two owners open other establishments as well. When they balked, he negotiated a 99-year contract that allowed him to sell the fast-food idea and the name—and their golden arches design—wherever he could.

On April 15, 1955, Kroc opened his first McDonald’s restaurant in Des Plaines, a suburb of Chicago. Three months later, he sold his first franchise in Fresno, California. Others soon followed. Kroc scouted out new locations, almost always on highway “strips”; persuaded people to put up the capital; and provided them with specifications guaranteed to ensure future success. For his efforts, he received a percentage of the gross take.

From the start, Kroc insisted on standardization. Every McDonald’s restaurant was the same—from the two functional arches supporting the glass enclosure that housed the kitchen and take-out window to the single arch near the road bearing a sign indicating how many 15-cent hamburgers had already been sold. All menus and prices were exactly the same, and Kroc demanded that everything from hamburger size to cooking time be constant. He insisted, too, that the establishments be clean. No pinball games or cigarette machines were permitted; the premium was on a good, inexpensive hamburger, quickly served, at a nice place.

McDonald’s, of course, was an enormous success. In 1962, total sales exceeded \$76 million. In 1964, before the company had been in operation for 10 years, it had sold more than 400 million hamburgers and 120 million pounds of french fries. By the end of the next year, there were 710 McDonald’s stands in 44 states. In 1974, only 20 years after Kroc’s vision of the hamburger’s future, McDonald’s did \$2 billion worth of business. When Kroc died in 1984, a total of 45 billion burgers had been sold at 7,500 outlets in 32 countries. Ronald McDonald, the clown who came to represent the company, became known to children around the globe after his Washington, D.C., debut in November 1963. When McDonald’s began to advertise, it became the country’s first restaurant to buy television time. Musical slogans such as “You deserve a break today” and “We do it all for you” became better known than some popular songs.

The success of McDonald’s provides an example of the development of new economic and technological trends in the United States in the post–World War II years. Ray Kroc capitalized on the changes of the automobile age. He understood that a restaurant had a better chance of success not in the city but along the highways, where it could draw on heavier traffic. Kroc understood, too, that the franchise notion provided the key to rapid economic growth. Finally, he sensed the importance of standardization and uniformity. He understood the mood of the time—the quiet conformity of people searching for the key to the American dream of prosperity and stability. The McDonald’s image may have been monotonous, but that was part of its appeal. Customers always knew what they would get wherever they found the golden arches. If the atmosphere was “bland,” that too was deliberate. As Kroc said, “Our theme is

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kind of synonymous with Sunday school, the Girl Scouts and the YMCA. McDonald's is clean and wholesome." It was a symbol of the age.

This chapter describes the structural and political changes in American society in the 25 years following World War II. Even as the nation became involved in the global confrontations of the Cold War with the Soviet Union (a story taken up in Chapter 27), Americans were preoccupied with the shifts in social and economic patterns that were taking place. This chapter examines how economic growth, spurred by technological advances, transformed the patterns of work and daily life in the United States. Self-interest triumphed over idealism, as most people gained a level of material comfort previously unknown. Comforted by a renewed commitment to organized religion that involved people of all persuasions, they felt confident in the patterns of their lives. The political world reflected the prosperity and affluence that followed years of depression and war. Building on the impact

of the New Deal and the American role as the "arsenal of democracy" in World War II, government was larger and more involved in people's lives than ever before, despite Republican resistance in the 1950s. Political commitments in the decade and a half after the war laid the groundwork for the welfare state that emerged in the 1960s.

But even as the nation prospered, it experienced serious social and economic divisions among its diverse peoples. This chapter also shows the enormous gaps that existed between rich and poor, even in the best of times. It shows the continuing presence of what one critic eloquently called "the other America" and documents the considerable income disparity and persistent prejudice that African Americans (like members of other minority groups) encountered in their efforts to share in the postwar prosperity. The frustrations they experienced highlighted the limits of the postwar American dream and led to the reform movements that changed American society.

ECONOMIC BOOM

Most Americans were optimistic after 1945. As servicemen returned home from fighting in World War II, their very presence caused a change in family patterns. A baby boom brought unprecedented population growth. The simultaneous and unexpected economic boom had an even greater impact. Large corporations increasingly dominated the business world, but unions grew as well, and most workers improved their lives. Technology appeared triumphant, with new products flooding the market and finding their way into most American homes. Prosperity convinced the growing middle class that all was well in the United States.

The Thriving Peacetime Economy

The wartime return of prosperity after the Great Depression continued in the postwar years, relieving fears of another depression. The next several decades saw one of the longest sustained economic expansions the country had ever known, as the United States solidified its position as the richest nation in the world. Other nations struggled with the aftereffects of World War II. Yet in the United States, prosperity was the norm.

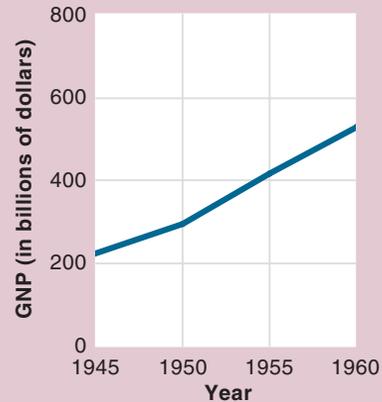
The statistical evidence of economic success was impressive. The gross national product (GNP) jumped dramatically between 1945 and 1960, while

per capita personal income likewise rose—from \$1,087 in 1945 to \$2,026 in 1960. Almost 60 percent of all families in the country were now part of the middle class, a dramatic change from the class structure in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

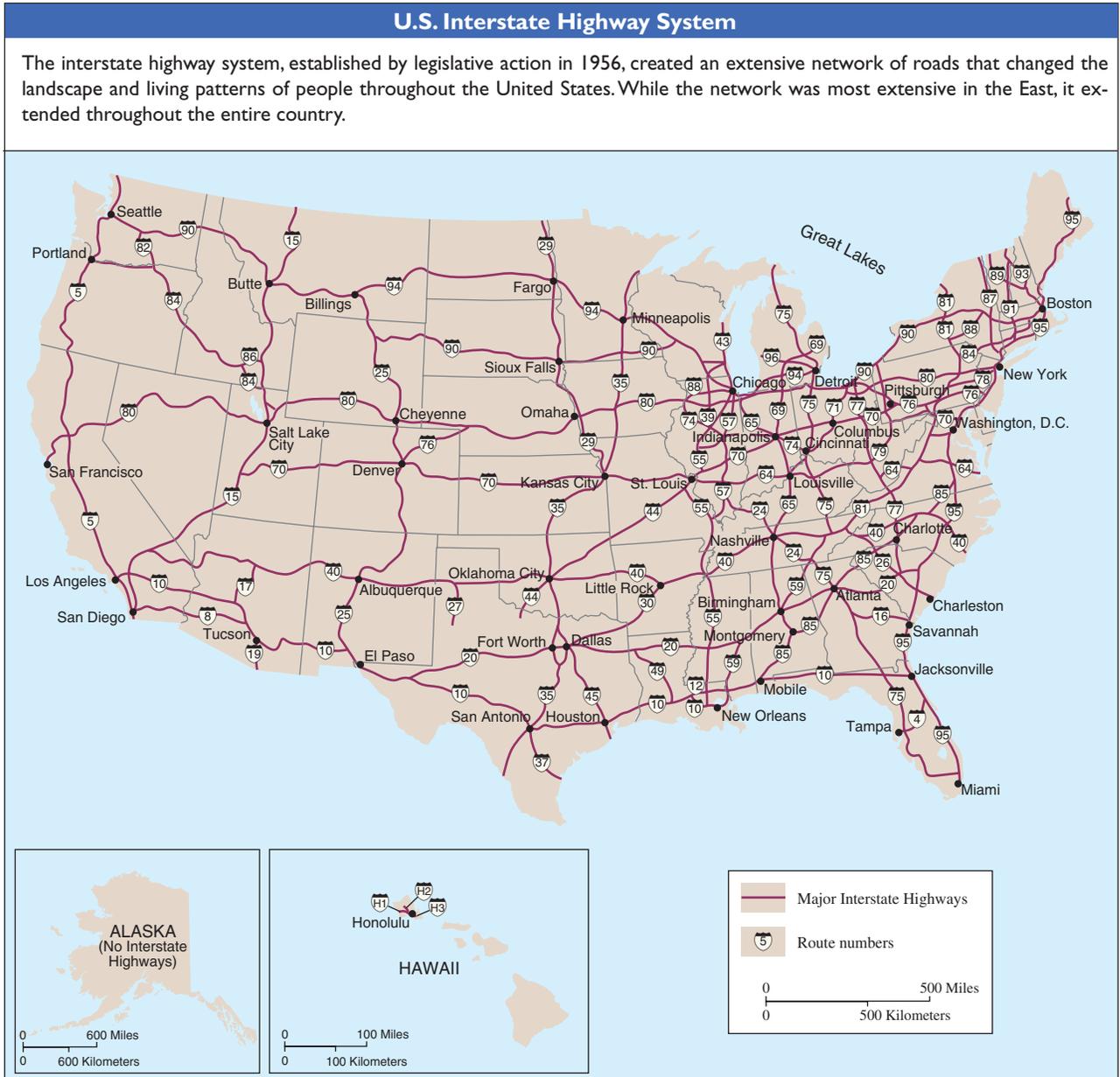
Personal resources fueled economic growth. During World War II, American consumers had

Increase in GNP, 1945–1960

The gross national product (GNP) rose steadily in the decade and a half after World War II as the United States enjoyed an unprecedented period of prosperity.



Source: National Income and Product Accounts, 1929–1994.



been unable to spend all they earned because factories were producing for war. With accumulated savings of \$140 billion at the end of the struggle, consumers were ready to buy whatever they could. Equally important was the 22 percent rise in real purchasing power between 1946 and 1960. Families now had far more discretionary income—money to satisfy wants as well as needs—than before. At the end of the Great Depression, fewer than one-quarter of all households had any discretionary income; in 1960, three of every five did.

This new consumer power, in contrast to the underconsumption of the 1920s and 1930s, spurred the economy. Most homes now had an automobile, a television set, a refrigerator, a washing machine,

and a vacuum cleaner. But consumers could also indulge themselves with electric can openers, electric pencil sharpeners, electric toothbrushes, aerosol cans, and automatic transmissions for their cars.

The automobile industry played a key part in the boom. Just as cars and roads transformed America in the 1920s when mass production came of age, so they contributed to the equally great transformation three decades later. Limited to the production of military vehicles during World War II, the auto industry expanded dramatically in the postwar period. Seventy thousand cars were made in 1945; 8 million were manufactured in 1955; and not quite 7 million were produced in 1960. Customers now chose from a wide variety of engines, colors, and

optional accessories. Fancy grilles and tail fins distinguished each year's models.

The development of a massive interstate highway system also stimulated auto production and so contributed to prosperity. Rather than encourage the growth of a mass transit system, through the Interstate Highway Act of 1956, the Eisenhower administration poured \$26 billion, the largest public works expenditure in American history, into building more than 40,000 miles of federal highways, linking all parts of the United States. Federal officials claimed the system would make evacuation quicker in the event of nuclear attack. President Eisenhower boasted that “the amount of concrete poured to form these roadways would build . . . six sidewalks to the moon. . . . More than any single action by the government since the end of the war, this one would change the face of America.” Significantly, this massive effort helped create a nation dependent on oil.

A housing boom also fed economic growth as home-ownership rates rose from 53 percent in 1945 to 62 percent in 1960. Much of the stimulus came from the GI Bill of 1944. In addition to giving returning servicemen priority for many jobs and providing educational benefits, it offered low-interest home mortgages. Millions of former servicemen from all social classes eagerly purchased their share of the American dream.

The government's increasingly active economic role both stimulated and sustained the expansion. Businesses were allowed to buy almost 80 percent of the factories built by the government during the war for much less than they cost. Even more important was the dramatic rise in defense spending as the Cold War escalated. In 1947, Congress passed the National Security Act creating the Department of Defense and authorized an initial budget of \$13 billion. With the onset of the Korean War, the defense budget rose to \$22 billion in 1951 and to about \$47 billion in 1953. Approximately half of the total federal budget went to the armed forces. This spending, in turn, helped stimulate the aircraft and electronic industries. The government underwrote 90 percent of aviation and space research, 65 percent of electricity and electronics work, and 42 percent of scientific instrument development. Meanwhile, the close business–government ties of World War II grew stronger.

Most citizens welcomed the huge expenditures, not only because they supported the American stance in the struggle against communism but also because they understood the economic impact of military spending. Columnist David Lawrence noted in 1950, “Government planners figure they have found the magic formula for almost endless

good times. Cold war is an automatic pump primer. Turn a spigot, and the public clamors for more arms spending.”

Postwar American growth avoided some of the major problems that often bedevil periods of economic expansion—inflation and the enrichment of a few at the expense of the many. Inflation, a problem in the immediate postwar period, slowed from an average of 7 percent per year in the 1940s to a gentle 2 to 3 percent per year in the 1950s. And though the concentration of income remained the same—the bottom half of the population still earned less than the top tenth—the ranks of middle-class Americans grew.

American products were sold around the world. People in other countries had developed a taste for Coca-Cola during the war. Now numerous other goods became available overseas. American books, magazines, movies, and records promoted the spread of American culture and provided still more profits for American entrepreneurs.

A major economic transformation had occurred in the United States. Peaceful, prosperous, and productive, the nation had become what economist John Kenneth Galbraith called the “affluent society.”

Postwar Growth Around the World

Elsewhere in the world, postwar reconstruction began but affluence took longer to arrive. Both European and Asian countries had suffered greater casualties than the United States, and some nations, even those on the winning side, had to deal with the enormous devastation that had taken place.

Great Britain was ravaged by the war. German bombs had fallen on downtown London, and residents had used the underground—the extensive subway system—to take shelter from the attacks. Rationing in England, necessary to provide the equitable distribution of scarce resources, lasted until the early 1950s. British factories, which had been the first to industrialize, were now inefficient and outdated. Home of the Industrial Revolution, England now failed to keep up with the rapid pace of technological innovation. The British automobile industry, for example, yielded part of its share of the world market to other nations, such as Germany, which introduced the inexpensive and reliable Volkswagen Beetle that was soon sold around the world. Meanwhile, Britain lagged behind other European nations in developing a modern superhighway system that could spur industrial development.

In the general election of 1945, British voters ousted Winston Churchill and the Conservative party in favor of the Labour party, which was committed to

social change. It took over the coal and railroad industries and began to nationalize the steel industry. While owners were compensated, some critics argued that the government's actions stifled industrial progress. Nevertheless, Great Britain began an economic and social recovery. It even provided a system of socialized medicine far in advance of anything in the United States.

While France was on the winning side of the war, it had suffered the indignity of occupation. It, too, experienced recovery, thanks in part to a rising birthrate, which was also occurring in the United States. At the same time, France, like Britain, was struggling with the demands of its colonial empire to be free. Brutal struggles in Indochina and Algeria caused financial instability and helped undermine economic development until France pulled out of both areas in the 1950s.

Defeated nations showed the most dramatic development of all. As the United States decided that a strong West Germany was necessary as a buffer against the Soviet Union, it helped cause what came to be known as “the German miracle.” Because much of German industrial capacity had been destroyed by the war, new factories could be built with the newest technological equipment. The Allied High Commission, responsible for governing Germany, provided economic aid, scaled down German debts, and eliminated controls over German industry. In the early 1950s, the West German rate of growth reached 10 percent a year, while the gross national product rose from \$23 billion in 1950 to \$103 billion in 1964.

Japan likewise revived quickly. Like Germany, it suffered tremendous wartime destruction, due to both conventional bombing and to the new atomic bombs that devastated Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945. Under the direction of General Douglas MacArthur, the United States directed the reconstruction effort. A new constitution created a democratic framework and led to the signing of a peace treaty in 1952. As political change occurred, the economy grew rapidly, and Japan overtook France and West Germany, soon ranking third in the world behind the United States and the Soviet Union.

So too did the Soviet Union rebuild. Reparations from West Germany and industrial extractions from Eastern Europe helped promote the reconstruction effort. The totalitarian structure of the Soviet state eliminated public debate about the allocation of resources, and the nation embarked on a series of initiatives that led to the development of a Soviet atomic bomb and an increase in the size of collective farms.

