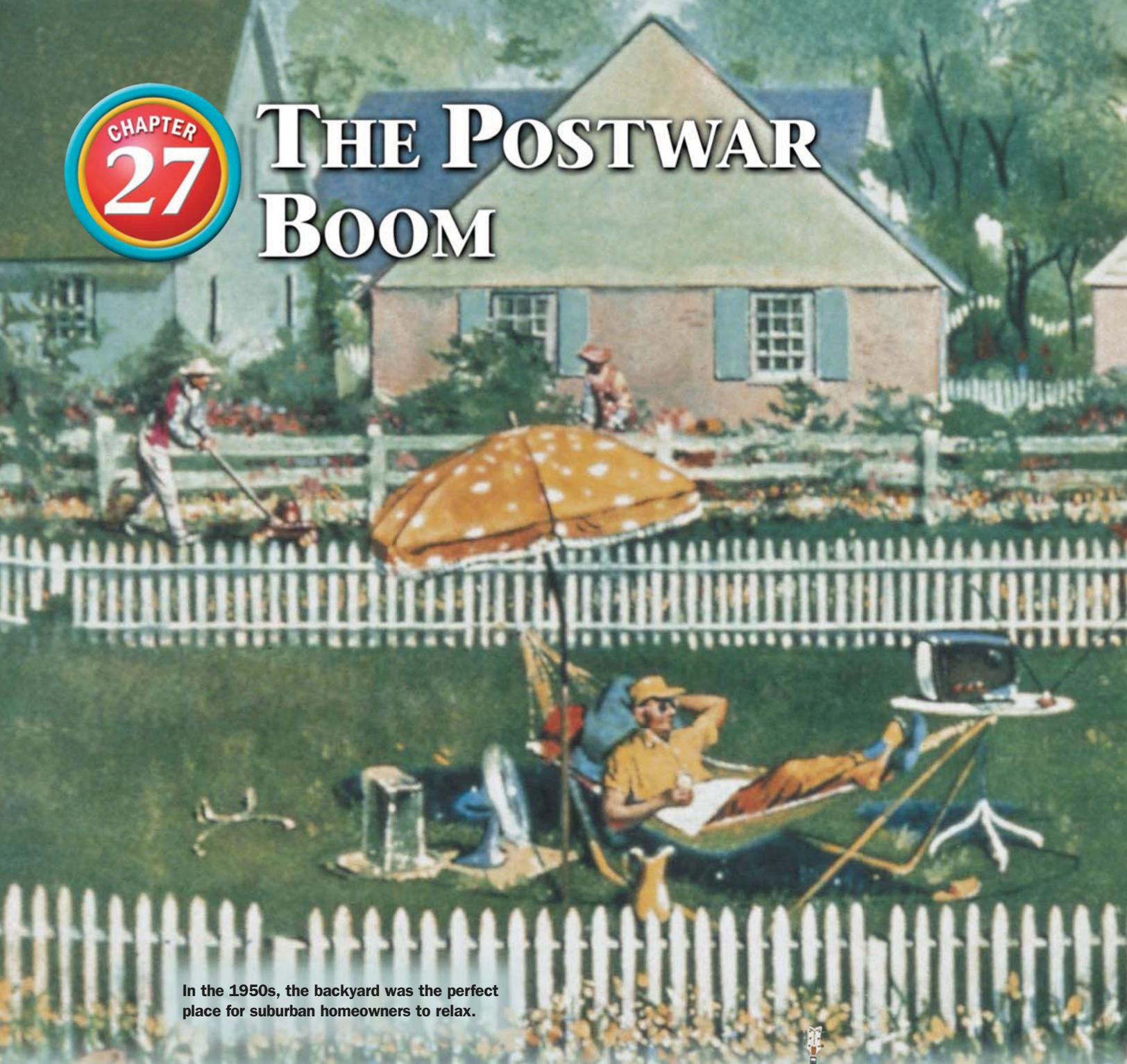


CHAPTER  
**27**

# THE POSTWAR BOOM



In the 1950s, the backyard was the perfect place for suburban homeowners to relax.

