**The Postwar Boom**

**The Soldiers Come Home**

The late 1940s and early 1950s were a period of astonishing economic growth in the United States. One British Prime Minister called the period in America, “the greatest prosperity the world has ever known.” A combination of political, economic, and social factors contributed to this postwar prosperity.

**Demobilization**

At the height of World War II, there were eight million American men and women in uniform. American factories were producing enormous numbers of tanks, aircraft, battleships, guns, and ammunition as well as goods to supply the Allies. Once the war ended, millions of American soldiers returned home and factories were converted back to peacetime uses. This caused some unemployment increases and a struggling economy. However, after a brief period of adjustment, the economy boomed, people settled back to work, and began having families.

**The G.I. Bill of Rights**

To help ease veterans’ return to civilian life, Congress passed the Servicemen’s Readjustment Act, or the GI Bill of Rights, in 1944. In addition to encouraging veterans to get an education by paying part of their tuition, the GI Bill guaranteed them a year’s worth of unemployment benefits while job hunting. It also offered low interest, federally guaranteed loans. Millions of young families used these benefits to buy homes and farms or to establish businesses. Every veteran who served at least 90 days qualified to receive these benefits. More than two million veterans used the benefits to go to college and another five million used it for other forms of training.

**The Baby Boom**

As soldiers returned from World War II and settled into family life, they contributed to an unprecedented population explosion known as the baby boom. During the late 1940s and through the early 1960s, the birthrate (number of live births per 1,000 people) in the United States soared. At the height of the baby boom, in 1957, one American infant was born every seven seconds—a total of 4,308,000 that year. The result was the largest generation in the nation’s history. Contributing to the size of the baby-boom generation were many factors, including: reunion of husbands and wives after the war, decreasing marriage age, desirability of large families, confidence in continued economic prosperity, and advances in medicine.

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| How did the lives of Americans change after World War II? |

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| How did the Baby Boom affect American life in the 1950s? |

**Postwar Economic Policies**

**Truman’s Fair Deal**

Truman continued proposing an ambitious economic program. Truman’s Fair Deal, an extension of Roosevelt’s New Deal, included proposals for a nationwide system of compulsory health insurance and a crop-subsidy system to provide a steady income for farmers. In Congress, some Northern Democrats joined Dixiecrats and Republicans in defeating both measures.

In other instances, however, Truman’s ideas prevailed. Congress raised the hourly minimum wage from 40 cents to 75 cents, extended Social Security coverage to about 10 million more people, and initiated flood control and irrigation projects. Congress also provided financial support for cities to clear out slums and build 810,000 housing units for low-income families.

One economic problem that Truman had to address was strikes. Facing higher prices and lower wages, 4.5 million discontented workers, including steelworkers, coal miners, and railroad workers, went on strike in 1946. Although he generally supported organized labor, Truman refused to let strikes cripple the nation. He threatened to draft the striking workers and to order them as soldiers to stay on the job. He authorized the federal government to seize the mines, and he threatened to take control of the railroads as well. Truman appeared before Congress and asked for the authority to draft the striking railroad workers into the army. Before he could finish his speech, the unions gave in.

Disgusted by shortages of goods, rising inflation, and labor strikes, Americans were ready for a change. The Republicans asked the public, “Had enough?” Voters gave their answer at the polls: in the 1946 congressional elections, the Republican Party won control of both the Senate and the House of Representatives for the first time since 1928. The new 80th Congress ignored Truman’s domestic proposals. In 1947, Congress passed the Taft-Hartley Act over Truman’s veto. This bill overturned many rights won by the unions under the New Deal.

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| In what ways did Truman succeed as a President? | In what ways did Truman struggle as a President? |
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**America-The World’s Leading Producer**

Most economists who had forecast a postwar depression were proved wrong because they had failed to consider consumers’ pent-up accumulation of needs and wants. People had gone without many goods for so long that by the late 1940s, with more than $135 billion in savings from defense work, service pay, and investments in war bonds, Americans suddenly had money to spend. They snatched up everything from automobiles to houses. After a brief period of postwar economic readjustment, the American economy boomed. The demand for goods and services outstripped the supply and increased production, which created new jobs.

