

Postwar America

Important Terms & Names (DEFINE)

1. GI Bill of Rights-
2. Suburb-
3. Harry S. Truman-
4. Dixiecrat-
5. Executive Order 9981-
6. Segregation-
7. Fair Deal-
8. Dwight D. Eisenhower-
9. Brown vs Board of Education-
10. Conglomerate-
11. Franchise-
12. Baby Boom-
13. Dr. Jonas Salk-
14. Consumerism-
15. Planned Obsolescence-

READJUSTMENT AND RECOVERY

How did the end of World War II affect America?

After World War II, millions of veterans returned home and used the **GI Bill of Rights**. The GI Bill was issued by Congress and offered a free education, unemployment benefits and to low interest loans in order to buy homes.

At first, there was a terrible housing shortage. Then developers such as William Levitt built thousands of assembly-line, mass-produced, standardized, and inexpensive homes in the **suburbs**, small residential communities near the cities. Many veterans and their families moved in. Congress also gave financing to clear out slums and build low-income housing units and public housing projects.

The United States changed from a wartime to a peacetime economy. After the war, many defense workers were laid off. Returning veterans added to unemployment. When wartime price controls ended, prices shot up. Congress eventually put back economic controls on wages, prices, and rents.

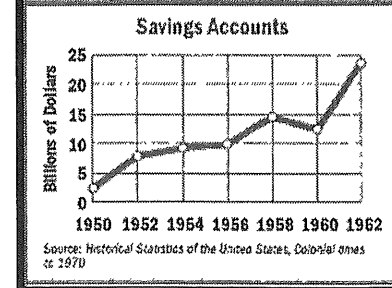
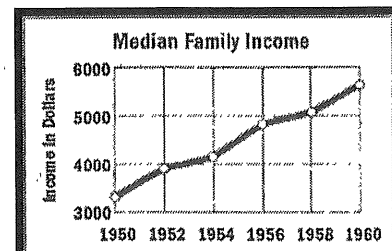
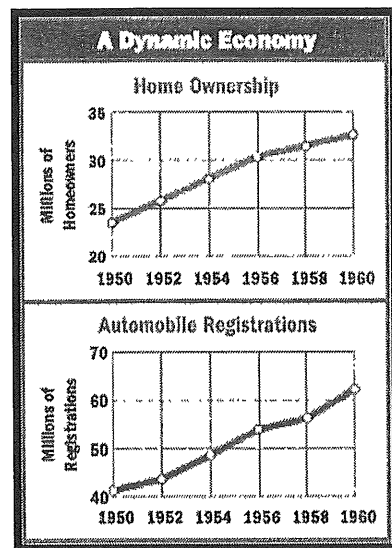
The economy began to improve on its own. There was a huge pent-up demand for consumer goods. People had been too poor to buy these goods during the Depression. Many items had not been available during the war. Now Americans went on a tremendous spending spree on cars and appliances and houses. The Cold War increased defense spending and kept many people employed, and a rebuilt Europe helped create a strong foreign market for US goods.

MEETING ECONOMIC CHALLENGES; SOCIAL UNREST PERSISTS

What were postwar problems?

President **Harry S. Truman** faced a number of problems immediately after the war. One was labor unrest. In 1946, a steel-workers' strike was followed by a coal miners' strike. In addition, the railroad unions threatened to stop all rail traffic in the nation.

Truman was pro-labor. But he would not let strikes cripple the nation. He threatened to draft striking workers into the army and then ordered them back to work. The unions gave in.



During this time, before the economy turned around, many Americans were disgusted with shortages, rising inflation, and strikes. Voters became more conservative. In the 1946 election, conservative Republicans gained control of Congress. Congress passed the Taft-Harley Act, which overturned many rights won by unions during the New Deal.

After the war, there was racial violence in the South. African-American veterans demanded their rights as citizens. Truman met with African-American leaders. They asked for a federal anti-lynching law, an end to the poll tax as a voting requirement, and a permanent body to prevent racial discrimination in hiring.