The Corporate Impact on American Life

After 1945, the major corporations in the United States tightened their hold on the American economy. Government policy in World War II had produced tremendous industrial concentration. The government suspended antitrust actions that might impede the war effort, while government contracts spurred expansion of the big corporations at the expense of smaller firms.

Industrial concentration continued after the war, making oligopoly—domination of a given industry by a few firms—a feature of American capitalism. Several waves of mergers had taken place in the past, including one in the 1890s and another in the 1920s. Still another occurred in the 1950s. At the same time, the booming economy encouraged the development of conglomerates—firms with holdings in a variety of industries in order to protect themselves against instability in one particular area.



McDonald's Golden Arches McDonald's provided a model for other franchisers in the 1950s and the years that followed. The golden arches, shown here in an early version, were virtually the same wherever they appeared. Initially found along highways around the country, they were later built within cities and towns as well. How did the golden arches contribute to McDonald's popularity? (Sandy Felsenhall/CORBIS)

Expansion took other forms as well. Even as the major corporations grew, so did smaller franchise operations such as McDonald’s, Kentucky Fried Chicken, and Burger King. Ray Kroc, introduced at the start of this chapter, provided a widely imitated pattern.

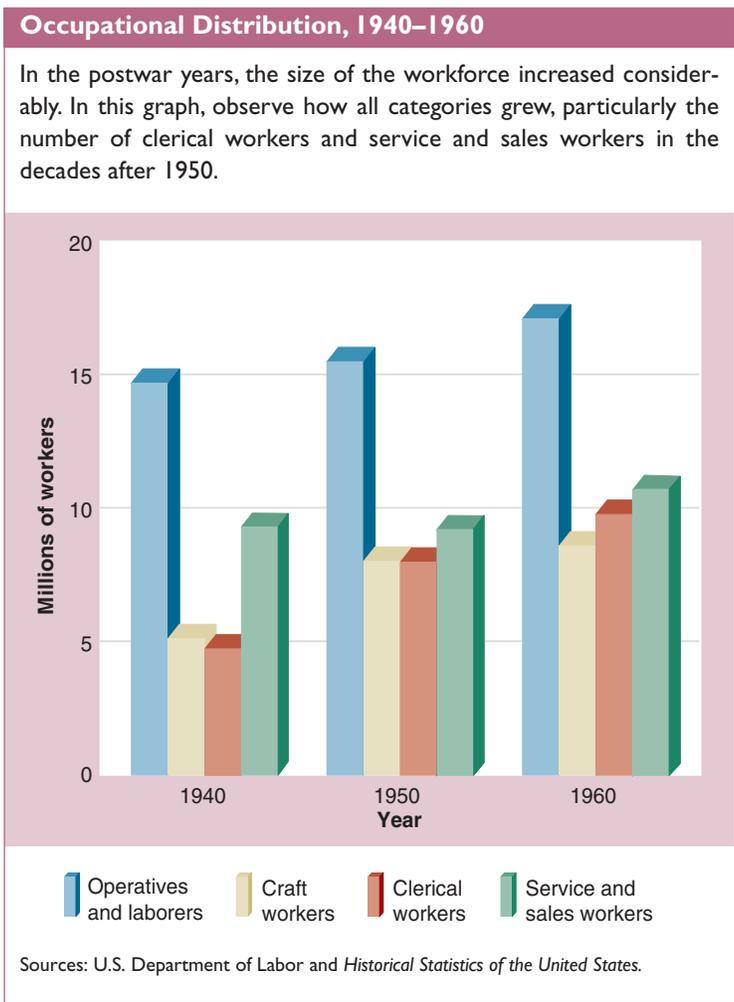
While expanding at home, large corporations also moved increasingly into foreign markets, as they had in the 1890s. But at the same time, they began to build plants overseas, where labor costs were cheaper. In the decade after 1957, General Electric built 61 plants abroad, and numerous other firms did the same. Corporate planning, meanwhile, developed rapidly, as firms sought managers who could assess information, weigh marketing trends, and make rational decisions to maximize profit.

Changing Work Patterns

As corporations changed, so did the world of work. Reversing a 150-year trend after World War II, the

United States became less a goods producer and more a service provider. Between 1947 and 1957, the number of factory workers fell by 4 percent, while the number of clerical workers increased 23 percent and the number of salaried, middle-class employees rose 61 percent. By 1956, a majority of American workers held white-collar jobs, and the percentage rose in the years that followed. These new white-collar workers, paid by salary rather than by the hour, served as corporate managers, office workers, salespeople, and teachers.

Yet white-collar employees paid a price for comfort. Work in the huge corporations became ever more impersonal and bureaucratic, and white-collar employees seemed to dress, think, and act the same (as depicted in a popular novel and film of the 1950s, *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit*). Corporations, preaching that teamwork was all-important, indoctrinated employees with the appropriate standards of conduct. RCA issued company neckties. IBM had training programs to teach employees the company line. Social critic C. Wright Mills observed,





Suburban Commuters Commuters, such as these people in Park Forest, Illinois, in 1953, traveled from the suburbs to offices in the city every day. How would you describe the appearance of these commuters? Are there more men or women? How closely do they resemble one another? (*Time Life Pictures/Getty Images*)

“When white-collar people get jobs, they sell not only their time and energy but their personalities as well.”

But not all Americans held white-collar jobs. Many were still blue-collar assembly line workers, who made the goods others enjoyed. They too dreamed of owning a suburban home and several cars and providing more for their children than they had enjoyed while growing up. Their lives were now more comfortable than ever before, as the union movement brought substantial gains. These were the more fortunate members of the working class. Millions of others, perhaps totaling 40 percent of the workforce, held less appealing and less well-paying positions. More and more worked as taxi drivers, farm laborers, or dime-store sales clerks. For them, jobs were less stable, less secure, and less interesting.

The Union Movement at High Tide

The union movement had come of age during the New Deal, and the end of World War II found it even stronger. There were more union members—14.5

million—than ever before. Ten million belonged to the American Federation of Labor (AFL); the other 4.5 million belonged to the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO). Having taken a wartime no-strike pledge and given their full support to the war effort, they now looked forward to better pay and a greater voice in workplace management.

The immediate postwar period was difficult. Cancellation of defense orders laid off war workers and prompted fears of a depression, like the one that had followed World War I. Even workers who held their jobs lost the overtime pay they had enjoyed during the war. Many responded by striking. In 1946 alone, 4.6 million workers went out on strike—more than ever before in U.S. history. There were work stoppages in the automobile, coal, steel, and electrical industries and a threatened strike by railway workers. These disruptions alienated middle-class Americans and outraged conservative Republicans who felt that unionization had gone too far.

In the late 1940s, a new equilibrium emerged. In many industries, big business at last recognized the basic rights of industrial workers, and union leaders and members in turn acknowledged the prerogatives of management and accepted the principle of fair profit. Corporations in the same industry agreed to cooperate rather than compete with one another over labor costs. This meant that once a leading firm reached agreement with the union, the other firms in that area adopted similar terms, and the costs of the new contract would be met by a general increase in prices.

At the same time, companies made material concessions to workers—for example, adjusting their pay to protect them against inflation. In 1948, General Motors offered the United Auto Workers a contract that included a cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) and a 2 percent “annual improvement factor” wage increase intended to share GM’s productivity gains with workers. In 1950, GM again took the lead, this time with a five-year agreement providing pensions along with a cost-of-living adjustment and wage increase. Five years later, automobile workers won a guaranteed annual wage. The merger of the AFL and CIO in 1955 ratified the changes that had occurred in the labor movement, as the new organization, led by building trade unionist George Meany, represented more than 90 percent of the country’s now larger group of 17.5 million union members. By the end of the 1950s, the COLA principle was built into most union contracts.

Union gains, like middle-class affluence, came at a price. Co-opted by the materialistic benefits big business provided, workers fell increasingly under

the control of middle-level managers and watched anxiously as companies automated at home or expanded abroad, where labor was cheaper. But the agreements they had reached often precluded any response. The anti-Communist crusade, described in the next chapter, also undermined union radicalism. And throughout the period, in unions, as in other institutions, women and blacks faced continued discrimination.

Agricultural Workers in Trouble

The agricultural world changed even more than the industrial world in the postwar United States. On the eve of World War II, agriculture had supported one of every five Americans. Now, in one generation, mechanization and consolidation forced that figure down to one of every 20. Altogether, some 15 million rural jobs disappeared.

New technology revolutionized farming. Improved planting and harvesting machines and better fertilizers and pesticides brought massive gains in productivity. Increasing profitability led to agricultural consolidation. In the 25 years after 1945, average farm size almost doubled. Farms specialized more in cash crops, such as corn or soybeans, that were more profitable than hay or oats used to feed animals. Demanding large-scale investment, farming became a big business—often called “agribusiness.” Family farms found it difficult to compete with the technologically superior corporations and watched their share of the market fall.

In response, farmers left the land in increasing numbers. Some were midwestern whites who generally found jobs in offices and factories. In the South, the upheaval was more disruptive. Many of the uprooted agricultural workers were African Americans, who became part of the huge migration north that had been going on since World War I. Overall, from 1910 to 1970, more than 6.5 million African Americans left the South; of these, 5 million moved north after 1940. Most of them gravitated to cities, where they faced problems of poverty and discrimination in housing and employment. The agricultural life, as it had been known for decades, even centuries, was over.

DEMOGRAPHIC AND TECHNOLOGICAL SHIFTS

The postwar economic boom was intertwined with a series of demographic changes. The population grew dramatically and continued to move west, while at the same time, millions of white Americans left the

cities for the suburbs that began to grow exponentially in the postwar years. New patterns, revolving around television and other gadgets provided by the advances of technology, came to characterize the consumer culture that dominated suburban life.

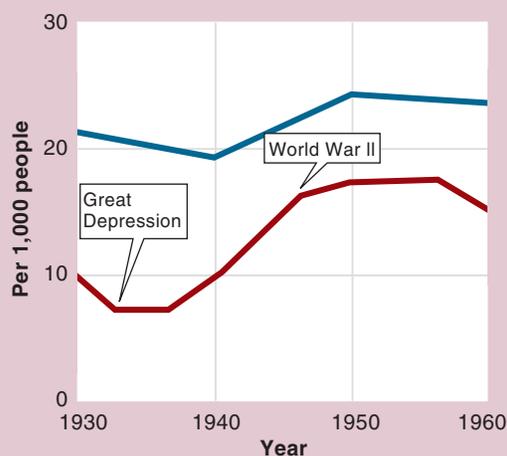
Population Growth

In post–World War II America, a growing population testified to prosperity’s return. The birthrate soared in the postwar years as millions of Americans began families. The “baby boom” peaked in 1957, with a rate of more than 25 births per 1,000. In that year, 4.3 million babies were born, one every seven seconds. While the population growth of 19 million in the 1940s was double the rise of the decade before, that increase paled against the increase in the 1950s, which totaled 29 million.

The rising birthrate was the dominant factor affecting population growth, but the death rate was also declining. Miracle drugs such as penicillin and streptomycin, now widely available, helped cure strep throat and other bacterial infections, intestinal ailments, and more serious illnesses such as tuberculosis. A polio vaccine introduced a decade after the war virtually eliminated that dreaded disease. Life expectancy rose: midway through the 1950s, the

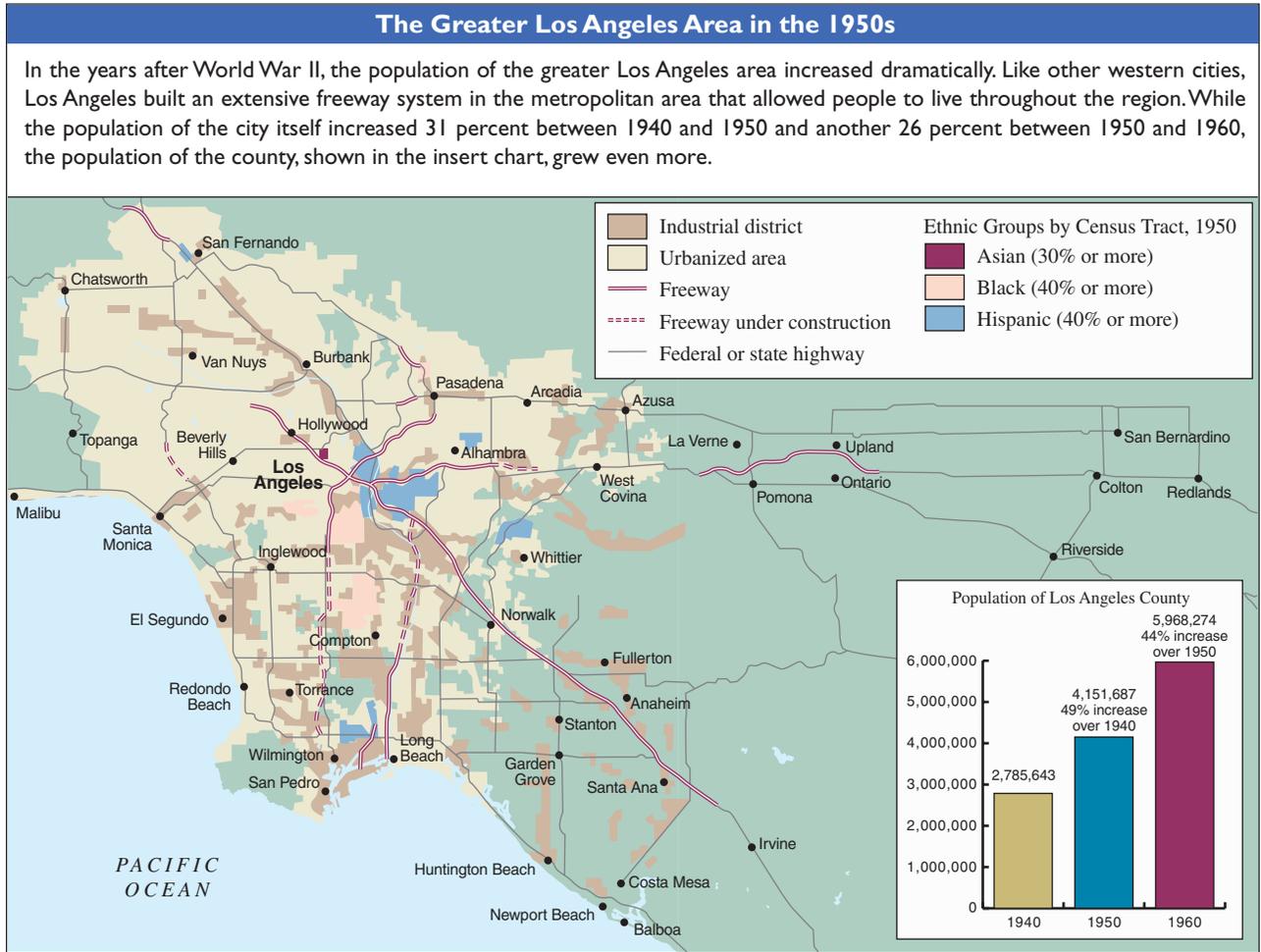
Birth and Population Growth Rates, 1900–1960

Both birth and population growth rates increased dramatically after the difficult years of the Great Depression. Note the baby boom that began at the end of World War II and continued for the next decade.



— Birthrate — Population growth rate

Sources: U.S. Bureau of the Census and *Statistical Abstract of the United States*.



average was 70 years for whites and 64 for blacks, compared with 55 for whites and 45 for blacks in 1920.

The baby boom shaped family and social patterns. Many women who had taken jobs during the war now left the workforce to rear their children and care for their homes. Their lives changed considerably as they substituted housework for paid work. Demand grew for diaper services and baby foods. Entering school, the baby-boom generation strained the educational system. Between 1946 and 1956, enrollment in grades 1 through 8 soared from 20 million to 30 million. Because school construction had slowed during the Depression and had virtually halted during the Second World War, classrooms were needed. Teachers, too, were in short supply.