The Cold War also contributed to economic growth. Concern over Soviet expansion kept American defense spending high and people employed. Foreign-aid programs, such as the Marshall Plan, provided another boost to the American economy. By helping nations in Western Europe recover from the war, the United States helped itself by creating strong foreign markets for its exports. With less than 7% of the world’s population, the United States became responsible for 50% of its manufacturing output. In these years, Americans produced 57% of the world’s steel, 62% of its oil, 80% of its automobiles, and 43% of its electricity.

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| What Factors contributed to the American postwar economic boom? |

**Housing and the Growth of Suburbs**

In 1945 and 1946, returning veterans faced a severe housing shortage. Many families lived in cramped apartments or moved in with relatives. In response to this housing crisis, developers like William Levitt and Henry Kaiser used efficient, assembly-line methods to mass-produce houses. Levitt, who bragged that his company could build a house in 16 minutes, offered homes in small residential communities surrounding cities, called suburbs, for less than $7,000. Levitt’s first postwar development—rows of standardized homes built on treeless lots—was located on New York’s Long Island and named Levittown. These homes looked exactly alike, and certain zoning laws ensured that they would stay the same. Despite their rigid conformity, Americans loved the openness and small-town feel to the planned suburbs. With the help of the GI Bill and the Federal Housing Administration, many veterans and their families moved in and cultivated a new lifestyle. Between 1945 and 1960, American home ownership increased by one-half.

Suburbs, residential communities with single family homes, private lawns, and plenty of fresh air on the outskirts of cities, began to grow faster than the cities they surrounded. The movement of middle-income families from cities to suburbs contributed to the declining tax base in the nation’s inner cities. Once vibrant downtown areas became increasingly poor as businesses and wealthy residents left these areas for the suburbs.

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| What affect do you think the suburbs will have on race relations between whites and non-whites? |

**Truman and Civil Rights**

Problems arose not only in the economy but in the very fabric of society. After World War II, a wave of racial violence erupted in the South. Many African Americans, particularly those who had served in the armed forces during the war, demanded their rights as citizens. Truman put his presidency on the line for civil rights. “I am asking for equality of opportunity for all human beings,” he said, “. . . and if that ends up in my failure to be reelected, that failure will be in a good cause.” In 1946, Truman created a President’s Commission on Civil Rights. Following the group’s recommendations, Truman asked Congress for several measures including a federal anti-lynching law, a ban on the poll tax as a voting requirement, and a permanent civil rights commission.

Congress refused to pass these measures, or a measure to integrate the armed forces. As a result, Truman himself took action. In July 1948, he issued an executive order for integration of the armed forces, calling for “equality of treatment and opportunity in the armed forces without regard to race, color, religion, or national origin.” In addition, he ordered an end to discrimination in the hiring of government employees. The Supreme Court also ruled that the lower courts could not bar African Americans from residential neighborhoods. These actions represented the beginnings of a federal commitment to dealing with racial issues.

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| How did Truman use his executive power to advance Civil Rights? |

**The Eisenhower Years, 1953-1960**

Dwight Eisenhower was elected President in November of 1952. Despite being the first Republican President in 20 years, he preserved the New Deal programs of Presidents Roosevelt and Truman. At the same time, he tried to reduce government spending and to promote American business interests. President Eisenhower’s style of governing differed from that of the Democrats. His approach, which he called “dynamic conservatism,” was also known as “Modern Republicanism.” He called for government to be “conservative when it comes to money and liberal when it comes to human beings.”

Eisenhower followed a middle-of-the road course and avoided many controversial issues. He accomplished much on the domestic scene. Shortly after becoming president, Eisenhower pressed hard for programs that would bring around a balanced budget and a cut in taxes. During his two terms, Ike’s administration raised the minimum wage, extended Social Security and unemployment benefits, increased funding for public housing, and backed the creation of interstate highways and the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare. His popularity soared, and he won reelection in 1956.