**1946** Baby boom begins.

**1947** Jackie Robinson integrates major league baseball.



**1948** Harry S. Truman is elected president.

**1950's** Disc jockey Alan Freed is the first to use the term "rock 'n' roll" on the air.



**1952** Dwight D. Eisenhower is elected president.

USA  
WORLD

**1946**

**1948**

**1950**

**1952**

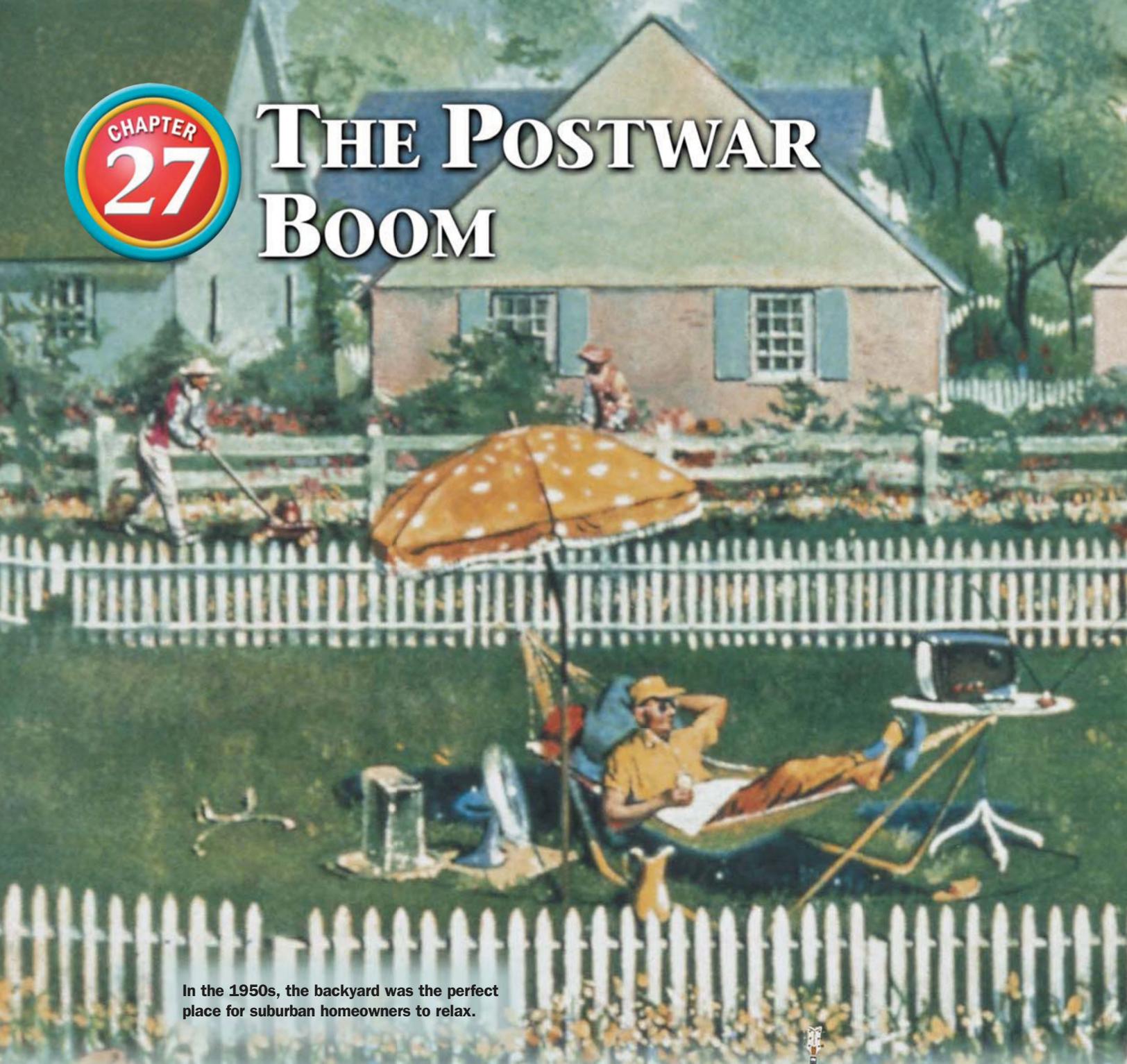
**1949** Mao Zedong's Communist forces gain control of China.

