

Postwar America

1945–1960

Why It Matters

After World War II, the country enjoyed a period of economic prosperity. Many more Americans could now aspire to a middle-class lifestyle, with a house in the suburbs and more leisure time. Television became a favorite form of entertainment. This general prosperity, however, did not extend to many Hispanics, African Americans, Native Americans, or people in Appalachia.

The Impact Today

The effects of this era can still be seen.

- The middle class represents a large segment of the American population.
- Television is a popular form of entertainment for many Americans.



The American Vision Video The Chapter 27 video, “America Takes to the Roads,” describes the cultural impact of the automobile and its importance to the growing baby boom generation.



- 1944**
- GI Bill enacted

Truman
1945–1953



- 1946**
- Series of work strikes plagues country

- 1947**
- Levittown construction begins

- 1948**
- Truman elected president



United States

PRESIDENTS

1944

1948

1952



World

- 1946**
- Juan Perón elected president of Argentina

- 1948**
- South Africa introduces apartheid

- 1952**
- Scientists led by Edward Teller develop hydrogen bomb



These confident newlyweds capture the prosperous attitude of postwar America.

1953

- Lucille Ball gives birth in real life and on her television show



1955

- Salk polio vaccine becomes widely available

1956

- Elvis Presley appears on *The Ed Sullivan Show*
- Federal Highway Act passed

1957

- Estimated 40 million television sets in use in United States



1958

- Galbraith's *The Affluent Society* published

Eisenhower
1953–1961



1956

1960

1954

- Gamal Abdel Nasser takes power in Egypt

1956

- Suez Canal crisis erupts

1957

- USSR launches *Sputnik I* and *Sputnik II* satellites

HISTORY Online

Chapter Overview
Visit the *American Vision* Web site at tav.glencoe.com and click on **Chapter Overviews—Chapter 27** to preview chapter information.

CLICK HERE

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Main Idea

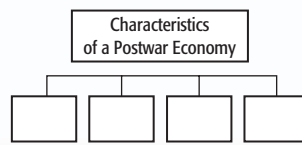
After World War II, the Truman and Eisenhower administrations set out to help the nation adjust to peacetime.

Key Terms and Names

GI Bill, closed shop, right-to-work law, union shop, featherbedding, "Do-Nothing Congress," Fair Deal, dynamic conservatism, Federal Highway Act

Reading Strategy

Categorizing As you read about the Truman and Eisenhower administrations, complete a graphic organizer similar to the one below by listing the characteristics of the postwar economy of the United States.



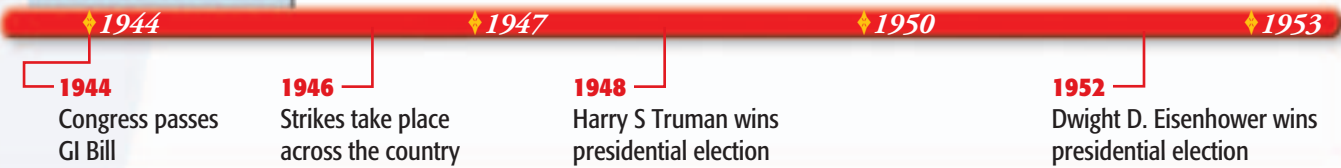
Reading Objectives

- **Explain** the Truman administration's efforts on the domestic front.
- **Describe** President Eisenhower's domestic agenda.

Section Theme

Economic Factors Following World War II, the federal government supported programs that helped the economy make the transition to peacetime production.

Preview of Events



★ An American Story ★

As World War II ended, Robert Eubanks was worried as he prepared for his discharge from the army. He had joined the army because, as an African American, it was hard for him to find a job that paid well. Then he heard about something known as the GI Bill, a government program that paid veterans' tuition for college and provided a living allowance.

Eubanks took advantage of the program and enrolled at the Illinois Institute of Technology. He earned three degrees on the GI Bill and eventually became a professor at the University of Illinois.

Years later Eubanks recalled how his life was changed by the bill. "It's very hard to explain how things were during the 1940s," he said. "The restrictions on blacks then were rough. The GI Bill gave me my start on being a professional instead of a stock clerk."

—adapted from *When Dreams Came True*

Army fatigues and college diploma

Return to a Peacetime Economy

After the war many Americans feared the return to a peacetime economy. They worried that after military production halted and millions of former soldiers glutted the labor market, unemployment and recession might sweep the country.

Despite such worries, the economy continued to grow after the war as increased consumer spending helped ward off a recession. After 17 years of economic depression and wartime shortages, Americans rushed out to buy the luxury goods they had long desired.



HISTORY
Online

Student Web Activity Visit the *American Vision* Web site at tav.glencoe.com and click on **Student Web Activities—Chapter 27** for an activity on postwar America.

The Servicemen's Readjustment Act, popularly called the **GI Bill**, further boosted the economy. The act provided generous loans to veterans to help them establish businesses, buy homes, and attend college.

Inflation and Strikes The postwar economy was not without its problems. A greater demand for goods led to higher prices, and this rising inflation soon triggered labor unrest. As the cost of living rose, workers across the country went on strike for better pay. Work stoppages soon affected the automobile, electrical, steel, and mining industries.

Afraid that the nation's energy supply would be drastically reduced because of the striking miners, President Truman forced the miners to return to work after one strike that had lasted over a month. Truman ordered government seizure of the mines while pressuring mine owners to grant the union most of its demands. The president also halted a strike that shut down the nation's railroads by threatening to draft the striking workers into the army.

Republican Victory Labor unrest and high prices prompted many Americans to call for a change. The Republicans seized upon these sentiments during the 1946 congressional elections, winning control of both houses of Congress for the first time since 1930.

Disgusted with the rash of strikes that was crippling the nation, the new conservative Congress quickly set out to curb the power of organized labor. Legislators proposed a measure known as the **Taft-Hartley Act**, which outlawed the **closed shop**, or the practice of forcing business owners to hire only union members. Under the law, states could pass **right-to-work laws**, which outlawed **union shops** (shops in which new workers were required to join the union). The measure also prohibited **featherbedding**, the practice of limiting work output in order to create more jobs. Furthermore, the bill forbade unions from using their money to support political campaigns. When the bill reached Truman, however, he vetoed it, arguing:

“ . . . [It would] reverse the basic direction of our national labor policy, inject the government into private economic affairs on an unprecedented scale, and conflict with important principles of our democratic society. Its provisions would cause more strikes, not fewer.”

—quoted in *The Growth of the American Republic*

The president's concerns did little to sway Congress, which passed the Taft-Hartley Act in 1947 over Truman's veto. Its supporters claimed the law

held irresponsible unions in check just as the Wagner Act of 1935 had restrained anti-union activities and employers. Labor leaders called the act a “slave labor” law and insisted that it erased many of the gains that unions had made since 1933.

✓ Reading Check

Explaining Why did Truman veto the Taft-Hartley Act?

Truman's Domestic Program

The Democratic Party's loss of members in the 1946 elections did not dampen President Truman's spirits or his plans. Shortly after taking office, Truman had proposed a series of domestic measures that sought to continue the work done as part of Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal. During his tenure in office, Truman worked to push this agenda through Congress.

Truman's Legislative Agenda Truman's proposals included the expansion of Social Security benefits; the raising of the legal minimum wage from 40¢ to 75¢ an hour; a program to ensure full employment through aggressive use of federal spending and investment; public housing and slum clearance; long-range environmental and public works planning; and a system of national health insurance.

Truman also boldly asked Congress in February 1948 to pass a broad civil rights bill that would

The GI Bill African American soldiers review the benefits of the GI Bill, which included loans to attend college and to buy homes.



protect African Americans' right to vote, abolish poll taxes, and make lynching a federal crime. He also issued an executive order barring discrimination in federal employment, and he ended segregation in the armed forces.

Most of Truman's legislative efforts, however, met with little success, as a coalition of Republicans and conservative Southern Democrats defeated many of his proposals. While these defeats angered Truman, the president soon had to worry about other matters.

The Election of 1948 As the presidential election of 1948 approached, most observers gave Truman little chance of winning. Some Americans still believed that he lacked the stature for the job, and they viewed his administration as weak and inept.

Divisions within the Democratic Party also seemed to spell disaster for Truman. At the Democratic Convention that summer, two factions abandoned the party altogether. Reacting angrily to Truman's support of civil rights, a group of Southern Democrats formed the States' Rights, or Dixiecrat, Party and nominated South Carolina governor **Strom Thurmond** for president. At the same time, the party's more liberal members were frustrated by Truman's ineffective domestic policies and critical of his anti-Soviet foreign policy. They formed a new Progressive Party, with Henry A. Wallace as their presidential candidate. In addition, the president's Republican opponent was New York governor Thomas Dewey, a dignified and popular candidate who seemed unbeatable. After polling 50 political writers, *Newsweek* magazine declared three weeks before the election, "The landslide for Dewey will sweep the country."

Picturing History

African Americans Rally for Truman During the 1948 election, President Truman spoke at many rallies similar to this one in New York City. [What legislative proposals by President Truman built African American political support?](#)



Perhaps the only one who gave Truman a chance to win was Truman himself. "I know every one of those 50 fellows," he declared about the writers polled in *Newsweek*. "There isn't one of them has enough sense to pound sand in a rat hole." Ignoring the polls, the feisty president poured his efforts into an energetic campaign. He traveled more than 20,000 miles by train and made more than 350 speeches. Along the way, Truman attacked the majority Republican Congress as "do-nothing, good-for-nothing" for refusing to enact his legislative agenda.

Truman's attacks on the "Do-Nothing Congress" did not mention that both he and Congress had been very busy dealing with foreign policy matters. Congress had passed the Truman Doctrine's aid program to Greece and Turkey, as well as the Marshall Plan. It had also created the Department of Defense and the CIA and established the Joint Chiefs of Staff as a permanent organization. The 80th Congress, therefore, did not "do nothing" as Truman charged, but its accomplishments were in areas that did not affect most Americans directly. As a result, Truman's charges began to stick, and to the surprise of almost everyone, his efforts paid off.

