

# 13

## Postwar Confidence and Anxiety

1945–1960

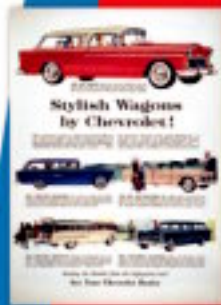


## WITNESS HISTORY AUDIO

### Postwar Prosperity

World War II was over, and Americans wanted nothing more than to put it and all its horrors behind them. Government spending helped new families make ends meet and helped change the economy from making bombs and warplanes to making cars and refrigerators. Americans were eager to buy these newly available items. They bought houses in the suburbs, cars, washing machines, automatic mixers, radios, and cameras. The future seemed rosy. *Listen to the Witness History audio to hear more about the prosperity and anxiety of the nation after World War II.*

- ◀ A favorite family pastime was taking a long afternoon drive in the family car.



1950s car ad



A cosmetic container served as an Eisenhower campaign item.

### Chapter Preview

**Chapter Focus Question:** How did social and economic changes after World War II affect Americans?

#### Section 1

An Economic Boom

#### Section 2

A Society on the Move

#### Section 3


Mass Culture and Family Life

#### Section 4

Dissent and Discontent



Elvis Presley

Use the  **Quick Study Timeline** at the end of this chapter to preview chapter events.

#### Note Taking Study Guide Online

For: Note Taking and American Issues Connector  
Web Code: nee-8601

▼ Returning veterans, aided by the GI Bill of Rights, filled university classrooms.

## WITNESS HISTORY AUDIO

### The GI Bill of Rights

Passed in 1944, the Serviceman's Readjustment Act, known as the GI Bill of Rights, was intended to ease the soldier's transition from wartime to peacetime. One veteran remembers how the GI Bill affected his life:

“You were able to go to any school that accepted you . . . So I . . . found the best school that I [could] go to, regardless of tuition, which was Columbia in New York, and they accepted me. I graduated [with] a Bachelor of Science in Business Administration and they accepted me into the Master's program in business at Columbia and I was amazed that [the government] paid the entire tuition. . . . [It] was a revolution that all these people, who never would go to college, went to college because of the GI Bill.”

—Interview with Harvey S. Lowy, Rutgers Oral History Archives of World War II

# An Economic Boom

## Objectives

- Describe how the United States made the transformation to a peacetime economy.
- Discuss the accomplishments of Presidents Harry Truman and Dwight Eisenhower.
- Analyze the 1950s economic boom.

## Terms and People

demobilization  
GI Bill of Rights  
baby boom

productivity  
Taft-Hartley Act  
Fair Deal

## NoteTaking

**Reading Skill: Understand Effects** List the problems raised by the shift to a peacetime economy and the steps taken to solve them.

United States After WWII	
Problem	Solution
• Returning soldiers need jobs	• GI Bill

**Why It Matters** After World War II, many Americans worried that the war's end would bring renewed economic depression. Numerous economists shared this pessimistic view of the future, predicting that the American economy could not produce enough jobs to employ all those who were returning from the military. Yet, instead of a depression, Americans experienced the longest period of economic growth in American history, a boom that enabled millions of Americans to enter the middle class. This era of sustained growth fostered a widespread sense of optimism about the nation's future. **Section Focus Question:** How did the nation experience recovery and economic prosperity after World War II?

## The Nation Recovers From War

At the end of the war in August 1945, more than 12 million Americans were in the military. Thousands of American factories were churning out ships, planes, tanks, and all the materials required to help fight the war in the Pacific. Virtually overnight, both the need for such a huge military machine and the focus on war production came to an end. Orders went out from Washington, D.C., canceling defense contracts, causing millions of defense workers to lose their jobs. Wartime industries had to be converted to meet peacetime needs.



As Americans set about enjoying the fruits of peace, President Harry Truman responded to calls to “bring the boys home for Christmas” by starting the **demobilization**, or sending home members, of the army. By July 1946, only 3 million remained in the military.

Americans were happy that the war was over, but they retained some sense of unease about the future. One poll taken in the fall of 1945 showed that 60 percent of Americans expected their earnings to fall with the return of a peacetime economy. “The American soldier is . . . worried sick about postwar joblessness,” *Fortune* magazine observed.

**The GI Bill Aids Returning Soldiers** To help deal with this anxiety, the federal government enacted a law popularly known as the **GI Bill of Rights**. It granted veterans a variety of benefits. It provided a year of unemployment payments to veterans who were unable to find work. Those who attended college after the war received financial aid. The act also entitled veterans to government loans for building homes and starting businesses.

The GI bill had an enormous impact on American society. Home loans to veterans fueled an **upsurge** in home construction, which led to explosive growth in suburban areas. Perhaps the greatest contribution of the GI bill came in education. The average soldier was inducted into the armed forces at the time when he or she would have been finishing high school. The bill encouraged veterans to enter or return to college. Each veteran was eligible to receive \$500 a year for college tuition. The bill also provided \$50 a month for living expenses and \$75 a month for married veterans. Eight million veterans eventually took advantage of the education benefits.

**A Baby Boom Fills Classrooms** Upon their return, soldiers quickly made up for lost time by marrying and having children. Americans had put off having children because of the depression and war. Now, confident that the bad times were behind them, many married couples started families. This led to what population experts termed a **baby boom**. In 1957, at the peak of the baby boom, one American baby was born every 7 seconds, a grand total of 4.3 million for the year. One newspaper columnist commented, “Just imagine how much these extra people . . . will absorb—in food, in clothing, in gadgets, in housing, in services. . . .” Between 1940 and 1955, the U.S. population experienced its greatest increase, growing 27 percent from about 130 to about 165 million.

**Converting From a Wartime Economy** Fortunately, unemployment did not materialize, nor did a depression return. However, Americans experienced some serious economic problems. The most painful was skyrocketing prices. With war’s end, the federal government ended rationing and price controls, both of which had helped keep inflation in check during the war. A postwar rush to buy goods created severe inflationary pressures. There was just too much money to spend on too few goods. Overall, prices rose about 18 percent in 1946. The price of some products, such as beef, nearly doubled within a year.

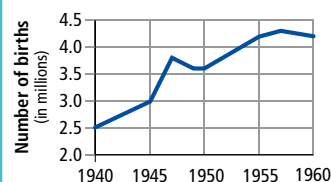
### Vocabulary Builder

**upsurge**—(UHP suhrj) *n.* sudden increase

### New Families

Marriage rates soared as soldiers returned home. Confident that the bad times were behind them, newly wed couples bought new homes and started families. The increase in the birthrate began in 1946 and slowed by 1964.

**Birthrate, 1940–1960**



SOURCE: Historical Statistics of the United States



**The U.S. Dominates the World Economy** During the depression, Americans could not buy the goods they desired. The economy improved during the war, but wartime restrictions kept spending down and limited economic growth. The end of wartime restrictions finally opened the floodgates to consumer purchases. As demand soared, businesses employed more people to produce goods. This created a cycle in which people bought new goods, leading businesses to hire more workers, who in turn bought more goods.

At the end of World War II, the United States was the only developed nation untouched by the devastation. Although it had only 6 percent of the world's population, the United States produced about 50 percent of the world's total output. This allowed Americans to enjoy a higher standard of living than any other nation in the world.

**Technological Progress Boosts Productivity** The American economy benefited from numerous technological advances during the postwar period. Some developments, such as the use of atomic energy, were the result of war research. The use of computers increased, and businesses gradually began to depend on them. Worker **productivity**—the rate at which goods are produced or services performed—continued to improve, largely because of new technology.

**Government Spending Supports Growth** Increased government spending boosted the economy, too. With the outbreak of the Korean War, the United States once again committed a significant part of its budget to defense spending. Military spending led to the development of new technologies and new materials, such as plastics and new light metal alloys, that found widespread use outside the military. Other large federal spending programs, such as the Marshall Plan, initiated foreign demand for goods made in the United States.

#### Vocabulary Builder

initiate—(ih NIHSH ee ayt) *v.* to arrange for something to start



**Checkpoint** What did many Americans expect to happen to the American economy after World War II?

#### INFOGRAPHIC

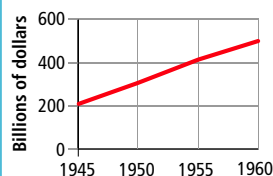
## AMERICA *Returns to* WORK

When World War II ended, nearly everyone feared hard times. However, the postwar years ushered in a period of domestic prosperity that lasted nearly 20 years. The United States became the richest country in the world. Many Americans found that they had greater buying power than ever before.

◀ By 1950, 3 out of 10 women were in the workforce.

The rise in the GNP signaled ▶ the nation's economic success. Between 1945 and 1960, the GNP more than doubled.

#### U.S. GNP, 1945–1960



SOURCE: USInfo.State.Gov

# Truman Overcomes Huge Obstacles

On April 12, 1945, when Franklin Roosevelt died, Harry S. Truman had been Vice President for only 4 months. When Eleanor Roosevelt told him that her husband had died, Truman responded “Is there anything I can do for you?” She replied, “Is there anything we can do for you? For you are the one in trouble now.”


Eleanor Roosevelt’s remark captured Harry Truman’s predicament. He had to preside over one of the more difficult times in American history. The postwar years saw the beginning of the Cold War and communist takeovers in Europe and Asia. At home, there was inflation and labor unrest. Communist advances and a troubled domestic economy created a sense of deep unrest in the American public during the Truman years.

**Grappling With Congress and Labor** From the first days of his presidency, Truman faced a double-barreled challenge: a restless labor movement and a combative Republican Party. Trade unionists demanded pay increases to keep up with inflation. When employers refused to meet labor’s demands, millions of steel, coal, railroad, and automotive workers went on strike.

The wave of strikes was one of the largest in American history. It prompted Congress to enact the **Taft-Hartley Act**, a law that outlawed the closed shop—a workplace in which only union members can be hired. Taft-Hartley rolled back some of the rights that labor unions had gained during the New Deal. Although Truman vetoed the Taft-Hartley Act, Congress overrode his veto.