**1950** Korean War begins.



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WORLD

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**1948**

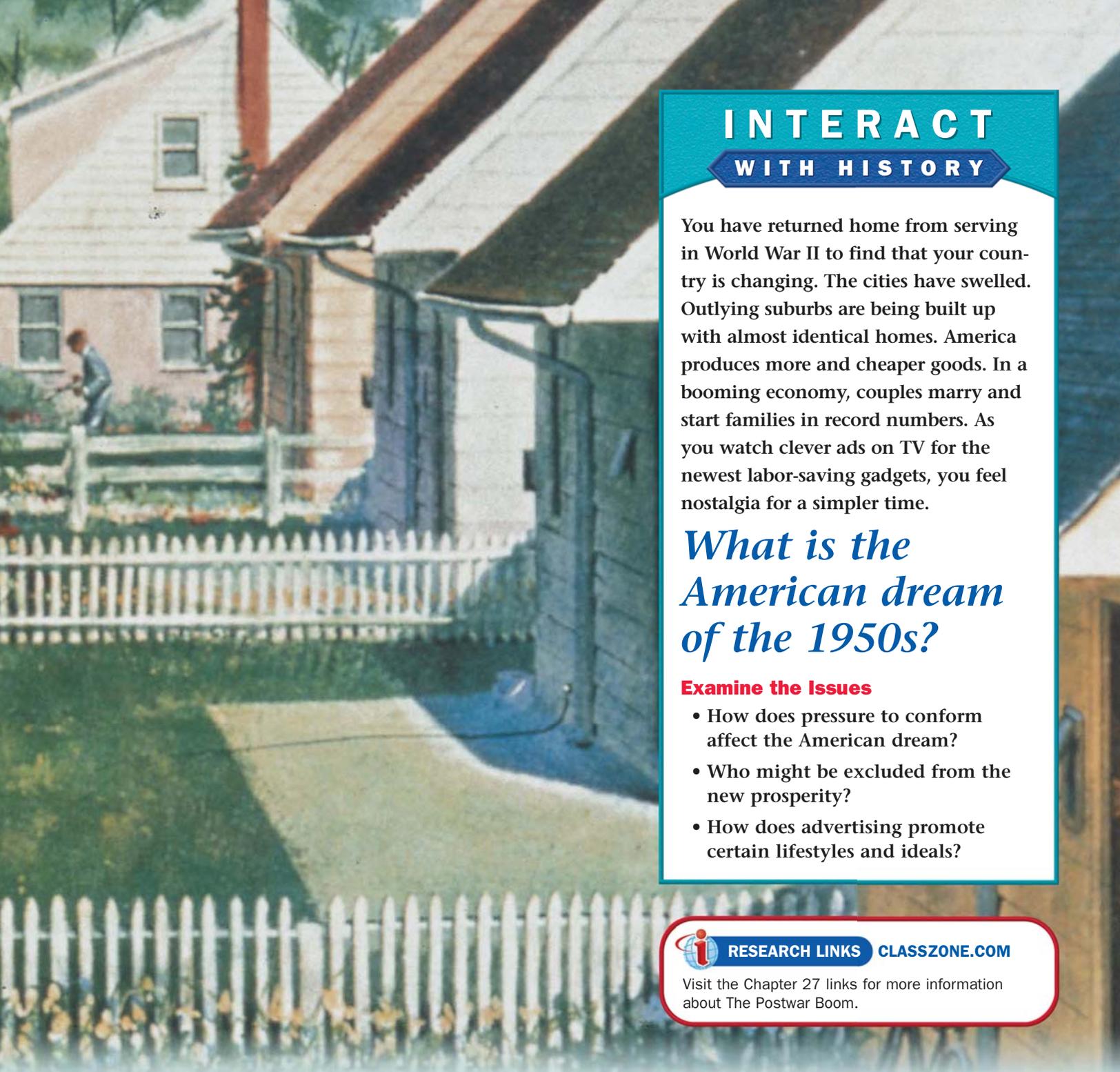
**1950**

**1952**

**1949** Mao Zedong's Communist forces gain control of China.

**1950** Korean War begins.





# INTERACT WITH HISTORY

You have returned home from serving in World War II to find that your country is changing. The cities have swelled. Outlying suburbs are being built up with almost identical homes. America produces more and cheaper goods. In a booming economy, couples marry and start families in record numbers. As you watch clever ads on TV for the newest labor-saving gadgets, you feel nostalgia for a simpler time.

## What is the American dream of the 1950s?

### Examine the Issues

- How does pressure to conform affect the American dream?
- Who might be excluded from the new prosperity?
- How does advertising promote certain lifestyles and ideals?



RESEARCH LINKS [CLASSZONE.COM](http://CLASSZONE.COM)

Visit the Chapter 27 links for more information about The Postwar Boom.

1953 Korean War cease-fire is signed.

1954 *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* outlaws school segregation.