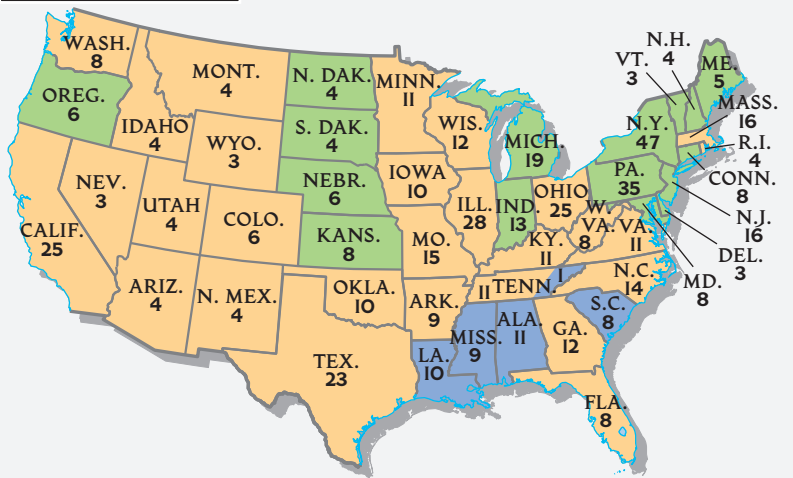
With a great deal of support from laborers, African Americans, and farmers, Truman won a narrow but stunning victory over Dewey. Perhaps just as remarkable as the president's victory was the resurgence of the Democratic Party. When the dust had cleared after Election Day, Democrats had regained control of both houses of Congress.

GOVERNMENT

The Fair Deal Truman's State of the Union message to the new Congress repeated the domestic agenda he had put forth previously. "Every segment of our population and every individual," he declared, "has a right to expect from . . . government a fair deal." Whether intentional or not, the president had coined a name—the **Fair Deal**—to set his program apart from the New Deal.

The 81st Congress did not completely embrace Truman's Fair Deal. Legislators did raise the legal minimum wage to 75¢ an hour. They also approved an important expansion of the Social Security system, increasing benefits by 75 percent and extending them to 10 million additional people. Congress also passed the National Housing Act of 1949, which provided for the construction of more than 800,000 units of low-income housing, accompanied by long-term rent subsidies.

Congress refused, however, to pass national health insurance or to provide subsidies for farmers or



Presidential Election, 1948			
Candidate	Electoral Vote	Popular Vote	Political Party
Truman	303	24,179,345	Democrat
Dewey	189	21,991,291	Republican
Thurmond	39	1,176,125	States' Rights
Wallace	0	1,157,326	Progressive

A victorious Truman holds a paper that incorrectly predicted a Dewey victory.



Geography Skills

- 1. Interpreting Maps** How many electoral votes did President Truman receive?
- 2. Applying Geography Skills** Where did Strom Thurmond enjoy strong political support?

federal aid for schools. In addition, legislators opposed Truman's efforts to enact civil rights legislation.

Reading Check **Summarizing** What was the outcome of Truman's proposed legislative agenda?

The Eisenhower Years

In 1950 the United States went to war in Korea. The war consumed the nation's attention and resources and basically ended Truman's Fair Deal. By 1952, with the war a bloody stalemate and his approval rating dropping quickly, Truman declined to run again for the presidency. With no Democratic incumbent to face, Republicans pinned their hopes of regaining the White House on a popular World War II hero.

The Election of 1952 Dwight Eisenhower decided to run as the Republican nominee for president in 1952. His running mate was a young California senator, Richard Nixon. The Democrats nominated Illinois governor Adlai Stevenson, a witty and eloquent speaker who had the support of leading liberals and organized labor.

The Republicans adopted the slogan: "It's time for a change!" The warm and friendly Eisenhower,

known as "Ike," promised to end the war in Korea. "I like Ike" became the Republican rallying cry.

Eisenhower's campaign soon came under fire as reports surfaced that Richard Nixon had received gifts from California business leaders totaling \$18,000 while he was a senator. For a while, it looked as if Nixon might be dropped from the ticket. In a nationwide speech broadcast on radio and television, Nixon insisted the funds had been used for legitimate political purposes. He did admit that his family had kept one gift, a cocker spaniel puppy named "Checkers." He declared, "The kids love the dog, [and] regardless about what they say about it, we're going to keep it." This so-called "Checkers speech" won praise from much of the public and kept Nixon on the ticket.

Eisenhower won the election by a landslide, carrying the Electoral College 442 votes to 89. The Republicans also gained an eight-seat majority in the House, while the Senate became evenly divided between Democrats and Republicans.

Ike as President President Eisenhower had two favorite phrases. "Middle of the road" described his political beliefs, which fell midway between conservative and liberal. He also referred to the notion of "dynamic conservatism," which meant balancing economic conservatism with some activism.

Why It Matters

Interstate Highways

As Cold War tensions rose, American officials realized that the ability to move troops and military equipment across the country quickly and efficiently could very well determine whether the nation could survive attack. Since the haphazard system of two-lane highways that crisscrossed America could not handle such a task, the Eisenhower administration proposed a 41,000-mile network of multi-lane interstate highways. The interstate system changed American life in several significant ways.



More Efficient Distribution of Goods >

The interstates made the distribution of goods faster and more efficient. In the 1990s, trucks moved more than 6 billion tons of goods each year, nearly half of all commercial transports in the United States. Most of these trucks used interstates.



Eisenhower wasted little time in showing his conservative side. The new president's cabinet appointments included several business leaders. Under their guidance, Eisenhower ended government price and rent controls, which many conservatives had viewed as unnecessary federal control over the business community. The Eisenhower administration viewed business growth as vital to the nation. The president's secretary of defense, formerly the president of General Motors, declared to the Senate that "what is good for our country is good for General Motors, and vice versa."

Eisenhower's conservatism showed itself in other ways as well. In an attempt to curb the federal budget, the president vetoed a school construction bill and agreed to slash government aid to public housing. Along with these cuts, he supported some modest tax reductions.

Eisenhower also targeted the federal government's continuing aid to businesses, or what he termed "creeping socialism." Shortly after taking office, the president abolished the Reconstruction Finance Corporation (RFC), which since 1932 had lent money to banks, railroads, and other large institutions in financial trouble. Another Depression-era agency, the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA), also came under Eisenhower's economic scrutiny.

During his presidency, appropriations for the TVA fell from \$185 million to \$12 million.

In some areas, President Eisenhower took an activist role. For example, he advocated the passage of two large government projects. During the 1950s, as the number of Americans who owned cars increased, so too did the need for greater and more efficient travel routes. In 1956 Congress responded to this growing need by passing the **Federal Highway Act**, the largest public works program in American history. The act appropriated \$25 billion for a 10-year effort to construct more than 40,000 miles (64,400 km) of interstate highways. Congress also authorized construction of the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence Seaway to connect the Great Lakes with the Atlantic Ocean through a series of locks on the St. Lawrence River. Three previous presidents had been unable to reach agreements with Canada to build this waterway to aid international shipping. Through Eisenhower's efforts, the two nations finally agreed on a plan to complete the project.

Extending the New Deal Although President Eisenhower cut federal spending and worked to limit the federal government's role in the nation's economy, he also agreed to extend the Social Security system to an additional 10 million people. He also extended unemployment compensation to an





◀ Suburbanization and Urban Sprawl

The interstate system contributed to the growth of suburban communities and the eventual geographic spread of centerless cities. Using the interstates, suburbanites could commute to their jobs miles away.

A New Road Culture ▶

The interstates created an automobile society. In 1997, \$687 billion were spent on private automobiles compared to \$22.8 billion for public transit. Additionally, chains of fast food restaurants and motels replaced independent operators across the country.



Speed of Travel

The interstate highways drastically decreased the time it took to travel across the continent. In 1919 a young Dwight D. Eisenhower joined 294 other members of the army to travel the 2,800 miles from Washington, D.C., to San Francisco. They made the trip in 62 days, averaging 5 miles per hour. During World War II, General Eisenhower was impressed with the modern design of Germany's freeway system, the Autobahn. "The old convoy," he said, "had started me thinking about good, two-lane highways, but Germany had made me see the wisdom of broader ribbons across the land." Wide lanes and controlled entrance and exit points allowed cars to travel at much higher speeds. Using the interstate highways, Eisenhower's trip would now take 4½ days.

Travel Times: Washington, D.C., to San Francisco



additional 4 million citizens and agreed to increase the minimum hourly wage from 75¢ to \$1 and to continue to provide some government aid to farmers.

By the time Eisenhower ran for a second term in 1956—a race he won easily—the nation had successfully completed the transition from a wartime to a peacetime economy. The battles between liberals and

conservatives over whether to continue New Deal policies would continue. In the meantime, however, most Americans focused their energy on enjoying what had become a decade of tremendous prosperity.

✓ Reading Check **Evaluating** What conservative and activist measures did Eisenhower take during his administration?

SECTION 1 ASSESSMENT

Checking for Understanding

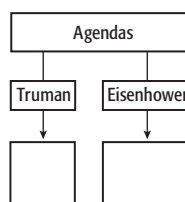
- Define:** *closed shop, right-to-work law, union shop, featherbedding, dynamic conservatism.*
- Identify:** GI Bill, "Do-Nothing Congress," Fair Deal, Federal Highway Act.

Reviewing Themes

- Economic Factors** How did President Eisenhower aid international shipping during his administration?

Critical Thinking

- Interpreting** In what ways did the Taft-Hartley Act hurt labor unions?
- Categorizing** Use a graphic organizer to compare the agendas of the Truman and Eisenhower administrations.



Analyzing Visuals

- Analyzing Maps** Study the map on page 811. Which parts of the country did Dewey win? Why do you think he did so well in these areas?

Writing About History

- Persuasive Writing** Take on the role of a member of Congress during the Truman administration. Write a speech in which you try to persuade the 81st Congress to either pass or defeat Truman's Fair Deal measures.

Guide to Reading

Main Idea

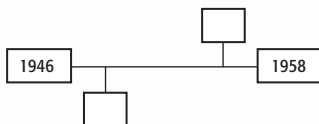
The postwar economic boom brought great changes to society, including the ways many Americans worked and lived.

Key Terms and Names

John Kenneth Galbraith, white-collar, blue-collar, multinational corporation, franchise, David Riesman, Levittown, baby boom, Jonas Salk

Reading Strategy

Sequencing As you read about American society in the 1950s, complete a time line similar to the one below by recording the scientific and technological breakthroughs of the time.

**Reading Objectives**

- **Explain** the reasons for and the effects of the nation's economic boom.
- **Describe** changes to the American family that took place during the 1950s.

Section Theme

Continuity and Change Americans became avid consumers in the atmosphere of postwar abundance.

Preview of Events

◆ 1946

1947

Construction of Levittown begins

◆ 1950

1950

David Riesman's *The Lonely Crowd* published

◆ 1954

1955

Salk polio vaccine becomes widely available

◆ 1958

1958

John Kenneth Galbraith's *The Affluent Society* published

★ *An American Story* ★

Kemmons Wilson
on magazine cover

In the summer of 1951, Kemmons Wilson traveled with his family from Memphis, Tennessee, to Washington, D.C. He noticed that some of the motels they stayed in were terrible. Each added a \$2 charge per child to the standard room price, and many were located far from restaurants, forcing travelers back into their cars to search for meals.