**Angering Segregationists** Unlike FDR, who feared challenging the power of white southern senators and representatives, Truman refused to remain passive. He established a special committee on civil rights to investigate race relations. The committee made several recommendations for civil rights reforms. However, Congress rejected the recommendations

American families wanted their own homes. Home construction contributed to the booming economy. ▼



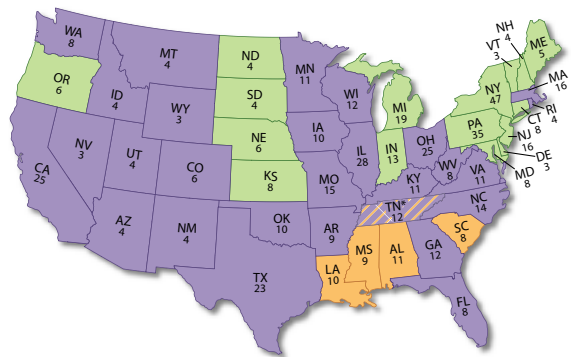
As the demand for consumer goods soared, manufacturers turned out an increasing number of products. Here, workers assemble television sets. ▼



## Thinking Critically

1. **Analyze Graphs** How much did the GNP increase between 1945 and 1960?
2. **Analyze Information** Why was the postwar period a time of prosperity for most Americans?

# Presidential Election of 1948



Candidate (Party)	Electoral Vote	Popular Vote	% Electoral Vote	% Popular Vote
Truman (Democratic)	303	24,105,182	57	50
Dewey (Republican)	189	21,970,065	36	46
Thurmond (States' Rights)	39	1,169,063	7	2
Wallace (Progressive)	—	1,157,172	—	2

\*One of Tennessee's electors voted for Thurmond

## A Truman Victory

Despite the mistaken headline, Truman defeated Dewey in a close election. The Democrats won with a popular vote of 24 million to the Republicans' popular vote of nearly 22 million. The campaign button promoted Truman's opponents, Thurmond and Wright from the States' Rights Party. *What role should the media have in elections?*

and did not pass any meaningful civil rights reforms until the late 1950s. Truman also issued an executive order desegregating the military. This was more successful. By 1951, most units had been integrated.

**Truman Upsets Dewey** By the spring of 1948, Truman's standing had sunk so low that he faced challenges from both the right and the left in his own Democratic Party. Southern Democrats, angry at Truman's support for civil rights, left the party and established the States' Rights Party. They named South Carolina governor Strom Thurmond as their candidate for President. At the other end of the political spectrum, Henry Wallace, who had been Vice President during FDR's third term, broke with Truman over foreign policy issues. Wallace became the candidate of a new Progressive Party.


The breakaway of two large blocs of Democrats was accompanied by the Republican Party's nomination of Thomas Dewey, the well-known governor of New York, for President. Few people thought that Truman had any chance of winning the 1948 election. Truman, however, did not see it that way. He staged an energetic "whistle stop" train tour of the nation, delivering over 300 speeches and traveling 31,000 miles in a matter of weeks. At train stops in small towns, Truman attacked the current Congress as "do nothing" and the worst in history. "Give 'em hell, Harry!" some in the crowd would cry out during his speeches. Although every political poll predicted that Dewey would win easily, Truman won by a narrow victory. He had managed the political upset of the century.

**Truman Proposes a Fair Deal** Shortly after the election, Truman announced a far-ranging legislative program, which he called the **Fair Deal**. The Fair Deal, he explained, would strengthen existing New Deal reforms and establish new programs, such as national health insurance. But Congress was not in a reforming mood, and Truman failed to win approval for most of his Fair Deal proposals.

Legislative failure and a stalled war in Korea contributed to Truman's loss of popularity. He chose not to seek the 1952 Democratic nomination. His reputation, however, has improved through the years. Today, many historians applaud



him for his common-sense approach, as the first President to challenge public discrimination and as a determined opponent of communist expansion.

 **Checkpoint** Why were workers dissatisfied during the postwar period?

## Eisenhower Charts a Middle Path

The 1952 election was hardly a contest. The Republican candidate, Dwight Eisenhower, was so popular that both the Democratic and Republican parties had wanted him as their presidential candidate. Eisenhower, whose nickname was Ike, charmed the public with his friendly smile, reassuring personality, and record of service and honesty. The Democratic candidate, Adlai Stevenson, a senator from Illinois, failed to catch the popular imagination the way Eisenhower did.


Dwight Eisenhower had spent nearly his entire adult life in the military and had never held a political office before 1952. Thus, Americans could not know for certain which way he would guide the nation upon taking office. However, most Americans believed that Eisenhower's calm personality mirrored his political views and that he would keep to the "middle road," achieving a balance between liberal and conservative positions.

Eisenhower charted a middle course as President. While he shared the conservative view that the federal government had grown too strong, he did not repeal existing New Deal programs, such as Social Security and the minimum wage. Federal spending actually increased during his presidency. Eisenhower even introduced several large new programs. For example, he created an interstate highway system and began to spend federal dollars for education, specifically to train more scientists.

One reason for Eisenhower's popularity was the strength of the American economy during the 1950s. His presidency was one of the most prosperous, peaceful, and politically tranquil in the twentieth century.



Dwight Eisenhower

 **Checkpoint** Why did federal spending increase during Eisenhower's presidency?

### SECTION

# 1

## Assessment

### Progress Monitoring Online

For: Self-test with vocabulary practice  
Web Code: nea-1302

### Comprehension

- 1. Terms and People** Explain how each of the following changed the lives of Americans during the postwar years.
  - GI Bill of Rights
  - baby boom
  - productivity
  - Fair Deal
- 2. NoteTaking Reading Skill: Understand Effects** Use your problem-and-solution chart to answer the Section Focus Question: How did the nation experience recovery and economic prosperity after World War II?

### Writing About History

- 3. Quick Write: Gather Information** Use the library and reliable Internet sources to find information about the Taft-Hartley Act. Use the words *Taft-Hartley Act* as key words to begin a search. Once you have found several sites, create note cards to gather the information you have found.

### Critical Thinking

- 4. Identify Assumptions** Why was the government willing to give billions of dollars in assistance to returning World War II veterans?
- 5. Draw Conclusions** After the war, Truman faced challenges with labor unions. Would you consider Truman as working for or against organized labor? Explain.
- 6. Synthesize Information** How did the baby boom impact the postwar economy?



## Homes for Veterans

In 1949, developer William Levitt purchased thousands of acres of farmland in Hempstead, on Long Island, New York. Drawing on modern production techniques, he constructed thousands of homes that he sold for just under \$8,000 each. Advertisements for Levittown captured the mood of the country as it stood poised to begin an era of unprecedented prosperity.

“This is Levittown! All yours for \$58 [a month]. You’re a lucky fellow, Mr. Veteran. Uncle Sam and the world’s largest builder have made [it] possible for you to live in a charming house in a delightful community without having to pay for them with your eyeteeth.”

—Advertisement for Levittown homes,  
*The New York Times*, March 1949

▲ Moving vans line the street of a new suburban neighborhood.

# A Society on the Move

## Objectives

- Examine the rise of the suburbs and the growth of the Sunbelt.
- Describe changes in the U.S. economy and education in the postwar period.

## Terms and People

Interstate Highway Act	multinational
Sunbelt	corporation
service sector	AFL-CIO
information industry	California Master Plan
franchise business	

## NoteTaking

### Reading Skill: Identify Main Ideas

Complete a chart like the one below to capture the main ideas.

Postwar Changes		
Society	Economy	Education
• Growth of suburbs	• Service economy	•

**Why It Matters** Since the first colonists arrived in Jamestown, Virginia, Americans have been on the move. In the years following World War II, mobility became especially important. People moved to the suburbs and to the Sunbelt. They also moved into white-collar jobs. At the same time, the American economy was changing. The impact of these changes still affects us today. **Section Focus Question:** What social and economic factors changed American life during the 1950s?

## Americans Move to the Suburbs

Between 1940 and 1960, more than 40 million Americans moved to the suburbs, one of the largest mass migrations in history. Rural regions suffered the most dramatic decline in population, but people also came by the thousands from older industrial cities, seeking, as one father put it, a place where “a kid could grow up with grass stains on his pants.” During the same time period, many older industrial cities lost population.

**Suburbs Attract Young Americans** People flocked to the suburbs in part because the nation suffered from a severe shortage of urban housing. During the depression and World War II, new housing construction had come to a near standstill. At war’s end, as Americans married and formed families, they went in search of a place they could call their own.

Fortunately, at this time of peak demand, developers figured out how to build affordable housing in a hurry. William Levitt became a leader in mass producing suburban homes. Entire rows of houses in Levittown were built using the same plan. This method enabled workers to build houses in weeks rather than in months. On the installment plan, buyers could pay \$58 a month toward the cost of a home. Demand for the homes was so great that Levitt built two other Levittowns—one outside Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and the other in New Jersey. These houses were ideal for young couples starting out because they were affordable and comfortable. Other developers adopted Levitt's techniques, and suburbs were soon springing up across the country.

Suburban development depended on help from the government. State and federal governments constructed thousands of miles of highways that linked the suburbs to cities. New home buyers benefited from the GI bill and the Federal Housing Administration (FHA), which provided low-interest loans. FHA-backed loans allowed home buyers to pay as little as 5 to 10 percent of the purchase price and to pay off their mortgages over 30 years.

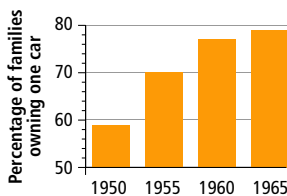
Residents of new suburbs faced the challenge of establishing new towns with churches and schools and police and fire departments. Through these institutions, the suburbanites forged a sense of community. During the 1950s, the suburbs became increasingly self-contained. While suburban residents of earlier generations had depended on the city for entertainment and shopping, the post-war suburban dweller could find a vast array of goods and services in nearby shopping centers.