1956 Eisenhower is reelected.



1958 NASA—the National Aeronautics and Space Administration—is established.

1959 Alaska and Hawaii become the 49th and 50th states.

1960 John F. Kennedy is elected president.

1954

1956

1958

1960

1954 USSR opens the first small nuclear power plant.

1956 Soviets crush uprising in Hungary.

1957 Soviets launch *Sputnik I*.

1959 Fidel Castro comes to power in Cuba.



# Postwar America

## MAIN IDEA

The Truman and Eisenhower administrations led the nation to make social, economic, and political adjustments following World War II.

## WHY IT MATTERS NOW

In the years after World War II, the United States became the economic and military power that it still is today.

## Terms & Names

- GI Bill of Rights
- suburb
- Harry S. Truman
- Dixiecrat
- Fair Deal

## One American's Story

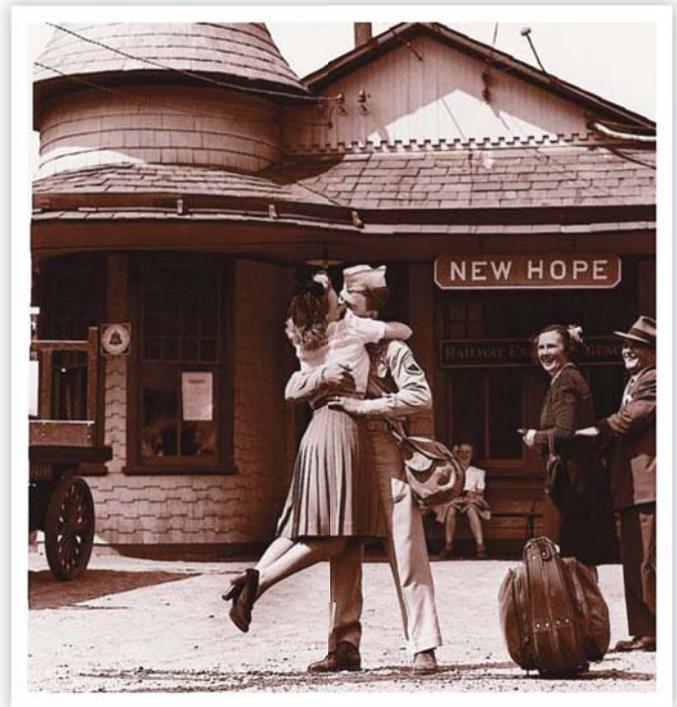
Sam Gordon had been married less than a year when he was shipped overseas in July 1943. As a sergeant in the United States Army, he fought in Belgium and France during World War II. Arriving back home in November 1945, Sam nervously anticipated a reunion with his family. A friend, Donald Katz, described Sam's reactions.