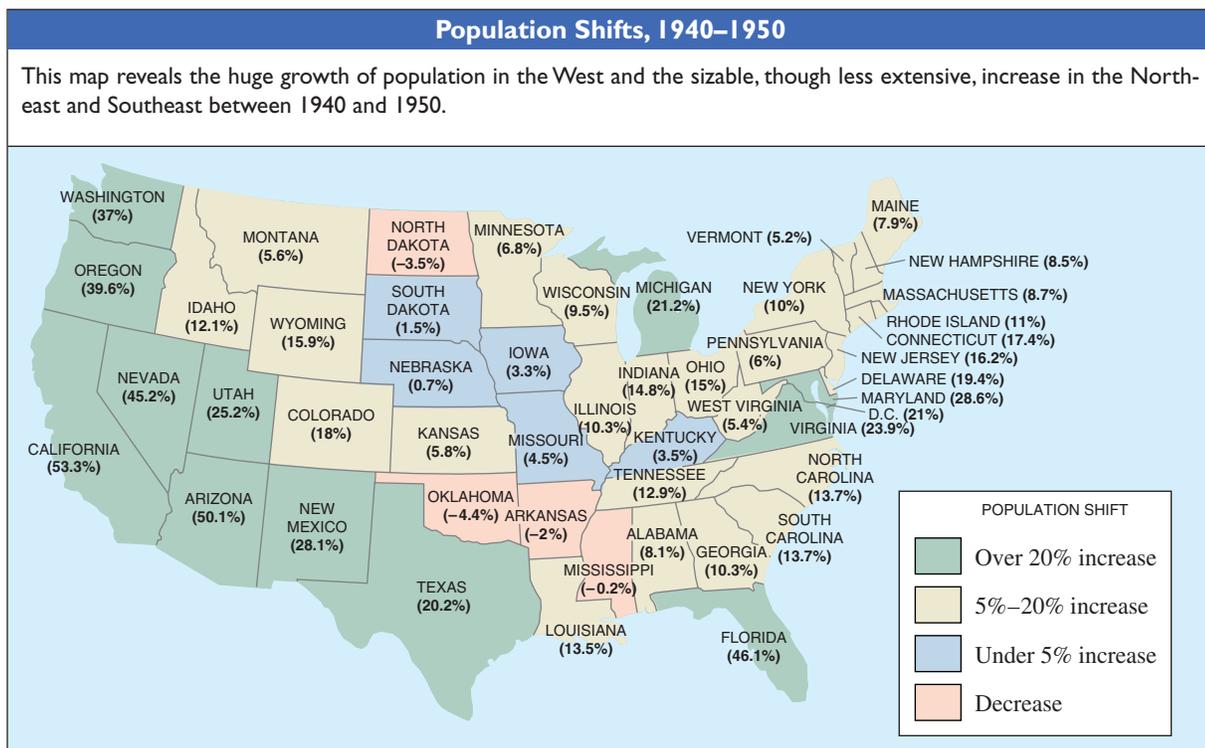
Movement West

As the population grew, Americans became more mobile, and much of the movement was westward.

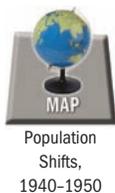
For many generations, working-class Americans had been the most likely to move; now geographic mobility spread to the middle class. Each year in the 1950s, more than a million farmers left their farms in search of new employment. Other Americans pulled up stakes and headed on as well, some moving to look for better jobs, others simply wandering for a while after returning home from the war and then settling down.

Population Increases in Selected Sun Belt Cities, 1940–1960 (in thousands)			
	1940	1950	1960
Los Angeles, California	1,504	1,970	2,479
Miami, Florida	172	249	292
Atlanta, Georgia	302	331	487
Dallas, Texas	295	434	680
Phoenix, Arizona	65	107	439

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census.



War-time mobility encouraged the development of the West. Although the scarcity of water in the western states required massive water projects to support population growth, war workers and their families streamed to western cities where shipyards, airplane factories, and other industrial plants were located. After the war, this migration pattern persisted. The Sun Belt—the region stretching along the southern tier of the United States from Florida to California—attracted numerous new arrivals. Cities such as Houston, Albuquerque, Tucson, and Phoenix expanded phenomenally. The population of Phoenix soared from 65,000 in 1940 to 439,000 in 1960. In the 1950s, Los Angeles pulled ahead of Philadelphia as the third-largest city in the United States.



One-fifth of all the growth in the period took place in California. Even baseball teams—the Brooklyn Dodgers and the New York Giants—left the East Coast for western shores. By 1963, in a dramatic illustration of the importance of the West, California passed New York as the nation’s most populous state.

The migration west occurred for a number of reasons. Servicemen who had been stationed in the West liked the scenery, climate, and pace of life. Many returned with their families after the war. With funds from the Federal Housing Administration or

Veterans Administration, they could afford to borrow money and buy new homes. That spending, in turn, helped fuel the region’s economic growth.

In addition, Cold War spending promoted economic development, and much of that expansion occurred in the West. Once the Korean War sparked increased military expenditures, California’s economic growth outpaced that of the country as a whole. Aircraft production in the state accounted for more than 40 percent of the total increase in manufacturing employment there between 1949 and 1953. In the 1950s, rocket research further stimulated the aerospace industry. In 1959, California had nearly one-quarter of all prime military contracts in the nation. By 1962, the Pacific Coast as a whole held almost half of all Defense Department research and development contracts.

Finally, the West benefited from the boom in the service economy. Many western workers in postwar America were part of the growing service sector. The percentage of workers in such jobs was higher in virtually all western states than in eastern counterparts. Denver became a major regional center of the federal bureaucracy in the postwar years. From 14,000 people on the payroll in 1951, the number rose to 23,000 in 1961. Albuquerque likewise gained numerous federal offices and became known as “little Washington.” The old West of cowboys, farmers,

and miners was turning into a new West of bureaucrats, lawyers, and clerks.

The New Suburbs

As the population shifted westward after World War II, another form of movement was taking place. Millions of white Americans fled the inner city to suburban fringes, intensifying a movement that had begun before the war. Fourteen of the nation’s largest cities, including New York, Boston, Chicago, Philadelphia, and Detroit, actually lost population in the 1950s. As central cities became places where poor nonwhites clustered, new urban and racial problems emerged.

For people of means, cities were places to work in but then to leave at five o’clock. In Manhattan, south of the New York borough’s City Hall, the noon-time population of 1.5 million dropped to 2,000 overnight. “It was becoming a part-time city,” according to writer John Brooks, “tidally swamped with bustling humanity every weekday morning when the cars and commuter trains arrived, and abandoned again at nightfall when the wave sucked back—left pretty much to thieves, policemen, and rats.”

As the cities declined, new suburbs blossomed. If the decade after World War I had witnessed a rural-to-urban shift, the decades after World War II saw a reverse shift to the regions outside the central cities, usually accessible only by car. By the end of the

1950s, one-third of all Americans resided in suburbs that promised fulfillment of the American dream and seemed insulated from the troubles of the world outside.

The pioneer of the postwar suburbanization movement was William J. Levitt, a builder eager to gamble and reap the rewards of a growing demand. Levitt had recognized the advantages of mass production during World War II, when his firm constructed housing for war workers. Aware that the GI Bill made mortgage money readily available, he saw the possibilities of suburban development. But to cash in, Levitt had to use new construction methods.

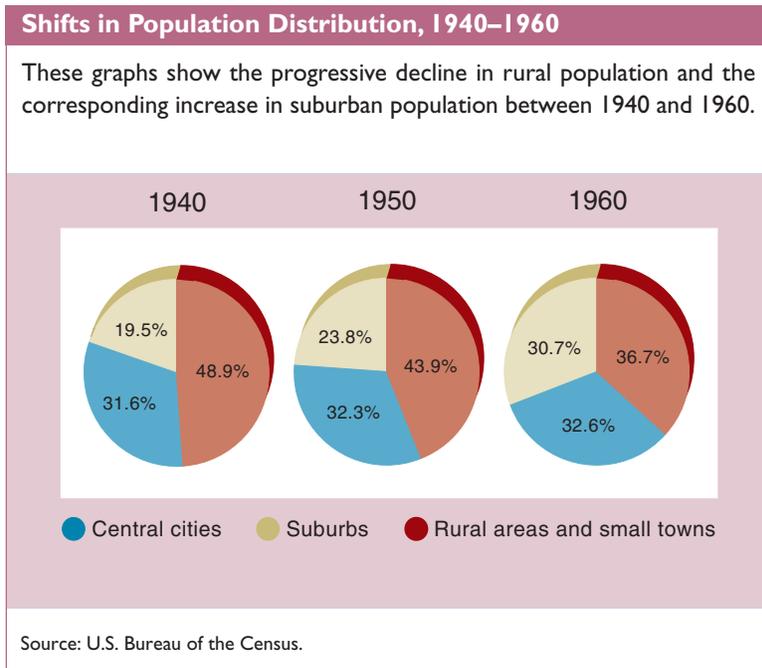
Mass production was the key. Individually designed houses were a thing of the past, he believed. “The reason we have it so good in this country,” he said, “is that we can produce lots of things at low prices through mass production.” Houses were among them. Working on a careful schedule, Levitt’s team brought precut and preassembled materials to each site, put them together, and then moved on to the next location.

Levitt proved that his system worked. Construction costs at Levittown, New York, a new community of 17,000 homes built in the late 1940s, were only \$10 per square foot, compared with the \$12 to \$15 common elsewhere. The next Levittown appeared in Bucks County, Pennsylvania, several years after the first, and another went up in Willingboro, New Jersey, at the end of the 1950s. Levitt’s success provided a model for other developers.



Levitt argued that his homes helped underscore American values. “No man who owns his own house and lot can be a Communist,” he once said. “He has too much to do.” Levitt also helped perpetuate segregation by refusing to sell homes to blacks. “We can solve a housing problem, or we can try to solve a racial problem but we cannot combine the two,” he declared in the early 1950s.

Government-insured mortgages, especially for veterans, fueled the housing boom. So did fairly low postwar interest rates. With many American families vividly remembering the Depression and saving significant parts of their paychecks, the nation had a pool of savings large enough to keep mortgage interest rates in the affordable 5 percent range.





Levittown Step-by-step mass production, with units completed in assembly line fashion, was the key to William Levitt's approach to housing. But the suburban developments he and others created were marked by street after street of houses that all looked the same. The Levittown in this picture was built on 1,200 acres of potato fields on Long Island in New York. How did the pattern you see here reflect the overall culture of the 1950s? (Cornell Capa/Magnum Photos, Inc.)

Suburbanization transformed the American landscape. Huge tracts of former fields, pastures, and forests were now divided into tiny standardized squares, each bearing a small house with a two-car garage and a manicured lawn. Stands of trees disappeared, for it was cheaper to cut them down than to work around them. Folksinger Malvina Reynolds described the new developments she saw:



*Little boxes on the hillside
 Little boxes made of ticky tacky
 Little boxes on the hillside
 Little boxes all the same.
 There's a green one and a pink one
 And a blue one and a yellow one
 And they're all made out of ticky tacky
 And they all look just the same.*

As suburbs flourished, businesses followed their customers out of the cities. Shopping centers led the way. At the end of World War II, there were eight, but the number multiplied rapidly in the 1950s. In a single

three-month period in 1957, 17 new centers opened; by 1960, there were 3,840 in the United States. Developers such as Don M. Casto, who built the Miracle Mile near Columbus, Ohio, understood the importance of location as Americans moved out of the cities. "People have path-habits," he said, "like ants." Shopping centers catered to the suburban clientele and transformed consumer patterns. They allowed shoppers to avoid the cities entirely and further eroded urban health.

The Environmental Impact

Suburbanization had environmental consequences. Rapid expansion often took place without extensive planning and encroached on some of the nation's most attractive rural areas. Before long, virtually every American city was ringed by an ugly highway sporting garish neon signs. Billboard advertisements filled whatever space was not yet developed.

Responding to the increasingly cluttered terrain, architect Peter Blake ruthlessly attacked the practices of the 1950s in his muckraking book *God's Own Junkyard: The Planned Deterioration of America's Landscape*, published in 1964. He condemned the careless attitudes toward the environment that led to the "uglification" of a once lovely land. After describing breathtaking natural resources, Blake deplored the unconscionable desecration of the American landscape:

Our suburbs are interminable wastelands dotted with millions of monotonous little houses on monotonous little lots and crisscrossed by highways lined with billboards, jazzed-up diners, used-car lots, drive-in movies, beflagged gas stations, and garish motels. Even the relatively unspoiled countryside beyond these suburban fringes has begun to sprout more telephone poles than trees, more trailer camps than national parks.

Despite occasional accounts like Blake's, there was little real consciousness of environmental issues in the early post-World War II years. The term *environment* itself was hardly used prior to the war. Yet the very prosperity that created the dismal highway strips in the late 1940s and 1950s was leading more and more Americans to appreciate natural environments as treasured parts of their rising standard of living. The shorter workweek provided more free time, and many Americans now had the means for longer vacations. They began to explore mountains and rivers and ocean shores and to ponder how to protect them. In 1958, Congress established the National Outdoor Recreation Review Commission, a first step toward consideration of environmental

issues that became far more common in the next decade. Americans also began to recognize the need for open space in their communities in order to compensate for the urban overdevelopment.

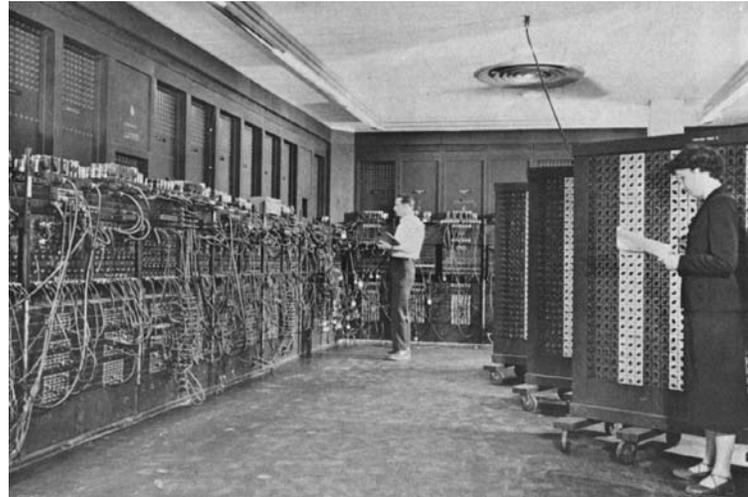
Technology Supreme

A technological revolution transformed postwar America. Some developments—the use of atomic energy, for example—flowed directly from war research. Federal support for scientific activity increased dramatically, as the pattern of wartime collaboration continued. The government established the National Institutes of Health in 1948 to coordinate medical research and the National Science Foundation in 1950 to fund basic scientific research.

The advent of the Cold War led to ever-greater government involvement. The Atomic Energy Commission, created in 1946, and the Department of Defense, established in 1949, provided rapidly increasing funding for research and development. Support for the Los Alamos Scientific Laboratory, where the atomic bomb had been assembled, continued, while the government contracted with the University of California to open the new Livermore Laboratory near San Francisco. Money went to other large research universities as well and fueled their growth. Scientists engaged in both basic and applied research and helped develop nuclear weapons, jet planes, satellites, and consumer goods that were often the side products of military research. At the same time, other innovations came from the research and development activities sponsored by big business.

Computers both reflected and assisted the process of technological development. Prior to World War II, Vannevar Bush, an electrical engineer at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, had built a machine filled with gears and shafts, along with electronic tubes in place of some mechanical parts, to solve differential equations. Wartime advances brought large but workable calculators, such as the Mark I electromechanical computer developed by engineer Howard Aiken and installed by IBM at Harvard in 1944. It was huge—55 feet long and 8 feet high—and had a million components.

Even more complicated was the Electronic Numerical Integrator and Calculator, called ENIAC, built in 1946 at the University of Pennsylvania. Like the Mark I, it was large, containing 18,000 electronic tubes and requiring tremendous amounts of electricity and special cooling procedures. It also needed to be “debugged” to remove insects attracted to the heat and light, giving rise to the term still used today by computer scientists for solving



The ENIAC Computer The ENIAC computer, first used in 1946, was a huge machine that took up an entire room. Yet it was far slower and far less powerful than the tiny desktop computers that became popular several decades later. How easy would it have been to use the machine pictured here? (*US Army Photo*)

software glitches. In a widely publicized test conducted soon after installation, operators set out to multiply 97,367 by itself 5,000 times. A reporter pushed the necessary button, and the task was completed in less than half a second. In the years that followed, new machines with their own internal instructions and memories were developed.

A key breakthrough in making computers faster and more reliable was the development of the transistor by three scientists at Bell Laboratories in 1948. Computers transformed American society as surely as industrialization had changed it a century before, and computer programmers and operators were in increasing demand as computers contributed dramatically to the centralization and interdependence of American life.

