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America at Midcentury

1945–1961



JACKIE ROBINSON (Photo File/MLB
Photos via Getty Images)

“WHEN JACKIE TOOK THE FIELD,” the Reverend Jesse Jackson declared at Jack Roosevelt Robinson’s funeral in 1972, “something reminded us of our birthright to be free.” Indeed, as no one else in the postwar period, **Jackie Robinson** personified the accelerating momentum of the struggle against racial discrimination that emerged from the Second World War. Like other grandchildren of slaves and children of sharecroppers,

Robinson moved from the Deep South to California. He lettered in four sports at UCLA before serving in the Second World War. Refusing to accept segregation on army buses—“Nobody’s going to separate bullets and label them ‘for white troops’ and ‘for colored troops,’” he told an officer—Robinson was tried and acquitted of insubordination in a court martial. After being honorably discharged, Robinson briefly played in the Negro Baseball League before accepting the 1945 offer of Branch Rickey, general manager of the Brooklyn Dodgers organization, to play for their farm club in Montreal. Although intensely proud of himself and his race, Robinson agreed to Rickey’s condition that he not respond to the abuse he would face: “I want a ballplayer with enough guts not to fight back.” Robinson did not. Instead, he won the batting crown of the International League in 1946, and joined the Brooklyn club the following year—the first African-American to play major league baseball in the twentieth century.

It would not, however, be an easy trip around the bases to racial harmony. He endured racist insults and beanballs (a record nine times that season, 65 times in seven years), flying spikes and hate mail, even death threats, from fans and other players. But his dazzling bat, feet, and glove, and his dignified courage, helped the Dodgers win the pennant and

“It was unquestioned gospel,” feminist Betty Friedan would later write in *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), that postwar women “could identify with nothing beyond the home—not politics, not art, not science, not events large or small, war or peace, in the United States or the world, unless it could be approached through female experience as a wife or mother or translated into domestic detail.” (*State Library and Archives of Florida*)

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Robinson was named Rookie of the Year. His success led the Cleveland Indians to make Larry Doby the first black to play in the American League and eroded the resistance to African-Americans in collegiate sports.

More than batting champion for 1949 and Most Valuable Player, Robinson became a symbol of progress in race relations and a spur to changes in national policy and institutional practices. His example led the Cleveland and Los Angeles franchises of the All-American Football Conference, and the Boston Celtics in the National Basketball Association, to follow the Dodgers' lead. Moreover, the popular press increasingly attacked prejudice, and more groups than ever before preached tolerance; various cities and states, particularly in the Northeast, passed laws against discrimination in employment and public accommodations; the Supreme Court chipped away at the judicial foundations of segregation; the Truman Administration proposed civil rights legislation; and antiracism took its place alongside bread-and-butter issues in the agenda of liberalism. Yet many changes came very slowly, if at all. The Boston Red Sox refused to integrate until 1959, and just as Robinson, following his retirement in 1957, never received an offer to return to the game in a management capacity, the coaches and front-office personnel of most sports clubs remained lily-white for decades. The struggle to end racism in America had taken root, but not yet flowered.

For most white Americans, however, economic growth and prosperity, and the Cold War, defined the postwar era. Many would remember it as “the good life,” a time of affluence and suburbia. A new way of life, centered on family “togetherness” and consumption, became the American Dream. Yet Americans also worried about the arms race, and the atmospheric nuclear testing that pumped strontium 90, a cancer-causing chemical that accumulates in the teeth and bone marrow of children, into the world's environment. Fewer middle-class whites paid much attention to racial discrimination or to critics who railed against mainstream values in the postwar years.

A time of fundamental changes and of portents of yet greater change, the period from 1945 to 1961 brought the advent of an automated and computerized postindustrial society, the incredible spread and influence of television, the baby boom, the growth of suburbs and the Sunbelt, high-speed interstate highways, and an enormous internal migration. Midcentury America encompassed booming prosperity and persistent poverty, civil-rights triumphs and rampant racism, consensus and alienation. Much like Jackie Robinson breaking the color line in major league baseball, it showcased what we were, and what we would become.

“Bring the Boys Home
by Christmas”

FOCUS Questions

- What were the main sources of the postwar economic expansion and affluence?
- What, if any, were the negative consequences of the era's preoccupation with economic growth and prosperity?
- What factors account for the growth of suburbia in postwar America, and how accurate is the image of 1950s suburban life as one of contentment, conservatism, and conformity?
- What actions by minorities and youth foretold the movements for social change to come in the 1960s?
- What innovative strategies were developed by the civil rights movement in this era, and what were the main reasons for the increasing success of the movement?

Postwar Jitters

The immediate concerns of most Americans following V-J Day centered on “bringing the boys home” and avoiding a return to the Great Depression. The steep decline in defense spending and factory jobs caused many to fear demobilization and the reconversion to a peacetime economy. Strife between labor and management, as well as inflation and shortages, intensified the anxiety. But by 1947, consumer spending and the Cold War had begun to spur a quarter-century of economic growth and prosperity, the longest such period in American history.

Demobilization and Reconversion

When the war ended, GIs and civilians alike wanted those who had served overseas “home alive in '45.” Troops demanding transport ships barraged Congress with threats of “no boats, no votes.” In December 1945, postcards deluged the White House with the message “Bring the Boys Home by Christmas.” Truman bowed to popular demand, and by 1948, American military strength had dropped from 12 million to just 1.5 million.

Returning veterans faced readjustment problems intensified by a soaring divorce rate and a drastic housing shortage. Many feared the return of mass unemployment and economic depression as war plants closed. Defense spending dropped from



VETERANS AT PENNSYLVANIA STATE COLLEGE The Serviceman's Readjustment Act of 1944 (the so-called GI Bill), included among its various programs financial assistance for every veteran of the Second World War who sought further education. Some 8 million veterans would eventually study at technical institutes, trade schools, and universities. (© Bettmann/Corbis)

\$76 billion in 1945 to under \$20 billion in 1946, and more than a million defense jobs vanished. By the end of the decade more women were working outside the home than during World War II. Most took jobs in traditional women's fields, especially office work and sales, to pay for family needs. Although the postwar economy created new openings for women in the labor market, many public figures urged women to seek fulfillment at home. Popular culture romanticized married bliss and demonized career women as a threat to social stability.

The GI Bill of Rights

The Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944, commonly called the GI Bill of Rights or **GI Bill**, was designed to forestall the expected recession by easing veterans back into the work force, and to reward the "soldier boys" for their wartime service. The GI Bill

gave veterans priority for many jobs, occupational guidance, and if need be, fifty-two weeks of unemployment benefits. It also provided low-interest government loans to some 4 million returning GIs who were starting businesses or buying homes, helping to fuel a baby boom, suburbanization, and a record demand for new goods and services.

The government also promised to pay up to four years of further education or job training for veterans. By 1946, flush with stipends of sixty-five dollars a month—ninety dollars for those with dependents—and up to five hundred dollars a year for tuition and books, 1.5 million veterans were attending college, spurring a huge increase in higher education and the creation of many new colleges. By 1947, veterans made up over half of all college students.

To make room for the millions of GIs pursuing higher education after the war, many colleges limited the percentage of women admitted or barred

students from out of state. The percentage of female college graduates dropped from 40 percent in 1949 to 25 percent in 1950. By then, most women who might have been students were the working wives of the 8 million veterans who took advantage of the GI Bill to go college.

The GI Bill democratized higher education. By 1956, nearly 10 million veterans had used the GI Bill to enroll in vocational training programs and colleges (most the first in their families to do so). No longer a citadel of privilege, universities awarded twice as many degrees in 1950 as in 1940, propelling millions of veterans into the middle class. Two decades later, these more affluent and educated veterans expected their children to follow suit. Higher education became an accepted part of the American Dream.

The Economic Boom Begins

In addition to the assistance given returning servicemen, a 1945 tax cut of \$6 billion spurred corporate investment in new factories and equipment and helped produce an economic boom (see Figure 27.1). Further kindling postwar prosperity, Americans spent much of the \$135 billion they had

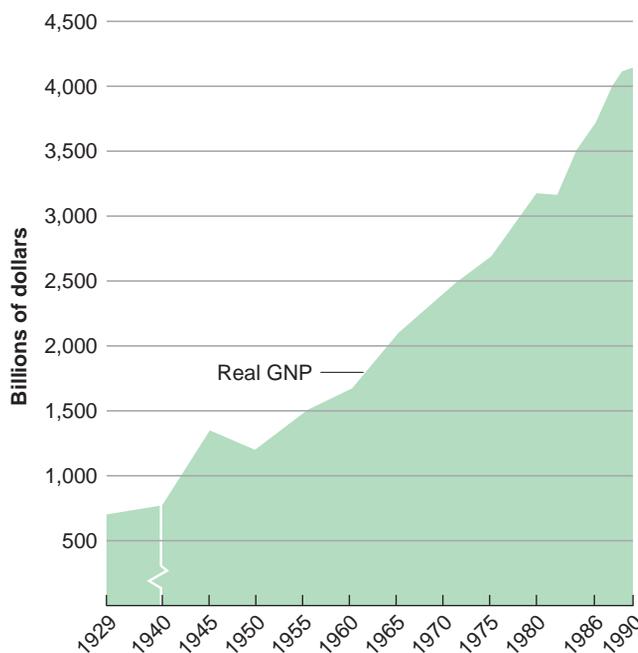


FIGURE 27.1 GROSS NATIONAL PRODUCT, 1929–1990 Following World War II, the United States achieved the highest living standard in world history. Between 1950 and 1970, the real GNP, which factors out inflation and reveals the actual amount of goods and services produced, steadily increased. However, in 1972, 1974–1975, 1980, and 1982, the real GNP declined.

Source: *Economic Report of the President, 1991.*

Note: Data shown in 1982 dollars.

saved from wartime work and service pay to satisfy their desire to consume, and sales of homes, cars, and appliances skyrocketed. Scores of new products—televisions, high-fidelity phonographs, filter cigarettes, automatic transmissions, freezers, and air conditioners—became hallmarks of the middle-class lifestyle.

The Bretton Woods Agreement (1944) among the Allies had set the stage for the United States to become economic leader of the noncommunist world. It created the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to stabilize exchange rates by valuing (“pegging”) other currencies in relation to the U.S. dollar; established the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (World Bank) to help rebuild war-battered Asia and Europe; and laid the groundwork for the 1947 General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) to break up closed trading blocs and expand international trade. Since the United States largely controlled and funded these powerful economic institutions, they gave the United States an especially favorable position in international trade and finance.

With many nations in ruins, American firms could import raw materials cheaply; with little competition from other industrial countries, they could increase exports to record levels. U.S. economic dominance also resulted from wartime advances in science and technology, which significantly increased the productivity of American workers, and led to revolutionary developments in such industries as electronics and plastics.

The Affluent Society

In 1958, the economist John Kenneth Galbraith published *The Affluent Society*, a study of postwar America whose title reflected the broad-based prosperity that made the 1950s seem the fulfillment of the American Dream. By the end of the decade, about 60 percent of American families owned homes; 75 percent, cars; and 87 percent, at least one TV. Government spending, a huge upsurge in productivity, and steadily increasing consumer demand pushed the gross national product (GNP) up 50 percent. The United States achieved the world’s highest living standard ever. By 1960, the average worker’s income, adjusted for inflation, was 35 percent higher than in 1945. With just 6 percent of the world’s population, the United States produced and consumed nearly half of everything made and sold on Earth.