### A PERSONAL VOICE DONALD KATZ

“Sam bulld through the crowd and hailed a taxi. The cab motored north through the warm autumn day as he groped for feelings appropriate to being back home alive from a terrible war. . . . [He was] nearly panting under the weight of fear. . . . *Back home alive . . . married to a girl I haven't seen since 1943 . . . father of a child I've never seen at all.*”

— *Home Fires*

Sam Gordon met his daughter, Susan, for the first time the day he returned home from the war, and he went to work the next morning. Like many other young couples, the Gordons began to put the nightmare of the war behind them and to return to normality.



▲ GIs returned home to their families after World War II with new hope, but also with new problems.

## Readjustment and Recovery

By the summer of 1946, about 10 million men and women had been released from the armed forces. Veterans like Sam Gordon—along with the rest of American society—settled down to rebuild their lives.

**THE IMPACT OF THE GI BILL** 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.

**HOUSING CRISIS** 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, many veterans and their families moved in and cultivated a new lifestyle.

**REDEFINING THE FAMILY** Tension created by changes in men's and women's roles after the war contributed to a rising divorce rate. Traditionally, men were the breadwinners and heads of households, while women were expected to stay home and care for the family. During the war, however, about 8 million women, 75 percent of whom were married, entered the paid work force. These women supported their families and made important household decisions. Many were reluctant to give up their newfound independence when their husbands returned. Although most women did leave their jobs, by 1950 more than a million war marriages had ended in divorce.

**ECONOMIC READJUSTMENT** After World War II, the United States converted from a wartime to a peacetime economy. The U.S. government immediately canceled war contracts totaling \$35 billion. Within ten days of Japan's surrender, more than a million defense workers were laid off. Unemployment increased as veterans joined laid-off defense workers in the search for jobs. At the peak of postwar unemployment, in March 1946, nearly 3 million people were seeking work.

Rising unemployment was not the nation's only postwar economic problem, however. During the war, the Office of Price Administration (OPA) had halted inflation by imposing maximum prices on goods. When these controls ended on June 30, 1946, prices skyrocketed. In the next two weeks, the cost of consumer products soared 25 percent, double the increase of the previous three years. In some cities, consumers stood in long lines, hoping to buy scarce items, such as sugar, coffee, and beans. Prices continued to rise for the next two years until the supply of goods caught up with the demand.

While prices spiraled upward, many American workers also earned less than they had earned during the war. To halt runaway inflation and to help the nation convert to a peacetime economy, Congress eventually reestablished controls similar to the wartime controls on prices, wages, and rents. **A**



▲ The suburbs were a mass phenomenon, even on moving day.

### Background

See *unemployment rate* on page R47 in the Economics Handbook.

### MAIN IDEA

#### Identifying Problems

**A** What problems did Americans face after World War II?

**REMARKABLE RECOVERY** 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. Judging from the graphs (shown left), many Americans prospered in the 1950s in what the economist John Kenneth Galbraith called "the affluent society."

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. **B**

**MAIN IDEA**

**Analyzing Causes**

**B** What factors contributed to the American postwar economic boom?

**A Dynamic Economy**

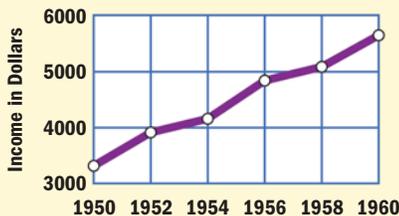
**Home Ownership**



**Automobile Registrations**



**Median Family Income**



**Savings Accounts**



Source: *Historical Statistics of the United States, Colonial times to 1970*

**SKILLBUILDER**

**Interpreting Graphs**

1. From 1950 to 1960, by what percentage did each of the economic indicators shown above increase?
2. Which years show the biggest increases for each of the graphs above?

**Meeting Economic Challenges**

Despite an impressive recovery, Americans faced a number of economic problems. Their lives had been in turmoil throughout the war, and a desire for stability made the country more conservative.

**PRESIDENT TRUMAN'S INHERITANCE** When **Harry S. Truman** suddenly became president after Franklin D. Roosevelt's death in 1945, he asked Roosevelt's widow, Eleanor, whether there was anything he could do for her. She replied, "Is there anything we can do for you? For you are the one in trouble now." In many ways, President Truman was in trouble.