Computers were essential for space exploration. They helped scientists perform the mathematical calculations that let astronauts venture beyond the confines of the earth. In the postwar years, increasingly sophisticated forms of space flight became possible. Rocketry had developed during World War II but came of age after the war. Rockets could deliver nuclear weapons but could also launch satellites and provide the means to venture millions of miles into outer space.

Tiny transistors powered not only computers but also a wide variety of new appliances and gadgets designed for personal use. A transistorized miniature hearing aid, for example, could fit into the frame of a pair of eyeglasses. Stereophonic high-fidelity systems, using new transistor components, provided better sound.

An ominous technological trend related to computerization was the advent of automation. Mechanization was not new, but now it became far more widespread, threatening both skilled and unskilled workers. In 1952, the Ford Motor Company began using automatic drilling machines in an engine plant and found that now 41 workers could do a job that had previously required 117 workers. The implications of falling purchasing power as machines replaced workers were serious for an economy dependent on consumer demand.

The Consumer Culture

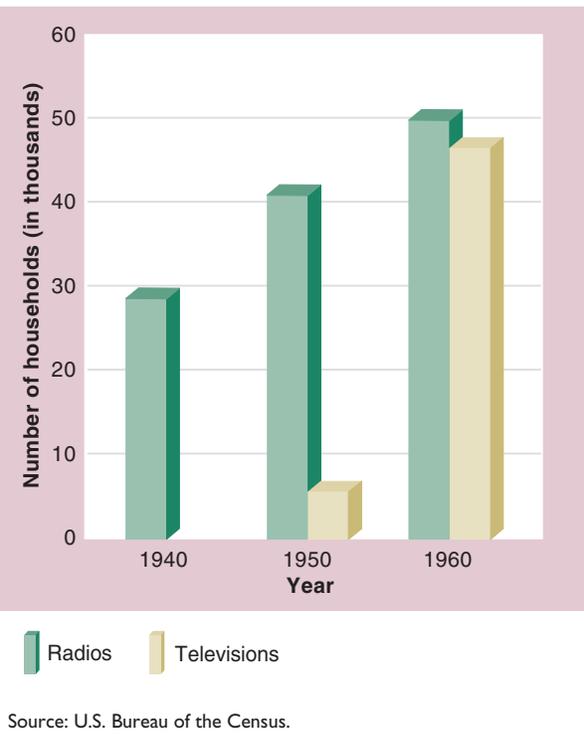
Americans maintained an ardent love affair with the appliances and gadgets produced by modern technology. By the end of the 1950s, most families had at least one automobile, as well as the staple appliances they had begun to purchase earlier—refrigerator, washing machine, television, and vacuum cleaner. Dozens of less-essential items also became popular. There were electric can openers, electric pencil sharpeners, and electric toothbrushes, as well as push-button phones, aerosol bombs, and automatic transmissions to eliminate the manual shifting of car gears.



The Mouseketeers *The Mickey Mouse Club* was a popular daily feature on television in the 1950s. Millions of American children were glued to their television sets each day after school, as they shared a common experience and absorbed the values promoted by the television networks. What does this picture tell you about the composition of the cast? (Photofest)

Households Owning Radios and Televisions, 1940–1960

Radio became increasingly popular in the postwar years, but observe the astronomical increase in the number of households owning television sets in the decade after 1950.



Television, developed in the 1930s, became a major influence on American life after World War II. In 1946, there were fewer than 17,000 television sets, but by 1960, three-quarters of all American families owned at least one set. In 1955, the average American family tuned in four to five hours each day. Some studies predicted that an American student, on graduating from high school, would have spent 11,000 hours in class and 15,000 hours before the “tube.” Young Americans grew up to the strains of “Winky Dink and You,” “The Mickey Mouse Club,” and “Howdy Doody Time” in the 1950s. Older viewers watched situation comedies such as *I Love Lucy* and *Father Knows Best* and live dramas such as *Playhouse 90*.

Television highlighted the rock-and-roll music that developed in the 1950s. Americans watched Elvis Presley play his guitar and sing, gyrating his hips in a sexually suggestive way that terrified parents, who worried about the influence of this new music, based on black rhythm and blues songs, on their children. Young people eagerly watched their



Cover
Illustration for
“The Desi–Lucy
Love Story,”
1956



Dick Clark's
American
Bandstand,
1958

counterparts dance to the music of Bill Haley and the Comets, Little Richard, Chuck Berry, and Elvis himself on *American Bandstand* every afternoon.

Consumption, increasingly a pillar of the American economy, required a vast expansion of consumer credit. Installment plans facilitated buying a new car, while credit cards encouraged the purchase of smaller items such as television sets and household appliances. Eating out became easier when meals could be charged on a card. The first of the consumer credit cards—the Diner's Club card—appeared in 1950, followed at the end of the decade by the American Express card and the BankAmericard (later renamed Visa). By the end of the 1960s, about 50 million credit cards of all kinds were in use in the United States. Consumer credit—total private indebtedness—increased from \$8.4 billion in 1946 to nearly \$45 billion in 1958.

For consumers momentarily unsure about new purchases, a revitalized advertising industry was ready to persuade them to go ahead and buy. Advertising had come of age in the 1920s, as businesses persuaded customers that buying new products brought status and satisfaction. It had faltered when the economy collapsed in the 1930s but began to revive during the war, as firms kept the public aware of consumer goods, even those in short supply. With the postwar boom, advertisers again began to hawk their wares, this time even more aggressively than before.

Having weathered the poverty and unemployment of the 1930s and made sacrifices during a long war, Americans now regarded abundance and leisure as their due, sometimes neglecting to look beyond the immediate objects of their desire. As journalist William Shannon wrote, the decade was one of “self-satisfaction and gross materialism. . . . The loudest sound in the land has been the oink and grunt of private hoggishness. . . . It has been the age of the slob.”

CONSENSUS AND CONFORMITY

As the economy expanded, an increasing sense of sameness pervaded American society. Third- and fourth-generation ethnic Americans became much more alike. As immigration slowed to a trickle after 1924, ties to Europe weakened, assimilation speeded up, and interethnic marriage skyrocketed. Television gave young and old a shared, visually seductive experience. Escaping the homogenizing tendencies was difficult. Sociologist David Riesman pointed out that in the classic nursery rhyme “This Little Pig

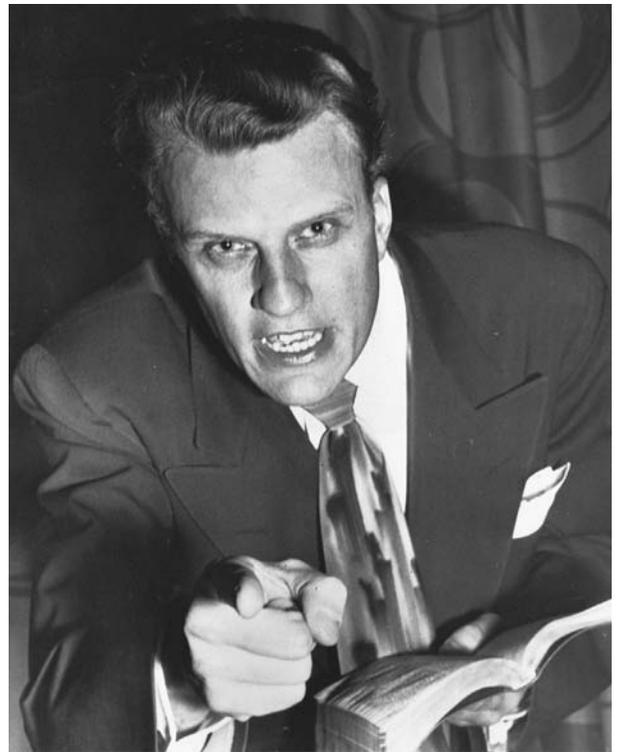
Went to Market,” each pig went his own way. “Today, however, all little pigs go to market; none stay home; all have roast beef, if any do; and all say ‘we-we.’”

Contours of Religious Life

Postwar Americans discovered a shared religious sense and returned to their churches in record numbers. By the end of the 1950s, fully 95 percent of all Americans identified with some religious denomination.

Ecumenical activities—worldwide efforts on the part of different Christian churches—promoted greater religious involvement. A first World Council of Churches meeting in 1948 in Amsterdam, the Netherlands, helped draw attention to the place of religion in modern life. Evangelical revivalism, led by Southern Baptist Billy Graham and others, became increasingly popular.

At the same time, Catholicism sought to broaden its appeal. This effort succeeded as Pope John XXIII convened the Vatican Ecumenical Council in 1962 to make the Catholic church’s traditions and practices



Preacher Billy Graham Evangelist Billy Graham preached a fiery message to millions of Americans in the 1950s. On the radio, on television, and in huge revivals, he urged sinners to embrace God and so save their nation from the perils of the Communist threat. How did the religious message Graham preached fit into the contours of the Cold War? (Bettmann/CORBIS)

more accessible—for example, substituting modern languages for Latin in the liturgy.

Judaism likewise broadened its appeal. As assimilation occurred, quotas that had kept many out of more exclusive universities and other institutions began to disappear. Jews, like others, relied on the GI Bill to move to the suburbs, where they bought new homes and built new synagogues, most of which followed the more casual patterns of Reform or Conservative, rather than Orthodox, Judaism.

The religious revival drew in part on the power of suggestion that led Americans to do what others did. Religion could reinforce the importance of family life, for, according to one slogan, “The family that prays together stays together.” The renewal of interest in religion also offered an acceptable means of escape from the anxieties of a middle-class executive’s life. In the 1950s, the Full Gospel Businessmen’s Fellowship not only provided religious camaraderie but also enjoyed access to the White House. In 1953, President Dwight D. Eisenhower began the tradition of opening the inaugural ceremony with a prayer.

Eisenhower reflected the national mood when he observed that “our government makes no sense unless it is founded in a deeply felt religious faith—and I don’t care what it is.” In 1954, Congress added the words “under God” to the pledge to the flag and the next year voted to require the phrase “In God We Trust” on all U.S. currency. Yet the revival sometimes seemed to rest on a shallow base of religious knowledge. In one public opinion poll, 80 percent of the respondents indicated that the Bible was God’s revealed word, but only 35 percent were able to name the four Gospels and more than half were unable to name even one.

A challenge to religious conformity came from members of the so-called Beat Generation who embraced Buddhism. They helped promote the Buddhist vogue that emerged in the 1950s and 1960s, with Zen centers opening in Los Angeles in 1956, San Francisco in 1959, and New York in 1966. Zen stressed Buddha’s emphasis on meditation that led to his enlightenment. In the next decade, the counterculture reached out to a variety of alternative religions, including some related to Buddhism (see Chapter 28).

Traditional Roles for Men and Women

World War II had interrupted traditional patterns of behavior for both men and women. As servicemen went overseas, women left their homes to work. After 1945, women faced tremendous pressure to leave their jobs and to conform to accepted prewar gender patterns, even though, paradoxically, more women entered the workforce than ever before.

Men and women had different postwar expectations. Most men expected to go to school and then find jobs to support their families. Viewing themselves as the primary breadwinners, they wanted their jobs waiting for them after the war. For women, the situation was more complex. While they wanted to resume patterns of family life that had been disrupted by the war, many had enjoyed working in the military plants and were reluctant to re-treat to the home, despite pressure to do so.

In 1947, *Life* magazine ran a long photo essay called “The American Woman’s Dilemma” that summed up the problem. The essay observed that women were caught in a conflict between the traditional expectation to stay home and the desire to have a paid job. A 1946 *Fortune* magazine poll also captured the discontent of some women. Asked whether they would prefer to be born again as men or as women, 25 percent of the women interviewed said they would prefer to be men. That dissatisfaction was strongest among white, well-educated, middle-class women, which was understandable, since family economic circumstances usually required black and lower-class white women to continue working outside the home.

By the 1950s, middle-class doubts and questions had largely receded. The baby boom increased average family size and made the decision to remain home easier. The flight to the suburbs gave women more to do, and they settled into the routines of re-decorating their homes and gardens and transporting children to and from activities and schools.

In 1956, when *Life* produced a special issue on women, the message differed strikingly from that of nine years before. Profiling Marjorie Sutton, the magazine spoke of the “Busy Wife’s Achievements” as “Home Manager, Mother, Hostess, and Useful Civic Worker.” Married at age 16, Marjorie was now involved with the PTA, Camp Fire Girls, and charity causes. She cooked and sewed for her family of four children, supported her husband by entertaining 1,500 guests a year, and worked out on the trampoline “to keep her size 12 figure.”

Marjorie Sutton reflected the widespread social emphasis on marriage and home. Many women went to college to find husbands—and dropped out if they succeeded. Almost two-thirds of the women in college, but less than half the men, left before completing a degree. Women were expected to marry young, have children early, and encourage their husbands’ careers. An article in *Esquire* magazine in 1954 called working wives a “menace.”

Adlai Stevenson, Democratic presidential candidate in 1952 and 1956, defined the female role in



AMERICAN VOICES

Betty Friedan, From *The Feminine Mystique*

Betty Friedan was a journalist who first was active in union work, then wrote articles for popular women's magazines. After conducting a survey of her Smith College classmates, she wrote *The Feminine Mystique*, which became widely popular after its publication in 1963.

The problem lay buried, unspoken, for many years in the minds of American women. It was a strange stirring, a sense of dissatisfaction, a yearning that women suffered in the middle of the twentieth century in the United States. Each suburban wife struggled with it alone. As she made the beds, shopped for groceries, matched slipcover material, ate peanut butter sandwiches with her children, chauffeured Cub Scouts and Brownies, lay beside her husband at night—she was afraid to ask even of herself the silent question—“Is this all?” . . .

If a woman had a problem in the 1950s and 1960s, she knew that something must be wrong with

her marriage, or with herself. Other women were satisfied with their lives, she thought. What kind of a woman was she if she did not feel this mysterious fulfillment waxing the kitchen floor? She was so ashamed to admit her dissatisfaction that she never knew how many other women shared it. . . .

In 1960, the problem that has no name burst like a boil through the image of the happy American housewife. . . . We can no longer ignore that voice within women that says: “I want something more than my husband and my children and my home.”

- What is the problem Betty Friedan highlights here?
- Why do suburban women seem to be unhappy?
- How widespread does the problem seem to be to Friedan?

politics. “The assignment for you, as wives and mothers,” he told a group of women, “you can do in the living room with a baby in your lap or in the kitchen with a can opener in your hand.” As in much of the nineteenth century, a woman was “to influence man and boy” in her “humble role of housewife” and mother.

Pediatrician Benjamin Spock agreed. In 1946 he published *Baby and Child Care*, the book most responsible for the child-rearing patterns of the post-war generation. In it, he advised mothers to stay at home if they wanted to raise stable and secure youngsters. Working outside the home might jeopardize their children's mental and emotional health.

Popular culture highlighted the stereotype of the woman concerned only about marriage and family. Author Betty Friedan described these patterns in her explosive 1963 critique, *The Feminine Mystique*. Shifting her attention away from the working-class and union issues that had concerned her before, she now profiled women in the 1950s and early 1960s. They “could desire no greater destiny than to glory in their own femininity. . . . All they had to do was to devote their lives from earliest girlhood to finding a husband and bearing children.” Their role was clear. “It was unquestioned gospel,” she wrote, “that women could identify with *nothing* beyond the home—not politics, not art, not science, not events large or small, war or peace, in the United States or

the world, unless it could be approached through female experience as a wife or mother or translated into domestic detail.”

Movies reinforced conventional images. Doris Day, charming and wholesome, was a favorite heroine. In film after film, she showed how an attractive woman who played her cards right could land her man.

The family was all-important in this scenario. Fewer than 10 percent of all Americans felt that an unmarried person could be happy. In a pattern endlessly reiterated by popular television programs, the family was meant to provide all satisfaction and contentment. The single-story ranch house that became so popular in this period reflected the focus on the family as the source of recreation and fun. No longer were kitchen and den private, as they had been earlier in a reflection of the notion of separate spheres. Now houses, with far more shared and open space, stressed livability and family comfort.

Sexuality was a troublesome if compelling post-war concern. In 1948, Alfred C. Kinsey published *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male*. Kinsey was an Indiana University zoologist who had previously studied the gall wasp. When asked to teach a course on marriage problems, he found little published material about human sexual activity and decided to collect his own. He compiled case histories of 5,300 white males and recorded patterns of sexual behavior.