The New Industrial Society

Federal spending constituted a major source of economic growth, nearly doubling in the 1950s



THE GOOD LIFE, FORTIES-STYLE After the war, Americans grabbed for the good life, whether that meant jiving to a jukebox, trying some fast food at the first McDonald's in San Bernardino, California, or celebrating Thanksgiving—as this couple in Joliet, Illinois, does with their sixteen children. (AP Images and © Bettmann/Corbis)

to \$180 billion. Just 1 percent of the GNP in 1929, federal expenditures reached 17 percent by the mid-1950s. These funds built roads and airports, financed home mortgages, supported farm prices, and provided stipends for education. More than half the federal budget—10 percent of the GNP—went to defense spending (see Figure 27.2). These expenditures made the federal government the nation's main financier of scientific and technological research and development (R&D).

For the West, especially, it was as if World War II never ended, as the new Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs signified. Politicians from both parties in California sought contracts for Lockheed, those from Texas labored for General Dynamics, and those from Washington State kept defense funds flowing to Boeing. By the late 1950s, California alone received half the space budget and

a quarter of all major military contracts. By then, Denver had the largest number of federal employees outside Washington, D.C.; Albuquerque boasted more Ph.D. degrees per capita than any other U.S. city; and over a third of workers in Los Angeles depended on defense industries. Utah, once the Mormon dream of an agricultural utopia, received the nation's highest per capita expenditures on space and defense research. Government spending transformed the mythic West of individualistic cowboys, miners, and farmers into a West of bureaucrats, manufacturers, and scientists dependent on federal funds.

Science became a ward of the state, with government funding and control transforming both the U.S. military and industry. Financed by the Atomic Energy Commission (AEC) and utilizing navy scientists, the nation's first nuclear-power plant came

Text not available due to copyright restrictions

on line in 1957. The chemical industry continued its wartime growth. As chemical fertilizers and pesticides contaminated ground water supplies, and as the use of plastics for consumer products reduced landfill space, Americans—unaware of the hidden perils—marveled at fruits and vegetables covered with Saran Wrap and delighted in their Dacron suits and Teflon-coated pots and pans.

Electricity consumption tripled in the 1950s, and electronics became the fifth-largest American industry, as factories automated and consumers purchased electric washers and dryers, freezers, blenders, television sets, and stereos. Cheap oil

fueled expansion. Domestic oil production and foreign imports rose steeply, and by 1960 oil had replaced coal as the nation's main energy source. Hardly anyone paid attention when a physicist warned in 1953 that “adding 6 billion tons of carbon dioxide to the atmosphere each year is warming up the Earth.”

Plentiful, cheap gasoline fed the growth of the automobile and aircraft industries. The nation's third-largest

industry in the 1950s, aerospace depended heavily on defense spending and on federally funded research. The automobile industry, still the titan of the American economy, also utilized technological R&D. Where machines had earlier replaced some human workers, automation now controlled the machines. Between 1945 and 1960, the industry halved the number of hours and workers required to produce a car.

The Age of Computers

The computer was a major key to the technological revolution. To decipher secret Axis codes, International Business Machines (IBM) in 1944 produced the Mark I calculator, a cumbersome device with five hundred miles of wiring. In late 1945, to improve artillery accuracy, the military devised ENIAC, the first electronic computer. Still unwieldy, with eighteen thousand vacuum tubes, ENIAC could perform five thousand calculations per second. Next came the development of operating instructions, or programs, that could be stored inside the computer's memory; the substitution of printed circuits for wires; and in 1948, at Bell Labs, the invention of tiny solid-state transistors that ended reliance on radio tubes.

Sales of electronic computers to industry rose from twenty in 1954 to more than a thousand in 1957 and more than two thousand in 1960. Major manufacturers used them to monitor production lines, track inventory, and ensure quality control. In government, computers were as indispensable to Pentagon strategists playing war games as they were to the Census Bureau and the Internal Revenue Service. By the mid-1960s, more than thirty thousand mainframe computers would be used by banks, hospitals, and universities. Further developments led to the first integrated circuits and to what would ultimately become the Internet, fundamentally changing the nature of work as well as its landscape.

The development of the high-technology complex known as Silicon Valley began in 1951 as Stanford University utilized its science and engineering faculties to design and produce products for the Fairchild Semiconductor and Hewlett-Packard companies. This relationship became a model followed by other high-tech firms. Soon apricot and cherry orchards throughout the Santa Clara valley gave way to industrial parks filled with computer firms and pharmaceutical laboratories. Initially a far cry from dirty eastern factories, these campus-like facilities would eventually choke the valley with traffic congestion, housing developments, and smog. Similar developments would follow the military-fueled research

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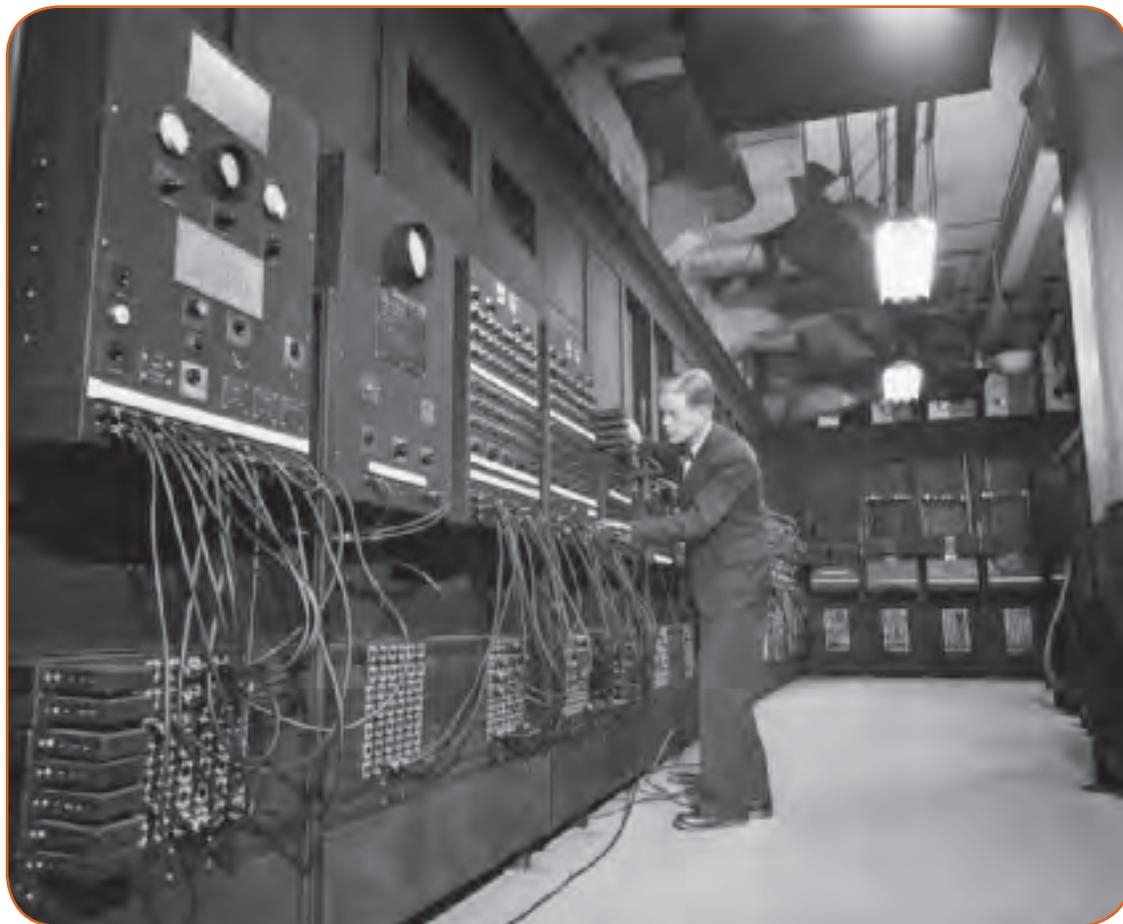
PRODUCTION LINE AT DOUGLAS AIRCRAFT COMPANY The Cold War stimulated an enormous boom in defense spending. By midcentury, more than half the federal budget, about 10 percent of the GNP, went to defense contractors like Douglas Aircraft, which helped the economy of the South and the West to flourish. (© Bettmann/Corbis)

complexes along Boston's Route 128, near Austin, Texas, and in North Carolina's Research Triangle.

The Costs of Bigness

Rapid technological advances accelerated the growth and power of big business. In 1950, twenty-two U.S. firms had assets of more than \$1 billion; ten years later more than fifty did. By then, one-half of 1 percent of all companies earned more than half the total corporate income in the United States. The wealthiest became oligopolies, swallowing up weak competitors. Three television networks monopolized the nation's airwaves; three automobile and three

aluminum companies produced more than 90 percent of America's cars and aluminum; and a handful of firms controlled the lion's share of assets and sales in steel, petroleum, chemicals, and electrical machinery. Corporations acquired overseas facilities to become "multinational" enterprises, and formed "conglomerates" by merging companies in unrelated industries: International Telephone and Telegraph (ITT) branched out from communications into car rental, home building, motel chains, insurance, and more. Growth and consolidation meant greater bureaucratization. "Executives" replaced "capitalists." Success required conformity not creativity, teamwork not individuality. According to sociologist



ENIAC, THE ELECTRONIC NUMERICAL INTEGRATOR AND COMPUTER The co-conceiver and designer of ENIAC, Dr. John W. Mauchly of the University of Pennsylvania's School of Electrical Engineering publicly unveiled the first general-purpose electronic computer in February 1946. (© Bettmann/Corbis)

David Riesman's *The Lonely Crowd* (1950), the new "company people" were "other-directed," eager to follow the cues from their peers and not think innovatively or act independently. In the old nursery rhyme "This Little Pig Went to Market," Riesman noted, each pig went his own way. "Today, however, all little pigs go to market; none stay home; all have roast beef, if any do; and all say 'we-we.'"

Changes in American agriculture paralleled those in industry. Farming grew increasingly scientific and mechanized. Technology halved the work hours necessary to grow crops between 1945 and 1960, causing many farm families to migrate to cities. In 1956 alone, one-eleventh of the farm population left the land (see Figure 27.3). Meanwhile, heavily capitalized farm businesses, running "factories in the field," prospered by using more machines and chemicals.

"Today, . . . all little pigs go to market; none stay home; all have roast beef, if any do; and all say 'we-we.'"

Until the publication of Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* in 1962, few Americans understood the extent to which fertilizers, herbicides, and pesticides poisoned the environment. Carson, a former researcher for the Fish and Wildlife Service (see page 832), dramatized the problems caused by use of the insecticide DDT and its spread through the food chain. Her depiction of a "silent spring" caused by the death of songbirds from DDT toxicity led many states to ban its use. The federal government followed suit. But the incentives for cultivating more land, and more marginal land, led to further ravages. The Army Corps of Engineers and the Bureau of Reclamation dammed the waters of the West, turning the Columbia and Missouri Rivers into rows of slack-water reservoirs, killing fish and wildlife as well as immersing hundreds of square miles of Indian tribal lands.