**The “Car Culture” Takes Over** During the 1920s, automobile ownership had soared in the United States. With the explosion of suburban growth in the 1950s, Americans grew even more dependent upon their cars. The number of registered automobiles jumped from 26 million in 1945 to 60 million in 1960.

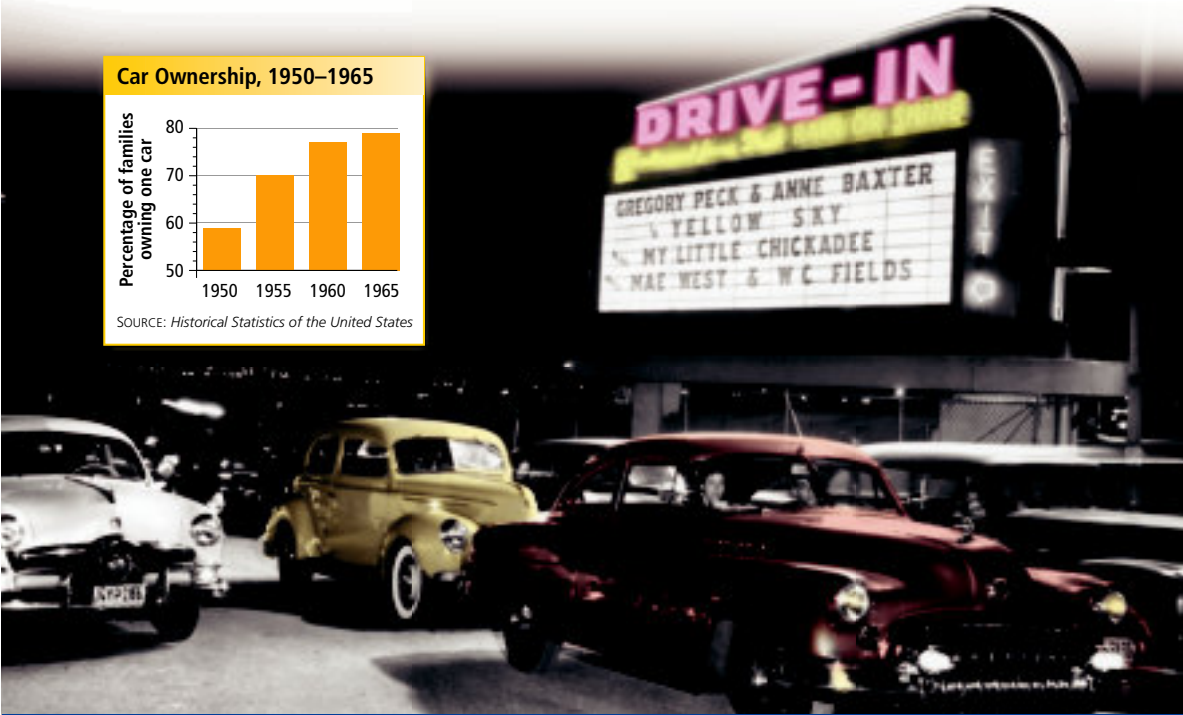
### The Car Culture

The automobile industry thrived and, as a result, led to new businesses. As shown here, Americans were happy to spend leisure time in their cars and watch a movie at the local drive-in theater. The number of families that owned cars increased drastically between 1950 and 1960. *Do you think increased car ownership may have had negative effects?*

**Car Ownership, 1950–1965**



SOURCE: *Historical Statistics of the United States*



# The New Suburban Lifestyle

As more families moved into the suburbs, a new way of life emerged. Suburban communities blossomed as all the services and conveniences of city life, including hospitals, entertainment, and shopping centers, became available. Schools were usually nearby, and children, as shown here, could easily walk to one.

Suburban dwellers greatly depended on the automobile. Shopping malls were built with large parking lots to accommodate shoppers' cars.

In time, most suburban families owned two cars.



These new automobiles tended to have big engines and enormous horsepower. They came with the newest technology, such as power steering and brakes and automatic transmission. Harley Earl of the Ford Motor Company captured the mood of the 1950s by designing cars with lots of chrome that reminded people of jet planes.

While some suburbanites rode the train or other forms of mass transportation, Americans increasingly depended upon their cars to commute to work. Suburbanites also needed their cars to shop at suburban shopping malls. Entrepreneurs opened fast-food restaurants and drive-in movie theaters, both of which catered to the car culture. While these businesses flourished, many older businesses, often located in older city neighborhoods, struggled to survive.



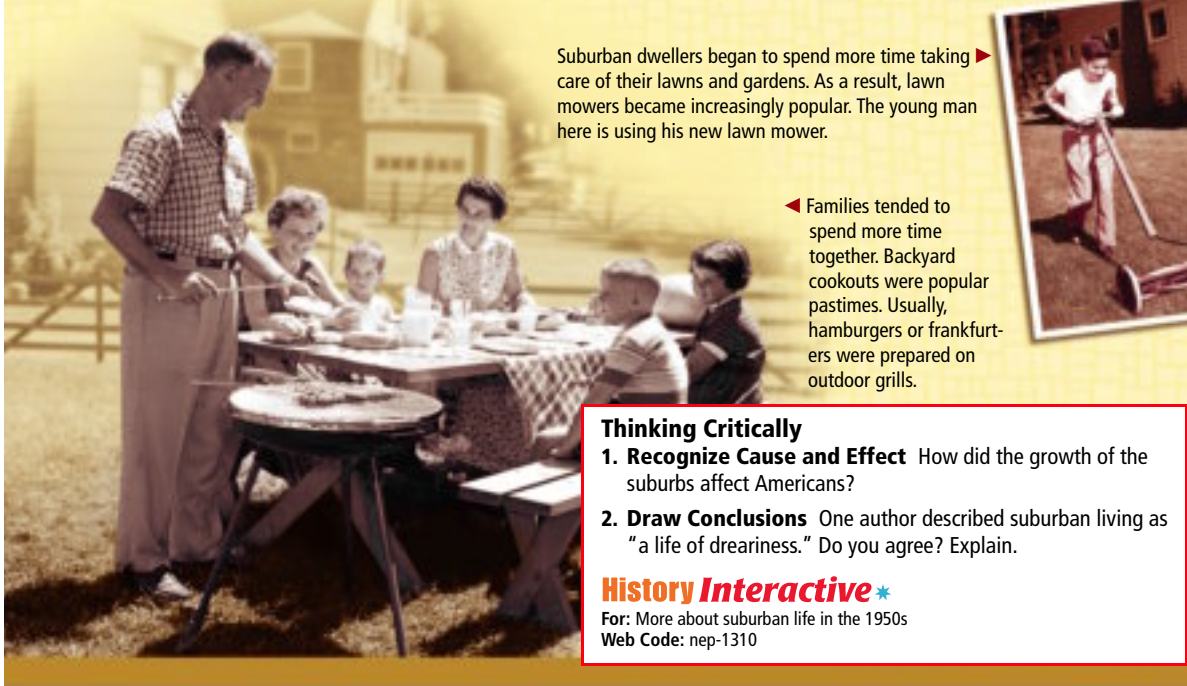
**Checkpoint** How did Americans living in the suburbs benefit from the “car culture”?

## Eisenhower Interstate Highway System

The scale of suburban growth would not have been remotely possible without a massive federal program of highway building. Committed to the idea of easing automobile travel, President Eisenhower authorized the first funding of the interstate system in 1953. Further legislation passed by Congress in 1956 resulted in the **Interstate Highway Act**, which authorized funds to build 41,000 miles of highway consisting of multilane expressways that would connect the nation's major cities. This represented the biggest expenditure on public works in history, bigger by far than any project undertaken during the New Deal. In 1990, further recognition of President Eisenhower's role in establishing the massive highway system led to a renaming of the highways. It became the Dwight D. Eisenhower System of Interstate and Defense Highways.

### Vocabulary Builder

**undertake**—(uhn der TAYK) *v.* to take upon oneself; agree to do



Suburban dwellers began to spend more time taking care of their lawns and gardens. As a result, lawn mowers became increasingly popular. The young man here is using his new lawn mower.

Families tended to spend more time together. Backyard cookouts were popular pastimes. Usually, hamburgers or frankfurters were prepared on outdoor grills.

### Thinking Critically

- 1. Recognize Cause and Effect** How did the growth of the suburbs affect Americans?
- 2. Draw Conclusions** One author described suburban living as "a life of dreariness." Do you agree? Explain.

### History Interactive\*

For: More about suburban life in the 1950s  
Web Code: nep-1310

Besides easing commutes from suburbs to cities, the new highways boosted the travel and vacation industries. Families traveled to national and state parks, to the beach, and to new destinations, such as Las Vegas. With more money and more children, American families avidly sought entertainment and leisure activity. Walt Disney met this demand by building an extraordinary amusement park in Southern California. Disneyland exhibits excited the imagination with spectacular visions of the future, including make-believe rides in space and a special exhibit based on the movie *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea*.

**✓ Checkpoint** How did the Interstate Highway System spur the growth of the suburbs?

## Migrating to the Sunbelt

In 1958, the Brooklyn Dodgers and the New York Giants, two well-known baseball teams, moved from New York City to Los Angeles and San Francisco, respectively. Their move reflected another crucial trend of the postwar era, the growth of the **Sunbelt**, the name given to the southern and western states. By the mid-1960s, California passed New York as the state with the largest population. The migration to Sunbelt cities, such as Houston, Texas, and Los Angeles, California, continued for the rest of the twentieth century.

**Seeking the Benefits of the Sunbelt** Many factors played a role in attracting so many people to the Sunbelt. California, which added more than 5 million new residents in the 1940s and 1950s, had both an appealing climate and a large number of jobs in defense industries. The explosive growth of the aerospace and electronics industries also attracted newcomers to the Sunbelt. The booming petrochemical industry boosted Houston's population. The development of air conditioning made it easier to live in hotter climates, too.