Frustrated, Wilson decided to build a motel chain that would provide interstate travelers with comfortable lodgings. They would be located near good family restaurants and allow kids to stay free. Together with a group of investors, Wilson began building the Holiday Inn motel chain. Families loved his motels, and soon Holiday Inns were sprouting up all over the country.

Wilson said he never doubted the success of his endeavor. "I like to think that I'm so . . . normal that anything I like, everybody else is going to like too," he said. "The idea that my instincts are out of line just doesn't occur to me." His prosperity mirrored a growing affluence in the nation. This time of prosperity made the shortages of the Great Depression and World War II a distant memory.

—adapted from *The Fifties*

American Abundance

Wilson's motel chain proved successful largely because the 1950s was a decade of incredible prosperity. In 1958 economist **John Kenneth Galbraith** published *The Affluent Society*, in which he claimed that the nation's postwar prosperity was a new phenomenon. In the past, Galbraith said, all societies had an "economy of scarcity,"

meaning that a lack of resources and overpopulation had limited economic productivity. Now, the United States and a few other industrialized nations had created what Galbraith called an “economy of abundance.” New business techniques and improved technology enabled these nations to produce an abundance of goods and services for their people—all of which allowed many of them to enjoy a standard of living never before thought possible.

The Spread of Wealth Some critics accused Galbraith of overstating the situation, but the facts and figures seemed to support his theory. Between 1940 and 1955, the average income of American families roughly tripled. Americans in all income brackets—poor, middle-class, and wealthy—experienced this rapid rise in income. The dramatic rise in home ownership also showed that the income of average families had risen significantly. Between 1940 and 1960, the number of Americans owning their own homes rose from about 41 to about 61 percent.

Accompanying the country’s economic growth were dramatic changes in work environments. Mechanization in farms and factories meant that fewer farmers and laborers were needed to provide the public with food and goods. As a result, more Americans began working in what are called **white-collar** jobs, such as those in sales and management. In 1956, for the first time, white-collar workers outnumbered **blue-collar** workers, or people who perform physical labor in industry.

Multinationals and Franchises Many white-collar employees worked for large corporations. As these businesses competed with each other, some expanded overseas. These **multinational corporations** located themselves closer to important raw materials and benefited from a cheaper labor pool, which made them more competitive.

The 1950s also witnessed the rise of **franchises**, in which a person owns and runs one or several stores of a chain operation. Because many business leaders believed that consumers valued dependability and familiarity, the owners of chain operations often demanded that their franchises present a uniform look and style.

The Organization Man Like franchise owners, many corporate leaders also expected their employees to conform to company standards. In general, corporations did not desire free-thinking individuals or people who might speak out or criticize the company.

Some social observers recognized this phenomenon and disapproved of it. In his 1950 book, *The Lonely Crowd*, sociologist **David Riesman** argued that this conformity was changing people. Formerly, he claimed, people were “inner-directed,” judging themselves on the basis of their own values and the esteem of their families. Now, however, people were becoming “other-directed,” concerning themselves with winning the approval of the corporation or community.

In his 1956 book *The Organization Man*, writer **William H. Whyte, Jr.**, assailed the similarity many business organizations cultivated in order to keep any individual from dominating. “In group doctrine,” Whyte wrote, “the strong personality is viewed with overwhelming suspicion,” and the person with ideas is considered “a threat.”

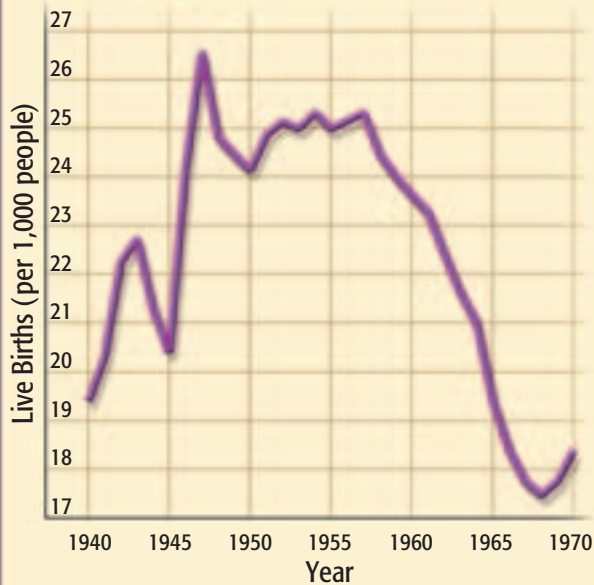
The New Consumerism The conformity of the 1950s included people’s desires to own the same new products as their neighbors. With more disposable income, Americans bought more luxury items, such as refrigerators, washing machines, vacuum cleaners, and air conditioners. Americans also bought a variety of labor-saving machines. As *House and Garden* magazine boasted in a 1954 article, coffeemakers, blenders, and lawn trimmers “[replaced] the talents of caretaker, gardener, cook, [and] maid.”



Analyzing Political Cartoons

The Organization Man In the 1950s, more and more people worked in white-collar corporate jobs. Some social critics worried that this development emphasized conformity. **In what other ways did society encourage people to conform?**

The Baby Boom



Source: *Historical Statistics of the United States: Colonial Times to 1970.*

Graph Skills

- 1. Interpreting Graphs** When did the rapid rise in population shown here reach its peak?
- 2. Analyzing Cause and Effect** What factors contributed to this rapid rise in births?

Accompanying the nation's spending spree was the growth of more sophisticated advertising. Advertising became the fastest-growing industry in the United States, as manufacturers employed new marketing techniques to sell their products. These techniques were carefully planned to whet the consumer's appetite. The purpose of these advertisers was to influence choices among brands of goods that were essentially the same. According to the elaborate advertising campaigns of the time, a freezer became a promise of plenty, a second car became a symbol of status, and a mouthwash became the key to immediate success.

The Growth of Suburbia Advertisers targeted their ads to consumers who had money to spend. Many of these consumers lived in the nation's growing suburbs that grew up around cities.

Levittown, New York, was one of the earliest of the new suburbs. The driving force behind this planned residential community was Bill Levitt, who mass-produced hundreds of simple and similar-looking homes in a potato field 10 miles east of New York City. Between 1947 and 1951, thousands of families rushed to buy the inexpensive homes, and

soon other communities similar to Levittown sprang up throughout the United States.

Suburbs became increasingly popular throughout the 1950s, accounting for about 85 percent of new home construction. The number of suburban dwellers doubled, while the population of cities themselves rose only 10 percent. Reasons for the rapid growth of suburbia varied. Some people wanted to escape the crime and congestion of city neighborhoods. Others viewed life in the suburbs as a move up to a better life for themselves and their children. In contrast to city life, suburbia offered a more picturesque environment. As developers in earlier periods had done, the developers of the 1950s attracted home buyers with promises of fresh air, green lawns, and trees.

Affordability became a key factor in attracting home buyers to the suburbs. Because the GI Bill offered low-interest loans, new housing was more affordable during the postwar period than at any other time in American history. Equally attractive was the government's offer of income tax deductions for home mortgage interest payments and property taxes. For millions of Americans, the suburbs came to symbolize the American dream. They owned their homes, sent their children to good schools, lived in safe communities, and enjoyed economic security.

Nevertheless, some observers viewed the growth of such plain and identical-looking communities as another sign of Americans' tendency toward conformity. "You too can find a box of your own," one sarcastic critic wrote about Levittown, "inhabited by people whose age, income, number of children, problems, habits, conversations, dress, possessions, perhaps even blood types are almost precisely like yours."

Reading Check **Interpreting** What were two causes and effects of the economic boom of the 1950s?

The 1950s Family

In addition to all the other transformations taking place in the nation during the 1950s, the American family also was changing. Across the country, many families grew larger, and more married women entered the workforce.

The Baby Boom The American birthrate exploded after World War II. From 1945 to 1961, a period known as the **baby boom**, more than 65 million children were born in the United States. At the height of the baby boom, a child was born every seven seconds.

Several factors contributed to the baby boom. First, young couples who had delayed marriage during

World War II and the Korean War could now marry, buy homes, and begin their families. In addition, the government encouraged the growth of families by offering generous GI benefits for home purchases. Finally, on television and in magazines, popular culture celebrated pregnancy, parenthood, and large families.

Women in the Fifties Many women focused on their traditional role of homemaker during the 1950s. Even though 8 million American women had gone to work during the war, the new postwar emphasis on having babies and establishing families now discouraged women from seeking employment. Many Americans assumed that a good mother should stay home to take care of her children.

“Let’s face it, girls,” declared one female writer in *Better Homes and Gardens* in April 1955, “that wonderful guy in your house—and in mine—is building your house, your happiness and the opportunities that will come to your children.” The magazine advised stay-at-home wives to “set their sights on a happy home, a host of friends and a bright future through success in HIS job.”

Despite the popular emphasis on homemaking, however, the number of women who held jobs outside the home actually increased during the 1950s. Most women who went to work did so in order to help their families maintain their comfortable lifestyles. By 1960 nearly one-third of all married women were part of the paid workforce.

Reading Check **Evaluating** What were three factors that contributed to the baby boom?

Technological Breakthroughs

As the United States underwent many social changes during the postwar era, the nation also witnessed several important scientific advances. In medicine, space exploration, and electronics, American scientists broke new ground during the 1950s.

Advances in Electronics The electronics industry made rapid advances after World War II. In 1947 three American physicists—John Bardeen, Walter H. Brattain, and William Shockley—developed the transistor, a tiny device that generated electric signals and made it possible to miniaturize radios and calculators.

The age of computers also dawned in the postwar era. In 1946 scientists working under a U.S. Army contract developed one of the nation’s earliest

computers—known as ENIAC (Electronic Numerical Integrator and Computer)—to make military calculations. Several years later, a newer model called UNIVAC (Universal Automatic Computer) would handle business data and launch the computer revolution. The computer, along with changes and improvements in communication and transportation systems, allowed many Americans to work more quickly and efficiently. As a result, families in the 1950s had more free time, and new forms of leisure activity became popular.