RECOVERING THE PAST

Clothing

Clothing can be an important source of information about the past. The clothes people wear often announce their age, gender, and class and frequently transmit some sense of their origin, occupation, and even their politics. The vocabulary of dress includes more than garments alone: hairstyles, jewelry, and makeup all contribute to the way people choose to present themselves. Clothing can signal strong emotions; a torn, unbuttoned shirt, for example, can indicate that a person who seldom dresses that way is really upset. Bright colors can demonstrate a daring sense and a willingness to make a strong statement. By examining clothing styles in a number of different decades, we can begin to understand something of the changing patterns of people's lives.

In the 1920s, flappers and other women often dressed like children, with loose dresses usually in pastel colors ending just below the knee. Large trimmings, such as huge artificial flowers, accentuated the effect. A "boyish" figure was considered most attractive. The clothes conveyed a feeling of playfulness and a willingness to embrace the freedom of the young. Men's suits in the same period were now made out of lighter materials and looked less padded than before. As the tall, stiff collar of an earlier age disappeared



Harlem women in the 1920s. (Photographs and Prints Division, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations/Art Resources, NY)



Frances Perkins with laborers in the 1930s. (Brown Brothers)

and trousers became more high-waisted, men too had a more youthful look.

The Great Depression of the 1930s brought a change in style. Flappers now looked silly, especially as millions of people were starving. Advertisements and films promoted a new maturity and sophistication, more appropriate to hard times. Men's suits became heavier and darker, as if symbolically to provide protection in a bread line. Trousers were wider, and jackets were frequently double-breasted. Overcoats became longer. Women's clothes were likewise made out of heavier fabrics and used darker colors. Skirts fell almost to the ankles on occasion and were covered by longer coats. Clothes indicated that there was no place for the playfulness of the decade before.

As conditions improved during and after World War II, styles changed once more. In the 1940s, young teenage girls frequently wore bobby socks rolled down to their ankles. Working women wore overalls, but with their own adornments to maintain their femininity. Rosie the Riveter, drawn by noted artist Norman Rockwell, wore her overalls proudly as she sat with a riveting gun in her lap and an attractive scarf around her hair. In the postwar years, the "Man in the Gray Flannel Suit" looked serious, sober, and



World War II women at work. (Oregon Historical Society, OrHi 37401)



A woman and child in the 1950s. (© The Dorothea Lange Collection, The Oakland Museum of California, City of Oakland, Gift of Paul S. Taylor)

well tailored, ready to go work for corporate America. His female partner wanted to look equally worldly and sophisticated and wore carefully tailored adult clothing, with the waist drawn in (often by a girdle) and heels as tall as three inches, when going out. The fashion industry helped define the decorative role women were supposed to play in supporting men as they advanced their business careers.

Then came the 1960s and an entirely new look. Casual clothing became a kind of uniform. The counterculture was a movement of the young, and clothing took on an increasingly youthful look. Skirts rose above the knee in 1963 and a few years later climbed to mid-thigh. Women began to wear pants and trouser suits. Men and women both favored jeans and informal shirts and let their hair grow longer. Men broke away from the gray suits of the preceding decade and indulged themselves in bright colors in what has been called the “peacock revolution.”

REFLECTING ON THE PAST Look carefully at the pictures on these pages. They show fashions from different periods and can tell us a good deal about how these people defined themselves. Examine first the photo of the three black women from the 1920s. What kinds of adornments do you notice? What impression do these women convey?

Look at the photograph of Frances Perkins, secretary of labor in the 1930s. What kind of dress is she wearing? How do her clothes differ from those of the women in the 1920s? In the picture, she is talking to a number of working men. What do their clothes tell you about the kind of work they might be doing?

In the picture of two drill press operators during World War II, the women are dressed to handle the heavy machinery. Are their clothes different from those of the laborers in the preceding picture? How have the women accommodated themselves to their work, while still maintaining their individuality?

Now look at the picture of a woman in the 1950s. What kind of work might she do? What kind of flexibility do these clothes give her? What do the stylistic touches convey?

Finally, examine the photograph of the man and woman at an outdoor music festival in the 1960s. What does their clothing remind you of? Where might it come from? What impression are these people trying to create by their dress?



Countercultural dress in the 1960s. (Ken Heyman/Woodfin Camp & Associates)



Sex Symbol Marilyn Monroe Sex goddess Marilyn Monroe—shown here in a widely distributed promotional photo for *The Seven Year Itch*—stirred the fantasies of American males in the 1950s. Despite the family orientation of suburban America, millions were captivated by her seductive appeal. What messages were conveyed by this picture? (AP/World Wide Photos)

Kinsey shocked the country with his statistics on premarital, extramarital, and otherwise illicit sexual acts. Among males who went to college, he concluded, 67 percent had engaged in sexual intercourse before marriage, as had 84 percent of those who went to high school but not beyond. Thirty-seven percent of the total male population had experienced some kind of overt homosexual activity. Five years later, Kinsey published a companion volume, *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female*, which detailed many of the same sexual patterns. Although critics denounced Kinsey for what they considered his unscientific methodology and challenged his results, both books sold widely, for they opened the door to a subject previously considered taboo.

Interest in sexuality was reflected in the fascination with sex goddesses such as Marilyn Monroe. With her blond hair, breathy voice, and raw sexuality, she personified the forbidden side of the good life and became one of Hollywood's most popular stars. The images of such film goddesses corresponded to male fantasies of women, visible in *Playboy* magazine, which first appeared in 1953 and soon achieved a huge readership. As for men's

wives, they were expected to manage their suburban homes and to be cheerful and willing objects of their husbands' desire.

Despite reaffirming the old ideology that a woman's place was in the home, the 1950s were years of unnoticed but important change. Because the supply of single women workers fell as a result of the low birthrate of the Depression years and increased schooling and early marriage, older married women continued the pattern begun during the war and entered the labor force in larger numbers than before. In 1940, only 15 percent of American wives had jobs. By 1950, 21 percent were employed, and 10 years later, the figure had risen to 30 percent. Moreover, more than half of all working women were married, a dramatic reversal of pre-World War II patterns. Although the media hailed those women who primarily tended to their families, some magazine articles, in fact, did stress the achievements of women outside the home.

While many working women were poor, divorced, or widowed, many others worked to acquire the desirable new products that were badges of middle-class status. They stepped into the new jobs created by economic expansion, clustering in office, sales, and service positions, occupations already defined as female. They and their employers considered their work subordinate to their primary role as wives and mothers. The conviction that women's main role was homemaking justified low wages and the denial of promotions. Comparatively few women entered professions where they would have challenged traditional notions of a woman's place.

African American women worked as always but often lost the jobs they had held during the war. For example, as the percentage of women in the Detroit automobile industry dropped from 25 percent to 7.5 percent in the immediate postwar period, black women who had held some of the jobs were the first to go. Bernice McCannon, an African American employee at a Virginia military base, observed, "I have always done domestic work for families. When war came, I made the same move many domestics did. I took a higher paying job in a government cafeteria as a junior baker. If domestic work offers a good living, I see no reason why most of us will not return to our old jobs. We will have no alternative." These jobs, however, did not pay well at all. In the 1950s, the employment picture improved somewhat. African American women succeeded both in moving into white-collar positions and in increasing their income. By 1960, more than one-third of all black women held clerical, sales, service, or professional jobs. The income gap between white women and black women holding

similar jobs dropped from about 50 percent in 1940 to about 30 percent in 1960.

Cultural Rebels

Not all Americans fit the 1950s stereotypes. Some were alienated from the culture and rebelled against its values. As young people struggled to meet the standards and expectations of their peers, they were intrigued by Holden Caulfield, the main figure in J. D. Salinger’s popular novel *The Catcher in the Rye* (1951). Holden, a boarding-school misfit, rebelled against the “phonies” around him who threatened his individuality and independence.

Writers of the “Beat Generation” espoused unconventional values in their stories and poems. Challenging the apathy and conformity of the period, they stressed spontaneity and spirituality and claimed that intuition was more important than reason, Eastern mysticism (with its Buddhist influence) more valuable than Western faith. The “Beats” deliberately outraged respectability by sneering at materialism, flaunting unconventional sex lives, and smoking marijuana.

Their literary work reflected their approach to life. Finding conventional academic forms confining, they rejected them. Jack Kerouac typed his best-selling novel *On the Road* (1957), describing free-wheeling trips across country, on a 250-foot roll of



“Beat” Poet Allen Ginsberg Allen Ginsberg was one of the most influential “Beats” who went out of his way to protest what he considered the stultifying patterns of American life. His poetry challenged more conventional norms. How does this photograph relate to the things that troubled Ginsberg about modern American culture? (Allen Ginsberg/CORBIS)



Rock-and-Roll Star Elvis Presley Elvis Presley, a truck driver from Memphis, Tennessee, turned rock and roll into a kind of teenage religion. In appearances such as this one at a state fair in Memphis, Tennessee, in 1956, his fans worked themselves into a frenzy. How did Elvis’s popularity help a new youth culture develop? (Getty Images)

paper. Dispensing with conventional punctuation and paragraphing, the book was a song of praise to the free lifestyle the “Beats” espoused.

Poet Allen Ginsberg, who, like Kerouac, was a Columbia University dropout, became equally well known for his poem “Howl.” Written during a wild weekend in 1955, the poem was a scathing critique of modern, mechanized culture. The poem became a cult piece, particularly after the police seized it on the grounds that it was obscene. When the work survived a court test, national acclaim followed for Ginsberg. He and the other “Beats” furnished a model for rebellion in the 1960s.

The signs of cultural rebellion also appeared in popular

AMERICAN VOICES

Allen Ginsberg, “Howl”

Allen Ginsberg became part of the group known as the “Beat Generation” after he dropped out of Columbia University. Critical of modern American society, he articulated his complaints in his scathing poem “Howl” in 1955.

I saw the best minds of my generation destroyed by
madness, starving hysterical naked,
dragging themselves through the negro streets at
dawn looking for an angry fix,
angelheaded hipsters burning for the ancient
heavenly connection to the starry dynamo in the
machinery of night,
who poverty and tatters and hollow-eyed and high sat
up smoking in the supernatural darkness of cold-
water flats floating across the tops of cities
contemplating jazz, . . .

who were burned alive in their innocent flannel suits
on Madison Avenue amid blasts of leaden verse &
the tanked-up clatter of the iron regiments of
fashion & the nitroglycerine shrieks of the fairies
of advertising & the mustard gas of sinister

intelligent editors, or were run down by the
drunken taxicabs of Absolute Reality, . . .

What sphinx of cement and aluminum bashed open
their skulls and ate up their brains and
imagination?

Moloch! Solitude! Filth! Ugliness! Ashcans and
unobtainable dollars! Children screaming under
the stairways! Boys sobbing in armies! Old men
weeping in the parks!

Moloch! Moloch! Nightmare of Moloch! Moloch the
loveless! Mental Moloch! Moloch the heavy judger
of men! . . .

- What do you think Allen Ginsberg means in the first line of this poem?
- What kinds of things bother him about American society?
- Moloch was an evil sun god in ancient Palestine centuries ago, usually represented as a bronze statue with the head of a bull, to whom children were sacrificed. What do you think the poet means by invoking Moloch in the last lines above?

music. Parents recoiled as their children flocked to hear a young Tennessee singer named Elvis Presley belt out rock-and-roll songs. Presley’s sexy voice, gyrating hips, and other techniques borrowed from black singers made him the undisputed “king of rock and roll.” A multimedia blitz of movies, television, and radio helped make songs such as “Heartbreak Hotel,” “Don’t Be Cruel,” and “Hound Dog” smash singles. Eighteen Presley hits sold more than a million copies in the last four years of the 1950s. His black leather jacket and ducktail haircut became standard dress for rebellious male teenagers.

American painters, shucking off European influences that had shaped American artists for two centuries, also became a part of the cultural rebellion. Led by Jackson Pollock and the “New York school,” some artists discarded the easel, laid gigantic canvases on the floor, and then used trowels, putty knives, and sticks to apply paint, glass shards, sand, and other materials in wild explosions of color. Known as abstract expressionists, these painters regarded the unconscious as the source of their artistic creations. “I am not aware of what is taking place [as I paint],” Pollock explained; “it is only after that I see what I have done.” Like much of the literature of rebellion, abstract expressionism reflected the



Abstract Expressionist Artist Jackson Pollock at Work Jackson Pollock often stood over the canvas and flung the paint around him as he moved across the painting in progress. Here he is shown in 1951 dripping the paint on the work that became *Autumn Rhythm*. What does the painting represent to you? What does it say about Pollock’s assessment of American society? (Photo by Hans Namuth/Courtesy, Center for Creative Photography, The University of Arizona. © 1991 Hans Namuth Estate)

artist's alienation from a world filled with nuclear threats, computerization, and materialism.

ORIGINS OF THE WELFARE STATE

The modern American welfare state originated in the New Deal. Franklin D. Roosevelt's efforts to deal with the ravages of the Great Depression and protect Americans from the problems stemming from industrial capitalism provided the basis for subsequent efforts to commit the government to help those who could not help themselves, even in prosperous times. Harry Truman's Fair Deal built squarely on Roosevelt's New Deal. Truman's Republican successor, Dwight Eisenhower, sought to scale down spending but made no effort to roll back the most important initiatives of the welfare state.

Harry S Truman

Harry S Truman, America's first postwar president, was an unpretentious man who took a straightforward approach to public affairs. He was, however, ill prepared for the office he assumed in the final months of World War II. His three months as vice president had done little to school him in the complexity of postwar issues. Nor had Franklin Roosevelt confided in Truman. It was no wonder that the new president felt insecure. To a former colleague in the Senate, he groaned, "I'm not big enough for this job." Critics agreed.

Yet Truman matured rapidly. A sign on the president's White House desk read, "The Buck Stops Here," and he was willing to make quick decisions on issues, even if associates sometimes wondered whether he understood all the implications.

Truman took the same feisty approach to public policy that characterized his conduct of foreign affairs (see Chapter 27). He stated his position clearly and simply, often in black-and-white terms. Believing in plain speaking, he seldom hesitated to let others know exactly where he stood. He attacked his political enemies vigorously when they resisted his initiatives and often took his case to the American people. He was, in many ways, an old-style Democratic politician who hoped to use his authority to benefit the middle-class and working-class Americans who made up his political base.

Truman's Struggles with a Conservative Congress

Like Roosevelt, Harry Truman believed that the federal government had the responsibility for ensuring

the social welfare of all Americans. He shared his predecessor's commitment to assisting less-prosperous inhabitants of the country in a systematic, rational way. Truman wanted his administration to embrace and act on a series of carefully defined social and economic goals to extend New Deal initiatives even further.

Less than a week after the end of World War II, Truman called on Congress to pass a 21-point program. He wanted housing assistance, a higher minimum wage, more unemployment compensation, and a national commitment to maintaining full employment. During the next 10 weeks, Truman sent blueprints of further proposals to Congress, including health insurance and atomic energy legislation. But this liberal program soon ran into fierce political opposition.

The debate surrounding the Employment Act of 1946 hinted at the fate of Truman's proposals. This measure was a deliberate effort to apply the theory of English economist John Maynard Keynes to preserve economic equilibrium and prevent depression. A decade earlier Keynes had argued that massive spending was necessary to extricate a nation from depression. The money spent during World War II caused the economy to respond precisely as Keynes had predicted. Now economists wanted to institutionalize his ideas to forestall further problems. The initial bill, which enjoyed the strong support of labor, committed the government to maintaining full employment by monitoring the economy and taking remedial action in case of decline. Responses to a downturn included tax cuts and spending programs to stimulate the economy and reduce unemployment.

While liberals and labor leaders hailed the measure, business groups such as the National Association of Manufacturers condemned it. They claimed that government intervention would undermine free enterprise and promote socialism. Responding to the business community, Congress cut the proposal to bits. As finally passed, the act created a Council of Economic Advisers to make recommendations to the president, who was to report annually to Congress and the nation on the state of the economy. But it stopped short of committing the government to using fiscal tools to maintain full employment when economic indicators turned downward.

As the midterm elections of 1946 approached, Truman knew he was vulnerable. As more and more people questioned his competence as president, his support dropped from 87 percent of those polled after he assumed the office to 32 percent in November 1946. Gleeful Republicans asked the voters, "Had enough?"

They had. Republicans won majorities in both houses of Congress for the first time since the 1928 elections and gained a majority of the governorships as well. In Atlantic City, New Jersey, even a Republican candidate for justice of the peace who had died a week before the election was victorious.