**A PERSONAL VOICE HARRY S. TRUMAN**

"I don't know whether you fellows ever had a load of hay fall on you, but when they told me yesterday what had happened [Roosevelt's death], I felt like the moon, the stars, and all the planets had fallen on me."

—excerpt from a speech, April 13, 1945

Despite his lack of preparation for the job, Truman was widely viewed as honorable, down-to-earth, and self-confident. Most important of all, he had the ability to make difficult decisions and to accept full responsibility for their consequences. As the plaque on his White House desk read, "The Buck Stops Here." Truman faced two huge challenges: dealing with the rising threat of communism, as discussed in Chapter 18, and restoring the American economy to a strong footing after the war's end.

### MAIN IDEA

#### Summarizing

**C** What actions did President Truman take to avert labor strikes?

**TRUMAN FACES STRIKES** 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. **C**

**“HAD ENOUGH?”** 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.

## Social Unrest Persists

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 SUPPORTS CIVIL RIGHTS** 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 antilynching 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

#### Vocabulary

**discrimination:** treatment based on class or category rather than individual merit

**In 1947, Jackie Robinson joined the Brooklyn Dodgers, angering some fans but winning the hearts, and respect, of many others.**

## HISTORICAL SPOTLIGHT

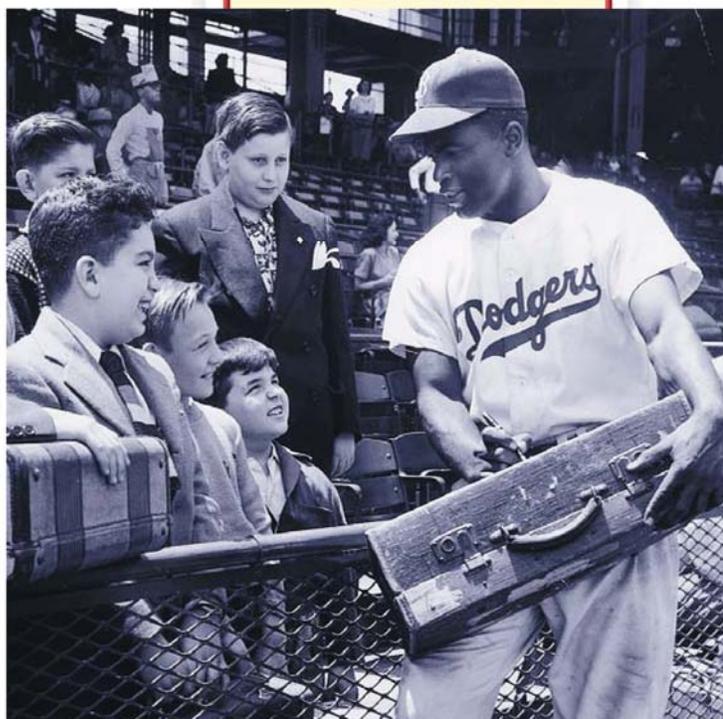
### JACKIE ROBINSON

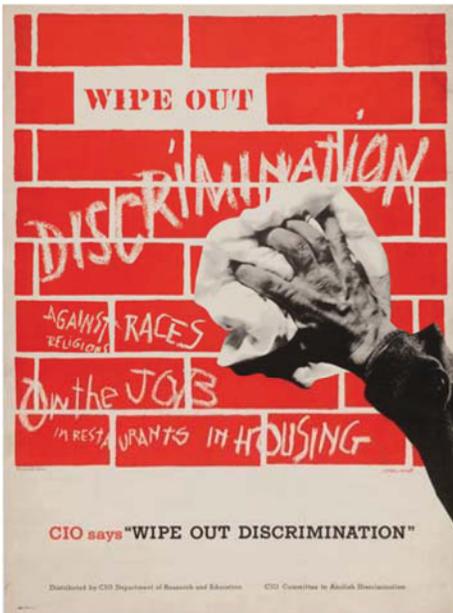
Jackie Robinson took a brave step when he turned the Brooklyn Dodgers into an integrated baseball team in 1947. But he—and the country—had a long way to go.