Truman put his career on the line for civil rights. But Congress would not pass any of his civil rights measures. Finally, Truman acted on his own. In 1948, he issued **Executive Order 9981** which ended the **segregation** of the armed forces. He also passed federal legislation to eliminate discrimination in hiring government employees.

Meanwhile, the Supreme Court said that African Americans could not be kept from living in certain neighborhoods. These acts marked the beginning of a federal commitment to deal with racial issues.

Truman was nominated for president in 1948. He insisted on a strong civil rights plank in the Democratic Party platform. This split the party. Many Southern Democrats left the Democratic Party. These **Dixiecrats** were against civil rights. They wanted to preserve the "Southern way of life." They formed the States' Rights Party. Some liberals left the Democratic Party to form the Progressive Party.

It didn't look like Truman could win. But he took his ideas to the people. He had criticized the "do-nothing congress" for refusing to pass many of his measures including public housing, federal aid to education, a higher minimum wage, and greater social security. Truman won a narrow victory, and in 1946 democrats took control of Congress.

Truman tried to pass economic and social reforms. He called his program the **Fair Deal**. Health insurance and a crop-subsidy program for farmers were both defeated by Congress. But an increase in the minimum wage, extension of Social Security, and financial aid for cities passed. Truman's Fair Deal had mixed results.



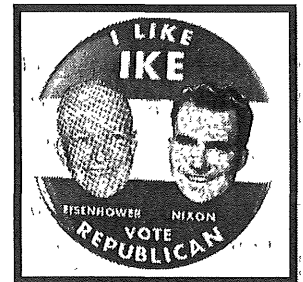
Jackie Robinson took a brave step when he turned the Brooklyn Dodgers into an integrated baseball team in 1947. Bu he- and the country- had a long way to go. Unhappy fans hurled insults at Robinson from the stands. Some players on opposing team tried to hit him with pitches or to injure him with the spikes on their cleats. He even received death threats. But he endured this with poise and restraint, saying, *"Plenty of time I wanted to haul off when somebody insulted me for the color of my skin but I had to hold to myself. I knew I was kind of an experiment."*

In 1949, Robinson was voted as the National League's Most Valuable Player. He later became the first African American to be inducted into the Baseball Hall of Fame.

REPUBLICANS TAKE THE MIDDLE ROAD

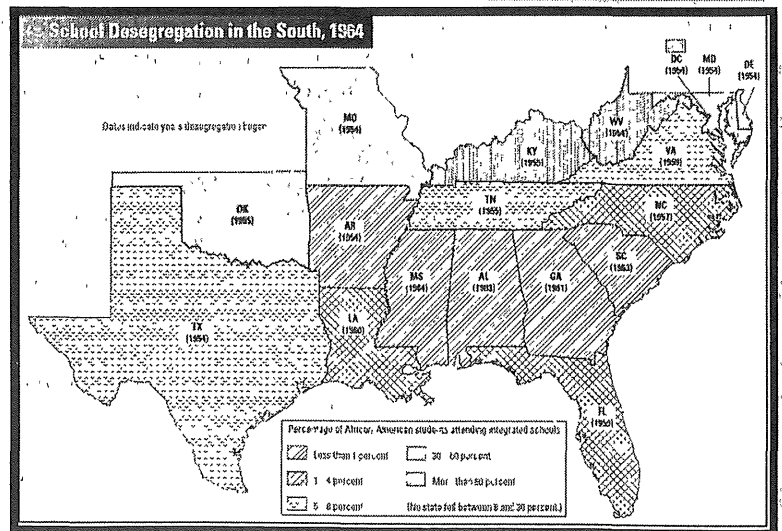
Why did Eisenhower win?

Truman did not run for reelection in 1952. The big issues of that campaign were (1) the stalemate in the Korean War, (2) anti-Communist hysteria and McCarthyism, (3) the growing power of the federal government, (4) strikes, and (5) inflation. Voters wanted a change. The Republicans nominated war hero General **Dwight D. Eisenhower**. He easily beat Democrat Adlai Stevenson.