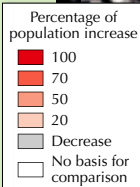
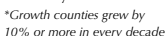
### NoteTaking

**Reading Skill: Identify Causes and Effects** As you read, identify the effects of the population shift to the Sunbelt.

Moving to the Sunbelt	
Causes	Effects
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Jobs</li> <li></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li></li> <li></li> </ul>



**Web Code:** nep-1303




**3. Draw Conclusions** Based on your knowledge of postwar migration and the information in the map, why do you think population decreased in the city of St. Louis?

Latinos contributed to the growth of the Sunbelt. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, many Cubans, who were escaping the new regime of Fidel Castro, made Miami, Florida, their new home. Prior to World War II, most Mexican Americans lived in rural areas. However, by the 1960s, the majority of them migrated to urban areas, such as Los Angeles, El Paso, and Phoenix.

**Impact of Migration** The shift to the suburbs and the Sunbelt had a momentous impact on American society. As people moved, their political power went with them. Thus, suburbs and the Sunbelt gained representation. Urbanites in the Northeast and Midwest lost political power. California's representation in the House of Representatives, for example, more than doubled between 1948 and 1998.

Urban and suburban growth created environmental concerns, ranging from traffic jams and smog to water shortages. In the 1960s and 1970s, environmental groups would begin to grapple with some of the byproducts of this growth.

 **Checkpoint** What motivated so many Americans to migrate to the Sunbelt?

## The American Economy Changes Focus

These important postwar population shifts were matched by equally groundbreaking structural changes in the American economy. For the first time in American history, more people found employment in the **service sector**, businesses that provide services, such as healthcare, law, retail, banking, or insurance, than in the manufacturing sector. These shifts led some to describe the United States as a postindustrial society.

**The Service Sector Grows** Between 1947 and 1957, the percentage of the American workforce employed in industrial or blue-collar jobs declined 4 percent. During the same time period, employment in the service sector, or white-collar jobs, rapidly grew. The new workforce included many who worked in **information industries**, including those who built or operated the first computers. These computers were enormous. One of the first, named ENIAC, short for Electronic Numerical Integrator and Computer, took up roughly 18,000 square feet, or the size of three basketball courts! Despite its size, it was less powerful than today's desktop computer.

Still, ENIAC was a remarkable advance. By the 1960s, the government and private industry had found many uses for the computer. Hotels used computers to help make reservations, and banks used them to keep track of accounts. Industries started using computers to automate work or perform jobs once done by people.

Meanwhile, the number of women in the labor force continued to grow, doubling between 1940 and 1960. Many of these women worked part time. Few pursued long-term careers and most remained underpaid. Yet, without their paychecks, their families would have found it difficult to remain in the middle class.

While the service sector grew rapidly, both the number and percentage of Americans who made a living by farming continued to decline. In 1935, one fourth of the nation's families lived on farms. By 1960, less than one in ten families did. At the same

### White-Collar Jobs

The number of white-collar workers, such as the office workers shown here, greatly increased in the 1950s.



time, improvements in technology, ranging from mechanical cotton pickers to chemical pesticides, made agriculture much more productive. This allowed fewer workers to grow even more food. New irrigation systems helped transform much of the land in the Southwest from arid to fertile fields.

**Entrepreneurs Start Businesses** At home, the postwar era saw the rise of **franchise businesses**. A franchise business allows a company to distribute its products or services through retail outlets owned by independent operators. Franchises were attractive to consumers because they stressed quality and sameness, no matter where one was in the United States. The Holiday Inn franchise came into existence following a trip that home builder Kemmons Wilson took to Washington, D.C., with his family of five children. Frustrated, Wilson found hotels difficult to locate, overpriced, and lacking adequate parking facilities. As he traveled, according to author David Halberstam, “Wilson became more irritated until he turned to his wife and announced that he was going into the hotel business. Everyone in this country, he thought, had a car and a family, and sooner or later everyone had to go somewhere.” Today, there are tens of thousands of Holiday Inn hotels all over the world.

Many postwar critics lamented the growth of franchise businesses. For them, the franchises represented a growing lack of originality, evidence that the United States was becoming a “bland” nation in which people ate bland food, lived in bland look-a-like houses, and watched bland television shows that followed the same plot line.

**American Corporations Go Multinational** As the postwar economy expanded, so did **multinational corporations**, companies that produced and sold their goods and services all over the world and established branches abroad. General Motors, General Electric, and IBM, produced a larger and larger share of all of the goods sold. Many of these corporations earned large portions of their profits abroad. Coca Cola, for instance, sold its soft drinks all over the globe. Hollywood movies found eager audiences in Tokyo, Mexico City, and Germany.

**Unions Consolidate Their Gains** The prosperity of the 1950s was reflected in generally good times for the labor movement. In 1955, the AFL and the CIO, which had split in the mid-1930s, united to form the **AFL-CIO**. The new organization enjoyed a good deal of political clout, especially within the Democratic Party. Yet, trade unions also lost some momentum during the late 1940s and early 1950s. Most of the new white-collar workers did not join unions, and labor’s image was tarnished by a corruption scandal involving the Teamsters Union. Government investigators accused the Teamsters, who represented truck drivers, of illegally using their members’ funds.



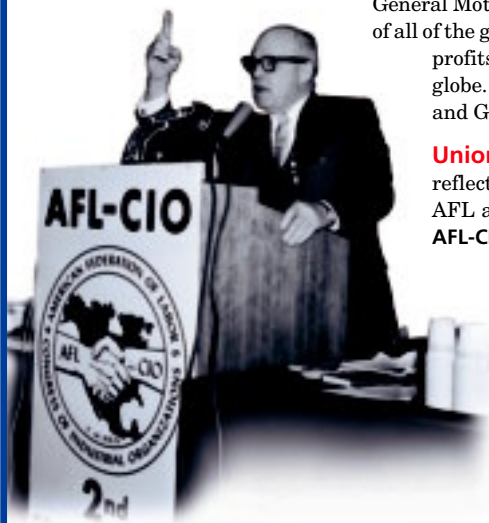
**Checkpoint** In what ways did American businesses change during the postwar period?

## Educational Opportunities Expand

As the economy grew, so too did opportunities for Americans to attain higher education. A more educated workforce boosted economic productivity. In 1940, only about 15 percent of college-age Americans attended college. By the early 1960s, however, close to 40 percent did. The percentage of Americans who completed high school also rose sharply. “The astonishing growth of education in the late

### Vocabulary Builder

**frustrate**—(FRUHS trayt) *v.* to annoy; disappoint



### Labor Leader

George Meany served as the first president of the AFL-CIO.


1940s (and thereafter),” wrote historian James Patterson, “seemed yet another sign that the American Dream was well and alive.”

### Government Provides Funding for Education

Large sums of money were needed to meet the education needs of the baby-boom generation. In the 1950s and early 1960s, California opened a new school about once a week. Most of the funding for education came from local and state governments, but after the Soviet Union launched *Sputnik 1* in 1957, many Americans called for more federal funds for education.

In a mood of crisis, Congress quickly approved the National Defense Education Act. Its \$1 billion program was aimed at producing more scientists and science teachers. The act authorized money for loans to high school and college graduates to continue their scientific education.

**Education Is “Democratized”** The postwar era saw the stirrings of a movement to make education more accessible. Many states poured funds into their public universities, making it easier for ordinary Americans to attend college. California, for example, established a **California Master Plan**, which called for three tiers of higher education: research universities, state colleges, and community colleges. All of them were to be accessible to all of the state’s citizens. Other states also built or expanded their college systems. On another front, in 1954, the Supreme Court ruled in *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* that segregated schools were unconstitutional. However, it would be years before many schools were actually integrated.

 **Checkpoint** How did American education change in the years following World War II?



### Growing Classrooms

Class sizes increased as baby-boom children reached school age. The number of high school and college graduates soared.

## SECTION

# 2 Assessment

### Progress Monitoring Online

For: Self-test with vocabulary practice  
Web Code: nea-1303

### Comprehension

- 1. Terms and People** What is the relationship between each of the following terms and the social and economic changes that took place in the postwar period?
  - Interstate Highway Act
  - Sunbelt
  - service sector
  - information industries
  - franchise business
- 2. NoteTaking Reading Skill: Identify Main Ideas** Use your chart to answer the Section Focus Question: What social and economic factors changed American life during the 1950s?

### Writing About History

- 3. Quick Write: Evaluate Sources** Choose a topic from this section for further research. Use the Internet or the library to find one source that provides information about your selected topic. Determine the reliability of the source. Consider the following:
  - Is it a primary or secondary source?
  - Is the information supported by the evidence?
  - Is the information mostly facts or mostly opinions?
  - If you are using the Internet, is the information from a Web site that is known for being reliable?

### Critical Thinking

- 4. Draw Conclusions** What were the benefits of the Interstate Highway Act? What were the disadvantages?
- 5. Demonstrate Reasoned Judgment** Do you think it was easy for people in declining manufacturing industries to switch into the service sector? Explain your answer.
- 6. Synthesize Information** How did the Sunbelt states benefit from the growth of the automobile and air conditioning industries?



◀ Baby-boomer fads were often based on popular television shows.

## WITNESS HISTORY AUDIO

### The Latest Fad

As baby boomers went to school, new fads came and went with amazing speed. One such fad revolved around a popular television show about the American folk hero Davy Crockett. Steven Spielberg, who later would become one of Hollywood's most successful movie directors, recalled the craze.

“I was in third grade at the time. Suddenly, the next day, everybody in my class but me was Davy Crockett. And because I didn't have my coonskin cap and my powder horn, or Old Betsy, my rifle, and my chaps, I was deemed the Mexican leader, Santa Anna. And they chased me home from school until I got my parents to buy me a coonskin cap.”

—Steven Spielberg, recalling the Davy Crockett craze of 1955

# Mass Culture and Family Life

## Objectives

- Explain why consumer spending increased.
- Discuss postwar changes in family life.
- Describe the rise of new forms of mass culture.