Unhappy fans hurled insults at Robinson from the stands. Some players on opposing teams tried to hit him with pitches or to injure him with the spikes on their shoes. He even received death threats. But he endured this with poise and restraint, saying,

“Plenty of times, I wanted to haul off when somebody insulted me for the color of my skin but I had to hold to myself. I knew I was kind of an experiment.”

In 1949, Robinson was voted the National League’s most valuable player. He later became the first African American to be inducted into the Baseball Hall of Fame.





▲ **Wipe Out Discrimination** (1949), a poster by Milton Ackoff, depicts the civil rights consciousness that angered the Dixiecrats.

African Americans from residential neighborhoods. These actions represented the beginnings of a federal commitment to dealing with racial issues. **D**

**THE 1948 ELECTION** Although many Americans blamed Truman for the nation's inflation and labor unrest, the Democrats nominated him for president in 1948. To protest Truman's emphasis on civil rights, a number of Southern Democrats—who became known as **Dixiecrats**—formed the States' Rights Democratic Party, and nominated their own presidential candidate, Governor J. Strom Thurmond of South Carolina. Discontent reigned at the far left of the Democratic spectrum as well. The former vice-president Henry A. Wallace led his supporters out of mainstream Democratic ranks to form a more liberal Progressive Party.

As the election approached, opinion polls gave the Republican candidate, New York Governor Thomas E. Dewey, a comfortable lead. Refusing to believe the polls,

Truman poured his energy into the campaign. First, he called the Republican-dominated Congress into a special session. He challenged it to pass laws supporting such elements of the Democratic Party platform as public housing, federal aid to education, a higher minimum wage, and extended Social Security coverage. Not one of these laws was passed. Then he took his campaign to the people. He traveled from one end of the country to the other by train, speaking from the rear platform in a sweeping "whistlestop campaign." Day after day, people heard the president denounce the "do-nothing, 80th Congress."

**STUNNING UPSET** Truman's "Give 'em hell, Harry" campaign worked. He won the election in a close political upset. The Democrats gained control of Congress as well, even though they suffered losses in the South, which had been solidly Democratic since Reconstruction.

**MAIN IDEA**

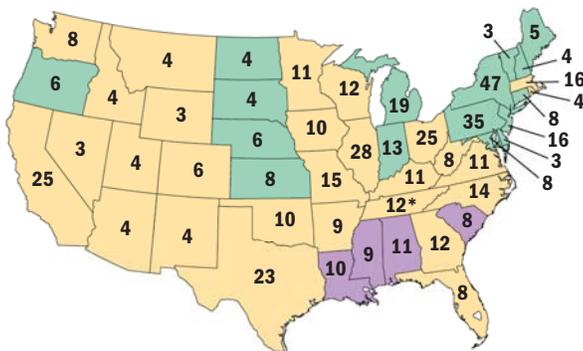
**Summarizing**

**D** How did Truman use his executive power to advance civil rights?



▶ Truman surprised the newspapers by winning the 1948 election.

**Presidential Election of 1948**



\* Tennessee — 11 electoral votes for Truman, 1 electoral vote for Thurmond

Party	Candidate	Electoral Votes	Popular Votes
Democratic	Harry S. Truman	303	24,179,000
Republican	Thomas E. Dewey	189	21,991,000
States' Rights	J. Strom Thurmond	39	1,176,000
Progressive	Henry A. Wallace	—	1,157,000

**GEOGRAPHY SKILLBUILDER**

- 1. Region** In which regions of the country did Truman carry states? Dewey? Thurmond?
- 2. Region** In which regions was support for Truman the weakest?

### MAIN IDEA

#### Evaluating Leadership

**E** What were some of Truman's achievements as president?

**THE FAIR DEAL** After his victory, 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. **E**

## Republicans Take the Middle Road

Despite these social and economic victories, Truman's approval rating sank to an all-time low of 23 percent in 1951. The stalemate in the Korean War and the rising tide of McCarthyism, which cast doubt on the loyalty of some federal employees, became overwhelming issues. Truman decided not to run for reelection. The Democrats nominated the intellectual and articulate governor Adlai Stevenson of Illinois to run against the Republican candidate, General Dwight D. Eisenhower, known popularly as "Ike."