Medical Miracles The medical breakthroughs of the 1950s included the development of powerful antibiotics to fight infection; the introduction of new drugs to combat arthritis, diabetes, cancer, and heart



The Incredible Shrinking Computer

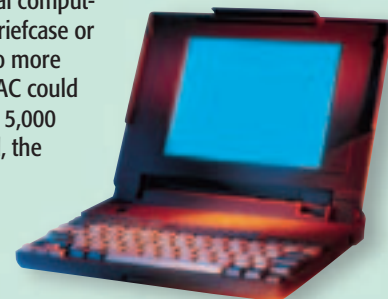
Past: The First Computer

ENIAC (Electronic Numerical Integrator and Computer) was the first large-scale digital computer. Operating from 1946 to 1955, its primary function was to provide data for the military. It weighed more than 30 tons and took up 1,800 square feet—more than some houses!



Present: Modern Marvels

Modern computers are very small and very fast. Many personal computers now fit easily in a briefcase or backpack. They are also more efficient. While the ENIAC could perform approximately 5,000 calculations per second, the typical home computer performs about 70 million calculations per second—14,000 times faster!





Picturing History

Polio Epidemic In the 1940s and 1950s, Americans were very concerned about the wave of polio cases that struck so many young children. Here, devices known as iron lungs help polio patients breathe. [How did people try to safeguard against the spread of the disease?](#)

disease; and groundbreaking advances in surgical techniques. Polio, however, continued to baffle the medical profession.

Periodic polio epidemics had been occurring in the United States since 1916. The disease had even struck the young Franklin Roosevelt and forced him to use a wheelchair. In the 1940s and 1950s, however, polio struck the nation in epidemic proportions. Officially known as infantile paralysis because it generally targeted the young, the disease brought a wave of terror to the country. No one knew where or when polio would strike, but an epidemic broke out in some area of the country each summer, crippling and killing its victims. People watched helplessly while neighbors fell sick. Many died, and those who did not were often confined to iron lungs—large metal tanks with pumps that helped patients breathe. If they eventually recovered, they were often paralyzed for the rest of their lives.

Because no one knew what caused the disease, parents searched for ways to safeguard their families each summer. Some sent their children to the country to avoid excessive contact with others. Public swimming pools and beaches were closed. Parks and playgrounds across the country stood deserted. Nevertheless, the disease continued to strike. In 1952 a record 58,000 new cases were reported.

Finally, a research scientist named **Jonas Salk** developed an injectable vaccine that prevented polio. Salk first tested the vaccine on himself, his wife, and his three sons. It was then tested on 2 million schoolchildren. In 1955 the vaccine was declared safe and effective and became available to the general public. The results were spectacular. New cases of polio fell to 5,700 in 1958 and then to 3,277 in 1960. American scientist Albert Sabin then developed an oral vaccine for polio. Because it was safer and more convenient than Salk's injection vaccine, the Sabin vaccine became the most common form of treatment against the disease. In the years to come, the threat of polio would almost completely disappear.

Conquering Space After the Soviet Union launched *Sputnik*, the world's first space satellite, in October 1957, the United States hastened to catch up with its

Cold War rival. Less than four months later, on January 31, 1958, the United States launched its own satellite from Cape Canaveral, Florida. Reporter Milton Bracker described the jubilant scene:

“As the firing command neared, a deadly silence fell on those who were watching. In the glare of the searchlights, a stream of liquid oxygen could be seen venting like a lavender cloud from the side of the seventy-foot rocket. . . . At fourteen and one-half seconds after time zero . . . the main stage engine came to life with an immeasurable thrust of flame in all directions. . . . With thousands of eyes following it, the rocket dug into the night and accelerated as its sound loudened. Spectators on near-by beaches pointed and craned their necks and cried, ‘There it is!’ and began to cheer.”

—quoted in *Voices from America’s Past*

Meanwhile, engineers were building smoother and faster commercial planes. Poet Carl Sandburg wrote about taking the first American jet flight from New York to Los Angeles. The trip took only five and a half hours. “You search for words to describe the speed of this flight,” wrote an amazed Sandburg.

Profiles IN HISTORY

Dr. Jonas Salk 1914–1995



The man who developed the vaccine for one of the nation’s most feared diseases almost did not go into medicine. Jonas Salk enrolled in college as a pre-law student but soon changed his mind. “My mother didn’t think I would make a very good lawyer,” Salk said, “probably because I could never win an argument with her.” Salk switched his major to premed and went on to become a research scientist.

Salk initially directed the search for a cure to the dreaded ailment of polio at the University of Pittsburgh’s Virus Research Laboratory. Every so often, Salk would make rounds in the overcrowded polio wards of nearby Municipal Hospital, where nurses described their feelings of pity and helpless rage as paralyzed children cried for water. As one nurse said, “I

can remember how the staff used to kid Dr. Salk—kidding in earnest—telling him to hurry up and do something.”

Salk became famous for his breakthrough vaccine. The shy doctor, however, did not desire fame. About his becoming a celebrity, Salk observed that it was “a transitory thing and you wait till it blows over. Eventually people will start thinking, ‘That poor guy,’ and leave me alone. Then I’ll be able to get back to my laboratory.”

“You are whisked . . . from an ocean on one side of the continent to an ocean on the opposite side in less time than it takes the sun to trace a 90-degree arc across the sky.”

Reading Check **Examining** What medical and technological advances met specific needs in the late 1940s and 1950s?

SECTION 2 ASSESSMENT

Checking for Understanding

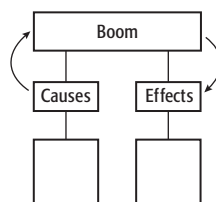
- Define:** *white-collar, blue-collar, multinational corporation, franchise, baby boom.*
- Identify:** John Kenneth Galbraith, David Riesman, Levittown, Jonas Salk.
- Describe** how and why the suburbs became popular places to live.

Reviewing Themes

- Continuity and Change** How was the affluent society of the United States in the 1950s different from previous decades?

Critical Thinking

- Interpreting** What caused the advertising industry boom in the 1950s?
- Organizing** Use a graphic organizer similar to the one below to list the causes and effects of the economic boom of the 1950s.



Analyzing Visuals

- Analyzing Photographs** Study the photograph on page 818 of children suffering from polio. What do you think it was like to live in such an environment? Do Americans today face similar medical fears?

Writing About History

- Descriptive Writing** Write an article for a magazine such as *Better Homes and Gardens* describing changes the American family underwent during the 1950s.

Popular Culture of the 1950s

Guide to Reading

Main Idea

During the carefree and prosperous 1950s, Americans turned to television, new forms of music, cinema, and literature to entertain themselves.

Key Terms and Names

Ed Sullivan, Alan Freed, Elvis Presley, generation gap, Jack Kerouac, Little Richard

Reading Strategy

Categorizing As you read about the popular culture of the 1950s, complete a graphic organizer similar to the one below comparing new forms of mass media during the 1950s.

New Forms of Mass Media	Description

Reading Objectives

- **Explain** the characteristics of the new youth culture.
- **Discuss** the contributions of African Americans to 1950s culture.

Section Theme

Culture and Traditions The 1950s added such elements as rock 'n' roll music and sitcom television to modern culture.

Preview of Events



★ An American Story ★



Lucille Ball and Desi Arnaz

In 1953 Lucille Ball and her real-life husband, Desi Arnaz, were starring in one of the most popular shows on American television, *I Love Lucy*. In January, Ball had a baby—both in real life and on her show. Her pregnancy and the birth of her baby became a national event that captivated her audience. A pre-filmed segment of the show showed Lucy and her husband going to the hospital to have the baby, and the show was broadcast only a few hours after the real birth. More than two-thirds of the nation's television sets tuned in, an audience of around 44 million viewers. Far fewer people watched the next day when television broadcast a presidential inauguration.

I Love Lucy was so popular that some people actually set up their work schedules around the show. Marshall Field's, which had previously held sales on the same night the show was on, eventually switched its sales to a different night. A sign on its shop window explained, "We love Lucy too, so we're closing on Monday nights." A relatively new medium, television had swept the nation by the mid-1950s.

—adapted from *Watching TV: Four Decades of American Television*

The New Mass Media

Although regular television broadcasts had begun in the early 1940s, there were few stations, and sets were expensive. By the end of the 1950s, however, the small, black-and-white-screened sets sat in living rooms across the country. Television's popularity

forced the other forms of mass media—namely motion pictures and radio—to innovate in order to keep their audiences.

The Rise of Television Popularity During World War II, televisions became more affordable for consumers. In 1946 it is estimated there were between 7,000 and 8,000 sets in the entire United States. By 1957 there were 40 million television sets in use. Over 80 percent of families had televisions.

By the late 1950s, television news had become an important vehicle for information. Television advertising spawned a growing market for many new products. Advertising, after all, provided television with the money that allowed it to flourish. As one critic concluded, “Programs on television are simply a device to keep the advertisements and commercials from bumping loudly together.” Televised athletic events gradually made professional and college sports one of the most prominent sources of entertainment.

Comedy, Action, and Games Early television programs fell into several main categories including comedy, action and adventure, and variety-style entertainment. Laughter proved popular in other formats

besides the half-hour situation comedy. Many of the early television comedy shows, such as those starring Bob Hope and Jack Benny, were adapted from popular old radio shows. Benny enjoyed considerable television success with his routines of bad violin playing and stingy behavior.

Television watchers in the 1950s also relished action shows. Westerns such as *Hopalong Cassidy*, *The Lone Ranger*, and *Gunsmoke* grew quickly in popularity. Viewers also enjoyed police programs such as *Dragnet*, a hugely successful show featuring Joe Friday and his partner hunting down a new criminal each week.

Variety shows such as **Ed Sullivan’s** *Toast of the Town* provided a mix of comedy, opera, popular song, dance, acrobatics, and juggling. Quiz shows attracted large audiences, too, after the 1955 debut of *The \$64,000 Question*. In this show and its many imitators, two contestants tried to answer questions from separate glass-encased booths. The questions, stored between shows in a bank vault, arrived at the studio at airtime in the hands of a stern-faced bank executive flanked by two armed guards. The contestants competed head-to-head, with the winner returning the following week to face a new challenger.

TV Nation

Television programming depicted a narrow view of American culture in the 1950s. Most television shows during these years centered around a common image of American life—an image that was predominantly white, middle-class, and suburban, epitomized by the popular situation comedy *The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet*. Such shows also reinforced traditional gender roles, showing fathers working and mothers staying home to raise children and take care of the house.

Westerns were also popular at the time, especially *The Lone Ranger*, in which a mysterious masked man helped people in distress. *The Howdy Doody Show*, which featured Buffalo Bob and his freckle-faced marionette, was the first network kids’ show to run five days a week, the first television show ever broadcast in color, and the first show ever to air more than 1,000 continuous episodes.