Blue-Collar Blues

Consolidation also transformed the labor movement. In 1955, the merger of the AFL and CIO

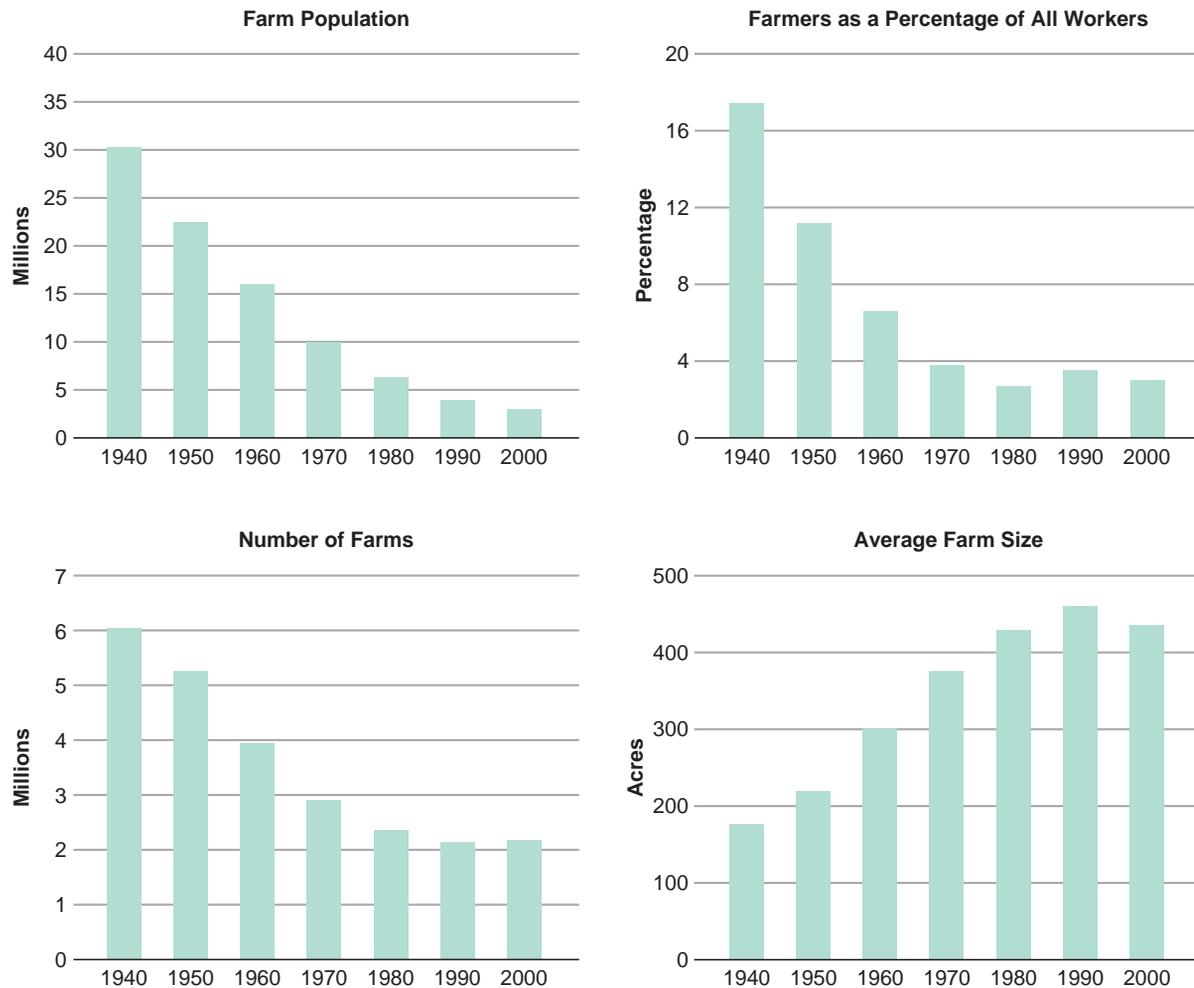


FIGURE 27.3 THE AMERICAN FARMER, 1940–2000 The postwar years saw a fundamental transformation of American agriculture. While the small family farmer joined the rural exodus to the cities, large farms prospered.

Sources: National Agricultural Statistics Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture; U.S. Bureau of the Census, Statistical Abstract of the United States, 1991, 1992, 2001 (Washington, D.C.).

brought 85 percent of union members into a single federation. Although labor leadership promised aggressive unionism, organized labor fell victim to its success at the bargaining table. Higher wages, shorter workweeks, paid vacations, health-care coverage, and automatic wage hikes tied to the cost of living led most workers to view themselves as middle class rather than the proletariat.

A decrease in the number of blue-collar workers further sapped labor militancy. Most of the new jobs in the 1950s were in the service sector and in public employment, which banned collective bargaining by labor unions, and automation cut membership in the coal, auto, and steelworkers' unions by more than half. In 1956, for the first time in U.S. history, white-collar workers outnumbered blue-collar workers. Although most service jobs were as routinized as any factory job, few unions sought to woo white-collar workers. The percentage of the unionized labor force dropped from a high of

36 percent in 1953 to 31 percent in 1960, and kept falling.

Prosperity and the Suburbs

As real income (adjusted for inflation) rose, Americans spent less of their income on necessities and more on powered lawnmowers and air conditioners. They heaped their shopping carts with frozen, dehydrated, and fortified foods. When they lacked cash, they borrowed. In 1950, Diner's Club issued the first credit card; American Express followed in 1958. Installment buying, home mortgages, and auto loans tripled Americans' total private indebtedness in the 1950s. In its effort to convince people to buy what they did not need, business spent more on advertising than the nation did on public schools. Thrift and savings were no longer depicted as virtues.



RACHEL CARSON The mother of modern ecology, Carson exposed the dangers of pesticides to animal and human life in her 1962 best seller *Silent Spring*, an enormously influential work that helped redefine the way humans look at their place in nature. (Alfred Eisenstaedt/TimeLife Pictures/Getty Images)

Suburban America

Urged to “Buy Now, Pay Later,” Americans purchased 58 million new cars during the 1950s. Manufacturers enticed people to trade in and up

by offering flashier models, two-tone color, tail fins, and extra-powerful engines—like Pontiac’s 1955 “Sensational Strato-Streak V-8,” which could go more than twice as fast as any speed limit. Seat belts remained an unadvertised extra-cost option. The consequences were increases in highway deaths, air pollution, oil consumption, and “autosclerosis”—clogged urban arteries.

In addition to “auto mania,” government policy spurred white Americans’ exodus to the suburbs (see Figure 27.4). Federal spending on highways skyrocketed from \$79 million in 1946 to \$2.6 billion in 1960, putting once-remote areas within “commuting distance” for city workers (see Technology and Culture). The income tax code stimulated home sales by allowing deductions for home-mortgage interest payments and for property taxes. Both the Federal Housing Administration (FHA) and Veterans Administration (VA) offered low-interest loans; and both continued to deny loans to blacks who sought to buy homes in white neighborhoods. In 1960, suburbia was 98 percent white.

In 1947, some thirty miles from midtown Manhattan on Long Island, Alfred and William Levitt used the mass-production construction techniques they perfected during the war to construct standardized 720-square-foot houses as quickly as possible. All 17,000 looked alike. Deeds to the property required door chimes, not buzzers, prohibited picket fences, mandated regular lawn mowing, and even specified when the wash could be hung to dry in the backyard. All the town streets curved at the same angle. A tree was planted every twenty-eight feet. The Levitts then built a second, larger Levittown in Bucks County, Pennsylvania, and a third in Willingboro, New Jersey.

Other contractors followed suit, and 85 percent of the 13 million new homes built in the 1950s were in the suburbs. In the greatest internal migration in the nation’s history, some 20 million Americans

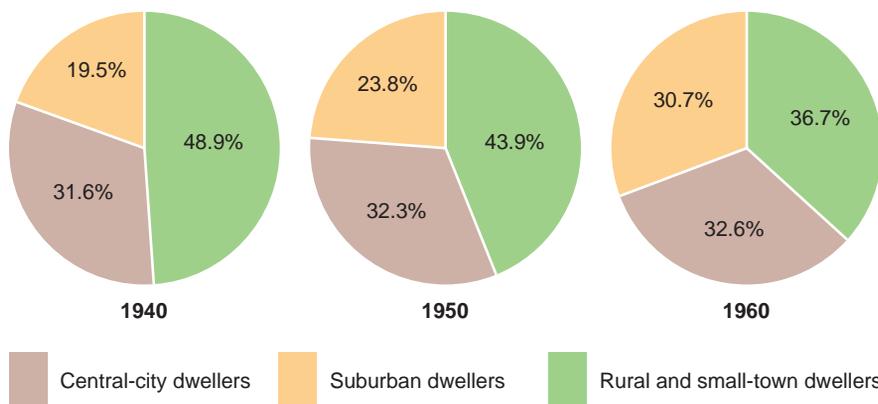


FIGURE 27.4 URBAN, SUBURBAN, AND RURAL AMERICANS, 1940–1960 In the fifteen years following World War II, more than 40 million Americans migrated to the suburbs, where, as one father put it, “a kid could grow up with grass stains on his pants.” Over the same period, fourteen of the fifteen largest U.S. cities lost population.

Source: Adapted from U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Current Censuses, 1930–1970* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office).

moved to the suburbs in the decade—making the suburban population equal to that of the central cities. Although social critics lampooned the “ticky-tacky” houses in “disturbia,” suburban life embodied the American dream for many families who longed for their own home, good schools, safe streets, and neighbors like themselves.

Americans also moved South and West, into the Sunbelt, lured by job opportunities, the climate, and the pace of life. California, where the population went from 9 to 19 million between 1945 and 1964, supplanted New York as the most populous state. Los Angeles boasted the highest per capita ownership of private homes and cars of any city. Initially designed to lure shoppers downtown, the highway system instead had become the road to a home in the suburbs (see Map 27.1).