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| Why do you think most Americans went along with Eisenhower’s conservative approach to domestic policy? |

**The Interstate Highway System**

One of Eisenhower’s greatest achievements was the Interstate Highway System. During World War II, Eisenhower was impressed by the German highway system and its role in transporting troops. He believed America needed a similar system. In 1956, Congress passed the Federal Highway Act, which led to the construction of the Interstate Highway System. The system still unites the country to this day. These highways contributed to prosperity and encouraged migration to the suburbs. With access to cars, affordable gas, and new highways, more and more Americans hit the road. They flocked to mountains, lakes, national parks, historic sites, and amusement parks for family vacations. Disneyland, which opened in California in July 1955, attracted 3 million visitors the next year.

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| What problems do you think were created by the increased travel with the Interstate Highway System? |

**The Age of Conformity**

While franchises like McDonald’s helped standardize what people ate, some American workers found themselves becoming standardized as well. Employees who were well paid and held secure jobs in thriving companies sometimes paid a price for economic advancement: a loss of their individuality. In general, businesses did not want creative thinkers, rebels, or anyone who would rock the corporate boat.

At home, a growing number of Americans lived in suburbs in houses that were similar or identical to those of their neighbors. Many suburban communities established their own rules. These rules sometimes enforced racial, ethnic, and religious uniformity. White residents might have to sign an agreement promising not to sell their home to a person of color. Universities has quotas limiting Jewish applicants.

Cars, appliances, clothing, and food were mass produced so everyone had similar goods. Newspapers, magazines, movies, and radio created a new mass culture that pushed the virtues of the middle-class family. Popular TV shows depicted what the average family should be: white, middle class, living in the suburbs, with a father at work, the mother at home, and two or three children. Unusual ideas or independent thinking was frowned upon. Fear of Communism greatly strengthened conformity.

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| How much conformity do you think exists today? |

**Eisenhower and Civil Rights**

Eisenhower could not completely sidestep a persistent domestic issue—civil rights—that gained national attention due to court rulings and acts of civil disobedience in the mid-1950s. The most significant judicial action occurred in 1954, when the Supreme Court ruled in *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* that public schools must be racially integrated. In a landmark act of civil disobedience a year later, a black seamstress named Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat on a bus to a white man. Her arrest sparked a boycott of the entire Montgomery, Alabama, bus system. The civil rights movement had entered a new era.

In 1957, Congress passed a civil rights bill to protect voting rights. That same year Eisenhower would order the National Guard to protect nine black students while they were integrated into a white only school in Little Rock Arkansas. However, Eisenhower was reluctant to use federal power to intervene in civil rights issues of a state.

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| Why do you think Eisenhower didn’t want to use his power to help Civil Rights more than he did? |

**A Subculture Emerges**

Although the mass media found a wide audience for their portrayals of mostly white popular culture, dissenting voices rang out throughout the 1950s. The messages of the beat movement in literature, and of rock ‘n’ roll in music, clashed with the tidy suburban view of life and set the stage for the counterculture that would burst forth in the late 1960s.

**The Beat Movement**

Centered in San Francisco, Los Angeles, and New York City’s Greenwich Village, the beat movement expressed the social and literary nonconformity of artists, poets, and writers. The word beat originally meant “weary” but came to refer as well to a musical beat. Followers of this movement, called beats or beatniks, lived nonconformist lives. They tended to shun regular work and sought a higher consciousness through Zen Buddhism, music, and, sometimes, drugs. Many beat poets and writers believed in imposing as little structure as possible on their artistic works, which often had a free, open form. They read their poetry aloud in coffeehouses and other gathering places. Works that capture the essence of this era include Allen Ginsberg’s long, free-verse poem, Howl, published in 1956, and Jack Kerouac’s novel of the movement, On the Road, published in 1957. This novel describes a nomadic search across America for authentic experiences, people, and values.