Ozzie and Harriet



Howdy Doody

Tonto and the Lone Ranger



Quick and Easy Eats Along with the television came . . . TV dinners! Capitalizing on the television boom of the 1950s, these frozen individual meals offered an entrée, a side dish or two, and a dessert, all on an aluminum tray divided into compartments.

Not everyone actually ate TV dinners in front of the television, but the meals were popular because they offered convenience. Noted one food industry executive of the time, “When Mary Smith rushes home from work late in the afternoon, she wants to buy food that not only will look pretty on the table but is something she can get ready in the half hour before her husband comes home for dinner.”



In 1956 the quiz show *Twenty-One* caused an uproar across the nation after **Charles Van Doren**, a young assistant professor with a modest income, won \$129,000 during his weeks on the program. The viewing public soon learned, however, that Van Doren and many of the other contestants had received the answers to the questions in advance. Before a congressional committee in 1959, Van Doren admitted his role in the scandal and apologized to his many fans, saying, “I was involved, deeply involved, in a deception.” In the wake of the *Twenty-One* fraud, many quiz shows went off the air.

Hollywood Adapts to the Times As the popularity of television grew, movies lost viewers. “Hollywood’s like Egypt,” lamented producer David Selznick in 1951. “Full of crumbling pyramids.” While the film business may not have been collapsing, it certainly did suffer after the war. Attendance dropped from 82 million in 1946 to 36 million by 1950. By 1960, when some 50 million Americans owned a television, one-fifth of the nation’s movie theaters had closed.

Throughout the decade, Hollywood struggled mightily to recapture its audience. “Don’t be a ‘Living Room Captive,’” one industry ad pleaded. “Step out and see a great movie!” When contests, door prizes, and an advertising campaign announcing that “Movies Are Better Than Ever” failed to lure people out of their homes, Hollywood began to try to make films more exciting. Between 1952 and 1954, audiences of 3-D films received special

glasses that gave the impression that a monster or a knife was lunging directly at them from off the screen. Viewers, however, soon tired of both the glasses and the often ridiculous plots of 3-D movies.

Cinemascope, movies shown on large, panoramic screens, finally gave Hollywood a reliable lure. Wide-screen spectacles like *The Robe*, *The Ten Commandments*, and *Around the World in 80 Days* cost a great deal of money to produce. These blockbusters, however, made up for their cost by attracting huge audiences and netting large profits. The movie industry also made progress by taking the “if you can’t beat ‘em, join ‘em” approach. Hollywood eventually began to film programs especially for television and also sold old movies, which could be rebroadcast cheaply, to the networks.

Like television, the films of the fifties for the most part adhered to the conformity of the times. Roles for single women who did not want families were few and far between. For example, each of Marilyn Monroe’s film roles featured the blond movie star as married, soon to be married, or unhappy that she was not married.

Movies with African Americans routinely portrayed them in stereotypical roles, such as maids, servants, or sidekicks for white heroes. Even when African Americans took leading roles, they were often one-dimensional characters who rarely showed human emotions or characteristics. African American actor Sidney Poitier resented having to play such parts:

“The black characters usually come out on the screen as saints, as the other-cheek-turners, as people who are not really people: who are so nice and good. . . . As a matter of fact, I’m just dying to play villains.”

—quoted in *The Fifties: The Way We Really Were*

Radio Draws Them In Television also lured away radio listeners and forced the radio industry, like Hollywood, to develop new ways to win back audiences. After television took over many of radio’s concepts of comedies, dramas, and soap operas, for example, many radio stations began to specialize in presenting recorded music, news, talk shows, weather, public-service programming, and shows for specific audiences.

As a result of this targeted programming, radio stations survived and even flourished. Their numbers more than doubled between 1948, when 1,680

stations were broadcasting to the nation, and 1957, when more than 3,600 stations filled the airwaves.

✓ Reading Check Identifying How did the television industry affect the U.S. economy?

The New Youth Culture

While Americans of all ages embraced the new mass media, some of the nation's youth rebelled against such a message. During the 1950s, a number of young Americans turned their backs on the conformist ideals adult society promoted. Although these youths were a small minority, their actions brought them widespread attention. In general, these young people longed for greater excitement and freedom, and they found an outlet for such feelings of restlessness in new and controversial styles of music and literature.

Rock 'n' Roll In the early 1950s, rock 'n' roll emerged as the distinctive music of the new generation. In 1951 at a record store in downtown Cleveland,

Ohio, radio disc jockey **Alan Freed** noticed white teenagers buying African American rhythm and blues records and dancing to the music in the store. A week later, Freed won permission from his station manager to play the music on the air. Just as the disc jockey had suspected, the listeners went crazy for it. Soon, white artists began making music that stemmed from these African American rhythms and sounds, and a new form of music, **rock 'n' roll**, had been born.

With a loud and heavy beat that made it ideal for dancing along with lyrics about romance, cars, and other themes that spoke to young people, rock 'n' roll grew wildly popular among the nation's teens. Before long boys and girls around the country were rushing out to buy the latest hits from such artists as Buddy Holly, Chuck Berry, and Bill Haley and the Comets. In 1956 teenagers found their first rock 'n' roll hero in **Elvis Presley**. Presley, who had been born in rural Mississippi and grown up poor in Memphis, Tennessee, eventually claimed the title of "King of Rock 'n' Roll."

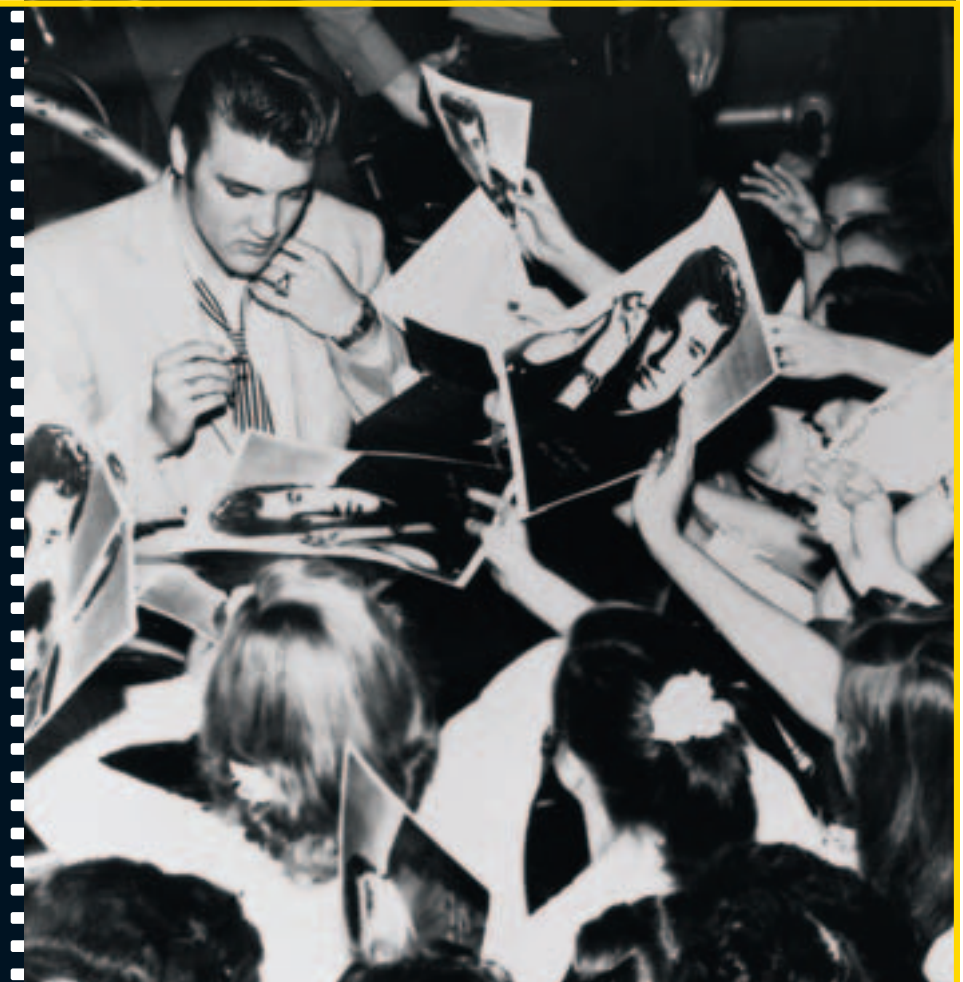
While in high school, Presley had learned to play guitar and sing by imitating the rhythm and blues

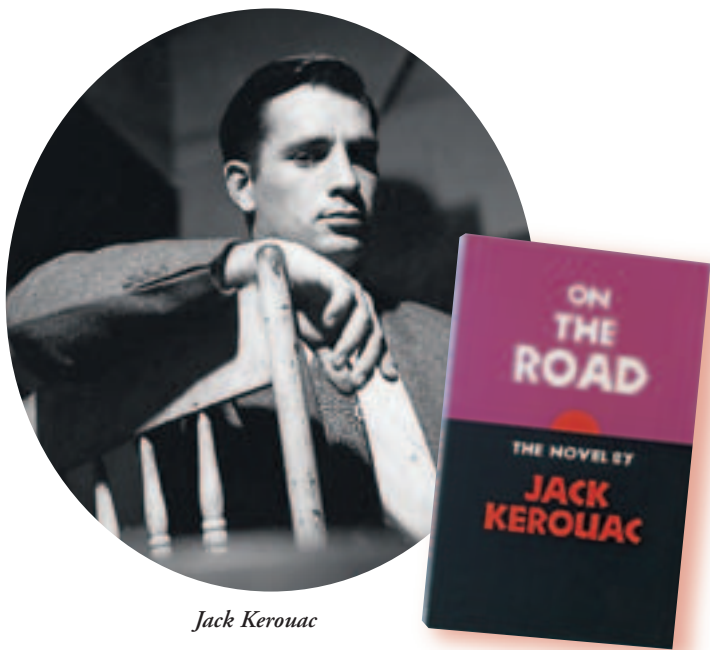
**NATIONAL
GEOGRAPHIC**

MOMENT in HISTORY

THE KING OF ROCK

Elvis Presley, shown here signing autographs after a performance in Houston, took American youth in the 1950s by storm. Parents, on the other hand, were less than thrilled with his music—a blend of African American-inspired rhythm and blues and early rock 'n' roll—and his hip-swiveling gyrations on stage. For Presley's first appearance on *The Ed Sullivan Show*, the host insisted that cameras show him only from the waist up. Elvis added to his fame by starring in a string of films that audiences loved but critics panned.