## Terms and People

consumerism  
median family income  
nuclear family

Benjamin Spock  
rock-and-roll  
Elvis Presley

## NoteTaking

**Reading Skill: Identify Main Ideas** Identify postwar changes in daily life and popular culture.

- I. The Culture of Consumerism  
A. Americans spend more
1. Increased family income
  - 2.

**Why It Matters** During the 1950s, the ideal family was one in which men worked and supported their families and women stayed home and reared their children. Television and other forms of mass culture suggested that this ideal was the norm. Whether most American families actually lived like the ones they saw on prime-time television, however, remains unclear. The family values of the 1950s still affect who we are and who we want to be. **Section Focus Question:** How did popular culture and family life change during the 1950s?

## The Culture of Consumerism

For much of our history, Americans had been taught to save their money. “A penny saved is a penny earned,” advised Benjamin Franklin. However, as the U.S. economy began to boom in the postwar era, Americans were caught up in a wave of **consumerism**, buying as much as they could, much of it on credit. What accounted for this spending spree?


**Spending Is Easy** One reason Americans spent more was that they had more money to spend. During the 1950s, **median family income**, or average family income, rose from \$3,319 to \$5,417. The average American family now had twice as much real income as the average family had during the prosperous years of the 1920s. Consumer-oriented companies found new and innovative ways to encourage buying on credit. For example, General Motors advertised

its cars with the slogan “Buy Now, Pay Later.” The Diner’s Club introduced the first credit card.

**Buying New Conveniences** Home appliances topped the list of the goods that Americans bought. Families purchased electric washing machines and dryers, refrigerators and ranges. These labor-saving appliances helped transform housework, lessening the physical demands of everything from washing clothes to preserving foods.

With money to spend, easy credit, and new goods to buy, shopping became a new pastime for Americans. Supermarkets, where customers could buy everything from milk to mops, appeared. Shopping centers sprouted all over suburbia.

One product that Americans bought in record numbers was a television. In 1946, manufacturers produced fewer than 6,000 TV sets. Seven years later, Americans purchased 7 million sets and by the end of the decade, 90 percent of all households owned a television.

 **Checkpoint** What were some reasons why consumer spending skyrocketed in the postwar era?

## Family Life in the Fifties

During World War II, many women—including married women with children—had gone off to work in factories. In 1943, women made up 25 percent of the workers in the wartime auto industry. With the war’s end, however, most of the women who had entered the workforce returned to being homemakers. Now, a more traditional image of the family took hold, one in which women stayed home and men served as “breadwinners.” Women who wanted a career outside the home faced social pressures to rethink their decisions.

**Portraying the “Ideal” Family** In the popular magazines of the postwar era, social scientists and other opinion makers described the **nuclear family**, or a household consisting of a mother and father and their children, as the backbone of American society. For the nuclear family to function smoothly, experts claimed, women had to accept their role as homemakers. Television shows and movies made similar assertions. For example, in the 1955 Hollywood movie *The Tender Trap*, actress Debbie Reynolds declared, “A woman isn’t a woman unless she’s been married and had children.”

As the 1950s progressed, however, more women were willing to challenge the view that a woman could not have a career outside the home. By 1960, women held one third of the nation’s jobs. Approximately half of these women workers were married.

**Children Are the Focus** More so than in the past, family life revolved around children. Not surprisingly, the best-selling book of the era was Dr. **Benjamin Spock’s** *Common Sense Book of Baby and Child Care*. Parents bought and read his book because they wanted expert advice on how to raise their children. Spock emphasized the importance of nurturing children, from their earliest days as infants through their teen years. Mothers, Spock suggested, should not

## The Homemaker

The ideal housewife stayed at home and raised the children. She used the latest appliances, dressed well, and took advantage of faster ways to prepare meals. The ad is for a convenience food—rice that can be prepared in a few minutes.



## Vocabulary Builder

**nevertheless**—(nehv er tuh LEHS)  
*adv.* in spite of that; however

## Vocabulary Builder

**recur**—(rih KUHR) *v.* to happen or occur again, especially after some lapse of time

worry about spoiling their children because children could not get too much comfort and love. Some criticized Spock for promoting what they called “a permissive culture.” **Nevertheless**, Spock’s book remained extremely popular for several decades.

Another sign of the degree to which family life revolved around children was the amount of money parents spent on their children. Some parents even defended their spending by arguing that such spending guaranteed against the **recurrence** of another depression.

As baby boomers became teens, their impact on the economy and American culture became even more noticeable. While as children they received toys, such as Davy Crockett caps and Barbie dolls, as teens they purchased very expensive items. As *LIFE* magazine observed:

### Primary Source


“The time is past when a boy’s chief possession was his bike and a girl’s party wardrobe consisted of a fancy dress worn with a string of dime-store pearls. . . . Today’s teenagers surround themselves with a fantastic array of garish and often expensive baubles and amusements. They own 10 million phonographs, over a million TV sets, 13 million cameras.”

—*LIFE*, August 31, 1959

**Celebrating a Religious Revival** The 1950s also witnessed a revival of religion in the United States. Organized religious groups became more powerful and more church buildings were built. Regular church attendance rose from about 50 million in 1940 to about 80 million in 1958. The increased number of churches in suburban communities across the country helped to strengthen community ties. The evangelist Billy Graham attracted millions to religious revivals that he held around the nation. Roman Catholic bishop Fulton Sheen effectively used television to reach audiences estimated at 10 million a week. During the 1950s, Congress added the words “In God We Trust” to the dollar bill and “under God,” to the Pledge of Allegiance. These additions were aimed at making clear the contrast between the centrality of religion in American society and the atheist basis of communist societies.

**Improved Healthcare Benefits Baby Boomers** During the 1950s, American families benefited from numerous advances in medicine. In 1954, Dr. Jonas Salk developed a vaccine against polio, the disease that had struck down Franklin Roosevelt and that, in 1952 alone, had crippled tens of thousands and killed 1,400, mostly children. By 1960, the widespread distribution of Salk’s new vaccine and an oral vaccine developed by Albert Sabin had nearly eliminated the disease.

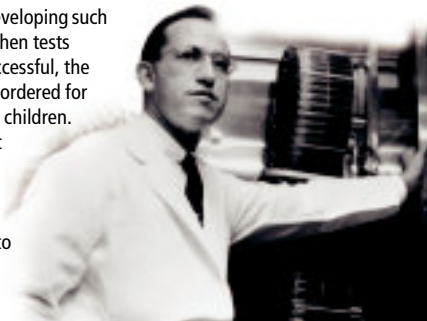
At the same time, antibiotics, such as penicillin, came into widespread use. The antibiotics helped control numerous infectious diseases caused by bacteria, such as whooping cough and tuberculosis. As a result of these medical advances and a better understanding of the importance of diet, children born after 1946 had a longer life expectancy than those born before 1946.

 **Checkpoint** In what ways did family life revolve around children during the 1950s?

## HISTORY MAKERS

### Jonas Salk (1914–1995)

As a doctor, Salk showed early interest in developing vaccines. In the late 1940s, he turned his attention to polio, which was becoming an alarmingly serious problem. Some researchers thought a polio vaccine would have to use live virus cells, which carried risks. Salk believed dead cells could be used and succeeded in 1952 in developing such a vaccine. When tests proved it successful, the vaccine was ordered for all American children. Eventually, it was used around the world and contributed to eliminating polio.



## Television Takes Center Stage

In 1938, when television was still just a curiosity, E. B. White, author of *Charlotte's Web*, wrote that it "is going to be the test of the modern world. . . . We shall stand or fall by the television." While White's view may have been exaggerated, clearly television has had an enormous impact on American society.

Between 1945 and 1960, Americans purchased television sets at a faster pace than they had bought either radios or cars during the 1920s. The popularity of this new technology threatened the movie industry because families stayed home to watch TV rather than go out to watch movies at the theater.

### ● INFOGRAPHIC

## BABY-BOOM KIDS

Unlike families in past generations where children were supposed to be seen but not heard, many baby-boom families centered around the children. Dr. Benjamin Spock advised parents to "trust themselves" and not to spank or scold their children. The economy responded to the needs of growing families for housing, clothing, food, and child-friendly entertainment.

▼ *Captain Kangaroo* was a popular children's television program, while a vacation at Disneyland was a treat for the whole family.

First published in 1946, Dr. Spock's book on child care is still available.

▲ These parents happily cater to the needs of their child.

▼ Toy sales rose during the 1950s.



### Thinking Critically

- Analyze Information** Why do you think the book by Dr. Spock was a bestseller in the 1950s?
- Draw Conclusions** How did the baby boom affect American society and economy?



# A New Entertainment

Each week, families gathered to watch their favorite television shows. Viewers followed the adventures of a masked Lone Ranger and his Indian companion Tonto. The beloved sitcom "I Love Lucy," starring Lucille Ball, ran for nearly six years. "Beat the Clock," a popular game show, challenged participants to engage in unusual stunts. Ads such as the one below urged Americans to keep buying televisions.



◀ The Lone Ranger and Tonto

◀ Lucille Ball

▲ Beat The Clock

Although television attracted viewers of all ages, it had a special influence on children. Baby boom children rushed home from school to watch the *Howdy Doody Show* or the *Mickey Mouse Club*. Children also watched hours of cartoons and shows featuring their favorite superheroes, such as the Lone Ranger. Westerns were especially popular during the 1950s and early 1960s.

Among the most memorable shows were sitcoms about families. Fifty million Americans tuned in each week to watch the *I Love Lucy* show, starring the comedic actress Lucille Ball. Other popular family sitcoms included *Leave It to Beaver*, *The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet*, and *Father Knows Best*.

These shows reflected and reinforced the ideal of the 1950s family. None of the family sitcoms had important African American characters. None of the major characters got divorced. Major real-life problems, such as mental illness, alcoholism, and personal depression, rarely, if ever, appeared. Writes David Halberstam, "No family problem was so great that it could not be cleared up within the allotted twenty-two minutes."