Eisenhower was a low-key president with middle-of-the-road policies- conservative on fiscal matters and liberal on social matters. He called this dynamic conservatism. He did have to deal with one controversial issue—civil rights. In 1954, the Supreme Court ruled in **Brown v. Board of Education** that public schools could not be segregated. Eisenhower believed that the federal government should not be involved in desegregation. But he upheld the law. When the governor of Arkansas tried to keep African-American students out of a white high school, Eisenhower sent federal troops to integrate the school.

The America of the mid-1950s was a place of "peace, progress, and prosperity." Eisenhower won a landslide reelection in 1956.



THE ORGANIZATION AND THE

ORGANIZATION MAN

What changes took place in the American workplace in the 1950s?

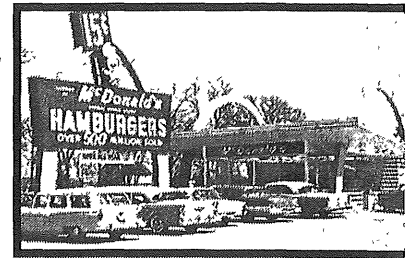
The economy grew rapidly in the 1950s. By 1956, more Americans were white-collar workers in offices than were in blue-collar factory jobs. White-collar workers were paid better. They usually worked in service industries, such as sales and communications.

Businesses also expanded. They formed **conglomerates**, which were major corporations that owned smaller companies in unrelated industries. Other businesses expanded by franchising. A **franchise** is a company that offers similar products or services in many locations, such as fast-food restaurants.

These large companies offered well-paying, secure jobs to certain kinds of workers. These workers were conformists, or team players. They were "company people" who would fit in and not rock the boat. Businesses rewarded loyalty rather than creativity. "Company people" received more opportunities for economic advancement. They promoted a sameness, or standardization, of people as well as products. Books such as *The Organization Man* and *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit* criticized this conformity.

In the decades since Ray Kroc opened his first McDonald's restaurant, franchising has become all but a way of life in the United States. Today, nearly 3,000 franchised companies operate over 500,000 businesses throughout the country. Officials estimate that franchises account for nearly one-third of all US retail sales. American franchises today provide a wide array of goods and services, from car maintenance, to tax services, to hair care. In an attempt to tap into the international market, hundreds of US companies have established overseas franchises. The franchise with perhaps the greatest global reach is the one that started it all. In addition to its more than 13,000 US franchises, McDonald's now operated over 19,000 franchises in dozens of countries around the world.

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SUBURBAN LIFESTYLE

What was life like in the 1950s?

Many Americans enjoyed the benefits of the booming economy and job security. Many worked in cities but lived in suburbs. They had the American dream of a single-family home, good schools, and a safe neighborhood with people just like themselves.

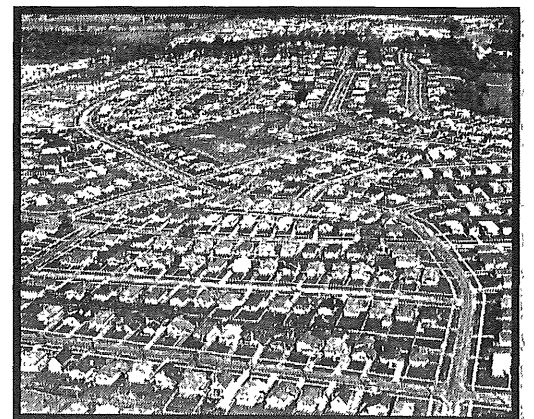
The economic boom and employment security led to an increase in births called the **baby boom**. It was caused by the reuniting of families after the war and growing prosperity.

Medical advances also wiped out childhood diseases. **Dr. Jonas Salk** developed a vaccine to prevent polio. Polio had killed or crippled 58,000 children a year.