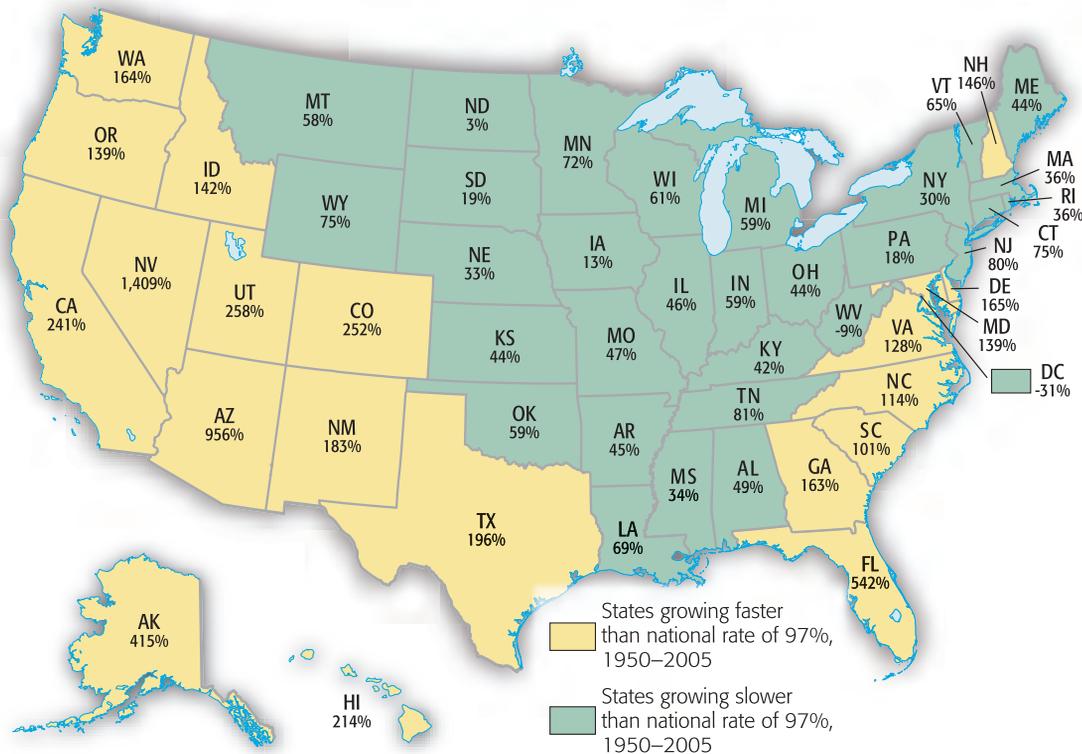
Industry, too, headed south and west, drawn by low taxes, low energy costs, and anti-union right-to-work laws. Senior citizens similarly headed to the easier climate. Both brought a conservative outlook. By 1980, the population of the Sunbelt, which stretched from the old Confederacy across Texas to southern California, exceeded that of the North and

East. The political power of the Republican Party rose accordingly.

Consensus and Conservatism

Not everyone embraced the conformity of 1950s consumer culture. Intellectuals found an audience for their attack on “organization men,” incapable of independent thought bent on getting ahead by going along, and on “status seekers” pursuing external rewards to compensate for inner insecurities. Others, like Riesman, took aim at “other-directed” conformists and “an America of mass housing, mass markets, massive corporations, massive government, mass media, and massive boredom.” Riesman described modern Americans as conformists, shaped by the opinions of their peers rather than by their own consciences, and lacking the inner resources to dare be different. Some took aim at the consumerist

“An America of mass housing, mass markets, massive corporations, massive government, mass media, and massive boredom.”



MAP 27.1 THE GROWTH OF THE SUNBELT, 1950–2000 Millions of Americans headed for warmer climates in the decades following the Second World War. Many from the Northeast and Upper Midwest, the regions hardest hit by the decline of jobs in established manufacturing industries, sought new employment opportunities; and many of the growing population of senior citizens sought the good life in the mushrooming number of “golden age” communities in Arizona, Florida, and southern California.

Source: D.W. Meinig, *The Shaping of America, Vol. 4* (New Haven, Conn. Yale University Press, 2004), p. 232.



The Interstate Highway System

As a young captain after World War I, Dwight Eisenhower had been given the task of accompanying a convoy of army trucks across the country. The woefully inadequate state of the roads for military transport dismayed him then as much as he would later be impressed by the German autobahns that allowed Hitler to deploy troops around Germany with incredible speed. Not surprisingly, when he became president, he sought a transportation system that would facilitate the rapid movement of the military, as well as increase road safety and aid commerce. The arms race with the Soviet Union, moreover, necessitated a network of highways for evacuating cities in case of a nuclear attack—a change, according to the *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, from “Duck and Cover” to “Run Like Hell.”

In 1954, Eisenhower set up a high-powered commission to recommend a highway program that would cost as much as a war. He appointed an army general to head it to emphasize the connection between highways, national defense, and the concerns Americans had about their security. The next year,

with the entire federal budget at \$71 billion, Eisenhower asked Congress for a \$40 billion, forty-one-thousand-mile construction project, to be financed by government bonds. Conservative Republicans, fearful of increasing the federal debt, balked. So Ike switched to a financing plan based on new gasoline, tire, bus, and trucking taxes. The federal government would use the taxes to pay 90 percent of the construction costs in any state willing to come up with the other 10 percent.

Millions of suburbanites commuting to central cities loved the idea of new multilane highways. So did motorists dreaming of summer travel; the powerful coalition of automobile manufacturers, oil companies, asphalt firms, and truckers, who stood to benefit financially the most; and the many special interests in virtually every congressional district, including real-estate developers, shopping mall entrepreneurs, engineers, and construction industries. Indeed, the interstate highway bill promised something to almost everybody except the inner-city poor. It sailed through Congress in 1956, winning by voice vote in the House and by an 89 to 1 margin in the Senate.



PROJECTED INTERSTATE HIGHWAY SYSTEM, 1957 Touted as the largest public works project in the history of the world, the Highway Act provided for the nation’s first centrally planned transportation system and the construction of a national system of high-speed expressways.

BREAKING GROUND FOR I-70 IN

MISSOURI More than a commuter's delight, the new expressways proved a boon for the automobile, concrete, oil, tire, and interstate trucking businesses, as well as providing steady work for construction firms.

(Missouri State Archives)



The largest and most expensive public-works scheme in American history, the interstate highway system was designed and built as a single project for the entire country, unlike the haphazard development of the canal and railroad networks. It required taking more land by eminent domain than had been taken in the entire history of road building in the United States. Expected increases in highway use, speed of travel, and weight of loads necessitated drastic changes in road engineering and materials. Utilizing the technological advances that had produced high-quality concrete and asphalt, diesel-powered road-bed graders, reinforced steel, and safely controlled explosives, construction crews built superhighways with standardized twelve foot-wide lanes, ten-foot shoulders, and median strips of at least thirty-six feet in rural areas. Terrain in which a dirt trail was difficult to blaze was laced with cloverleaf intersections and some sixteen thousand exits and entrances. More than fifty thousand bridges, tunnels, and overpasses traversed swamps, rivers, and mountains. Road curves were banked for speeds of seventy miles per hour, with grades no greater than 3 percent and minimum sight distances of six hundred feet. The massive amounts of concrete poured, Ike later boasted, could have made “six sidewalks to the moon” or sixty Panama Canals.

The network of four-to-eight-lane roads linking cities and suburbs made it possible to drive from New York to San Francisco without encountering a stoplight. It more than fulfilled the initial hopes of most of its backers, enormously speeding the movement of goods and people across the country, invigorating the tourist industry, providing steady work for construction firms, enriching those who lived near the interstates and sold their lands to developers, and hastening suburban development.

The freeways that helped unify Americans by increasing the accessibility of once-distant regions also helped

homogenize the nation with interchangeable shopping malls, motels, and fast-food chains. In 1955, Ray Kroc, who supplied the Multimixers for milk shakes to the original McDonald's drive-in in San Bernardino, California, began to franchise similar family restaurants beside highways, each serving the same standardized foods under the instantly recognizable logo of the golden arches. By century's end, McDonald's would be the world's largest private real-estate enterprise, as well as the largest food provider, serving more than 40 million meals daily in a hundred countries.

Moreover, the expressways boosted the interstate trucking business and hastened the decline of the nation's railroad lines and urban mass-transportation systems. The highways built to speed commuters into the central cities—“white men's roads through black men's bedrooms,” said the National Urban League—often bulldozed minority neighborhoods out of existence or served as barriers between black and white neighborhoods. The beltways that lured increasingly more residents and businesses to suburbia eroded city tax bases which, in turn, accelerated urban decay, triggering the urban crisis that then furthered suburban sprawl. The interstates had locked the United States into an ever-increasing reliance on cars and trucks, drastically increasing air pollution and American dependence on a constant supply of cheap and plentiful gasoline.

QUESTIONS FOR ANALYSIS

- Why did Congress authorize the construction of an interstate highway system?
- Describe some of the unintended consequences of the new highway system.

middle class: “all items in a national supermarket—categorized, processed, labeled, priced, and readied for merchandising.”

This social criticism oversimplified reality. It ignored ethnic and class diversity, the acquisitiveness and conformity of earlier generations, and the currents of dissent swirling beneath the surface. But it rightly spotlighted the elevation of comfort over challenge, and of private pleasures over public affairs. The decade was, in the main, a time of political passivity and preoccupation with personal gain.

Together, the Baby Boom, and Domesticity

After years of separation and loss, Americans yearned for emotional security as well as material success, and more than ever, they looked to family as a bastion of stability in an insecure world. In 1954, *McCall's* magazine coined the term *togetherness* to celebrate the “ideal” couple: the man and woman who centered their lives on home and children. Confident in continued economic prosperity and influenced by popular culture, Americans in mid-

century wed at an earlier age than had their parents (one woman in three married by age nineteen), and had more babies sooner. The fertility rate (the number of births per thousand women), eighty in 1940, peaked at 123 in 1957, when an American baby was born every seven seconds. That year, America’s rapidly increasing population matched India’s; the number of children per family had risen to 3.2, from 2.4 in 1945, and

one-third of the population was under the age of 15.

New antibiotics subdued once deadly childhood diseases like diphtheria and whooping cough, streptomycin drastically reduced tuberculosis, and the Salk and Sabin vaccines ended the dread of polio. The decline in childhood mortality helped raise American life expectancy from 65.9 years in 1945 to 70.9 years in 1970. Coupled with the “baby boom,” it led to a 19 percent population spurt during the 1950s—a larger jump than in any previous decade. The sheer size of the **baby-boom generation** (the 76 million Americans born between 1946 and 1964) ensured its impact and historical importance. Its needs and expectations at each stage of life would be as contorting as the digestion of a pig by a boa constrictor. First came the bulge in baby carriages; in the 1950s, school construction boomed; and in the 1960s, college enrollments soared. Then in the 1970s—as the baby boomers had their own families—home construction peaked. The 1980s and 1990s brought a

surge in retirement investments, and the twenty-first century a preoccupation with health matters. In the 1950s, the baby boom also made child rearing a foremost concern, reinforcing the idea that women’s place was in the home. No one did more to emphasize the necessity for women to be full-time mothers than **Dr. Benjamin Spock**. Only the Bible outsold his *Common Sense Book of Baby and Child Care* (1946) in the 1950s. Spock urged mothers not to work outside the home, in order to create an atmosphere of warmth and intimacy for their children. Crying babies were to be comforted; breast-feeding came back into vogue. Spock’s advice also led to a more “democratic” family and to a “permissive” approach to child-rearing in which kids ruled the roost.

The postwar emphasis on family togetherness renewed the ideal of domesticity in defining—and constraining—the role of women. As we saw in Chapter 25, an advertisement during the war pictured a woman in overalls about to leave for work proclaiming, “Some jubilant day, mother will stay home again doing the job she likes—making a home for you and daddy when he gets back.” With Daddy back, popular culture glorified marriage and parenthood as never before, emphasizing a woman’s role as a helpmate to her husband and a full-time mother to her children. Television mostly pictured women as at-home mothers. *Life* magazine lauded Marjorie Sutton for marrying at sixteen, cooking and sewing for the family, raising four children, being a pillar of the PTA and Campfire Girls, and working out on a trampoline “to keep her size 12 figure.”

Education reinforced these notions. Girls were encouraged to study typing and cooking and cautioned not to “miss the boat” of marriage by pursuing higher education. “Men are not interested in college degrees but in the warmth and humanness of the girls they marry,” stressed a textbook on the family. More men than women went to college in the 1950s, and only one-third of college women completed a degree.