Even before television emerged in the 1950s, a mass national culture had begun to develop in the United States. Nationally broadcast radio programs, Hollywood films, and other forms of popular culture had helped erode distinct regional and ethnic cultures. Television sped up and reinforced this process. Americans in every region of the country watched the same shows and bought the same goods they saw advertised.

Television changed political campaigns. During the 1952 presidential campaign, Americans could see the candidates in action. Usually, candidates with more money could buy more advertising time. The impact of television on elections continues today.



**Checkpoint** How did television reflect and reinforce the ideal of the nuclear family in the postwar period?

# Rock-and-Roll Shakes the Nation


In the summer of 1951, a relatively unknown white disc jockey named Alan Freed began broadcasting what commonly had been called “race” music to listeners across the Midwest. Renaming the music **rock-and-roll**, Freed planted the seed for a cultural revolution that would blossom in the mid-1950s.

**Drawing on African American Roots** Rock music originated in the rhythm and blues traditions of African Americans. As African Americans began to move north, they brought their musical traditions with them. Independent recording companies began recording rhythm and blues (R&B) music. Rock-and-roll borrowed heavily from rhythm and blues. As Chuck Berry, known as the pioneer of rock-and-roll, put it, “It used to be called boogie-woogie, it used to be called blues, used to be called rhythm and blues. . . . It’s called rock now.”

**Attracting a Wider Audience** Live performances of rhythm and blues music was long kept separate from whites by Jim Crow laws in the South or by more subtle forms of segregation in the North. Through the radio, it began to attract a wider white audience in the postwar era. For example, a young **Elvis Presley** listened to a Memphis radio station that played African American gospel tunes. He began to integrate those tunes into the music he played. Meanwhile, in the early 1950s, Sam Phillips set up a recording studio in Memphis to record and play the music of some of Memphis’s best African American blues performers, such as B. B. King. One day Phillips heard Presley and almost immediately recognized that he had found the person he had been looking for.

Presley’s arrival set off the new rock craze. His first hit, “Heartbreak Hotel,” sold in the millions and his success sparked popularity for rock music.

Yet, not everyone liked Elvis or the new rock craze. When Ed Sullivan, the host of a famous TV variety show, invited Elvis to sing on his show, he directed cameramen to show Elvis only from the waist up, because many parents objected to Elvis’s gyrating hips and tight pants. Ministers complained about the passions that rock music seemed to unleash among so many youngsters. Congress held hearings on the subversive nature of rock music. Nonetheless, it became a symbol of the emerging youth culture and of the growing power of youth on mass culture.

 **Checkpoint** How did rock-and-roll gain popularity?

## Popular Music

The record business boomed during the 1950s. Phonograph records, such as the one shown here, were made from vinyl, a plastic material. Listeners could enjoy nearly 30 minutes of music on each side.



## SECTION 3 Assessment

### Progress Monitoring Online

For: Self-test with vocabulary practice  
Web Code: nea-1304

#### Comprehension

- 1. Terms and People** For each item below, write two or three sentences explaining its significance.
  - consumerism
  - median family income
  - Benjamin Spock
  - Elvis Presley

#### 2. **NoteTaking** Reading Skill:

**Identify Main Ideas** Use your outline about changes in daily life and popular culture to answer the Section Focus Question: How did popular culture and family life change during the 1950s?

#### Writing About History

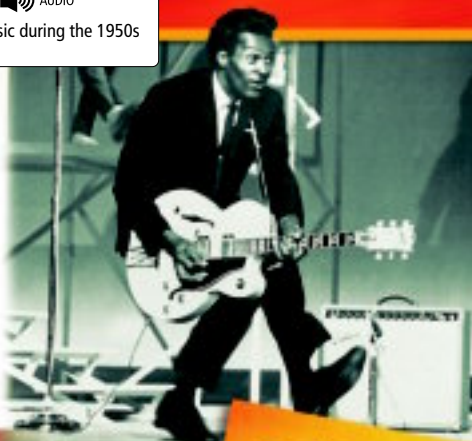
- 3. Quick Write: Create an Annotated Bibliography** Choose one topic from this section, such as family life in the 1950s or the impact of suburban growth on the nation. Using the library or the Internet, find three or more sources on your chosen topic. Use these sources to prepare an annotated bibliography in which you record the information each source provides.

#### Critical Thinking

- 4. Make Comparisons** In what ways was the mood of the 1950s different from the mood of the 1930s?
- 5. Identify Point of View** Why do you think the nuclear family became more important during the 1950s?
- 6. Identify Central Issues** Why was television a better medium than radio for consumerism?

## Rock-and-Roll

Rock-and-roll music burst on the scene in the 1950s, thrilling teenagers and horrifying their parents. A faster version of the rhythm and blues played by B. B. King and other Memphis musicians, rock-and-roll made stars of singers such as Little Richard and Chuck Berry. The biggest rock-and-roll idol was Elvis Presley. Girls screamed and fainted at the sight of Elvis, and his concerts were mobbed. He sold 40 million records in two years. Critics said the new music was just a fad, but disc jockeys and TV hosts such as Dick Clark, whose *American Bandstand* got 45,000 fan letters a week, knew rock-and-roll was here to stay.

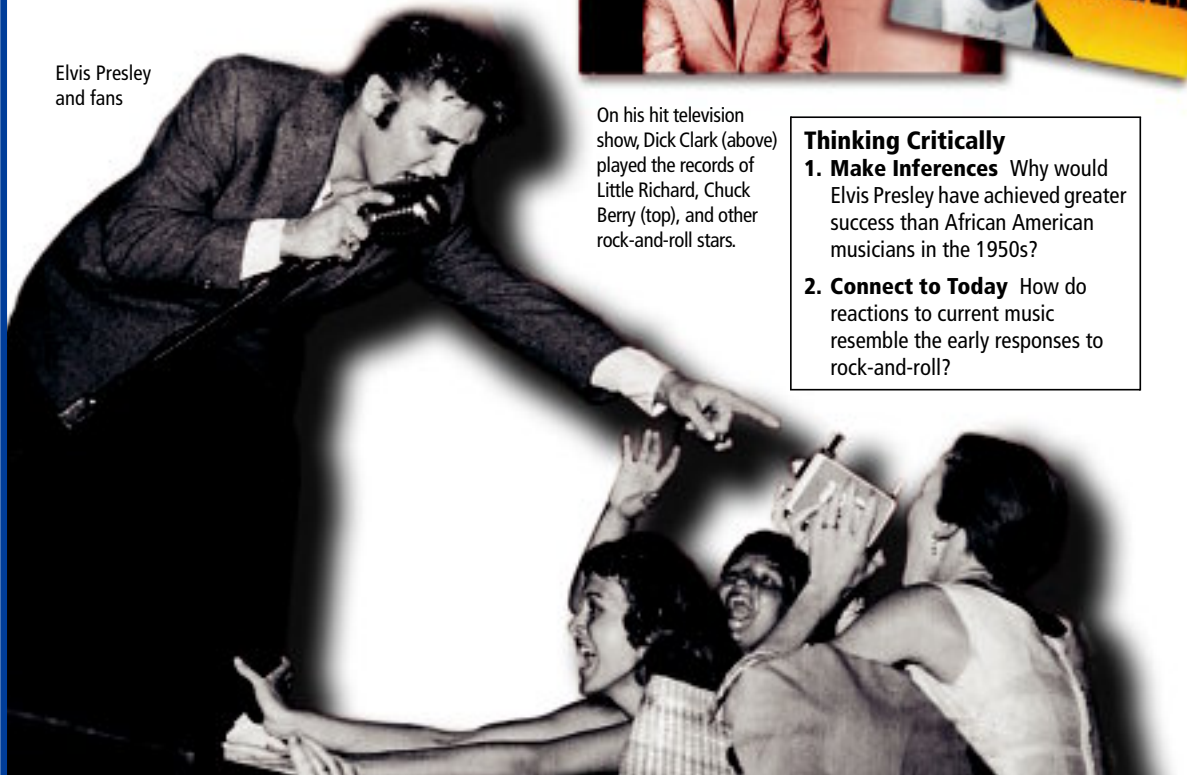


Elvis Presley  
and fans

On his hit television show, Dick Clark (above) played the records of Little Richard, Chuck Berry (top), and other rock-and-roll stars.

### Thinking Critically

- 1. Make Inferences** Why would Elvis Presley have achieved greater success than African American musicians in the 1950s?
- 2. Connect to Today** How do reactions to current music resemble the early responses to rock-and-roll?







**WITNESS HISTORY** AUDIO

**Troubles in the Promised Land**

In the twentieth century, millions of African Americans left the rural South and migrated to cities in the North and West. Yet, many of these migrants were disappointed. Claude Brown, who grew up in Harlem, wrote about their disillusionment in his novel *Manchild in the Promised Land*.

“The children of these disillusioned colored pioneers inherited the total lot of their parents—their disappointments, the anger. To add to their misery, they had little hope of deliverance. For where does one run to when he’s already in the Promised Land?”

—Claude Brown, *Manchild in the Promised Land*

## Dissent and Discontent

### Objectives

- Summarize the arguments made by critics who rejected the culture of the fifties.
- Describe the causes and effects of urban and rural poverty.
- Explain the problems that many minority group members faced in the postwar era.

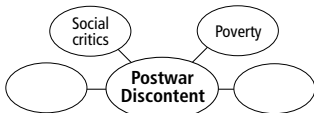
### Terms and People

beatnik  
inner city

urban renewal  
termination policy

### NoteTaking

**Reading Skill: Identify Main Ideas** Record the main ideas and supporting details.



**Why It Matters** Despite the prosperity of the 1950s, not all people benefited. Some, such as Claude Brown, were left out and had little hope of deliverance. Others, who had benefited, wondered whether all of the material things they acquired had actually led to a better life. The discontents of the 1950s would manifest the first signs of the dissent that would dominate the 1960s. **Section Focus Question:** Why were some groups of Americans dissatisfied with conditions in postwar America?