After the 1946 elections, Truman faced an unsympathetic Eightieth Congress. Republicans and conservative Democrats, dominating both houses, planned to reverse the liberal policies of the Roosevelt years. Hoping to re-establish congressional authority and cut the power of the executive branch, they insisted on less government intervention in business and private affairs. They also demanded tax cuts and curtailment of the privileged position they felt labor had come to enjoy.

When the new Congress met, it slashed federal spending and taxes. In 1947, Congress twice passed tax-cut measures, which Truman vetoed. In 1948, another election year, Congress overrode the veto.

Congress also struck at Democratic labor policies. Angry at the gains won by labor in the 1930s and 1940s, Republicans wanted to check unions and to circumscribe their right to engage in the kind of disruptive strikes that had occurred immediately after the war. Early in Truman's presidency, Congress had passed a bill requiring notice for strikes as well as a cooling-off period if a strike occurred. Truman vetoed it. But in 1947, commanding more votes, the Republicans passed the Taft–Hartley Act, which sought to limit the power of unions by restricting the weapons they could employ. It spelled out unfair labor practices (such as preventing nonunion workers from working if they wished) and outlawed the closed shop, whereby an employee had to join a union before getting a job. The law likewise allowed states to prohibit the union shop, which forced workers to join the union after they had been hired. It gave the president the right to call for an 80-day cooling-off period in strikes affecting national security and required union officials to sign non-Communist oaths.

Union leaders and members were furious. They called the measure a “slave-labor law” and argued vigorously that it eliminated many of their hard-won rights and left labor–management relations the way they had been in pre–New Deal days. Vetoing the measure, Truman claimed that it was unworkable and unfair and went on nationwide radio to seek public approval. This move regained him some of the support he had lost earlier when he had sought to force strikers to go back to work immediately after

the war. Congress, however, passed the Taft–Hartley measure over Truman's veto.

The Fair Deal and Its Fate

In 1948, Truman wanted a chance to consolidate a liberal program and decided to seek the presidency in his own right. Aware that he was an accidental occupant of the White House, he won what most people thought was a worthless nomination. Not only was his own popularity waning, but the Democratic party itself seemed to be falling apart.

The civil rights issue split the Democrats. When liberals defeated a moderate platform proposal and pressed for a stronger commitment to African American rights, angry delegates from Mississippi and Alabama stormed out of the convention. They later formed the States' Rights, or Dixiecrat, party. At their own convention, delegates from 13 states nominated Governor J. Strom Thurmond of South Carolina as their presidential candidate and affirmed their support for continued racial segregation.

Meanwhile, Henry A. Wallace, first secretary of agriculture, then vice president during Roosevelt's third term, and finally secretary of commerce, mounted his own challenge. Truman had fired Wallace from his cabinet for supporting a more temperate approach to the Soviet Union. Now Wallace became the presidential candidate of the Progressive party. Initially, he attracted widespread liberal interest because of his moderate position on Soviet–American affairs, his promotion of desegregation, and his promise to nationalize the railroads and major industries, but then support dropped off.

In that fragmented state, the Democrats took on the Republicans, who coveted the White House after 16 years out of power. Once again, the GOP nominated New York Governor Thomas E. Dewey, the unsuccessful candidate in 1944. Even though he was stiff and egocentric, the polls uniformly picked the Republicans to win. Dewey saw little value in brawling with his opponent and campaigned, in the words of one commentator, “with the humorless calculation of a Certified Public Accountant in pursuit of the Holy Grail.”

Truman, as the underdog, conducted a two-fisted campaign. He appealed to ordinary Americans as an unpretentious man engaged in an uphill fight. Believing that everyone was against him but the people, he addressed Americans in familiar language. He called the Republicans a “bunch of old mossbacks” out to destroy the New Deal as he attacked the “do nothing” Eightieth Congress. Speaking informally in

Harry Truman Celebrating His Unexpected Victory In one of the nation's most extraordinary political upsets, Harry Truman beat Thomas E. Dewey in 1948. Here an exuberant Truman holds a newspaper headline printed while he slept, before the vote turned his way. Why is Truman so gleeful? (Bettmann/CORBIS)



his choppy, aggressive style, he appealed to crowds that yelled, “Give ‘em hell, Harry!” He did.

The pollsters predicting a Republican victory were wrong. On election day, disproving the bold headline “Dewey Defeats Truman” in the *Chicago Daily Tribune*, the incumbent president scored one of the most unexpected political upsets in American history, winning 303–189 in the Electoral College. Democrats also swept both houses of Congress.

Truman won primarily because he was able to revive the major elements of the Democratic coalition that Franklin Roosevelt had constructed more than a decade before. Despite the rocky days of 1946, Truman managed to hold on to labor, farm, and black votes. Labor’s support was crucial. Working men and women had been irritated by his response to the strikes in the immediate postwar period but had been buoyed by his veto, even though unsuccessful, of the Taft–Hartley Act. In the end, wary of Wallace, they backed Truman.

The fragmentation of the Democratic party, which had threatened to hurt the president severely, helped him instead. The splinter parties drew off some votes but allowed Truman to make a more aggressive, direct appeal to the center.

With the election behind him, Truman pursued his liberal program. In his 1949 State of the Union message, he declared, “Every segment of our population and every individual has a right to expect

from our Government a fair deal.” The Fair Deal became the name for his domestic program, which included the measures he had proposed since 1945.

Parts of Truman’s Fair Deal worked; others did not. Lawmakers raised the minimum wage and expanded social security programs. A housing program brought modest gains but did not really meet housing needs. A farm program, aimed at providing income support to farmers if prices fell, never made it through Congress. Although he desegregated the military, other parts of his civil rights program failed to win congressional support. The American Medical Association undermined the effort to provide national health insurance, and Congress rejected a measure to provide federal aid to education.

The mixed record was not entirely Truman’s fault. Conservative legislators were largely responsible for sabotaging his efforts. At the same time, critics charged correctly that Truman was often unpragmatic and shrill in his struggles with an unsympathetic Congress. They argued that he sometimes seemed to provoke the confrontations that became a hallmark of his presidency. They also claimed that he was most concerned with foreign policy as he strove to secure bipartisan support for Cold War initiatives (see Chapter 27) and allowed his domestic program to suffer. Rising defense expenditures meant less money for projects at home.

Presidential Elections, 1948–1956

Year	Candidate	Party	Popular Vote	Electoral Vote
1948	HARRY S. TRUMAN	Democratic	24,105,812 (49.5%)	303
	Thomas E. Dewey	Republican	21,970,065 (45.1%)	189
	J. Strom Thurmond	States' Rights	1,169,063 (12.4%)	39
	Henry A. Wallace	Progressive	1,157,172 (12.4%)	0
1952	DWIGHT D. EISENHOWER	Republican	33,936,234 (55.1%)	442
	Adlai E. Stevenson	Democratic	27,314,992 (44.4%)	89
1956	DWIGHT D. EISENHOWER	Republican	35,590,472 (57.4%)	457
	Adlai E. Stevenson	Democratic	26,022,752 (42.0%)	73

Note: Winners' names appear in capital letters.

Still, Truman kept the liberal vision alive. The Fair Deal ratified many of the initiatives begun during the New Deal and led Americans to take programs such as social security for granted. Truman had not achieved everything he wanted—he had not even come close—but the nation had taken another step toward endorsing liberal goals.

The Election of Ike

Acceptance of the liberal state continued in the 1950s, even as the Republicans took control. By 1952, Truman's popularity had plummeted to 23 percent of the American people, and all indicators pointed to a political shift. The Democrats nominated Adlai Stevenson, Illinois's articulate and moderately liberal governor. The Republicans turned to Dwight Eisenhower, the World War II hero known as Ike.

Stevenson approached political issues in intellectual terms. "Let's talk sense to the American people," he said. "Let's tell them the truth." While liberals loved his approach, Stevenson himself anticipated the probable outcome. How, he wondered, could a man named Adlai beat a soldier called Ike?

The Republicans focused on communism, corruption, and Korea as major issues. They called the Democrats "soft on communism" and demanded a more aggressive approach at home and abroad. They criticized scandals involving Truman's cronies and friends. The Republicans also promised to end the unpopular Korean War.

Eisenhower proved to be a highly effective campaigner. He had a natural talent for taking his case to the American people, speaking in simple, reassuring terms they could understand. He struck a grandfatherly pose, unified the various wings of his party, and went on to victory at the polls. He received 55

percent of the vote and carried 41 states. The new president took office with a Republican Congress as well and had little difficulty winning a second term in 1956.

Dwight D. Eisenhower

Eisenhower stood in stark contrast to Truman. His easy manner and warm smile made him widely popular. As British field marshal Bernard Montgomery observed, "He has the power of drawing the hearts of men towards him as a magnet attracts bits of metal."

Eisenhower had not taken the typical route to the presidency. After World War II, he served successively as army chief of staff, president of Columbia University, and head of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). Despite his lack of formal political background, he had a real ability to get people to compromise and work together.

Ike's limited experience with everyday politics conditioned his sense of the presidential role. Whereas Truman loved political infighting and wanted to take charge, Eisenhower was more restrained. The presidency for him was no "bully pulpit," as it had been for Theodore Roosevelt and even FDR. "I am not one of those desk-pounding types that likes to stick out his jaw and look like he is bossing the show," he said. "You do not lead by hitting people over the head. Any damn fool can do that, but it's usually called 'assault'—not 'leadership.'"

"Modern Republicanism"

Eisenhower wanted to limit the presidential role. He was uncomfortable with the growth of the executive office over the past 20 years. Like the Republicans in Congress with whom Truman had tangled, he wanted to restore the balance between the branches of government and to reduce the authority of the



Ike for President: Eisenhower Campaign Ad, 1952

national government. He recognized, however, that it was impossible to scale back federal power to the limited levels of the 1920s, and he wanted to preserve social gains that even Republicans now accepted. Eisenhower sometimes termed his approach “dynamic conservatism” or “modern Republicanism,” which, he explained, meant “conservative when it comes to money, liberal when it comes to human beings.” Liberals quipped that his approach meant endorsing social projects and then failing to authorize the funds.

Economic concerns dominated the Eisenhower years. The president and his chief aides wanted desperately to preserve the value of the dollar, pare down levels of funding, cut taxes, and balance the budget after years of deficit spending. Eisenhower’s administration also supported business interests. This orientation became obvious when defense secretary Charles E. Wilson, former president of General Motors, declared at his confirmation hearing, “What is good for our country is good for General Motors, and vice versa.”

Eisenhower fulfilled his promise to reduce government’s economic role. After Republicans received financial support from oil companies during the campaign, the new Congress, with a strong endorsement from the president, passed the Submerged Lands Act in 1953, transferring control of about \$40 billion worth of oil lands from the federal government to the states. The *New York Times* called it “one of the greatest and surely the most unjustified give-away programs in all the history of the United States.”

The administration also sought to reduce federal activity in the electric power field. Eisenhower favored private rather than public development of power, and once said about the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA), the extensive public power and development project begun during the New Deal, “I’d like to see us sell the whole thing, but I suppose we can’t go that far.” He opposed a TVA proposal for expansion to provide power to the Atomic Energy Commission and instead authorized a private group, the Dixon–Yates syndicate, to build a plant in Arkansas for that purpose. Later, when charges of scandal arose, the administration canceled the agreement, but the basic preference for private development remained.

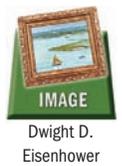
Committed to supporting business interests, the administration sometimes saw its program backfire. As a result of Eisenhower’s reluctance to stimulate the economy too much, the annual rate of economic growth declined from 4.3 percent between 1947 and 1952 to 2.5 percent between 1953 and 1960. The economy was still growing, but more slowly than

before. The country also suffered three recessions—in 1953–1954, 1957–1958, and 1960–1961—in Eisenhower’s eight years. During the slumps, tax revenues fell and the deficits that Eisenhower so wanted to avoid increased.

Eisenhower’s understated approach led to a legislative stalemate, particularly when the Democrats regained control of Congress in 1954. Opponents giped at Ike’s restrained stance and laughed about limited White House leadership. One observed that Eisenhower proved that the country did not “need” a president. Another spoke of the Eisenhower doll—you wound it up and it did nothing for eight years.

Yet Eisenhower understood just what he was doing; he had a better grasp of public policy than his critics realized. Beneath his casual approach lay real shrewdness. “Don’t worry,” he once assured his aides as they briefed him for a press conference. “If that question comes up, I’ll just confuse them.” He worked quietly to create the consensus that he believed was necessary for legislative progress and practiced what later observers called a “hidden hand” presidency, unobtrusively orchestrating support for his own ends.

Even more important was his role in ratifying the welfare state. By 1960, the government had become a major factor in ordinary people’s lives. It had grown enormously, employing close to 2.5 million people throughout the 1950s. Federal expenditures,



A Popular and Personable President Dwight Eisenhower provided a reassuring presence in the White House in the 1950s. His very presence conveyed the impression that everything was going to be all right. How did his wide smile, pictured here, make Americans feel good about themselves and their country? (Hulton Archive/Getty Images)

which had stood at \$3.5 billion in 1927, rose to \$97 billion in 1960. The White House now took the lead in initiating legislation and in steering bills through Congress. Individuals had come to expect old-age pensions, unemployment payments, and a minimum wage. By accepting the fundamental features of the national state that the Democrats had created, Eisenhower ensured its survival.



Dwight D.
Eisenhower,
Farewell to the
Nation
(January 17,
1961)

For all the jokes at his expense, Eisenhower remained popular with the voters. He accomplished most of his goals, and he was one of the few presidents to leave

office as highly regarded by the people as when he entered it. He was the kind of leader Americans wanted in prosperous times.

THE OTHER AMERICA

Not all Americans shared postwar middle-class affluence. Although most white Americans were barely conscious of poverty, it clearly existed in inner cities and rural areas. African Americans, uprooted from rural patterns and transplanted into urban slums, were among the hardest hit. But members of other minority groups, as well as less fortunate whites, suffered similar dislocations, unknown to the middle class.

Poverty amid Affluence

Many people in the “affluent society” lived in poverty. Economic growth favored the upper and middle classes. Although the popular “trickle-down” theory argued that economic expansion benefited all classes, little wealth reached the citizens at the bottom. In 1960, according to the Federal Bureau of Labor Statistics, a yearly subsistence-level income for a family of four was \$3,000 and for a family of six was \$4,000. The bureau reported that 40 million people (almost one-quarter of the population) lived below those levels, with nearly the same number only marginally above the line. Two million migrant workers labored long hours for a subsistence wage. Many less-mobile people were hardly better off. According to the 1960 census, 27 percent of the residential units in the United States were substandard.

Michael Harrington, socialist author and critic, shocked the country with his 1962 study *The Other America*. The poor, Harrington showed, were everywhere. He described New York City’s “economic underworld,” where “Puerto Ricans and Negroes, alcoholics, drifters, and disturbed people” haunted employment agencies for temporary positions as

“dishwashers and day workers, the fly-by-night jobs.” In the afternoon, he continued, “the jobs have all been handed out, yet the people still mill around. Some of them sit on benches in the larger offices. There is no real point to their waiting, yet they have nothing else to do.”

Harrington also described the conditions faced by the rural poor. Despite the prosperity that surrounded them, the mountain folk of Appalachia, the tenant farmers of Mississippi, and the migrant farmers of Florida, Texas, and California were all caught in poverty’s relentless cycle.

Hard Times for African Americans

African Americans were among the postwar nation’s least prosperous citizens. In the South, agricultural workers continued to fall victim to foreign competition, mechanization, and eviction as white farmers turned to less labor-intensive crops such as soybeans and peanuts.

The southern agricultural population declined dramatically as millions of blacks moved to southern cities, where they found better jobs, better schooling, and freedom from landlords. Some achieved middle-class status; many more did not. They remained poor, with even less of a support system than they had known before.

Millions of African Americans also headed for northern cities after 1940. In the 1950s, Detroit’s black population increased from 16 percent to 29 percent, Chicago’s from 14 percent to 23 percent. At one point in this decade, Chicago’s black population rose by more than 2,200 people each week. The new arrivals congregated in urban slums, where the growth of social services failed to keep pace with population growth.

The black ghetto that had begun to develop earlier in the twentieth century became a permanent fixture in the post-World War II years. African Americans attempting to move elsewhere often found the way blocked. In 1951, a black couple purchasing a home in Cicero, Illinois, was driven away when an angry crowd broke the house’s windows, defaced the walls, and shouted vile insults. This pattern was repeated around the country—in Birmingham, Chicago, Detroit, and countless other cities.