Women both embraced and repudiated the domestic ideal as profound changes accelerated. By 1952, 2 million more women worked outside the home than had during the war; and by 1960, twice as many did as in 1940. In 1960, one-third of the labor force was female, and one out of three married women worked outside the home. Of all women workers that year, 60 percent were married, while 40 percent had school-age children. Most held so-called “pink collar” jobs in the service industry—secretary or clerk, waitress or hairdresser. Their median wage was less than half that for men.

Most women worked to augment family income, not to challenge stereotypes. White women mostly filled clerical positions, while African-Americans held service jobs in private households and

“Men are not interested in [women having] college degrees but in the warmth and humanness of the girls they marry.”

restaurants. Some women, as during World War II, developed a heightened sense of expectations and empowerment as a result of employment. Transmitted to their daughters, their experience would fuel a feminist resurgence in the late 1960s.

Religion and Education

“Today in the U.S.,” *Time* claimed in 1954, “the Christian faith is back in the center of things.” Evangelist **Billy Graham**, Roman Catholic Bishop Fulton J. Sheen, and Protestant minister Norman Vincent Peale all had syndicated newspaper columns, best-selling books, and radio and television programs. Each promoted a potent mixture of religious salvation and aggressive anticommunism. Hollywood religious extravaganzas, such as *Ben Hur* and *The Ten Commandments*, were the biggest box-office hits of the 1950s, while television promoted the slogan that “the family that prays together stays together.” Congress added “under God” to the Pledge of Allegiance and required “IN GOD WE TRUST” to be put on all U.S. currency. While church membership doubled to 114 million between 1945 and 1960, the *intensity* of faith diminished for many people, as mainstream churches downplayed sin and evil, and preached Americanism and fellowship.

Similarly, education swelled in the 1950s yet seemed less rigorous than in earlier decades. Primary school enrollment rose by 10 million in the 1950s (compared with 1 million in the 1940s). California opened a new school every week throughout the decade and still faced a classroom shortage. The proportion of college-age Americans in higher education climbed from 15 percent in 1940 to more than 40 percent by the early 1960s. “Progressive” educators promoted sociability and self-expression over science and history. The “well-rounded” student became more prized than the highly skilled or intelligent student. Surveys of college students found them conservative, conformist, and careerist, a “silent generation” seeking security and comfort.

Few university faculty challenged the reigning thought of the day or addressed the problems of those in need. Historians downplayed class conflicts and highlighted the pragmatism of most Americans. Consensus—the widely shared agreement on most matters of importance, especially respect for private property, individualism, and equal opportunity—was frequently depicted as central to America’s history and greatness.

Postwar Culture

American culture reflected both the spirit of prosperity and the Cold War. Enjoying more leisure time and fatter paychecks, Americans spent one-

seventh of the GNP on entertainment. Spectator sports boomed, new symphony halls opened, and book sales doubled.

“The family that prays together stays together.”

With the opening of a major exhibit of abstract expressionists by the Museum of Modern Art in 1951, New York replaced Paris as the capital of the art world. Like the abstract canvases of Jackson Pollock and the cool jazz of trumpeter Miles Davis, introspection and improvisation characterized the major novels of the era. The personal yearnings of characters in John Updike’s *Rabbit Run* (1960), typically, had little to do with the political engagement and social realism of literature in the 1930s. Southern, African-American, and Jewish-American writers turned out the decade’s most vital fiction. William Faulkner continued his dense saga of Yoknapatawpha County, Mississippi, while Eudora Welty evoked southern small-town life in *The Ponder Heart* (1954). The black experience found memorable expression in James Baldwin’s *Go Tell It on the Mountain* (1953) and Ralph Ellison’s *Invisible Man* (1951). Bernard Malamud’s *The Assistant* (1957) explored the Jewish immigrant world, and Philip Roth’s *Goodbye Columbus* (1959) dissected the very different world of upwardly mobile Jews.

Hollywood reflected the diminished interest in political issues, churning out westerns, musicals, and costume spectacles. Most films about contemporary life portrayed Americans as one happy white, middle-class family. Minorities and the poor remained invisible, and women appeared largely as “dumb blondes” or cute helpmates. Still, as TV viewing soared, movie attendance dropped 50 percent, and a fifth of the nation’s theaters became bowling alleys and supermarkets by 1960.

The Television Culture

No cultural medium ever grew so quickly as television. In 1946, just one in 18,000 households had a TV set; by 1960, nine of ten households had at least one TV, and more Americans had televisions than had bathrooms (see Figure 27.5).

Business capitalized on the phenomenon. The three main radio networks—ABC, CBS, and NBC—gobbled up virtually every TV station in the country and, just as in radio, they profited by selling time to advertisers who wanted to reach the largest possible audiences. *TV Guide*, introduced in 1952, soon out-sold all other periodicals. First marketed in 1954, the TV dinner altered the nation’s eating habits. When Walt Disney produced a show on Davy Crockett in 1955, stores could not keep up with the massive demand for “King of the Wild Frontier” coonskin caps. It seemed that TV could sell anything.

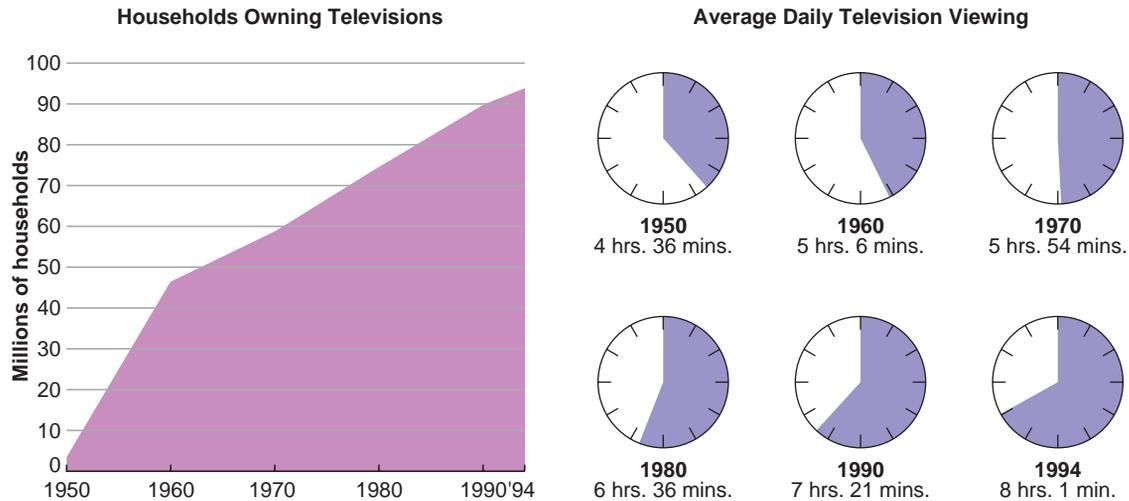


FIGURE 27.5 THE TELEVISION REVOLUTION, 1950–1994 As televisions became commonplace in the 1950s, TV viewing altered the nature of American culture and politics.

Source: *Statistical Abstracts of the United States.*

The head of the FCC called TV “a vast wasteland.” Others called it the “idiot box.”

Initially, TV showcased talent and creativity. Opera performances appeared in prime time, as did political dramas and documentaries like Edward R. Murrow’s *See It Now*. Early situation comedies such as *The Life of Riley* and *The Goldbergs* featured ethnic working-class families. But as the price of TV sets came down and the chill of McCarthyism spread, the networks’ caution and appetite for a mass audience transformed TV into a celebration of conformity and consumerism. Controversy went off the air. Most situation comedies, like *Father Knows Best* and *The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet*, portrayed perfectly coiffed moms who loved to vacuum in high heels, frisky yet obedient kids, and all-knowing dads. Even Lucille Ball and Desi Arnaz in *I Love Lucy*—which no network initially wanted because its all-American redhead was married to a Cuban—had a baby and left New York for suburbia.

Decrying TV’s mediocrity in 1961, the head of the Federal Communications Commission called it “a vast wasteland.” A steady parade of soaps, unsophisticated comedies, and violent westerns led others to call TV the “idiot box.”

Measuring television’s impact is difficult. Different people read the “texts” of TV (or of movies or books) in their own way and so receive their own messages from the medium. While TV bound some to the status quo, it raised expectations of others. It functioned both as a conservator and as a spur to change. In the main, television reflected existing values and

institutions. It stimulated the desire to be included in American society, not to transform it. It spawned mass fads for Barbie dolls and hula hoops, and spread the message of consumerism. It reinforced gender and racial stereotypes, rarely showing African-Americans and Latinos—except in servile roles or prison scenes. It extolled male violence in fighting evil; and it portrayed women as either zany madcaps or self-effacing moms. While promoting professional baseball and football into truly national phenomena, TV decreased the audience of motion picture theaters and of general interest magazines like *Life*.

Television also changed political life. Politicians could effectively appeal to the voters over the heads of party leaders, and appearance mattered more than content. The millions watching Senator Estes Kefauver grill mobsters about their ties to city governments made him a serious contender for the presidency. At least 20 million watched Senator Joseph McCarthy bully and demean witnesses. Richard Nixon reached 58 million and saved his political career with his appeal in the “Checkers” speech, answering charges that he had received gifts and money from California businessmen. Eisenhower’s pioneering use of brief “spot advertisements” clinched his smashing presidential victories. And in 1960, John F. Kennedy’s “telegenic” image played a major role in his winning the presidency.

Overall, television helped produce a more national, homogenized culture, diminishing provincialism and regional differences. It vastly increased the cost of political campaigning while decreasing the content level of political discussion. It also shortened attention spans. And its overwhelming



MOTOROLA TV FAMILY AD The television set itself, so grandly advertised and displayed, was a symbol of postwar affluence, and both advertising and programming, which featured largely middle-class, consumption-oriented suburban families, stimulated the consumer culture. Overall, TV powerfully reinforced the conservative, celebratory values of everyday American life in the 1950s. (Courtesy of Motorola Museum © 1955 Motorola, Inc/Picture Research Consultants & Archives)

portrayal of a contented citizenry reinforced complacency and hid the reality of “the other America.”

Seeds of Disquiet

Late in the 1950s, apprehension ruffled the calm surface of American life. Questions about the nation’s values and goals, periodic recessions, rising unemployment, and the growing national debt made Khrushchev’s boast that “your grandchildren will live under communism” ring in American ears. The growing alienation of American youth and a technological breakthrough by the Soviet Union further diminished national pride.

Sputnik

On October 4, 1957, the Soviet Union launched the first artificial satellite, *Sputnik* (“Little Traveler”). Weighing 184 pounds and only twenty-two inches in diameter, *Sputnik* dashed the American myth of unquestioned technological superiority. When *Sputnik II*, carrying a dog, went into a more distant orbit on November 3, Democrats charged that Eisenhower had allowed a “technological Pearl Harbor.”

The Eisenhower administration disparaged the Soviet achievement, but behind the scenes pushed to have the American Vanguard missile launch a satellite. On December 6, with millions watching on TV, Vanguard rose six feet in the air and exploded. Newspapers ridiculed America’s “Flopnik.”

Eisenhower did not laugh. He more than doubled the funds for missile development and established the Science Advisory Committee, whose recommendations led to the creation of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) in July 1958. By decade’s end, the United States had launched several space probes and successfully tested the Atlas intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM).