### Critics Reject the Fifties Culture

The failure of society to provide equal opportunities to minorities was one source of discontent during the postwar era. Another was the belief that while material conditions were better in the 1950s, the *quality* of life had not improved. Many intellectuals and artists did not consider homes in the suburbs, shopping centers, and an unending supply of new gadgets as representing a better life.

**Objecting to Conformity** Many social critics complained about an emphasis on conformity. In a book called *The Lonely Crowd*, sociologists David Riesman and Nathan Glazer lamented that Americans had sacrificed their individualism in order to fit into the larger community. They also criticized the power of advertising to mold public tastes. The theme of alienation, or the feeling of being cut off from mainstream society, dominated a number of the most popular novels of the era. The bestseller *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit*, by Sloan





## The Rebel

James Dean starred in the movie *Rebel Without a Cause*, which seemed to symbolize the way many young people felt at the time.

## Vocabulary Builder

**affluence**—(AF loo uhns) *n.*  
abundance or riches; wealth

Wilson, followed a World War II veteran who could not find real meaning in life after the war. Holden Caulfield, the main character in J. D. Salinger's *Catcher in the Rye*, a favorite among many teens, mocked what Salinger saw as the phoniness of adult society.

Although published in 1963, Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* would describe the plight of the suburban housewife during the 1950s. By the 1960s, Friedan would be at the forefront of a movement to change the social and political status of women in American society.

**The Beats Reject Middle-Class Life** An additional critique of American society came from a small group of writers and artists called **beatniks**, or the beats. The beats refused to conform to accepted ways of dressing, thinking, and acting. Conformity, they insisted, stifled individualism. They displayed their dislike of American society by careless dress and colorful jargon.

In their poems, such as Allen Ginsberg's "Howl," and novels, such as Jack Kerouac's *On the Road*, the beats lambasted what they saw as crass materialism and conformity of the American middle class. Many Americans, in turn, were outraged by their behavior.

 **Checkpoint** Why did many intellectuals and artists criticize American culture during the 1950s?

## Rural and Urban Poverty

Hidden behind the new household appliances, the spreading suburbs, the burgeoning shopping malls, and the ribbons of highways was a very different United States. It was a nation of urban slums, desperate rural poverty, and discrimination. People who were poor and dispossessed were well hidden.

In an influential 1962 book entitled *The Other America*, Michael Harrington shocked many Americans by arguing that poverty was widespread in the United States. Harrington claimed that 50 million Americans, one fourth of the nation, lived in poverty. Despite American **affluence**, Harrington said, poverty plagued African Americans in the inner cities, rural whites in areas such as Appalachia, and Hispanics in migrant farm labor camps and urban barrios. Harrington argued that Americans could not afford to ignore the existence of the poor:

### Primary Source

"The poor live in a culture of poverty. [They] get sick more than anyone else in the society. . . . Because they are sick more often and longer than anyone else, they lose wages and work and find it difficult to hold a steady job. And because of this, . . . their prospect is to move to an even lower level . . . toward even more suffering."

—Michael Harrington, *The Other America*, 1962

**Cities Suffer a Decline** During the decades that followed World War II, African Americans and other nonwhite minorities moved in great numbers from rural areas to cities. Most migrated in search of better economic opportunities. In the same period, however, American cities were suffering a severe decline as middle-class white families moved to the suburbs.

The loss of the middle class hurt cities economically because the middle class paid a large share of the taxes. It hurt them politically, as well, because as the suburbs gained population, they also gained representation in state legislatures and the national government. This combination of declining economic and political power put a serious strain on cities, leading to a deterioration of services, such as garbage removal and street repair. In turn, as the conditions

worsened and crime increased in what was now called the **inner city**, more of the middle class decided to move to the suburbs. Inner city refers to the older, central part of a city with crowded neighborhoods in which low-income, usually minority, groups live. Inner cities are often plagued with problems such as inadequate housing and schools, as well as crime.

Federal, state, and local governments tried to reverse the downward **trend** in American cities by developing **urban renewal** projects. With these projects, the government cleared large tracts of older housing and built freeways and developments which, it was hoped, would “revitalize” downtown areas. Unfortunately, the projects often backfired. Urban renewal drove people from their homes to make room for the new projects and highways. The poor were forced to seek housing in neighborhoods that were already overcrowded and overburdened. One resident of East Harlem, New York, who lost his home to an urban renewal project observed:

#### Primary Source

“Nobody cared what we wanted when they built this place. They threw our houses down and pushed us there and pushed our friends somewhere else. We don’t have a place around here to get a cup of coffee or a newspaper even, or borrow fifty cents.”

—*America’s History Since 1865*

The federal government tried to ease the shortage of affordable housing by constructing public housing. At the time, these housing projects seemed a godsend to those who lived there. Rent was cheap and the residents often enjoyed certain services, like hot running water, for the first time in their lives. Yet, since the public housing was often built in poor neighborhoods, the projects led to an even greater concentration of poverty. This, in turn led to other problems, such as crime.

**The Rural Poor Also Suffer** The plight of the rural poor was just as bad if not worse than that of the urban poor. Mississippi Delta sharecroppers, coal

#### Vocabulary Builder

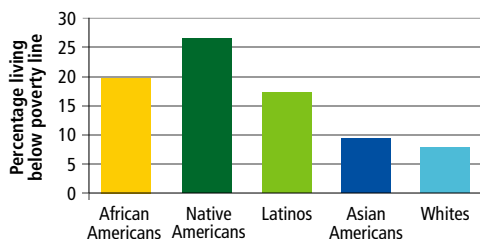
**trend**—(trehnd) *n.* general or prevailing course, as of events, a discussion, etc.

#### The Faces of Poverty

As revealed in Michael Harrington’s *The Other America*, poverty existed in urban and rural America. Crowded city tenements, such as the one shown at left below, were usually homes to large numbers of poor African Americans. In rural areas, poor whites and blacks endured lives of hardship. Below, a mother and her children stand in the doorway of a ragged shack.

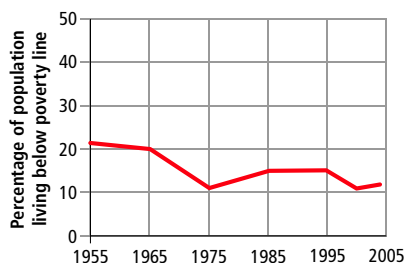


## Breakdown of Poverty by Ethnicity, 2006



SOURCE: U.S. Census Bureau

## Poverty in the United States, 1955–2005




SOURCE: U.S. Census Bureau

**Graph Skills** The number of people living below the poverty line decreased between 1955 and 2006. However, many Americans continue to struggle to find the steady jobs and decent housing that will help them break through the poverty cycle. *What percentage of Americans lived below the poverty line in 1965? Why do you think the poverty rate remains higher among minorities?*

to dominate farm production. Many independent small-farm owners found it difficult to compete with the large farms and slipped into poverty.

Many farmers responded by leaving their rural communities behind, joining the waves of the poor who relocated to the city. Others remained behind, wondering if they would ever get to enjoy the benefits of the new economy.

 **Checkpoint** How did the federal government respond to the decline of American cities?

## “Other Americans” Face Injustice

During the postwar years, the battle for civil rights in the South began to gain headlines. Yet, in the same time period, African Americans and other minorities also fought for equality in the urban north and west. Central to their struggles were efforts to overcome housing and employment discrimination.

**Puerto Ricans** Latinos from Puerto Rico and Mexico and Native Americans faced many of the same problems that African Americans encountered in the years following World War II. Puerto Rican migrants to New York City, for example, often found themselves clustered together in many of the poorest inner city neighborhoods with employment opportunities limited by both formal and informal forms of discrimination. As newcomers whose native language was not English, they enjoyed little political power. Thus, they received little help from city governments in getting better services, education, or an end to discriminatory practices.



**Mexicans** Both Mexicans and Mexican Americans faced a similar situation in the United States. During World War II, the U.S. government had established the bracero program as a means to address the shortage of agricultural workers. *Braceros* was a term for Mexican migrant farmworkers in the United States. The program gave temporary visas to Mexican immigrants. By 1964, 3 million Mexicans had worked in the United States under the program, most of them as farm laborers. Many were exploited and cheated by their employers. Mexican workers followed crops from state to state. Often, children worked alongside their parents. The migrants had little power to oppose the exploitation, for if they complained about conditions, employers threatened to deport them back to Mexico. One U.S. Department of Labor official called the program “legalized slavery.”

One champion of the rights of Mexican migrant workers, Ernesto Galarza, joined the effort to organize unions for Mexican farm laborers.


## HISTORY MAKERS

### Ernesto Galarza (1905–1984)

Born in Mexico, Galarza came with his family to Sacramento, California, at age six. For a time, he worked as a farm laborer. More fortunate than most Mexican American children, he succeeded in school and eventually received a Ph.D. He began to help migrant farmworkers—many of them Mexican Americans—organize unions. His book, *Merchants of Labor*, exposed the poor working conditions of the braceros.



**Native Americans** In 1953, the federal government enacted the **termination policy**, a major change in the rules governing Native Americans. The law sought to end tribal government and to relocate Native Americans to the nation's cities. It also terminated federal responsibility for the health and welfare of Native Americans. Proponents of the policy argued that it would free American Indians to assimilate, or merge, into American society. While some Native Americans praised the intent of the program, most came to agree with Senator Mark Hatfield of Oregon who argued that it made things worse for them. “[T]he social and economic devastation which these policies have wrought upon many groups has been tremendous. . . . While these problems were already severe among Indian societies generally, they have become epidemic among terminated Indians.”

 **Checkpoint** What were some of the problems that minorities had to overcome in the postwar era?

## SECTION

# 4 Assessment

### Progress Monitoring Online

For: Self-test with vocabulary practice  
Web Code: nea-1306

#### Comprehension

**1. Terms and People** Explain how each term below relates to problems or issues in the 1950s.

- beatnik
- urban renewal
- termination policy

**2. NoteTaking Reading Skill:**

**Identify Main Ideas** Use your concept web to answer the Section Focus Question: Why were some groups of Americans dissatisfied with conditions in postwar America?