The experiences of African Americans in the cities often proved different from what they had expected. As author Claude Brown recalled, blacks were told that in the North, “Negroes lived in houses with bathrooms, electricity, running water, and indoor toilets. To them, this was the ‘promised land’



African
American
Migration,
1915–1970

Independence in Africa

In the 1950s and 1960s, most African nations threw off their colonial rulers and achieved independence. **Reflecting on the Past** During which decade did more nations become free? How did attaining independence change social and economic patterns in the African nations? What effect did it have on the patterns of the Cold War? What effect did it have on the civil rights struggle in the United States?



that Mammy had been singing about in the cotton fields for many years.” But no one had told them “about one of the most important aspects of the promised land: it was a slum ghetto. . . . There were too many people full of hate and bitterness crowded into a dirty, stinky, uncared-for closet-size section of a great city.”

Novelist and essayist James Baldwin likewise described slum conditions and their corrosive effect on American blacks in his 1961 book *Nobody Knows My Name*:

They work in the white man’s world all day and come home in the evening to this fetid block. They struggle to instill in their children some private sense of honor or dignity, which will help the child to survive. This means, of course, that they must struggle, stolidly, incessantly, to keep this sense alive in themselves, in spite of the insults, the indifference, and the cruelty they are certain to encounter in their working day. They patiently browbeat the landlord into fixing the heat, the plaster, the plumbing; this demands prodigious patience, nor is patience usually enough. . . . Such frustration, so long endured, is driving many strong and admirable men and women whose only crime is color to the very gates of paranoia.

Such conditions, and the constant slights that accompanied segregation in both the North and the South, took a toll. African Americans learned how, in the words of a turn-of-the-century poem by Paul Laurence Dunbar, to “wear the mask.”

Still, the black community remained intact. Chicago’s South Side neighborhood was a vibrant place, replacing New York’s Harlem as black America’s cultural capital in the 1950s. This section of the city included such figures as boxing champion Joe Louis, gospel singer Mahalia Jackson, and Representative William Dawson, one of the few African American members of Congress.

Here and elsewhere, the black church played an important role in sustaining African American life. Blacks moving into the cities retained churchgoing habits and a commitment to religious institutions from their rural days. Older, established churches assisted newcomers in the transition to urban America, while new religious groups began to form. The churches offered more than religious sustenance alone. Many provided day-care facilities, ran Boy Scout and Girl Scout troops, and sponsored a variety of other social services.

The growth of the black urban population fostered the increased growth of businesses catering to the African American community. Black newspapers now provided a more regional, rather than a national, focus, but magazines such as *Jet*, a pocket-size

weekly with a large, countrywide circulation, filled the void. Black-owned and black-operated banks and other financial institutions increased in number.

Yet most African Americans remained second-class citizens. Escape from the slums was difficult for many and impossible for most. Persistent poverty remained a dismal fact of life.

African American Gains

African Americans had made significant gains during World War II. Black servicemen returning from the war vowed to reject second-class citizenship and helped mobilize a grassroots movement to counter discrimination. In the postwar years, African struggles for independence, such as the Kenyan Mau Mau revolt against the British, inspired African American leaders who now saw the quest for black equality in a broader context. They took enormous pride in the achievement of independence by a number of



Baseball Superstar Jackie Robinson Jackie Robinson’s electrifying play as the first African American in the major leagues led to acceptance of the integration of baseball. A spectacular rookie season in 1947 opened the way for other African Americans who had earlier been limited to the Negro leagues. In this photo, taken at Ebbets Field in Brooklyn during the 1957 World Series, Robinson is about to steal home. What impression do you have of Robinson here? (*Time Life Pictures/Getty Images*)

African nations and demanded comparable change at home. As Adam Clayton Powell, a Harlem preacher (and later congressman), warned, the black man “is ready to throw himself into the struggle to make the dream of America become flesh and blood, bread and butter, freedom and equality. He walks conscious of the fact that he is no longer alone—no longer a minority.”

The racial question was dramatized in 1947 when Jackie Robinson broke the color line and began playing major league baseball with the Brooklyn Dodgers. Sometimes teammates were hostile, sometimes opponents crashed into him with spikes high, but Robinson kept his frustrations to himself. A splendid first season helped ease the way and resulted in his selection as Rookie of the Year. African Americans flocked to the ballpark and followed his exploits on the radio. As Charles Jones of Charlotte, North Carolina, noted, “Robinson was knocking a ball everywhere on a *white man’s* baseball field. . . . I mean the entire community would be glued to listening, and inevitably Jackie would steal a base or knock a home run, and we’d be rooting.” After Robinson’s trailblazing effort, other blacks, formerly confined to the old Negro leagues, moved into the major leagues in baseball and then into other sports.

Some Americans were embarrassed as racial discrimination became entangled with Cold War politics. The appeal for support in Africa and Asia seemed hollow with segregation at home.

Somewhat reluctantly, Truman supported the civil rights movement. A moderate on questions of race, who believed in political, not social, equality, he responded to the growing strength of the African American vote. In 1946, he appointed a Committee on Civil Rights to investigate the problem of lynching and other brutalities against blacks and recommend remedies. The committee’s report, released in October 1947, showed that black Americans remained second-class citizens in every area of American life and called for change.

Though Truman hedged at first, in February 1948, he sent a 10-point civil rights program to Congress, the first presidential civil rights plan since Reconstruction. When the southern wing of the Democratic party bolted later that year, he moved forward even more aggressively. First he issued an executive order barring discrimination in the federal establishment. Then he ordered equality of treatment in the military services. Personnel needs in the Korean War broke down the last restrictions, particularly when the army found that integrated units performed well.



Executive Order
9981 (1948)

Elsewhere, the administration pushed other reforms. The Justice Department, not previously supportive of litigation from the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) on behalf of equal rights for African Americans, now entered the battle against segregation and filed briefs challenging the constitutionality of restrictions in housing, education, and interstate transportation. These actions helped build the pressure for change that influenced the Supreme Court. Congress, however, took little action.

As the civil rights struggle gained momentum during the 1950s, the judicial system played a crucial role. The NAACP was determined to overturn the 1896 Supreme Court decision *Plessy v. Ferguson*, in which the Court had declared that segregation of the black and white races was constitutional if the facilities used by each were “separate but equal.” The decree had been used for generations to sanction rigid segregation, primarily in the South, even though separate facilities were seldom, if ever, equal.

A direct challenge came in 1951. Oliver Brown, the father of 8-year-old Linda Brown, sued the school board of Topeka, Kansas, to allow his daughter to attend a school for white children that she passed as she walked to the bus that carried her to a black school farther away. The case reached the Supreme Court, which grouped several school segregation cases together.

On May 17, 1954, the Supreme Court released its bombshell ruling in *Brown v. Board of Education*. For more than a decade, Supreme Court decisions had gradually expanded black civil rights. Now the Court unanimously decreed that “separate facilities are inherently unequal” and concluded that the “separate but equal” doctrine had no place in public education. African Americans were elated. “The Supreme Court decision is the greatest victory for the Negro people since the Emancipation Proclamation,” Harlem’s *Amsterdam News* proclaimed. Author Ralph Ellison observed, “What a wonderful world of possibilities are unfolded for the children.” A year later, the Court turned to the question of implementation and declared that local school boards, acting with the guidance of lower courts, should move “with all deliberate speed” to desegregate their facilities.

President Eisenhower had the ultimate responsibility for executing the law. Doubting that simple changes in the law could improve race relations, he once observed, “I don’t believe you can change the hearts of men with laws or decisions.” While he thought privately that the *Brown* ruling was wrong, he knew that it was his constitutional duty to see



*Brown v. Board
of Education*
(1954)

that the decision was carried out. Even while urging sympathy for the South in its period of transition, he acted immediately to desegregate the Washington, D.C., schools as a model for the rest of the country. He also ordered desegregation in navy yards and veterans' hospitals.

The South resisted. The crucial confrontation came in Little Rock, Arkansas, in 1957. A desegregation plan, beginning with the token admission of a few black students to Central High School, was ready to go into effect. Just before the school year began, Governor Orval Faubus declared on television that it would not be possible to maintain order if integration took place. National Guardsmen, posted by the governor to keep the peace and armed with bayonets, turned away nine black students as they

tried to enter the school. After three weeks, a federal court ordered the troops to leave. When the black children entered the building, the white students, spurred on by their elders, belligerently opposed them, chanting such slogans as “Two, four, six, eight, we ain’t gonna integrate.” In the face of hostile mobs, the black children left the school.

With the lines drawn, Ike knew that such resistance could not be tolerated, and he finally took the one action he had earlier called unthinkable. For the first time since the end of Reconstruction, an American president called out federal troops to protect the rights of black citizens. Eisenhower ordered paratroopers to Little Rock and placed National Guardsmen under federal command. The black children entered the school and attended classes with the military protecting their rights. Thus desegregation began.

Meanwhile, African Americans, encouraged by their churches, began organizing themselves to take direct action, and their efforts significantly advanced the civil rights movement. In the 1930s and 1940s, some had joined demonstrations protesting job discrimination and segregation. All were horrified by the brutal murder of Emmett Till, a 14-year-old boy from Chicago visiting Mississippi, who offended a white woman at a country store. Pictures of his mangled body in an open casket helped energize the effort.

The catalyzing event occurred in Montgomery, Alabama, in December 1955. Rosa Parks, a 42-year-old



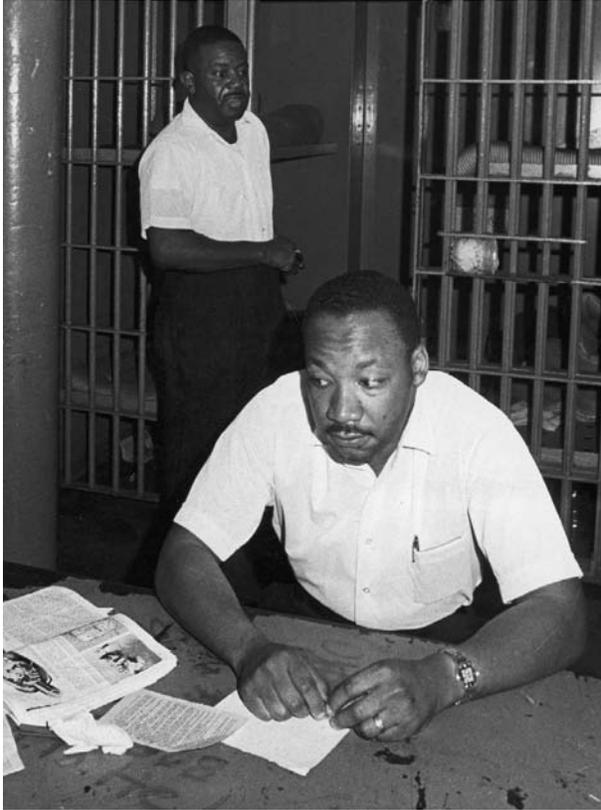
DOCUMENT
The Southern
Manifesto
(1956)



DOCUMENT
Cooper v.
Aaron (1958)



Integrating Little Rock’s Central High School National Guardsmen, under federal command, escorted African American students into Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas, in 1957. Observe the number of students and the number of soldiers as forcible integration began. How must the students have felt to have had such an armed escort? (Burt Glinn/Magnum Photos, Inc.)



Civil Rights Leaders Martin Luther King, Jr., and Ralph Abernathy Baptist minister Martin Luther King, Jr., emerged as the black spokesman in the Montgomery, Alabama, bus boycott and soon became the most eloquent African American leader of the entire civil rights movement. He was often jailed for his efforts, as shown in this picture of him sharing a cell with Ralph Abernathy, another civil rights leader. What effect did the jailing of King have on the larger movement? (Bettmann/CORBIS)

black seamstress who was also secretary of the Montgomery branch of the NAACP, sat down in the front of a bus in a section reserved by custom for whites. When ordered to move back, the longtime activist refused to budge. The bus driver called the police at the next stop, and Parks was arrested for violating the segregation laws.

That episode had an enormous impact. “Somewhere in the universe, a gear in the machinery shifted,” black activist Eldridge Cleaver observed, as African American civil rights officials seized the issue. E. D. Nixon, state NAACP president, told Parks, “This is the case we’ve been looking for. We can break this situation on the bus with your case.” Fifty black leaders met to discuss the case and decided to organize a massive boycott of the bus system.

Martin Luther King, Jr., the 27-year-old minister of the Baptist church where the meeting was held, soon emerged as the preeminent spokesman of the protest. King was an impressive figure and an inspiring speaker. “There comes a time when people

get tired . . . of being kicked about by the brutal feet of oppression,” he declared. It was time to be more assertive, to cease being “patient with anything less than freedom and justice.”

Although King, like others, was arrested on the trumped-up charge of speeding and jailed, grassroots support bubbled up. In Montgomery, 50,000 African Americans walked or formed car pools to avoid the transit system. Their actions cut gross revenue on city buses by 65 percent. Almost a year later, the Supreme Court ruled that bus segregation, like school segregation, violated the Constitution, and the boycott ended. But the mood it fostered continued, as ordinary black men and women challenged the racial status quo and forced both white and black leaders to respond.

Meanwhile, a concerted effort developed to guarantee black voting rights. The provisions of the Fifteenth Amendment notwithstanding, many states had circumvented the law for decades. Some states required a poll tax or a literacy test or an examination of constitutional understanding. Blacks often found themselves excluded from the polls.

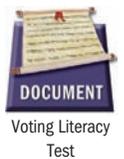
Largely because of the legislative genius of Senate majority leader Lyndon B. Johnson of Texas, a civil rights bill, the first since Reconstruction, moved toward passage. Paring the bill down to the provisions he felt would pass, Johnson pushed the measure through.

The Civil Rights Act of 1957 created a Civil Rights Commission and empowered the Justice Department to go to court in cases in which blacks were denied the right to vote. The bill was a compromise measure, yet it was the first successful effort to protect civil rights in 82 years.

Again led by Johnson, Congress passed the Civil Rights Act of 1960. This new measure set stiffer penalties for people who interfered with the right to vote but again stopped short of authorizing federal registrars to register blacks to vote and so, like its predecessor, was generally ineffective.

Latinos on the Fringe

Latinos, like other groups, had similar difficulties in the postwar United States. Latino immigrants from Cuba, Puerto Rico, Mexico, and Central America, often unskilled and illiterate, followed other less fortunate Americans to the cities. The conditions they encountered there were similar to those faced by blacks. Author Piri Thomas, born of Puerto Rican and Cuban parents in New York City’s Spanish Harlem, described his neighborhood in his memoir *Down These Mean Streets*:





Deportees Mexicans who entered the United States illegally were often arrested and deported. The men in this picture, waiting in a border patrol jail at Calexico, California, in 1951, walked 50 miles across the desert without adequate food and water, only to be apprehended and sent back. What image does this photograph convey about their state of mind? (*Time Life Pictures/Getty Images*)

Man! How many times have I stood on the rooftop of my broken-down building at night and watched the bulb-lit world below.

Like somehow it's different at night, this my Harlem. There ain't no bright sunlight to reveal the stark naked truth of garbage-lepered streets. Gone is the drabness and hurt, covered by a friendly night.

It makes clean the dirty-faced kids.

In the face of recurring discrimination, Spanish-speaking groups maintained a strong sense of group identity. The urban *barrios* where they settled preserved a sense of community and close-knit cohesive culture, even in the midst of pervasive poverty. The ties fostered in these communities provided a strong base for a growing political consciousness.

Chicanos, or Mexican Americans, were the most numerous of the newcomers and faced peculiar difficulties. During World War II, as the country experienced a labor shortage at home, American farmers sought Mexican *braceros* (helping hands) to harvest their crops. A program to encourage the seasonal immigration of farm workers continued after the war when the government signed a Migratory Labor Agreement with Mexico. Between 1948 and 1964, some 4.5 million Mexicans were brought to the United States for temporary work. *Braceros* were expected to return to Mexico at the end of their labor contract, but often they stayed. Joining them were millions more who entered the country illegally.

Conditions were harsh for the *braceros* in the best of times, but in periods of economic difficulty, troubles

worsened. During a serious recession in 1953–1954, the government mounted Operation Wetback to deport illegal entrants and *braceros* who had remained in the country illegally and expelled 1.1 million. As immigration officials searched out illegal workers, all Chicanos found themselves vulnerable.