Spurred by *Sputnik*, Americans embarked on a crash program to improve American education. The National Defense Education Act (1958) for the first time provided direct federal funding to higher education, especially to improve the teaching of the sciences, mathematics, and foreign languages. Far more funds went to university research to ensure national security. By 1960, the U.S. government was funneling \$1.5 billion to universities, a

“Your grandchildren will live under communism.”

hundred-fold increase over 1940, and nearly a third of scientists and engineers on university faculties worked full-time on government research, primarily defense projects. Some observers dubbed it the “military-industrial-educational complex.”

A Different Beat

Few adults considered the implications of affluence for the young, or the consequences of having a teenage generation stay in school instead of working. Few pondered how the young would respond to growing up in an age when traditional values like thrift and self-denial had declining relevance, or to maturing when young people had the leisure and money to shape their own subculture. Little attention was paid to the decline in the age of menarche (first menstruation), or the ways that the relatively new institution of junior high school affected the behavior of youth. Despite talk of family togetherness, busy fathers paid little attention to their children, and mothers sometimes spent more time chauffeuring their young than listening to them. Much of what adults knew about teenagers (a noun that first appeared in the 1940s but was not commonly used until the 1950s) they learned from the mass media, which focused on the sensational and the superficial.

Accounts of juvenile delinquency abounded, portraying high schools as war zones, city streets as jungles, and teenagers as zip-gun-armed hoodlums. In truth, teenage crime had barely increased. But male teenagers sporting black-leather motorcycle jackets, their hair slicked into “ducktails,” aroused adult alarm.

As dismaying to parents, young Americans embraced rock-and-roll. In 1952, Cleveland radio host Alan Freed, having observed white teenagers dancing to rhythm-and-blues records by such black performers as Chuck Berry and Bo Diddley, started a new radio program, “Moondog’s Rock and Roll Party,” to play “race music.” In 1954, Freed took the program to New York, creating a national craze for “rock-and-roll,” the very term that had been used in blues songs for sexual intercourse.

Just as white musicians in the 1920s and 1930s had adapted black jazz for white audiences, white performers in the 1950s transformed the heavy beat and suggestive lyrics of rhythm-and-blues into “Top Ten” rock-and-roll. In 1954, Bill Haley and the Comets dropped the sexual allusions from Joe Turner’s “Shake, Rattle, and Roll,” added country-and-western guitar riffs, and had the first major white rock-and-roll hit. When Haley performed

“Rock Around the Clock” in *The Blackboard Jungle*, a 1955 film about juvenile delinquency, many parents linked rock-and-roll with crime. Red hunters saw it as a communist plot to corrupt youth. Segregationists claimed it was a ploy “to mix the races.” Psychiatrists feared it was “a communicable disease.” Churches condemned it as the “devil’s music.”

“If I could find a white man who had the Negro sound and the Negro feel,” said Sam Phillips, the owner of Sun Records in Memphis, “I could make a million dollars.” He made it by finding **Elvis Presley**. Born in Tupelo, Mississippi, Elvis melded the Pentecostal music of his boyhood with the powerful beat and sexual energy of rhythm-and-blues. In songs like “Hound Dog” and “All Shook Up” he transformed the bland pop music that youth found wanting into a proclamation of teenage “separateness.” Presley’s gyrating pelvis and bucking hips—exuding sexuality—shocked middle-class adults, but the more adults condemned rock-and-roll, the more teenagers relished its assault on mainstream values. Record sales tripled between 1954 and 1960, and Dick Clark’s *American Bandstand* became the decade’s biggest TV hit. The songs for black artists written by the Jewish songwriters Jerry Leiber and Mike Stoller, the rocking versions of Mexican folk music by East Los Angeles’ Richie Valens (Valenzuela), and Little Richard dancing on his piano nourished the roots of the coming youth revolt.

Portents of Change

Teens cherished rock-and-roll for defying adult propriety. They elevated characters like James Dean in *Rebel Without a Cause* (1955) to cult status for rejecting society’s mores. They delighted in *Mad* magazine’s ridiculing of the phony and pretentious in middle-class America. They customized their cars to reject Detroit’s standards. All were signs of their distinctiveness from the adult world.

Nonconformist writers known as the **Beats** expressed a more fundamental revolt against middle-class society. In Allen Ginsberg’s *Howl* (1956) and Jack Kerouac’s *On the Road* (1957), the Beats scorned the conformity, religion, family values, and materialism of “square” America. They romanticized society’s outcasts—the mad ones, wrote Kerouac, “the ones who never yawn or say a commonplace thing, but burn, burn, burn like fabulous yellow roman candles exploding like spiders across the stars.” They glorified uninhibited sexuality and spontaneity in the search for “It,” the ultimate authentic experience.

The mass media scorned the Beats, as they did all dissenters. But some college youth admired their rejection of conformity. They read poetry

“If I could find a white man who had the Negro sound and the Negro feel, I could make a million dollars.”



“ELVIS THE PELVIS” IN 1956 That year Elvis Presley skyrocketed to rock-’n’-roll stardom. His rebellious sensuality, which caused girls to scream and faint, and boys to imitate his gyrating hips, reflected a hunger for more immediate and vital experiences than was considered “proper” in the 1950s. (*AP Images*)

and listened to jazz, and some students even protested capital punishment and demonstrated against the continuing investigations of the House Un-American Activities Committee. Others decried the nuclear-arms race. In 1958 and 1959, thousands

participated in Youth Marches for Integrated Schools in Washington. Together with the Beats and rock music, this vocal minority of the “silent generation” heralded a youth movement that would explode in the 1960s.

The Other America

“I am an invisible man,” declared the African-American narrator of Ralph Ellison’s *Invisible Man*; “I am invisible, understand, simply because people refuse to see me.” Indeed, few middle-class white Americans perceived the extent of social injustice in the United States. “White flight” from cities to suburbs physically separated races and classes. New expressways walled off ghettos and rural poverty from middle-class motorists speeding by. Popular culture focused on affluent Americans enjoying the “good life.” But poverty and racial discrimination were rife and dire, and the struggles for social justice intensified.

“I am an invisible man.”

Poverty and Urban Blight

Although the percentage of poor families (defined as a family of four with a yearly income of less than three thousand dollars) declined from 34 percent in 1947 to 22 percent in 1960, 35 million Americans remained

below the “poverty line.” Eight million senior citizens existed on annual incomes below one thousand dollars. A third of the poor lived in depressed rural areas, where 2 million migrant farm workers experienced the most abject poverty. Observing a Texas migratory-labor camp in 1955, a journalist reported that 96 percent of the children had consumed no milk in the previous six months; eight out of ten adults had eaten no meat; and most slept “on the ground, in a cave, under a tree, or in a chicken house.”

The bulk of the poor huddled in decaying inner-city slums. Displaced southern blacks and Appalachian whites, Native Americans forced off reservations, and newly arrived Hispanics strained cities’ inadequate facilities. Nearly two hundred thousand Mexican-Americans were herded into San Antonio’s Westside barrio. A local newspaper described them as living like cattle in a stockyard. As described by Michael Harrington in *The Other America: Poverty in the United States* (1962), the poor lived trapped in a vicious cycle of want and a culture of deprivation. Unable to afford good housing, a nutritious diet, and doctors, the poor got sick more often and for longer



IN A KENTUCKY MINING TOWN Life was not the “nifty fifties” for many Americans. Nearly one in four lived below the poverty line, which was calculated by the federal government to be \$2,973 for a family of four in 1959. The bottom 20 percent of Americans then owned only 0.05 percent of the nation’s wealth.

than more affluent Americans. Losing wages and finding it hard to hold steady jobs, they could not pay for the decent housing, good food, or doctors that would keep them from getting and staying sick. Children of the poor started school disadvantaged, quickly fell behind, and, lacking encouragement or expectation of success, dropped out. Living with neither hopes nor skills, the poor bequeathed a similar legacy to their children.

The pressing need for low-cost housing went unanswered. “Slum clearance” generally meant “Negro clearance,” and “urban renewal” meant “poor removal,” as developers razed low-income neighborhoods to put up parking garages and expensive housing. Bulldozers razed the Los Angeles barrio of Chavez Ravine to make way for Dodger Stadium. Landlords, realtors, and bankers deliberately excluded nonwhites from decent housing. Half of the housing in New York’s Harlem predated 1900. A dozen people might share a tiny apartment with broken windows, faulty plumbing, and gaping holes in the walls. Harlem’s rates of illegitimate births, infant deaths, narcotics use, and crime soared above the averages for the city and the nation. “Where flies and maggots breed, where the plumbing is stopped up and not repaired, where rats bite helpless infants,” black social psychologist Kenneth Clark observed, “the conditions of life are brutal and inhuman.”

Latinos and Latinas

High unemployment on the Caribbean island and the advent of direct air service to New York in 1945 brought a steady stream of Puerto Ricans to the city, where they could earn four times the average wage on the island. From seventy thousand in 1940 to a quarter of a million in 1950 and then nearly a million in 1960, El Barrio in New York City’s East Harlem had a larger Puerto Rican population and more bodegas than San Juan.

In New York, Puerto Ricans suffered from inadequate housing, employment, and schools, and from police harassment. Like countless earlier immigrants, they gained greater personal freedom in the United States while losing the security of a strong cultural tradition. Family frictions flared in the transition to unaccustomed ways. Parents felt upstaged by children who learned English and obtained jobs that were closed to older Puerto Ricans. The relationship between husbands and wives changed as women found readier access to jobs than did men. Yet, however much they tried to embrace American ways, many could not enjoy the promise of the American Dream because of their skin color and language. Increasingly, they turned to organizations like Antonia Pantoja’s Puerto Rican Association

for Community Affairs (PRACA), which sought to end discrimination against Puerto Ricans and *Nuyoricans*—their children born in New York City.

Mexican-Americans suffered the same indignities. Most were underpaid and segregated from mainstream American life. The presence of countless “undocumented aliens” compounded their woes.

After World War II, new irrigation systems added 7.5 million acres to the agricultural lands of the Southwest, stimulating demand for cheap Mexican labor. In 1951, to stem the resulting tide of illegal Mexican immigrants, Congress reintroduced the wartime “temporary worker” program that brought in seasonal farm laborers (*braceros*). Many stayed without authorization, joining a growing number of Latinos who entered the country illegally.

During the 1953–1955 recession, the U.S. government deported some 3 million allegedly undocumented entrants during the Eisenhower administration’s “Operation Wetback” (*wetback* being a term of derision for illegal Mexican immigrants who supposedly swam across the Rio Grande to enter the United States). Periodic roundups, however, did not stop the millions of Mexicans who continued to cross the poorly guarded border. The *bracero program* itself peaked in 1959, admitting 450,000 workers. Neither the *Asociación Nacional México-Americana* (founded in 1950) nor the older League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) could stop the exploitation or widespread violations of the rights of Mexican-American citizens.