The baby boom created the largest generation in US history. Suburban and business expansion led to a need for more schools and products for children. Suburban family life revolved around children. Many parents depended on advice from a popular baby-care book by Dr. Benjamin Spock. He said it was important that mothers stay at home with their children. The role of homemaker and mother was also glorified in the media and on television. But many women felt alone, bored at home, and dissatisfied with their lives.

By 1960, 40 percent of mothers worked outside the home. But their career opportunities usually were limited to "women's fields." These included secretarial work, nursing, and teaching. Even if women did the same work as men, they were paid less.

Americans had more leisure time. They spent time and money on leisure activities, such as sports. They also watched sports on television and read books and magazines. Youth activities, such as the Scouts and Little League, became popular too.



THE AUTOMOBILE CULTURE

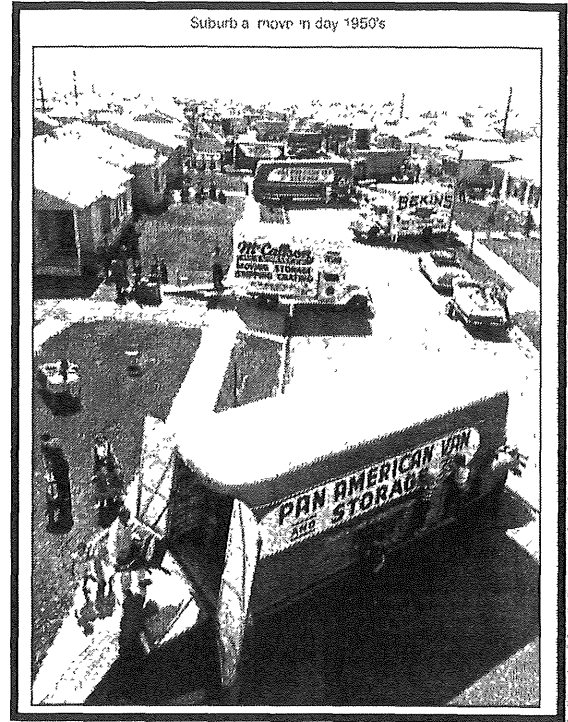
Why were cars so important?

Easy credit for buying cars and cheap gasoline led to a boom in automobile ownership. In the 1950s, the number of American cars on the road grew from 40 to 60 million.

A car was a necessity in the suburbs. There was no public transportation. People needed to drive to their jobs which were located in the cities. They also had to drive to shop and do errands. Therefore, more and better roads were also needed. In 1956, the United States began building a nationwide highway network. In turn, these roads allowed long-distance trucking. This led to a decline in the railroads.

Americans loved to drive. The expansion of America into an automobile culture led to a rise in other industries. They went to drive-in restaurants and movies. They drove long distances on vacation. Motels and shopping malls were built to serve them. Trucking replaced railroads across the nation. These new industries were good for the economy. However, the increase in driving also caused problems. These included stressful traffic jams, accidents and noise and air pollution.

Many white Americans left the cities. Jobs and industries followed. This left mostly poor people in crowded inner cities and created a large racial and economic gulf between suburban and city dwellers.



CONSUMERISM UNBOUND

Why did Americans turn to consumerism in the 1950s?

By the mid-1950s, nearly 60 percent of Americans were in the middle class. They had the money to buy more and more products. They measured success by their **consumerism**, or the amount of material goods they bought.

American business flooded stores with new products. Consumers had money to spend and leisure time. They bought household appliances, like washing machines, dryers, and dishwashers, and recreational items such as television sets, barbecue grills, and swimming pools.

Manufacturers also tried a new marketing strategy called **planned obsolescence**. They purposely made products to become outdated or to wear out quickly. Americans began to throw away items in order to buy "new models." Easy credit, including the introduction of credit cards, encouraged people to buy and caused private debt to grow.

The 1950s were "the advertising age." Ads were everywhere—even on the new medium of television. They tried to persuade Americans to buy things they didn't need. They appealed to people's desire for status and for a sense of belonging.



"Throw-away" society