Operation Wetback did not end the reliance on poor Mexican farm laborers. A coalition of southern Democrats and conservative Republicans, mostly representing farm states, extended the Migratory Labor Agreement with Mexico, for the legislators wanted to continue to take advantage of the cheap labor. Two years after the massive deportations of 1954, a record 445,000 *braceros* crossed the border.

Puerto Ricans were numerous in other parts of the country. A steady stream of immigrants had been coming to New York from Puerto Rico since the 1920s. As the island's sugarcane economy became more mechanized, nearly 40 percent of the inhabitants left their homes. By the end of the 1960s, New York City had more Puerto Ricans than San Juan, the island's capital. El Barrio, in East Harlem, became the center of Puerto Rican activity, the home of *salsa* music and small *bodegas*, grocery stores that served the neighborhood. Author Guillermo Cotto-Thorner described the place fondly in his autobiographical novel, *Trópico en Manhattan*, through the words of Antonio, an older resident.

This . . . is our neighborhood, El Barrio. . . . It's said that we Latins run things here. And that's how we see ourselves. While the Americans take most of the money

that circulates around here, we consider this part of the city to be ours. . . . The stores, barbershops, restaurants, butcher shops, churches, funeral parlors, greasy spoons, pool halls, everything is all Latino. Every now and then you see a business run by a Jew or an Irishman or an Italian, but you'll also see that even these people know a little Spanish.

Puerto Ricans, like many other immigrants, hoped to earn money in America and then return home. Some did; others stayed. Like countless Latinos, most failed to enjoy the promise of the American dream.

Like African Americans, Latinos fought for their own rights. The roots of the Latino struggle dated back to the World War II years. Chicanos established the American GI Forum because a Texas funeral home refused to bury a Mexican American casualty of World War II. When the group's protest led to a burial in Arlington National Cemetery, the possibilities of concerted action became clear. In the waning months of the war, a court case challenged Mexican American segregation in the schools. Gonzalo Méndez, an asparagus grower and a U.S. citizen who had lived in Orange County, California, for 25 years, filed suit to permit his children to attend the school reserved for Anglo-Americans, which was far more attractive than the Mexican one to which they had been assigned. A federal district court upheld his claim in the spring of 1945, and two years later, the circuit court affirmed the original ruling. With the favorable decision, other communities filed similar suits and began to press for integration of their schools. Meanwhile, Mexican American veterans chafed under continuing discrimination at home.

New organizations arose to struggle for equal rights. The Community Service Organization mobilized Chicanos against discrimination, as did the more radical *Asociación Nacional México-Americana*. And the League of United Latin American Citizens continued reform efforts.

Confrontations continued. Los Angeles, with its large number of Chicanos, was the scene of numerous unsavory racial episodes. In mid-1951, on receiving a complaint about a loud record player, police officers raided a baptismal gathering at the home of Simon Fuentes. Breaking into the house without a warrant, they assaulted the members of the party. In the "Bloody Christmas" case at the end of the year, officers removed seven Mexican Americans from jail cells and beat them severely.

Chicano activism in the 1950s was fragmented. Some Mexican Americans considered their situation hopeless. More effective mobilization had to await another day.

The Native American Struggle

Native Americans likewise remained outsiders in the postwar years. Years of persistent discrimination made it even harder to cope with the changes they faced. As power lines reached their reservations, Indians purchased televisions, refrigerators, washing machines, and automobiles. As they partook of the consumer culture, old patterns inevitably changed. Reservation life lost its cohesiveness, and alcohol became a major problem. With good jobs unavailable on the reservations, more and more Indians gravitated to the cities. Bennie Bearskin, a Winnebago, left home for Chicago in 1947, explaining: "The most important reason was that I could at least feel confident that [I could get] perhaps fifty paychecks a year here. . . . Even though it might be more pleasant to be back home, for instance, Nebraska." But Indians who moved to the cities often had difficulty adjusting to urban life and frequently faced hostility from white Americans.

Native Americans, like Latinos, began their own struggle for equality. They achieved an important victory just after the end of World War II when Congress established the Indian Claims Commission. Hundreds of tribal suits charging that ancestral lands had been illegally seized could now be filed against the government in federal courts. Many of them led to large settlements of cash—a form of



Troubles for Native American Veterans After returning home at the end of World War II, many Native American veterans found it difficult to fit into either Native American or white society. Alcoholism—which sometimes led to confrontations with the law—became a problem, as reflected in this sketch by Native American artist Aaron Yava, who drew what he saw in what he called the “border towns of the Navajo Nation.” What might have caused such confrontations? (Courtesy of the family of Aaron Yava)

TIMELINE

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| <p>1946 4.6 million workers on strike
ENIAC computer built
Benjamin Spock, <i>Baby and Child Care</i>
Employment Act</p> <hr/> <p>1947 Defense budget of \$13 billion
Taft–Hartley Act
Jackie Robinson breaks the color line in major league baseball</p> <hr/> <p>1948 GM offers UAW cost-of-living adjustment
Transistor developed at Bell Laboratories
Alfred C. Kinsey, <i>Sexual Behavior in the Human Male</i>
“Dixiecrat” party formed
Truman defeats Dewey</p> <hr/> <p>1949 Truman launches Fair Deal</p> <hr/> <p>1950s Each year a million farmers leave farms</p> <hr/> <p>1950 Diner’s Club card inaugurated
Asociación Nacional México-Americana formed</p> <hr/> <p>1951 J. D. Salinger, <i>The Catcher in the Rye</i></p> <hr/> <p>1952 Dwight D. Eisenhower elected president</p> <hr/> <p>1953 Defense budget of \$47 billion
Operation Wetback begins
Submerged Lands Act</p> | <p>1954 Congress adds “under God” to pledge to flag
<i>Brown v. Board of Education</i></p> <hr/> <p>1955 First McDonald’s opens in Illinois
Merger of AFL and CIO
Congress adds “In God We Trust” to currency
Montgomery, Alabama, bus boycott begins
Allen Ginsberg, “Howl!”—written and read</p> <hr/> <p>1956 Interstate Highway Act
Majority of U.S. workers hold white-collar jobs
Eisenhower reelected</p> <hr/> <p>1957 Baby boom peaks
Jack Kerouac, <i>On the Road</i>
Little Rock, Arkansas, school integration crisis
Civil Rights Act</p> <hr/> <p>1960 Three-quarters of all American families own a TV set
Civil Rights Act</p> <hr/> <p>1962 Michael Harrington, <i>The Other America</i></p> <hr/> <p>1963 California passes New York as most populous state
Betty Friedan, <i>The Feminine Mystique</i></p> <hr/> <p>1964 Peter Blake, <i>God’s Own Junkyard</i></p> |
|---|---|

reparation for past injustices—and sometimes the return of long-lost lands.

In the 1950s, federal Indian policy shifted course. As part of its effort to limit the role of the national government, the Eisenhower administration turned away from the New Deal policy of government support for tribal autonomy. In 1953, instead of trying to encourage Native American self-government, the administration adopted a new approach, known as “termination.” The government proposed settling all outstanding claims and eliminating reservations as legitimate political entities. To encourage their assimilation into mainstream society, families who would leave the reservations and move to cities were offered small subsidies by the government.

The new policy infuriated Native Americans. Earl Old Person, a Blackfoot elder, declared: “It is important to note that in our Indian language the only translation for termination is to ‘wipe out’ or ‘kill off’ . . . How can we plan our future when the Indian Bureau threatens to wipe us out as a race? It is like trying to cook a meal in your tipi when someone is standing outside trying to burn the tipi down.” With their lands no longer federally protected and their members deprived of treaty rights, many tribes became unwitting victims of people who wanted to seize their land. Though promising more freedom,

the new policy caused great disruption as the government terminated tribes such as the Klamath in Oregon, the Menominee in Wisconsin, the Alabama and Coushatta in Texas, and bands of Paiute in Utah.

The policy increased Indian activism. The National Congress of American Indians mobilized opposition to the federal program. A Seminole petition to the president in 1954 summed up a general view:

We do not say that we are superior or inferior to the White Man and we do not say that the White Man is superior or inferior to us. We do say that we are not White Men but Indians, do not wish to become White Men but wish to remain Indians, and have an outlook on all things different from the outlook of the White Man.

Not only did the termination policy foster a sense of Indian identity, but it also sparked a dawning awareness among whites of the Indians’ right to maintain their heritage. In 1958, the Eisenhower administration changed the policy of termination so that it required a tribe’s consent. The policy continued to have the force of law, but implementation ceased.

Asian American Advances

For Asian Americans, conditions improved somewhat in the aftermath of World War II. The war

against Nazism eroded the racism that proclaimed a commitment to white superiority. Japanese Americans, ravaged by their devastating internment during the war, fought back after the struggle. In 1946, a measure supporting a wartime law confiscating Japanese American property appeared on the ballot in California. But a spirited campaign by the Japanese American Citizens League reminding voters of the contributions of Japanese American soldiers during the war led to the measure's overwhelming defeat. Two years later, the Supreme Court, noting that the law was "nothing more than outright racial discrimination," declared it unconstitutional.

In 1952, the Immigration and Nationality Act, also known as the McCarran–Walter Act, eased

immigration quotas. Although the basic framework of the National Origins Act of 1924 remained intact, it removed the longstanding ban on Japanese immigration and made first-generation Japanese immigrants eligible for citizenship. It also established a quota of 100 immigrants a year from each Asian country. While that number was tiny compared to those admitted annually from northern and western Europe, the measure was a first step in ending the discriminatory exclusion of the past.

By the 1950s, many second- and third-generation Chinese, Japanese, and Koreans had moved into white-collar work. Promoting education for their children, they became part of the growing middle class, hoping like others to enjoy the benefits of the American dream.

Conclusion

Qualms amid Affluence

In general, the United States during the decade and a half after World War II was stable and secure. Structural adjustments caused occasional moments of friction but were seldom visible in prosperous times. Recessions occurred periodically, but the economy righted itself after short downturns. For the most part, business boomed. The standard of living for many of the nation's citizens reached new heights, especially compared with standards in other parts of the world. Millions of middle-class Americans joined the ranks of suburban property owners, enjoying the benefits of shopping centers, fast-food establishments, and other material manifestations of what they considered the good life. Workers found themselves savoring the materialistic advantages of the era. The political world reflected prosperous times.

Some Americans did not share in the prosperity, but they were not visible in the affluent suburbs. Many African Americans and members of other minority groups were seriously disadvantaged, although they still believed they could share in the American dream and remained confident that deeply rooted patterns of

discrimination could be changed. Even when they began to mobilize, their protest was peaceful at first.

Beneath the calm surface, though, there were signs of discontent. The seeds for the protest movements of the 1960s had already been sown. Disquieting signs were likewise evident on other fronts. The divorce rate increased as one-third of all marriages in the 1950s broke apart. Americans increasingly used newly developed tranquilizers in an effort to cope with problems in their lives. Some Americans began to criticize the materialism that seemed to undermine American efforts in the Cold War. Such criticisms in turn legitimized challenges by other groups, in the continuing struggle to make the realities of American life match the nation's ideals.

Criticisms and anxieties notwithstanding, the United States—for most whites and some people of color—continued to develop according to Ray Kroc's dreams as he first envisioned McDonald's establishments across the land. Healthy and comfortable, upper- and middle-class Americans expected prosperity and growth to continue in the years ahead.

Questions for Review and Reflection

1. What were the sources of American prosperity?
2. Who prospered most in postwar America?
3. Who was left out?
4. Why did conformity become the norm in the postwar United States?
5. How would you characterize the broad social and economic changes that took place in America in the years after World War II?

Recommended Reading

Recommended Readings are posted on the Web site for this textbook. Visit www.ablongman.com/nash

Fiction and Film

Guillermo Cotto-Thorner's, *Trópico en Manhattan* (1967) is an autobiographical novel about the Puerto Rican community in New York City. Allen Drury's, *Advise and Consent* (1959) is a novel about Washington politics, complete with blackmail and demagoguery. Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* (1952) is a powerful fictional account of an African American's journey through the 1950s. Allen Ginsberg's, *Howl and Other Poems* (1956) is a collection of iconoclastic poetry challenging the materialism of contemporary life. Jack Kerouac's *On the Road* (1957) is a stream-of-consciousness novel that questions the values of the 1950s. Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman* (1949) is the Pulitzer Prize-winning play about the shallow values of postwar American culture. J. D. Salinger's, *Catcher in the Rye* (1951) is the story of Holden Caulfield, a troubled adolescent who is overwhelmed by the phoniness of contemporary life. Sloan Wilson's, *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit* (1955) is a novel challenging the conformity of corporate America in the 1950s.

The Best Years of Our Lives (1946), the Academy Award-winning story of three servicemen returning home after World War II, captures the values of the immediate postwar era. *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1962) is a film based on Harper Lee's novel by the same title about children learning about racism—and about how to deal with it—in the South. *Kinsey* (2004) describes the life and work of Alfred Kinsey, the controversial sex researcher. *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit* (1956), the film made from the novel of the same name, critiques the lifestyle of corporate America in the 1950s. *The Murder of Emmett Till* (2003) is a powerful documentary film about the episode that helped mobilize African Americans. *The Untold Story of the Murder of Emmett Louis Till* (2004) is another vivid documentary that led the Justice Department to reopen the case. *No Down Payment* (1957) deals with life in the suburbs, as does the much more recent *Pleasantville* (1998), as it looks back at an earlier era.

Discovering U.S. History Online

The Postwar United States

http://lcweb2.loc.gov/ammem/ndlpedu/features/time_line/postwar/postwar.html

By way of primary documents, interviews, and artifacts, this site presents two sections: Arts and Entertainment: 1945–1968 and The Presidential Election of 1960.

Creating the Interstate System

www.tfhr.gov/pubrds/summer96/p96su10.htm

An illustrated article from the U.S. Department of Transportation, Federal Highway Administration's "Public Roads Website."

Levittown: Documents of an Ideal American Suburb

www.uic.edu/~pbhales/Levittown/

The postwar boom in housing made suburban living the cultural norm in America and shaped a generation. The story of the classic suburb, Levittown, is told on this site in pictures and text.

Computer History Museum

www.computerhistory.org

Choose from an interactive timeline, an image gallery, a video gallery, and a "guided" tour of the exhibits to explore the history of computers.

Fifties Web

www.fiftiesweb.com

This entertaining personal site tells about and samples music and television from the 1950s. It also includes a related links page.

American Cultural History: 1950–1959

<http://kclibrary.nhmccd.edu/decade50.html>

This site presents facts about the decade and a comprehensive overview of several cultural subtopics.

Religion in Post-World War II America

www.nhc.rtp.nc.us:8080/tserve/twenty/tkeyinfo/trelw2.htm

An essay on religion along with links to online resources.

Rachel Carson

www.rachelcarson.org

An illustrated biography and bibliography of this pioneering ecologist.

Harry S Truman

<http://www.ipl.org/div/potus/hstruman.html>

This site contains basic factual data about Truman's election and presidency, speeches, and online biographies.

Harry S Truman Library and Museumwww.trumanlibrary.org

This presidential library site has numerous photos and various important primary documents relating to Truman.

Dwight David Eisenhower<http://www.ipl.org/div/potus/ddeisenhower.html>

This site contains basic factual data about Eisenhower's election and presidency, including speeches and other materials.

The Dwight D. Eisenhower Library and Museumwww.eisenhower.utexas.edu

This site contains mainly photos of the president.

The Central High Crisis, Little Rock 1957www.ardemgaz.com/prev/central/

Using articles and photographs from Arkansas newspapers, the site explores the 1957 Little Rock events.

Massive Resistancewww.vcdh.virginia.edu/vahistory/massive.resistance/index.html

This site documents Virginia's resistance to segregation of schools with photographs, interview clips, documents, and a timeline of events.

Civil Rightswww.museum.tv/education/unit1.shtml

This site includes three online video documentaries. *As We See It: Little Rock Central High School* is a remarkable story of growth at the once infamous Little Rock Central High School as seen through the eyes of three sets of students from each period of change: the late 1950s, the late 1960s, and the late 1970s. This show was narrated and produced by the class of 1979 at Central High (1979). In *Corner of the Carpet*, Frank McGee examines the economic and moral cost of slums in Montgomery, Alabama (1956). *Malcolm X: City Desk* is an interview featuring Malcolm X that centers on civil rights and the Black Muslim movement (1963).