The Mexican-American population of Los Angeles County doubled to more than six hundred thousand, and the *colonias* of Denver, El Paso, Phoenix, and San Antonio grew proportionately as large. The most rural of all major ethnic groups in 1940, 85 percent of Mexican-Americans lived in urban areas by 1970. As service in World War II gave Hispanics an increased sense of their own American identity and of their claim on the rights of American citizens, urbanization provided better educational and employment opportunities. Unions like the United Cannery, Agricultural, Packing and Allied Workers of America brought higher wages and better working conditions for their Mexican-American members. Middle-class organizations included LULAC, the Unity League, and the GI Forum (established in 1949 after a funeral parlor in Texas refused to bury a deceased Chicano veteran). These groups campaigned to end discrimination and segregation and

“Where flies and maggots breed, where the plumbing is stopped up and not repaired, where rats bite helpless infants, the conditions of life are brutal and inhuman.”



MEXICAN FARM LABORERS BEING DEPORTED BACK TO MEXICO Following World War II, the U.S. government continued to use the *bracero* program when it needed inexpensive laborers to do the arduous work in the hot agricultural fields of the Sunbelt, and then deported millions of Mexicans when it no longer needed them, as in this photo taken during “Operation Wetback” in the recession of 1953–1955. (© Bettmann/Corbis)

won important court decisions that declared school segregation of Mexican-Americans unconstitutional (*Mendez*, 1947, and *Delgado*, 1948) and ended their exclusion from Texas jury lists (*Hernandez*, 1954).

The mobilization of Hispanic voters led to the election of the first Mexican-American mayor, in El Paso in 1958. Latinos also took pride in baseball star Roberto Clemente and their growing numbers in the major leagues, in Nobel

Prize winners like biologist Severo Ochoa, and in Anthony Quinn and other Hollywood stars. But the existence of millions of undocumented aliens and the continuation of the *bracero* program stigmatized all Hispanics. Their median income was less than two-thirds that of Anglos. At least a third lived in poverty.

Native Americans

Native Americans remained the poorest minority, with a death rate three times the national average. Unemployment rates on reservations during the

1950s reached a staggering 70 to 86 percent for some tribes. Congress again changed course, moving away from New Deal efforts to reassert Indian sovereignty and cultural autonomy and back toward the goal of assimilation. Between 1954 and 1962, Congress terminated treaties and withdrew financial support from sixty-one reservations. Proponents claimed such measures would increase “Indian self-sufficiency,” but this termination policy, which reduced federal services, sold off tribal lands, and pushed Indians off the reservations, was disastrous. First applied to the Menominees of Wisconsin and the Klamaths of Oregon, who owned valuable timberlands, it further impoverished the tribes and transferred more than 500,000 acres of Native American lands to non-Indians.

To lure Indians off the reservations and into urban areas, and to speed the sale of Indian lands to developers, the government established the Voluntary Relocation Program. It provided Native Americans with moving costs, assistance in finding housing and jobs, and living expenses until they obtained work. “We’re like wheat,” said one Hopi woman who went to the city. “The wind blows, we bend over. . . . You can’t stand up when there’s wind.”

“We’re like wheat. The wind blows, we bend over. . . . You can’t stand up when there’s wind.”

By 1960, about sixty thousand Indians had been relocated to cities. Some became middle class, generally losing their Indian identity in the process; some ended up on state welfare rolls, living in run-down shantytowns and addicted to alcohol; and nearly a third returned to their reservations. The National Congress of American Indians vigorously opposed termination, and most tribal politicians advocated Indian sovereignty, treaty rights, federal trusteeship, and the special status of Indians.

The Civil Rights Movement

The integration of baseball in 1947, spearheaded by the brilliant Jackie Robinson, symbolized a new robustness in the fight against racial discrimination and segregation in the postwar era. The war had heightened African-American expectations for racial equality, and demands included a permanent Fair Employment Practices Commission (FEPC), the outlawing of lynching, and the right to vote.

The Politics of Race

Fearful of black assertiveness in seeking the vote and in mobilizing grassroots forces, white racists accelerated their repression and violence. In 1946, whites killed several black veterans in Georgia for daring to vote and blinded a black soldier for failing to sit in the rear of a bus in South Carolina. In Columbia, Tennessee, also in 1946, a white riot against blacks who were insisting on their rights led to the arrest of seventy African-Americans and the jailhouse lynching of two of the prisoners.

These events horrified President Truman. Aware of the importance to the Democratic party of the growing African-American vote, Truman also realized how much white racism damaged U.S. relations with much of the world. Genuinely believing that every American should enjoy the full rights of citizenship, Truman in late 1946 established the **President's Committee on Civil Rights** to investigate race relations. The committee's report, *To Secure These Rights*, published in 1947, called for the eradication of racial discrimination and segregation and proposed antilynching and antipoll tax legislation and enactment of a permanent FEPC. Boldly, Truman in February 1948 sent a special message to Congress urging lawmakers to enact most of the committee's proposals. Although Truman's subsequent actions would fall short of his rhetoric, the president insisted on closing the gap between the nation's ideals and its racist practices and issued executive orders barring discrimination in federal employment and creating a committee to ensure "equality of treatment and opportunity" for all persons in the armed services.

Jim Crow in Court

During the Truman presidency, moreover, the Supreme Court declared segregation in interstate bus transportation unconstitutional (*Morgan v. Virginia*, 1946) and outlawed restrictive housing covenants that forbade the sale or rental of property to minorities (*Shelley v. Kraemer*, 1948). Soon thereafter, reflecting the growing determination of black Americans to demand their rights, the NAACP's chief attorney, Thurgood Marshall, abandoned the call for greater equality within "separate but equal" under which, for example, a county in South Carolina with segregated schools could, and did, provide \$179 in public funds per white student but only \$43 per black student. Instead, Marshall undertook a direct attack on segregation itself. He pursued a strategy built on an earlier federal court ruling that had prohibited the segregation of Mexican-American children in California schools as well as on decisions in 1950 in which the Supreme Court significantly narrowed the possibility of separate law school and graduate education being constitutional.

In May 1954, the new Chief Justice appointed by Eisenhower, **Earl Warren** (1953), speaking for a unanimous Court, reversed the "separate but equal" doctrine of *Plessy v. Ferguson* (see Chapter 20) in the landmark case of ***Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka***. Overturning more than sixty years of legal segregation, the Supreme Court ruled that separate educational facilities for blacks and whites were "inherently unequal," denying black children the "equal protection of the laws" guaranteed by the Fourteenth Amendment, and thereby unconstitutional. A year later, however, the Court decreed that school desegregation should proceed "with all deliberate speed"—an oxymoron that implied gradualism.

In the border states, some African-American and white students sat side by side for the first time in history. But in the South, where segregation was deeply entrenched in law and custom, politicians vowed resistance, and Eisenhower refused to press them to comply: "I don't believe you can change the hearts of men with laws or decisions." Although not personally racist, Ike never publicly endorsed the *Brown* decision and privately called his appointment of Earl Warren "the biggest damn fool mistake I ever made."

Encouraged by the president's indecisiveness, White Citizens' Councils organized to defend segregation and the Ku Klux Klan revived. Declaring *Brown* "null, void, and of no effect," southern legislatures adopted a strategy of "massive resistance" to thwart compliance with the law. They closed down or denied state aid to school systems that desegregated and enacted pupil-placement laws that permitted school boards to assign black and white children to different schools. In 1956, more

than a hundred members of Congress signed the **Southern Manifesto**, denouncing *Brown*, and that year not a single African-American attended school with whites in the Deep South, and few did so in the Upper South (see Going to the Source).

The Laws of the Land

Southern resistance reached a climax in September 1957. Although the Little Rock school board had accepted a federal court order to desegregate Central High School, Arkansas governor Orval E. Faubus mobilized the state's National Guard to block enforcement and bar nine African-American students from entering the school. After another court order forced Faubus to withdraw the guardsmen, an angry mob of whites blocked the black students' entry.

Eisenhower, believing he had to uphold federal authority, nationalized the Arkansas National Guard, augmented by a thousand federal troops, to

protect the African-American students for the rest of the academic year. He thus became, albeit reluctantly, the first president since Reconstruction to use federal troops to enforce the rights of blacks. Local authorities, however, shut down Little Rock's public schools the next year, and by decade's end, fewer than 1 percent of African-American students in the Deep South attended desegregated schools.

Clearly, court victories alone would not end Jim Crow. Nor would weak legislation. The Civil Rights Act of 1957, the first since Reconstruction, established a permanent commission on civil rights with broad investigatory powers, but did little to guarantee the ballot to blacks; and the Civil Rights Act of 1960 only slightly strengthened the first measure's enforcement provisions. At best, these bills implied a changing view of race relations by the federal government, which further encouraged blacks to fight for their rights.



LITTLE ROCK, 1957 Elizabeth Eckford, age fifteen, one of the nine black students to desegregate Central High School, endures abuse on her way to school, September 4, 1957. Such scenes of angry whites jeering, screaming, and threatening African-American students were televised to the nation, showing the human suffering caused by racist hatred in the South. By so doing, television made Americans aware of the stark consequences of racism. Forty years later, the young white woman shouting insults in this picture asked for forgiveness. (*AP Images/Arkansas Democrat/Will Counts*)

The *Brown* decision and the Southern Manifesto

On May 17, 1954, Chief Justice Earl Warren delivered the unanimous opinion of the Supreme Court in *Brown v. Board of Education*. Less than a year later, more than a hundred Senators

and Congressmen from the South signed a “Manifesto” pledging themselves “to use all lawful means to bring about a reversal of this decision.” Both documents are excerpted here.

From the Court’s opinion: These cases come to us from the States of Kansas, South Carolina, Virginia, and Delaware. They are premised on different facts and different local conditions, but a common legal question justifies their consideration together in this consolidated opinion.

In each of the cases, minors of the Negro race, through their legal representatives, seek the aid of the courts in obtaining admission to the public schools of their community on a non-segregated basis. In each instance, they had been denied admission to schools attended by white children under laws requiring or permitting segregation according to race.... The plaintiffs contend that segregated public schools are not “equal” and cannot be made “equal,” and that hence they are deprived of the equal protection of the laws....

We come then to the question presented: Does segregation of children in public schools solely on the basis of race, even though the physical facilities and other “tangible” factors may be equal, deprive the children of the minority group of equal educational opportunities? We believe that it does.... To separate them from others of similar age and qualifications solely because of their race generates a feeling of inferiority as to their status in the community that may affect their hearts and minds in a way unlikely ever to be undone....

We conclude that in the field of public education the doctrine of “separate but equal” has no place. Separate educational facilities are inherently unequal. Therefore, we hold that the plaintiffs and others similarly situated for whom the actions have been brought are, by reason of the segregation complained of, deprived of the equal protection of the laws guaranteed by the Fourteenth Amendment.

From the “Southern Manifesto”: We regard the decision of the Supreme Court in the school cases as a clear abuse of judicial power. It climaxes a trend in the Federal Judiciary undertaking to legislate, in derogation of the authority of

Congress, and to encroach upon the reserved rights of the States and the people.

The original Constitution does not mention education. Neither does the 14th amendment nor any other amendment. The debates preceding the submission of the 14th amendment clearly show that there was no intent that it should affect the system of education maintained by the States.

The very Congress which proposed the amendment subsequently provided for segregated schools in the District of Columbia....

This interpretation [upholding “separate but equal” in *Plessy v. Ferguson*], restated time and again, became a part of the life of the people of many of the States and confirmed their habits, customs, traditions, and way of life. It is founded on elemental humanity and common-sense, for parents should not be deprived by Government of the right to direct the lives and education of their own children.