Many mainstream Americans found this lifestyle less enchanting. *Look* magazine proclaimed, “There’s nothing really new about the beat philosophy. It consists merely of the average American’s value scale—turned inside out. The goals of the Beat are not watching TV, not wearing gray flannel, not owning a home in the suburbs, and especially—not working.” Nonetheless, the beatnik attitudes, way of life, and literature attracted the attention of the media and fired the imaginations of many college students.

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| Why do you think the beat movement became popular amongst the younger generation? |

**The Youth Culture and Rock and Roll**

While beats expressed themselves in unstructured literature, musicians in the 1950s added electronic instruments to traditional blues music, creating rhythm and blues. In 1951, a Cleveland, Ohio, radio disc jockey named Alan Freed was among the first to play the music. This audience was mostly white but the music usually was produced by African-American musicians. Freed’s listeners responded enthusiastically, and Freed began promoting the new music that grew out of rhythm and blues and country and pop. He called the music rock ‘n’ roll, a name that has come to mean music that’s both black and white—music that is American.

Not surprisingly, many adults condemned rock ‘n’ roll. They believed that the new music would lead to teenage delinquency and immorality. In a few cities, rock ‘n’ roll concerts were banned. But despite this controversy, television and radio exposure helped bring rock ‘n’ roll into the mainstream, and it became more acceptable by the end of the decade. Record sales, which were 189 million in 1950, grew with the popularity of rock ‘n’ roll, reaching 600 million in 1960.

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| What is similar between the beat movement and Rock and Roll? | What is different between the beat movement and Rock and Roll? |
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**Minorities in a Post War Society**

**Women**

During the 1950s, the role of homemaker and mother was glorified in popular magazines, movies, and TV programs such as Father Knows Best and The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet. Time magazine described the homemaker as “the key figure in all suburbia, the thread that weaves between family and community—the keeper of the suburban dream.” In contrast to the ideal portrayed in the media, however, some women, like Carol Freeman, who spoke of her discontentment, were not happy with their roles; they felt isolated, bored, and unfulfilled. According to one survey in the 1950s, more than one-fifth of suburban wives were dissatisfied with their lives.

The number of women working outside the home rose steadily during the decade. By 1960, almost 40 percent of mothers with children between ages 6 and 17 held paying jobs. But having a job didn’t necessarily contribute to a woman’s happiness. A woman’s career opportunities tended to be limited to fields such as nursing, teaching, and office support, which paid less than other professional and business positions did. Women also earned less than men for comparable work. Although increasing numbers of women attended four-year colleges, they generally received little financial, academic, or psychological encouragement to pursue their goals.

**Mexicans**

Many Mexicans had become U.S. citizens during the 19th century, when the United States had annexed the Southwest after the War with Mexico. Large numbers of Mexicans had also crossed the border to work in the United States during and after World War I.

When the United States entered World War II, the shortage of agricultural laborers spurred the federal government to initiate, in 1942, a program in which Mexican braceros (brE-sârPIs), or hired hands, were allowed into the United States to harvest crops. Hundreds of thousands of braceros entered the United States on a short-term basis between 1942 and 1947. When their employment was ended, the braceros were expected to return to Mexico. However, many remained in the United States illegally. In addition, hundreds of thousands of Mexicans entered the country illegally to escape poor economic conditions in Mexico.

One of the more notorious instances of prejudice against Mexican Americans involved the burial of Felix Longoria. Longoria was a Mexican-American World War II hero who had been killed in the Philippines. The only undertaker in his hometown in Texas refused to provide Longoria’s family with funeral services. In the wake of the Longoria incident, outraged Mexican Americans stepped up their efforts to stamp out discrimination. In 1948, Mexican-American veterans organized the G.I. Forum. Meanwhile, activist Ignacio Lopez founded the Unity League of California to register Mexican-American voters and to promote candidates who would represent their interests.

**Native Americans**

Native Americans also continued to fight for their rights and identity. When the war ended, Native Americans stopped receiving family allotments and wages. Outsiders also grabbed control of tribal lands, primarily to exploit their deposits of minerals, oil, and timber.