#### Writing About History

**3. Quick Write: Credit Sources** When you use quotes or ideas from sources in your research paper, you must provide proper credit. One way to do this is to list the author and page number of the material you have used in parentheses following the statement. If you have used the Internet, list the Web site. Research a topic from this section and write a paragraph using two sources. Credit the sources where appropriate and list them at the end.

#### Critical Thinking

- 4. Summarize** Summarize the arguments made by critics who rejected the culture of the fifties.
- 5. Synthesize Information** During the 1950s, many middle-class Americans were unaware of poverty. Are poor people invisible today? Explain.
- 6. Draw Conclusions** Why would the bracero program attract Mexican workers? What disadvantages did these workers face compared with other workers in the United States?



# Quick Study Guide

## Progress Monitoring *Online*

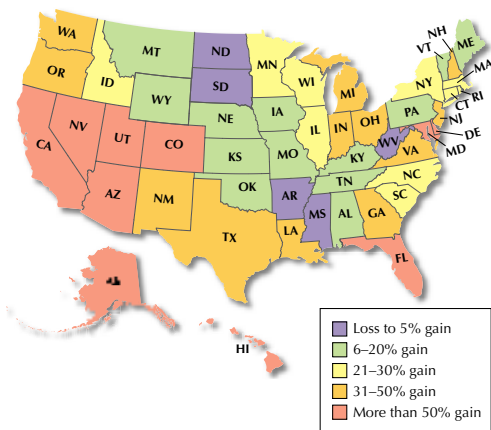
For: Self-test with vocabulary practice

Web Code: nea-1307

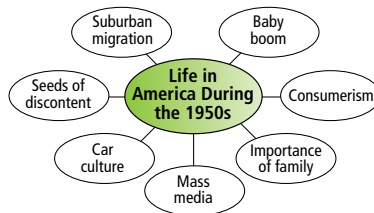
### ■ The Postwar Years

Worker productivity improves.
Wages increase.
Consumerism rises.
Baby boom boosts population.
GI Bill helps veterans.
Government spending increases.

### ■ Population Shifts, 1950–1970



### ■ Life in America, 1950s



### ■ Causes of Discontent

Farmers suffer hardships and begin to migrate to cities.
Cities experience political and economic decline.
African Americans, Latinos, and Native Americans continue to suffer discrimination.
Poverty is widespread among Americans in urban and rural areas.
Writers and artists protest values of life in the 1950s.

### ✓ Quick Study Timeline

#### In America

#### Presidential Terms

#### Around the World



**1944**  
GI Bill helps returning veterans

**1947**  
Taft-Hartley Act limits power of unions



**1951**  
Levittown, the first postwar suburb, is built on Long Island

Harry S. Truman 1945–1953

**1945**

**1945**  
World War II ends

**1950**

**1950**  
Korean War begins

# American Issues

## Connector

By connecting prior knowledge with what you have learned in this chapter, you can gradually build your understanding of enduring questions that still affect America today. Answer the questions below. Then, use your American Issues Connector study guide (or go online: [www.PHSchool.com](http://www.PHSchool.com) **Web Code:** neh-8602).

### Issues You Learned About

- **Poverty and Prosperity** Not all Americans have shared in the nation's more prosperous times.
  1. In the postwar decades, some Americans enjoyed new prosperity while others sank deeper into poverty. Write a paragraph contrasting the haves and have nots in American postwar society.
- **Technology and Society** New technological advances impact American cultural life.
  2. How did technology change American society in the 1950s? What were the effects of these inventions?
  3. What view of American society did television programs of the 1950s present? How accurate was this view?
  4. How did Elvis Presley's appearance on Ed Sullivan's TV variety show reflect the clash of values among Americans in the 1950s?

- **Migration and Urbanization** Americans are constantly moving, leading to the rise and fall of populations in cities, states, and regions.
  5. In the 1950s and 1960s, more and more Americans moved to the Sunbelt. Describe another specific migration movement in the United States.
  6. Why might the Brooklyn Dodgers have made the decision to relocate to Los Angeles in 1958?

### Connect to Your World

### Activity

**Education and American Society** Today, Americans are debating how public education in the United States can best provide a solid academic background for all students. Some feel that our education system is doing a great job already. Some say more money is needed. Other Americans believe that public education needs a complete overhaul and that spending more on the existing system is useless. Still others bypass the public education system and do not want their tax dollars supporting a system they do not use. Go online or to your local library and find out more about the debate over public education in the United States today. Write a few paragraphs explaining the different views.

1954

Salk develops polio vaccine

1956

Interstate Highway Act expands highway construction

Touchstone © 1981



1962

Michael Harrington's *The Other America* defines poverty in America

### History Interactive

For: Interactive timeline  
Web Code: nep-1309

Dwight D. Eisenhower 1953–1961

John F. Kennedy 1961–1963

1955

1955  
Soviet Union establishes Warsaw Pact

1960

1959  
Fidel Castro gains power in Cuba

1965

1963  
Military coup ends Diem government in South Vietnam

# Chapter Assessment

## Terms and People

1. Define **baby boom**. Explain the effect of the baby boom on American life.
2. What was the **Interstate Highway Act**? How did it help boost the postwar economy?
3. Who was **Benjamin Spock**? What different ideas did he have that changed people's views?
4. Define **beatnik**. Why was such a person dissatisfied?

## Focus Questions

The focus question for this chapter is **How did social and economic changes after World War II affect Americans?** Build an answer to this big question by answering the focus questions for Sections 1 through 4 and the Critical Thinking questions that follow.

### Section 1

5. How did the nation experience recovery and economic prosperity after World War II?

### Section 2

6. What social and economic factors changed American life during the 1950s?

### Section 3

7. How did popular culture and family life change during the 1950s?

### Section 4

8. Why were some groups of Americans dissatisfied with conditions in postwar America?

## Critical Thinking

9. **Analyze Information** How did the development of the interstate highway contribute to postwar prosperity?
10. **Synthesize Information** What measures did the government take to spark the economy after the war?
11. **Explain Effects** How did automobile production affect the economy?
12. **Draw Conclusions** How did technology both help and harm the farming industry?
13. **Analyzing Visuals** Study the visual below. In which election was this campaign button used? What voters would have supported these candidates and political party? Why?



14. **Identify Point of View** When describing company workers during the 1950s, one sociologist said, "When white-collar people get jobs, they sell not only their time and energy but their personalities as well." Why do you think some people agreed with this point of view?
15. **Analyze Information** Do you think life in the suburbs became the model for the American dream? Explain.

## Writing About History

**Writing a Research Report** Musicians were not the only artists who responded to the changing culture of the postwar years. Painters experimented and began to record their vision of the postwar culture. Write a research report in which you choose two artists and explain the significance of their works. Here are some possible choices: Jackson Pollock, Romare Bearden, Willem de Kooning, Mark Rothko, Robert Rauschenberg, John T. Biggers.

### Prewriting

- Do online research to read about the artists.
- Choose two artists. Gather information about the artists and their works.
- Create a set of questions about the artists you have chosen. Gather any additional information you need.

### Drafting

- Develop a working thesis, and choose supporting information to support the thesis.
- Make an outline to organize the report.
- Write an introduction that explains why the topic is interesting, and then write a body and a conclusion.

### Revising

- Use the guidelines on page SH14 of the Writing Handbook to revise your report.



# Document-Based Assessment

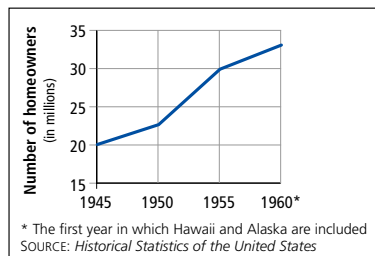
## Impact of the Suburbs

During the postwar era, the population began to shift from the cities to the suburbs. What impact did this population shift have on American life? What impact did it have on the economy? Use your knowledge of the postwar era and Documents A, B, C, and D to answer questions 1 through 4.

### Document A



### Document B



### Document C



### Document D

"William Levitt . . . looked upon a green expanse of woods . . . in . . . Bucks County, Pa., and dreamed of instant suburbia. . . . When he marketed his mass-produced homes in beautiful color brochures, thousands of young families wanted to buy. . . . They came to escape crowded cities like Trenton . . . or Philadelphia. . . . They came to own their own home, cook with their own appliances, mow their own lawn. They had GI loans in hand, babies on the way, and a '50s brand of pioneering spirit. . . . 'We were young, all of us who moved to Levittown, and we thought Bill Levitt was the greatest man in the world. Imagine it—\$10 deposit, \$90 at settlement, and you had a house of your own! . . . Levittown was a fresh marvel of modern planning to a Northeast corridor bursting at its seams in the early 1950s. . . . It took only \$100 . . . to make a down payment on a Levittown home. Levitt, . . . said . . . 'that every family in the United States is entitled to decent shelter.'"

"1951: American dream houses, all in a row"  
—by Jon Blackwell, *The Trentonian*, June 20, 1999

- According to Document D, what caused the shift of population from the cities to the suburbs?  
**A** The availability of affordable housing.  
**B** Fewer apartment buildings were built.  
**C** People saved more money to buy a home.  
**D** Cities provided good public transportation.
- Which document most clearly explains the impact of housing on the natural environment?  
**A** Document D  
**B** Document A  
**C** Document C  
**D** Document B
- What can you conclude about life in the postwar era from Documents A and C?  
**A** Most people wanted homes close to the city.  
**B** People looked at cheap houses as a way to escape crowded cities.  
**C** Most Americans could not afford new houses.  
**D** Cities were attractive and affordable places to live.
- Writing Task** What role did home ownership play in the population shift from cities to suburbs? What impact did it have on the economy? Use your knowledge of the chapter content and specific evidence from the primary sources above to support your opinion.