Though there has been no constitutional amendment or act of Congress changing this established legal principle almost a century old, the Supreme Court of the United States, with no legal basis for such action, undertook to exercise naked judicial power and substituted their personal political and social ideas for the established law of the land.

This unwarranted exercise of power by the Court, contrary to the Constitution, is creating chaos and confusion in the States principally affected. It is destroying the amicable relations between the white and Negro races that have been created through 90 years of patient effort by the good people of both races. It has planted hatred and suspicion where there had been heretofore friendship and understanding.

Source: *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, United States Reports*, 347 U.S. 483 (1954); and “The Southern Manifesto: Declaration of Constitutional Principles,” *Congressional Record*, 84th Congress, 2nd Session (March 12, 1956).

QUESTIONS

1. Upon what bases do the contrary views of the Supreme Court and the “Southern Manifesto” rest?
2. Who do you think has the better argument, and why?



Go to the website at www.cengage.com/history/boyerending7e for additional primary sources on this period.

Mass Protest in Montgomery

To sweep away the separate but rarely equal Jim Crow facilities in the South, African-Americans turned to new tactics, organizations, and leaders. They utilized nonviolent direct-action protest to engage large numbers of blacks in their own freedom struggle and to arouse white America's conscience.

In the 1950s, racism still touched even the smallest details of daily life. In Montgomery, Alabama, black bus riders had to surrender their seats so that no white rider would stand. Although they were more than three-quarters of all passengers, African-Americans had to pay their fares at the front of the bus, leave, and reenter through the back door, sit only in the rear, and then give up their seats to any standing white passengers.

On December 1, 1955, **Rosa Parks**, for many years an officer of the Montgomery NAACP and a veteran of civil rights protests in the 1930s and 1940s, refused to get up so that a white man could sit. "I was not tired physically," she later wrote. "No, the only tired I was, was tired of giving in." Her arrest sparked Jo

Ann Robinson of the Women's Political Council, and other blacks who had been engaged in the freedom struggle in Montgomery, to propose a boycott of the buses—the beginning of the mass phase of the civil-rights movement. They founded the Montgomery Improvement Association (MIA) to organize the protest, and elected **Martin Luther King, Jr.**, a twenty-seven-year-old African-American minister, to lead the boycott. "There comes a time when people get tired," declared King, articulating the anger of Montgomery blacks, "tired of being segregated and humiliated; tired of being kicked about by the brutal feet of oppression." The time had come, he continued, to cease being patient "with anything less than freedom and justice." "My soul has been tired for a long time," an old woman told a minister who had stopped his car to offer her a ride; "now my feet are tired, and my soul is resting." Montgomery African-Americans trudged the streets, organized car pools, and raised thousands of dollars to carry on the fight, and when city leaders would not budge, blacks persisted for more than a year until the Supreme Court ordered the buses desegregated.



ROSA PARKS BEING BOOKED Rosa Parks's arrest for refusing to give up her seat to a white man and move to the back of the bus inspired Montgomery's black leaders to strike a blow for freedom—to call for a boycott of the city bus system in protest. The massive response by the city's black community sparked the nonviolent civil disobedience phase of the struggle against white supremacy. (AP Images)

The Montgomery bus boycott demonstrated African-American strength and determination. It shattered the myth that African-Americans approved of segregation and that only outside agitators opposed Jim Crow. It affirmed the possibility of social change and inspired protests elsewhere in the South. It vaulted Dr. King, whose oratory simultaneously inspired black activism and touched white consciences, into the national spotlight. As no one before, King presented the case for black rights in a vocabulary that echoed both the Bible and the freedom values of the Founding Fathers.

King's philosophy of civil disobedience fused the spirit of Christianity with the strategy of achieving racial justice by nonviolent resistance. Casting aside the legalistic strategies of the NAACP, direct action gave every African-American an opportunity to demonstrate the moral evil of racial discrimination. King's insistence on nonviolence also diminished the likelihood of bloodshed. Preaching that blacks must lay their bodies on the line to provoke crises that would force whites to confront their racism, King urged his followers to love their enemies. By so doing, he believed, blacks would convert their oppressors and bring "redemption and reconciliation." In 1957, King and a group of black ministers formed the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) "to carry on nonviolent crusades against the evils of second-class citizenship." Yet more than on leaders, the movement's triumphs in the decade ahead would depend on the thousands of ordinary people who marched, rallied, and demonstrated extraordinarily in grassroots protest movements.

New Tactics for a New Decade

Foreshadowing the massive grass-roots activism to come, four black college students in Greensboro, North Carolina, entered the local Woolworth's on February 1, 1960, and sat down at the whites-only lunch counter, defying segregation. "We don't serve colored here," the waitress replied when the freshmen ordered coffee and doughnuts. The blacks remained seated. They would not be moved.

Impatient yet hopeful, the students would not accept the inequality their parents had endured. Inspired by the earlier black struggles for justice, as well as by successful African independence movements, they vowed to sit-in until they were served. Six months later, after prolonged sit-ins, boycotts, and demonstrations by hundreds of students, and violent white resistance, Greensboro's civic leaders grudgingly allowed blacks to sit down at hitherto segregated restaurants and be served.

Meanwhile, the courageous example of the Greensboro "coffee party" catalyzed similar sit-ins throughout the border states and Upper South.

Black students confronted humiliations and violence: they endured beatings, cigarette-burnings, tear-gassing, and jailing in their sit-ins to desegregate eating facilities, as well as in their "kneel ins" in churches, "sleep ins" in motel lobbies, "wade ins" on restricted beaches, "read ins" at public libraries, "play ins" at city parks, and "watch ins" at segregated movie theaters. Yet they stayed true to nonviolent principles and refused to retaliate.

The determination of the students transformed the struggle for racial equality. Their activism and commitment emboldened black adults and other youths to act. Their assertiveness desegregated facilities and generated a sense of self-esteem and strength. "I myself desegregated a lunch counter, not somebody else, not some big man, some powerful man, but little me," claimed a student. By year's end, nearly fifty thousand people had participated in demonstrations, desegregating lunch counters and other public facilities in 126 southern cities. Each victory convinced others that "nothing can stop us now."

Newly encouraged and emboldened, the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), which had been founded in WWII, organized a "freedom ride" through the Deep South in spring 1961 to dramatize the flouting of federal court decisions banning segregation in interstate transportation facilities. It aroused white wrath. Mobs beat the Freedom Riders in Anniston, Alabama, burning their bus, and mauled the protestors in Birmingham, making the **Freedom Rides** front-page news. A week later, scores of racist southerners in Montgomery beat Freedom Riders with bats and iron chains, generating international publicity and indignation, which ultimately forced the Interstate Commerce Commission to require the desegregation of all interstate carriers and terminals.

Many of the Freedom Riders were members of the **Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC)**. Formed in April 1960 by participants in the sit-ins, SNCC (known as "Snick") stressed both the nonviolent civil disobedience strategy of Martin Luther King, Jr., and the need to stimulate local activism and leadership. Within months, SNCC volunteers spread out into Mississippi, organizing voting-rights campaigns and sit-ins, and in fall 1961 it chose Albany, Georgia, as the site of a campaign to desegregate public facilities and secure the vote. Despite King's involvement, wily local authorities avoided the overt violence that had won the freedom riders national sympathy. The Albany movement collapsed; but the lesson of Albany, and of the Freedom Rides, had been learned: only the provocation of vicious white racist violence generated national publicity and forced the federal government to intervene to protect the rights of African-Americans. The young activists who learned that lesson and how to use the media skillfully would chart the course of the 1960s.

1944	Servicemen's Readjustment Act (GI Bill).	1955 (Cont.)	Elvis Presley ignites rock-n-roll. James Dean stars in <i>Rebel Without a Cause</i> . Montgomery bus boycott begins.
1946	ENIAC, the first electronic computer, begins operation.	1956	Interstate Highway Act.
1947	Levittown, New York, development started. Jackie Robinson breaks major league baseball's color line. President's Committee on Civil Rights issues <i>To Secure These Rights</i> .	1957	Little Rock school-desegregation crisis. Soviet Union launches <i>Sputnik</i> . Peak of baby boom (4.3 million births). Southern Christian Leadership Conference founded.
1948	Bell Labs develops the transistor.	1958	National Defense Education Act. National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) founded.
1950	<i>Asociación Nacional México-Americana</i> established.	1960	Sit-ins begin. Suburban population almost equals that of central city.
1953	Earl Warren appointed chief justice. Operation Wetback begins.	1961	Freedom Rides begin.
1954	<i>Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka</i> . <i>Father Knows Best</i> begins on TV.		
1955	Salk polio vaccine developed. AFL-CIO merger.		

CONCLUSION

A far more complex era than that implied in the stereotype of the “nifty fifties,” the decade encompassed contradictions. Although mightier than any nation had ever been and basking in a level of material comfort previously unknown in world history, many Americans felt uneasiness as the Cold War continued and prosperity brought unsettling changes.

The postwar era was one of unparalleled affluence for most Americans. Building on the accumulated savings and pent-up demand for consumer goods after the Second World War, high levels of government spending, the GI Bill, and new technologies that increased productivity spurred an economic boom. Prosperity further enriched the rich, transformed the working class into the middle class, and left the poor isolated on a remote island of deprivation and powerlessness in “the other America.”

Overall, the postwar United States, with its burgeoning suburbia and cornucopia of consumerism, seemed the very model of contentment and complacency—what Americans considered the good life. Despite the criticism by the Beats and intellectuals of conservatism and conformity, despite the alienation and rebelliousness of young people

questioning their parents' embrace of the status quo, most middle-class whites ignored the seeds of disquiet along with the inequities in American society. Enjoying their private pleasures, they rejected radicalism, condoned the income disparity and persistent prejudice minorities encountered, extolled a benign and optimistic religion, lauded mass culture, and idealized traditional gender roles, domesticity, and togetherness. Busy working and consuming, they left for a future decade the festering problems of hidden poverty, urban decay, and racial injustice.

Still, the cracks in the picture of a placid people widened. Unrest competed with consensus. Although racism remained omnipresent, the seeds of struggle, planted in the 1930s and the Second World War, flowered in new campaigns to end racial discrimination and segregation. In the courts, the NAACP ceased requesting that separate facilities be equal and instead insisted that true equality required desegregation. And in the streets, Martin Luther King, Jr., SNCC, and CORE employed the techniques of nonviolent civil disobedience to attack Jim Crow, bringing some gains and stimulating an insurgency that spurred further challenges to make the nation live up to its ideals.

KEY TERMS

Jackie Robinson (p. 823)

GI Bill (p. 825)

Sunbelt (p. 833)

baby-boom generation (p. 836)

Dr. Benjamin Spock (p. 837)

Billy Graham (p. 837)

Sputnik (p. 839)

Elvis Presley (p. 840)

Beats (p. 840)

bracero program (p. 843)

President's Committee on Civil

Rights (p. 845)

Earl Warren (p. 845)

Brown v. Board of Education of

Topeka (p. 845)

Southern Manifesto (p. 846)

Rosa Parks (p. 848)

Martin Luther King, Jr. (p. 848)

Freedom Rides (p. 849)

Student Nonviolent Coordinating

Committee (SNCC) (p. 849)

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