In 1953, the federal government announced that it would give up its responsibility for Native American tribes. This new approach, known as the termination policy, eliminated federal economic support, discontinued the reservation system, and distributed tribal lands among individual Native Americans. In response to the termination policy, the Bureau of Indian Affairs began a voluntary relocation program to help Native Americans resettle in cities. The termination policy was a dismal failure, however. Although the Bureau of Indian Affairs helped relocate 35,000 Native Americans to urban areas during the 1950s, they were often unable to find jobs in their new locations because of poor training and racial prejudice. They were also left without access to medical care when federal programs were abolished. In 1963, the termination policy was abandoned.

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| What seems to be the biggest problem facing all minorities in Postwar America? |
| Which minority do you think had it the hardest? Explain your answer. |

**Postwar Florida**

The period 1945-1950 sparked the first postwar boom. Highway and airport construction had accelerated so that, by war's end, Florida had an up-to-date transportation network ready for use by residents and the visitors who seemed to arrive in an endless stream. Buoyed by prosperity and the lure of unhurried beaches and warm Februaries, migrants began to pour into the Sunshine State. Florida’s population grew from 1.9 million residents in 1940 to 2.7 million inhabitants a decade later.

World War II served as lynchpin and springboard to the population explosion. DDT, brewed in Central Florida laboratories, was sprayed liberally to rid the bayous and wetlands of voracious mosquitoes. Air conditioning, available only in fancy movie theaters in 1940, made its debut in window units in 1951. By 1950, the residents of Miami and Jacksonville watched the first TV signals beamed in Florida. In 1947, Newt Perry opened Weeki Wachee Springs on a lonely highway in sparsely populated Hernando County. Annually, hundreds of thousands of visitors made the trek south to enjoy tourist attractions such as Cypress Gardens, Marineland, and Silver Springs.

Since World War II, Florida's economy also has become more diverse. Tourism, cattle, citrus, and phosphate have been joined by a host of new industries that have greatly expanded the numbers of jobs available to residents. The cigar industry was booming after World War II, although mechanization actually decreased the jobs available in the field.

An unfortunate side effect of the large population increase was The Pork Chop Gang. The Pork Chop Gang was a group of 20 conservative legislators from rural areas of north Florida, who worked together to dominate the Florida legislature, especially to maintain segregation. They have been called "Florida's version of McCarthyism". They had become unusually powerful in the 1950s because the legislative districts of the state had not been redrawn to account for the massive growth of urban areas in earlier years.

Fighting against the Pork Chop Gang was a man named Harry T. Moore. In the early 1930s Moore had become state secretary for the Florida chapter of the NAACP. Through his registration activities, he greatly increased the number of members, and he worked on issues of housing and education. He investigated lynchings, filed lawsuits against voter registration barriers and white primaries, and worked for equal pay for black teachers in public schools.

Moore also led the Progressive Voters League. Following a 1944 US Supreme Court ruling against white primaries, between 1944 and 1950, he succeeded in increasing the registration of black voters in Florida to 31 percent of those eligible to vote, markedly higher than in any other Southern state. In 1946 he and his wife were fired from the public school system because of his activism; he worked full-time for the NAACP.

Harry T. Moore and his wife, Harriette Vyda Simms Moore, also an educator, were the victims of a bombing of their home in Mims, Florida on Christmas night 1951. He died in an ambulance on the way to a hospital in Seminole County while she died January 3, 1952 at the hospital in Sanford, Florida. Forensic work in 2005-6 resulted in the naming of the probable perpetrators as four Ku Klux Klan members, all long dead by the time of the investigation. The Moores were the first NAACP members to be murdered for civil rights activism; Moore has been called the first martyr of the early stage of the African-American Civil Rights Movement (1896–1954).

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| Why was Florida experiencing such a large increase in the economy after World War II? |

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| How did the Civil Rights issues in Florida mirror those of the rest of the country? |

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| Do you think Postwar prosperity was more of a positive or a negative? Write a paragraph stating your position. Defend your answer with 3 facts from this packet. |