Jack Kerouac

music he heard on the radio. By 1956 Elvis had a record deal with RCA Victor, a movie contract, and public appearances on several television shows. At first the popular television variety show host Ed Sullivan refused to invite Presley on, insisting that the rock 'n' roll music was not fit for a family-oriented show. When a competing show featuring Presley upset his own high ratings, however, Sullivan relented. He ended up paying Presley \$50,000 per performance for three appearances, more than triple the amount he had paid any other performer.

The dark-haired and handsome Presley owed his wild popularity as much to his moves as to his music. During his performances he would gyrate his hips and dance in other suggestive ways that shocked many in the audience. Presley himself admitted the importance of this part of his act:

“I’m not kidding myself. My voice alone is just an ordinary voice. What people come to see is how I use it. If I stand still while I’m singing, I’m dead, man. I might as well go back to driving a truck.”

—quoted in *God’s Country: America in the Fifties*

Not surprisingly, parents—many of whom listened to Frank Sinatra and other more mellow and mainstream artists—condemned rock 'n' roll as loud, mindless, and dangerous. The city council of San Antonio, Texas, actually banned rock 'n' roll from the jukeboxes at public swimming pools. The music, the council declared, “attracted undesirable elements given to practicing their gyrations in abbreviated bathing suits.” A minister in Boston complained that “rock and roll inflames and excites youth.”

The rock 'n' roll hits that teens bought in record numbers united them in a world their parents did not share. Thus in the 1950s rock 'n' roll helped to create what became known as the **generation gap**, or the cultural separation between children and their parents.

The Beat Movement If rock 'n' roll helped to create a generation gap, a group of mostly white artists who called themselves the **beats** highlighted a values gap in the 1950s United States. The term *beat* may have come from the feeling among group members of being “beaten down” by American culture, or from jazz musicians who would say, “I’m beat right down to my socks.”

The beats sought to live unconventional lives as fugitives from a culture they despised. Beat poets, writers, and artists harshly criticized what they considered the sterility and conformity of American life, the meaninglessness of American politics, and the emptiness of popular culture.

In 1956, 29-year-old beat poet **Allen Ginsberg** published a long poem called “Howl,” which blasted modern American life. Another beat member, **Jack Kerouac**, published *On the Road* in 1957. Although Kerouac’s book about his freewheeling adventures with a car thief and con artist shocked some readers, the book went on to become a classic in modern American literature.

 **Reading Check** **Summarizing** How did rock 'n' roll help create the generation gap?

African American Entertainers

While artists such as Jack Kerouac rejected American culture, African American entertainers struggled to find acceptance in a country that often treated them as second-class citizens. With a few notable exceptions, television tended to shut out African Americans. In 1956, NBC gave a popular African American singer named Nat King Cole his own 15-minute musical variety show. In 1958, after 64 episodes, NBC canceled the show after failing to secure a national sponsor for a show hosted by an African American.

African American rock 'n' roll singers had more luck gaining acceptance. The talented African American singers and groups who recorded hit songs in the fifties included **Chuck Berry**, **Ray Charles**, **Little Richard**, and the **Drifters**. The latter years of the 1950s also saw the rise of several African American women’s groups, including the

Little Richard



Fats Domino

Picturing History

African American Entertainers Rhythm and blues music provided the roots of the 1950s rock 'n' roll sound. Did African American rock 'n' roll artists experience the same acceptance as artists like Elvis Presley? Why or why not?

Crystals, the Chiffons, the Shirelles, and the Ronettes. With their catchy, popular sound, these groups became the musical ancestors of the famous late 1960s groups Martha and the Vandellas and the Supremes.

Over time, the music of the early rock 'n' roll artists had a profound influence on music throughout the world. Little Richard and Chuck Berry, for example, provided inspiration for the Beatles, whose music swept Britain and the world in the 1960s. Elvis's

music transformed generations of rock 'n' roll bands that were to follow him and other pioneers of rock.

Despite the innovations in music and the economic boom of the 1950s, not all Americans were part of the affluent society. For much of the country's minorities and rural poor, the American dream remained well out of reach.

Reading Check Evaluating What impact did American rock 'n' roll artists have on the rest of the world?

SECTION 3 ASSESSMENT

Checking for Understanding

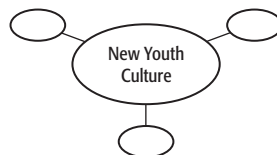
1. **Define:** *generation gap.*
2. **Identify:** Ed Sullivan, Alan Freed, Elvis Presley, Jack Kerouac, Little Richard.
3. **Explain** what happened to motion pictures and radio when television became popular.

Reviewing Themes

4. **Culture and Traditions** What roles did African Americans play in television and rock 'n' roll?

Critical Thinking

5. **Comparing** How did the themes of television shows of the 1950s differ from the themes of the literature of the beat movement?
6. **Organizing** Use a graphic organizer similar to the one below to list the styles of music and literature that made up the new youth culture of the 1950s.



Analyzing Visuals

7. **Analyzing Photographs** Study the photographs on pages 820 and 821. Many people have criticized these television programs for presenting a one-sided view of American life. Do you agree with this criticism? Why or why not?

Writing About History

8. **Expository Writing** Imagine you are a beat writer in the 1950s. Explain to your readers how the themes you write about are universal themes that could apply to everyone.



Profile

JAMES DEAN had a brief but spectacular career as a film star. His role in *Rebel Without a Cause* made him an icon for American youth in the mid-50s. In 1955 Dean was killed in a car crash. He was 24.

"I guess I have as good an insight into this rising generation as any other young man my age. Therefore, when I do play a youth, I try to imitate life. *Rebel Without a Cause* deals with the problems of modern youth. . . . If you want the kids to come and see the picture, you've got to try to reach them on their own grounds. If a picture is psychologically motivated, if there is truth in the relationships in it, then I think that picture will do good."

—from an interview for *Rebel Without a Cause*

VERBATIM

“It will make a wonderful place for the children to play in, and it will be a good storehouse, too.”

MRS. RUTH CALHOUN,
mother of three, on her backyard
fallout shelter, 1951

“Riddle: What’s college? That’s where girls who are above cooking and sewing go to meet a man they can spend their lives cooking and sewing for.”

ad for Gimbel’s department store
campus clothes, 1952

“Radioactive poisoning of the atmosphere and hence annihilation of any life on Earth has been brought within the range of technical possibilities.”

ALBERT EINSTEIN,
physicist, 1950

“If the television craze continues with the present level of programs, we are destined to have a nation of morons.”

DANIEL MARSH,
President of Boston University, 1950

“Every time the Russians throw an American in jail, the House Un-American Activities Committee throws an American in jail to get even.”

MORT SAHL,
comedian, 1950s

WINNERS & LOSERS



Poodle Cut

POODLE CUTS

Short, curly hairstyle gains wide popularity and acceptance

TV GUIDE

New weekly magazine achieves circulation of 6.5 million by 1959

PALMER PAINT COMPANY OF DETROIT

Sells 12 million paint-by-number kits ranging from simple landscapes and portraits to Leonardo da Vinci’s *The Last Supper*

THE DUCKTAIL

Banned in several Massachusetts schools in 1957

COLLIER’S

The respected magazine loses circulation, publishes its final edition on January 4, 1957

LEONARDO DA VINCI’S THE LAST SUPPER

Now everyone can paint their own copy to hang in their homes



The Ducktail

ARCHIVE PHOTOS

SUPERSTOCK

1950s WORD PLAY

Translation, Please!

Match the word to its meaning.

Teen-Age Lingo

- | | |
|---------------|-------------------------------|
| 1. cool | a. a dull person, an outsider |
| 2. hang loose | b. worthy of approval |
| 3. hairy | c. formidable |
| 4. yo-yo | d. don't worry |



ANSWERS: 1. b; 2. d; 3. c; 4. a



Bomb Shelter

Be Prepared

“Know the Bomb’s True Dangers. Know the Steps You Can Take to Escape Them!—You Can Survive.”
Government pamphlet, 1950

DIGGING YOUR OWN BOMB SHELTER? Better go shopping. Below is a list of items included with the \$3,000 Mark I Kidde Kokoon, designed to accommodate a family of five for a three- to five-day underground stay.

- air blower
- radiation detector
- protective apparel suit
- face respirator
- radiation charts (4)
- hand shovel combination (for digging out after the blast)
- gasoline driven generator
- gasoline (10 gallons)
- chemical toilet
- toilet chemicals (2 gallons)
- bunks (5)
- mattresses and blankets (5)
- air pump (for blowing up mattresses)
- incandescent bulbs (2) 40 watts
- fuses (2) 5 amperes
- clock—non-electric
- first aid kit
- waterless hand cleaner
- sterno stove
- canned water (10 gallons)
- canned food (meat, powdered milk, cereal, sugar, etc.)
- paper products

NUMBERS 1957

3¢ Cost of first-class postage stamp

19¢ Cost of loaf of bread

25¢ Cost of issue of Sports Illustrated

35¢ Cost of movie ticket

50¢ Cost of gallon of milk (delivered)

\$2.05 Average hourly wage

\$2,845 Cost of new car



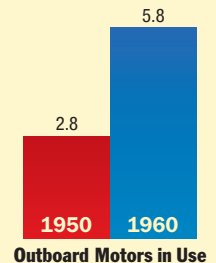
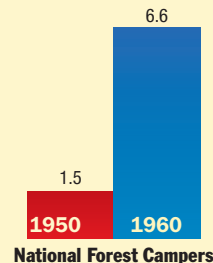
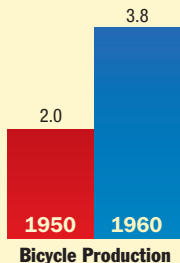
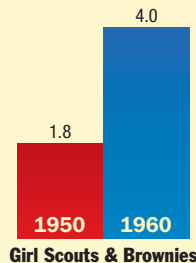
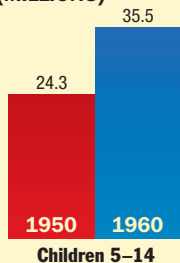
POPPER/ARCHIVE PHOTO

\$5,234 Median income for a family of four

\$19,500 Median price to buy a home

American Scene, 1950-1960

(MILLIONS)



The Other Side of American Life

Guide to Reading

Main Idea

Not everyone in the United States prospered during the nation's postwar boom, as millions of minorities and rural whites struggled daily with poverty.

Key Terms and Names

poverty line, Michael Harrington, urban renewal, Bracero program, termination policy, juvenile delinquency

Reading Strategy

Taking Notes As you read about social problems in the United States in the 1950s, use the major headings of the section to create an outline similar to the one below.

The Other Side of American Life
 I. Poverty Amidst Prosperity
 A.
 B.
 C.
 D.
 E.
 II.

Reading Objectives

- **Identify** those groups that found themselves left out of the American economic boom following World War II.
- **Explain** the factors that contributed to the poverty among various groups.

Section Theme

Continuity and Change For some groups, poverty continued during the apparent abundance of the 1950s.

Preview of Events



★ An American Story ★



Lorraine Hansberry

In 1959 Lorraine Hansberry's play, *A Raisin in the Sun*, opened on Broadway. The play told the story of a working-class African American family struggling against poverty and racism. The title referred to a Langston Hughes poem that wonders what happens to an unrealized dream: "Does it dry up like a raisin in the sun?" Hansberry's play won the New York Drama Critics Circle Award for the best play of the year. Reflecting later upon the play's theme, she wrote:

“Vulgarity, blind conformity, and mass lethargy need not triumph in the land of Lincoln and Frederick Douglass. . . . There is simply no reason why dreams should dry up like raisins or prunes or anything else in the United States. . . . I believe that we can impose beauty on our future.”

Postwar prosperity had bypassed many segments of the population. Minorities and the poor wondered when they could seize their own piece of the American dream.

—adapted from *To Be Young, Gifted, and Black*

Poverty Amidst Prosperity

Although the 1950s saw a tremendous expansion of the middle class, at least 1 in 5 Americans, or about 30 million people, lived below the **poverty line**, a figure the government set to reflect the minimum income required to support a family. Such poverty

remained invisible to most Americans, who assumed that the country's general prosperity had provided everyone with a comfortable existence. The writer **Michael Harrington**, however, made no such assumptions. During the 1950s, Harrington set out to chronicle poverty in the United States. In his book, *The Other America*, published in 1962, he alerted those in the mainstream to what he saw in the run-down and hidden communities of the country:

“Tens of millions of Americans are, at this very moment, maimed in body and spirit, existing at levels beneath those necessary for human decency. If these people are not starving, they are hungry, and sometimes fat with hunger, for that is what cheap foods do. They are without adequate housing and education and medical care.”

—from *The Other America*

The poor included single mothers and the elderly; minority immigrants such as Puerto Ricans and Mexicans; rural Americans, black and white; and inner city residents, who remained stuck in crowded slums as wealthier citizens fled to the suburbs. Poverty also gripped many Americans in the nation's Appalachian region, which stretches from Pennsylvania to Georgia, as well as Native Americans, many of whom endured grinding poverty whether they stayed on reservations or migrated to cities.

ECONOMICS

The Decline of the Inner City The poverty in the 1950s was most apparent in the nation's urban centers. As white families moved to the suburbs, many inner cities became home to poorer, less educated minority groups. The centers of many cities deteriorated, because as the middle class moved out, their tax money went with them. This deprived inner cities of the tax dollars necessary to provide adequate public transportation, housing, and other services.

When government tried to help inner city residents, it often made matters worse. During the 1950s, for example, **urban renewal** programs tried to eliminate poverty by tearing down slums and erecting new high-rise buildings for poor residents. The crowded, anonymous conditions of these high-rise projects, however, often created an atmosphere of violence. The government also unwittingly encouraged the residents of public housing to remain poor by evicting them as soon as they began to earn any money.

In the end, urban renewal programs actually destroyed more housing space than they created. Too

often in the name of urban improvement, the wrecking ball destroyed poor people's homes to make way for roadways, parks, universities, tree-lined boulevards, or shopping centers.

African Americans Many of the citizens left behind in the cities as families fled to the suburbs were African American. The large number of African American inner city residents resulted largely from the migration of more than 3 million African Americans from the South to the North between 1940 and 1960.

Many African Americans had migrated in the hopes of finding greater economic opportunity and escaping violence and racial intimidation. For many of these migrants, however, life proved to be little better in Northern cities. Fewer and fewer jobs were available as numerous factories and mills left the cities for suburbs and smaller towns in order to cut their costs. Long-standing patterns of racial discrimination in schools, housing, hiring, and salaries in the North kept inner-city African Americans poor. The last hired and the first fired for good jobs, they often remained stuck in the worst-paying occupations. In 1958 African American salaries, on average, equaled only 51 percent of what whites earned.

Picturing History

Inner-City Poverty This young African American girl in Chicago's inner city struggles to fill a bowl with water that has frozen due to lack of heat. [Why did the numbers of poor in the country's inner cities grow in the 1950s?](#)



Poverty and racial discrimination also deprived many African Americans of other benefits, such as decent medical care. Responding to a correspondent who had seen *A Raisin in the Sun*, Lorraine Hansberry wrote, “The ghettos are killing us; not only our dreams . . . but our very bodies. It is not an abstraction to us that the average [African American] has a life expectancy of five to ten years less than the average white.” Several African American groups, such as the NAACP and the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), pressed for greater economic opportunity for African Americans. In general, however, these organizations met with little success.

Hispanics African Americans were not the only minority group that struggled with poverty. Much of the nation’s Hispanic population faced the same problems. During the 1950s and early 1960s, the **Bracero program** brought nearly 5 million Mexicans to the United States to work on farms and ranches in the Southwest. The Braceros were temporary contract workers, and many later returned home. Some came with their families, however, and about 350,000 settled permanently in the United States.

These laborers, who worked on large farms throughout the country, lived a life of extreme poverty and hardship. They toiled long hours for little pay in conditions that were often unbearable. As Michael Harrington noted, “[The nation’s migrant

laborers] work ten-eleven-twelve hour days in temperatures over one hundred degrees. Sometimes there is no drinking water. . . . Women and children work on ladders and with hazardous machinery. Babies are brought to the field and are placed in ‘cradles’ of wood boxes.”

Away from the fields, many Mexican families lived in small, crudely built shacks, while some did not even have a roof over their heads. “They sleep where they can, some in the open,” Harrington noted about one group of migrant workers. “They eat when they can (and sometimes what they can).” The nation would pay little attention to the plight of Mexican farm laborers until the 1960s, when the workers began to organize for greater rights.

Native Americans Native Americans also faced challenges throughout the postwar era of prosperity. By the middle of the 1900s, Native Americans—who made up less than one percent of the population—were the poorest group in the nation. Average annual family income for Native American families, for example, was \$1,000 less than that for African Americans.

After World War II, during which many Native American soldiers had served with distinction, the U.S. government launched a program to bring Native Americans into mainstream society—whether they wanted to assimilate or not. Under the plan, which became known as the **termination policy**, the federal government withdrew all official recognition of the Native American groups as legal entities and made them subject to the same laws as white citizens. At the same time, the government encouraged Native Americans to blend in to larger society by helping them move off the reservations to cities such as Minneapolis, Minnesota.

Although the idea of integrating Native Americans into mainstream society began with good intentions, some of its supporters had more selfish goals. Speculators and developers sometimes gained rich farmland at the expense of destitute Native American groups.

Most Native Americans found termination a disastrous policy that only deepened their poverty. In the mid-1950s, for example, the Welfare Council of Minneapolis described Native American living conditions in that city as miserable. “One Indian family of five or six, living in two rooms, will take in relatives and friends who come from the reservations seeking jobs until perhaps fifteen people will be crowded into the space,” the council reported. During the 1950s, Native Americans in Minneapolis could expect to live only 37 years, compared to 46

Picturing History

Vocational Training Native American Franklin Beaver learns to become a stone mason at this vocational school sponsored by the U.S. Indian Bureau.
[Why was the government trying to bring Native Americans into mainstream society?](#)





Picturing History

Poverty in Appalachia This mining family lived in the kind of extreme poverty that was often overlooked in the 1950s. Eight people lived in this three-room house lined with newspaper. **Why was infant mortality so high in Appalachia?**

years for all Minnesota Native Americans and 68 years for other Minneapolis residents. Benjamin Reifel, a Sioux, described the widespread despair that the termination policy produced:

“The Indians believed that when the dark clouds of war passed from the skies overhead, their rising tide of expectations, though temporarily stalled, would again reappear. Instead they were threatened by termination. . . . Soaring expectations began to plunge. Termination took on the connotation of extermination for many.”

—quoted in *The Earth Shall Weep*

Appalachia The nation’s minorities were not the only people dealing with poverty. The picturesque streams and mountains of Appalachia hid the ruined mines, scarred hills, and abandoned farms of impoverished families who had dwelled in these hills for generations.

During the 1950s, 1.5 million people abandoned Appalachia to seek a better life in the nation’s cities. They left behind elderly and other less mobile residents. “Whole counties,” wrote one reporter who visited the region, “are precariously held together by a

flour-and-dried-milk paste of surplus foods. . . . The men who are no longer needed in the mines and the farmers who cannot compete . . . have themselves become surplus commodities in the mountains.”

A host of statistics spoke to Appalachia’s misery. Studies revealed high rates of nutritional deficiency and infant mortality. Appalachia had fewer doctors per thousand people than the rest of the country, and the doctors it did have were older than their counterparts in other areas. In addition, schooling in the region was considered even worse than in inner city slums.

Reading Check Identifying Which groups of people were left out of the country’s economic boom of the 1950s?

Juvenile Delinquency

During the 1950s, many middle-class white Americans found it easy to ignore the poverty and racism that afflicted many of the nation’s minorities, since they themselves were removed from it. Some social problems, however, became impossible to ignore.

One problem at this time was a rise in, or at least a rise in the reporting of, **juvenile delinquency**—anti-social or criminal behavior of young people. Between 1948 and 1953, the United States saw a 45 percent rise in juvenile crime rates. A popular 1954 book titled *1,000,000 Delinquents* correctly calculated that in the following year, about 1 million young people would get into some kind of criminal trouble. Car thefts topped the list of juvenile crimes, but people were



Rebelling Against Conformity This biker, one of the Louisville “Outlaws,” fits the stereotype of the 1950s juvenile delinquent.

also alarmed at the behavior of young people who belonged to street gangs and committed muggings, rape, and even murder.

Americans could not agree on what had triggered the rise in delinquency. Experts blamed it on a host of reasons, including poverty, lack of religion, television, movies, comic books, racism, busy parents, a rising divorce rate, and anxiety over the military draft. Some cultural critics claimed that young people were rebelling against the hypocrisy and conformity of their parents. Conservative commentators pinned the blame on a lack of discipline. Doting parents, complained Bishop Fulton J. Sheen, had raised bored children who sought new thrills, such as “alcohol, marijuana, even murder.” Liberal observers preferred to pinpoint social causes, blaming teen violence on poverty and feelings of hopelessness among underprivileged youths. Delinquency in the 1950s, however, cut across class

and racial lines—the majority of car thieves, for example, had grown up in middle-class homes.

Most teens, of course, steered clear of gangs, drugs, and crime. Nonetheless, the public tended to stereotype young people as juvenile delinquents, especially those teens who favored unconventional clothing, long hair, or street slang.

Many parents were also growing concerned over the nation’s educational system. As baby boomers began entering the school system, they ignited a spurt in school construction. During the 1950s, school enrollments increased by 13 million. School districts struggled to erect new buildings and hire new teachers. Nevertheless, shortages sprang up in both buildings and the people to staff them.

Americans’ education worries only intensified in 1957 after the Soviet Union launched the world’s first space satellites, *Sputnik I* and *Sputnik II*. Many Americans felt they had fallen behind their Cold War enemy and blamed what they felt was a lack of technical education in the nation’s schools. *Life* magazine proclaimed a “Crisis in Education,” and offered a grim warning: “What has long been an ignored national problem, *Sputnik* has made a recognized crisis.” In the wake of the *Sputnik* launches, efforts began to improve math and science education in the schools. Profound fears about the country’s young people, it seemed, dominated the end of a decade that had brought great progress for many Americans.

 **Reading Check** **Evaluating** How did many Americans feel about the education system of the 1950s?

SECTION 4 ASSESSMENT

Checking for Understanding

- Define:** poverty line, urban renewal, termination policy, juvenile delinquency.
- Identify:** Michael Harrington, Bracero program.
- Evaluate** how the federal government’s termination policy affected Native Americans.

Reviewing Themes

- Continuity and Change** Why did urban renewal fail the poor of the inner cities?

Critical Thinking

- Interpreting** What were some possible reasons for a dramatic rise in juvenile delinquency in the 1950s?
- Organizing** Use a graphic organizer similar to the one below to list the groups of Americans who were left out of the country’s postwar economic boom.



Analyzing Visuals

- Analyzing Photographs** Study the photograph on this page. What in the photograph might attract young people to this type of life? Why would others oppose such a life?

Writing About History

- Expository Writing** Using library or Internet resources, find information about juvenile delinquency in the United States today to write a report. Compare today’s problems with those of the 1950s. Share your report with the class.

Study and Writing SKILLBUILDER

Writing a Journal

Why Learn This Skill?

Journal writing is personal writing with a casual style. The style in which you write is not as important as what you write about—your experiences, interests, and feelings. Journal writing can help you generate new ideas, and it can also give you a clearer picture of your thoughts and help you put them in order.

Learning the Skill

A journal is a written account that records what you have learned or experienced. In a journal you can express your feelings about a subject, summarize key topics, describe difficulties or successes in solving particular problems, and draw maps or other visuals. To help you get started writing in your journal, follow these steps.

- Jot down notes or questions about a specific topic or event as you read your textbook. Then look for details and answers about it as you continue reading.
- Describe your feelings as you read a selection or look at a photograph. Are you angry, happy, frustrated, or sad? Explain why you are reacting in this way.
- Ask yourself if drawing a map or flowchart would help you understand an event better. If so, draw in your journal.

Practicing the Skill

The following excerpt is a journal entry describing the launching of the nation's first satellite in 1958. Read the excerpt, and then use the following questions to help you write entries in your own journal.

"As the firing command neared, a deadly silence fell on those who were watching. . . . At fourteen and one-half seconds after time zero, after the priming fuel had ignited almost invisibly, the main stage engine came to life with an immeasurable thrust of flame in all directions. . . . With

thousands of eyes following it, the rocket dug into the night and accelerated as its sound loudened. Spectators on nearby beaches pointed and craned their necks and cried, 'There it is!' and began to cheer."

- 1 What is particularly interesting about this description?
- 2 What are your feelings as you read the excerpt?
- 3 Note the descriptive phrases and details that make the event come to life. Try to use similar techniques when writing in your journal.
- 4 Draw a map or other visual to help you understand the situation described here.



*Cover from a
World War II
journal*

Skills Assessment

Complete the Practicing Skills questions on page 835 and the Chapter 27 Skill Reinforcement Activity to assess your mastery of this skill.

Applying the Skill

Writing a Journal Imagine that you have had the chance to take part in a great adventure—for instance, serving in the armed forces during a war overseas or participating in a spaceflight. Make notes for a journal entry describing what you have done and seen.



Glencoe's **Skillbuilder Interactive Workbook CD-ROM, Level 2**, provides instruction and practice in key social studies skills.

Reviewing Key Terms

On a sheet of paper, use each of these terms in a sentence.

- | | |
|------------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. closed shop | 9. franchise |
| 2. right-to-work law | 10. baby boom |
| 3. union shop | 11. generation gap |
| 4. featherbedding | 12. poverty line |
| 5. dynamic conservatism | 13. urban renewal |
| 6. white-collar | 14. termination policy |
| 7. blue-collar | 15. juvenile delinquency |
| 8. multinational corporation | |

Reviewing Key Facts

- Identify:** GI Bill, Fair Deal, John Kenneth Galbraith, David Riesman, Ed Sullivan, Alan Freed, Elvis Presley, Jack Kerouac, Michael Harrington.
- What were three characteristics of the economy of the United States after World War II?
- What were two reasons for the economic boom of the 1950s?
- What caused many Americans to move to the suburbs in the 1950s?

- How did the scientific discovery of the transistor affect communications?
- Which groups of Americans found themselves left out of the postwar economic boom?

Critical Thinking

- Analyzing Themes: Continuity and Change** How has mass media changed since the 1950s?
- Evaluating** What factors led to a rise in juvenile delinquency in the United States during the 1950s?
- Comparing and Contrasting** Harry S Truman was a Democrat, and Dwight D. Eisenhower was a Republican. How were the domestic agendas of these two presidents different? How were they similar?
- Interpreting Primary Sources** George Gallup, one of the nation's first pollsters, spoke at the University of Iowa in 1953 about the importance of mass media in the United States. Read the excerpt and answer the questions that follow.

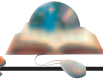
“One of the real threats to America's future place in the world is a citizenry which duly elects to be entertained and not informed. From the time the typical citizen arises and looks at his morning newspaper until he turns off his radio or television set before going to bed,

Chapter Summary

Signs of Prosperity

Signs of Inequality

Economy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The GI Bill provided loans to millions of war veterans. Consumer spending increased rapidly. More Americans owned homes than ever before. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Workers went on strike for higher wages. Truman's civil rights bill did not pass. Eisenhower cut back New Deal programs.
Population Patterns	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The U.S. population grew dramatically. The number of working women increased. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Financially able people moved from crowded cities to new suburbs. Many poor people remained in cities that now faced major economic and social problems.
Science, Technology, and Medicine	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Medical breakthroughs included the polio vaccine, antibiotics, and treatments for heart disease, arthritis, cancer, and diabetes. Improvements in communication, transportation, and electronics allowed Americans to work more efficiently. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Many poor people in inner cities and rural areas had limited access to health care.
Popular Culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Popular culture included new forms of music, radio, cinema, and literature. Television replaced radio as the nation's newest form of mass media. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> African Americans and other minorities were, for the most part, not depicted on television. Many television programs promoted stereotypical gender roles.



Self-Check Quiz

Visit the *American Vision* Web site at tav.glencoe.com and click on **Self-Check Quizzes—Chapter 27** to assess your knowledge of chapter content.

he has unwittingly cast his vote a hundred times for entertainment or for education. Without his knowing it, he has helped to determine the very character of our three most important media of communication—the press, radio, and television. . . .”

—quoted in *Vital Speeches of the Day*

- a. According to Gallup, what is a threat to the future of the United States in the world?
 - b. How do American citizens determine what is read, seen, and heard in the mass media?
26. **Organizing** Use a graphic organizer similar to the one below to list the changes to the American family during the 1950s.

Changes to American Family

Practicing Skills

27. **Writing a Journal** Imagine that you are Dr. Jonas Salk, and you realize that you have just discovered the world’s first successful polio vaccine. Write a journal entry that describes how you feel about this accomplishment and what impact it will have on the world.

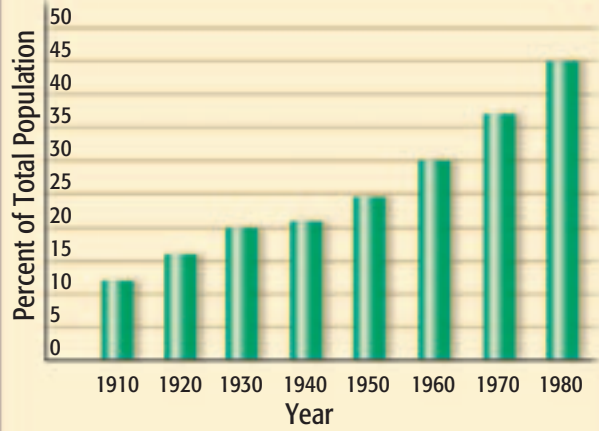
Writing Activity

28. **Writing a Book Report** Read one of the books about American society in the 1950s, such as *Why Johnny Can’t Read* or *The Other America*. Write a book report explaining the main concepts of the book and whether or not the issues are similar to or different from the main issues in American society today.

Chapter Activities

29. **American History Primary Source Document Library CD-ROM** Read the speech “On Television” by Newton Minow, under *The Postwar World*. Working with a few of your classmates, evaluate whether television has improved since Minow’s critical assessment. Has television content changed since the 1950s? If so, how? Present your findings and comparisons to your class.

Suburban Dwellers, 1910–1980



Source: *The First Measured Century*.

30. **Research Project** Work with a small group to research advertisements from the 1950s. Write a report comparing and contrasting advertisements from that decade with advertisements today. Present one or more of the advertisements along with your comparisons to your class.

Geography and History

31. The graph above shows the number of suburban dwellers in the United States as a percentage of the total population. Study the data displayed in the graph and answer the questions below.
- a. **Interpreting Graphs** What trend in the percentage of suburban dwellers does this graph show?
 - b. **Understanding Cause and Effect** How might the trend of suburban dwellers shown on this graph have affected life in suburbs and cities?

Standardized Test Practice

Directions: Choose the phrase that best completes the following statement.

The Eisenhower administration worked to achieve all of the following EXCEPT

- F ending wage and price controls.
- G winning passage for the Federal Highway Act.
- H repealing right-to-work laws.
- J extending the Social Security system.

Test-Taking Tip: Pay careful attention to the wording of the question. Note here that *EXCEPT* means that three of the four choices were part of Eisenhower’s programs.