**I LIKE IKE!** During the campaign, the Republicans accused the Democrats of "plunder at home and blunder abroad." To fan the anti-Communist hysteria that was sweeping over the country, Republicans raised the specter of the rise of communism in China and Eastern Europe. They also criticized the growing power of the federal government and the alleged bribery and corruption among Truman's political allies.

Eisenhower's campaign hit a snag, however, when newspapers accused his running mate, California Senator Richard M. Nixon, of profiting from a secret slush fund set up by wealthy supporters. Nixon decided to reply to the charges. In an emotional speech to an audience of 58 million, now known as the "Checkers speech," he exhibited masterful use of a new medium—television. Nixon denied any wrongdoing, but he did admit to accepting one gift from a political supporter.

#### Vocabulary

**slush fund:** a fund often designated for corrupt practices, such as bribery

#### A PERSONAL VOICE RICHARD M. NIXON

"You know what it was? It was a little cocker spaniel dog in a crate, that he'd [the political supporter] sent all the way from Texas. Black and white spotted. And our little girl—Tricia, the six-year-old—named it Checkers. And you know the kids, like all kids, love the dog and I just want to say this right now, that regardless of what they say about it, we're going to keep it."



Campaign accessories expressed Ike's popularity and projected an upbeat political mood.

—"Checkers speech," September 23, 1952



▲ Countering slush fund charges, Richard Nixon speaks to TV viewers about his daughters and their dog, Checkers.

Nixon's speech saved his place on the Republican ticket. In November 1952, Eisenhower won 55 percent of the popular vote and a majority of the electoral college votes, while the Republicans narrowly captured Congress.

### WALKING THE MIDDLE OF THE ROAD

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 contro-

versial issues, but he 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. (See page 914.) 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.

Although Eisenhower did not assume leadership on civil rights 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.

## SECTION 1

### ASSESSMENT

**1. TERMS & NAMES** For each term or name, write a sentence explaining its significance.

- GI Bill of Rights
  - Harry S. Truman
  - Dixiecrat
  - Fair Deal
- suburb

### MAIN IDEA

#### 2. TAKING NOTES

Create a time line of key events relating to postwar America. Use the dates below as a guide.



Write a paragraph describing the effects of one of these events.

### CRITICAL THINKING

#### 3. DRAWING CONCLUSIONS

Do you think Eisenhower's actions reflected his philosophy of dynamic conservatism? Why or why not?

##### Think About:

- the definition of dynamic conservatism
- Eisenhower's actions on civil rights policies
- Eisenhower's accomplishments on other domestic issues

#### 4. EVALUATING LEADERSHIP

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

#### 5. CONTRASTING

How did Presidents Truman and Eisenhower differ regarding civil rights?

# The American Dream in the Fifties

## MAIN IDEA

During the 1950s, the economy boomed, and many Americans enjoyed material comfort.

## WHY IT MATTERS NOW

The “American dream,” a notion that was largely shaped by the 1950s, is still pursued today.

## Terms & Names

- conglomerate
- franchise
- baby boom
- Dr. Jonas Salk
- consumerism
- planned obsolescence

## One American's Story

Settled into her brand new house near San Diego, California, Carol Freeman felt very fortunate. Her husband Mark had his own law practice, and when their first baby was born, she became a full-time homemaker. She was living the American dream, yet Carol felt dissatisfied—as if there were “something wrong” with her because she was not happy.

### A PERSONAL VOICE CAROL FREEMAN

“As dissatisfied as I was, and as restless, I remember so well this feeling [we] had at the time that the world was going to be your oyster. You were going to make money, your kids were going to go to good schools, everything was possible if you just did what you were supposed to do. The future was rosy. There was a tremendous feeling of optimism. . . . Much as I say it was hateful, it was also hopeful. It was an innocent time.”

—quoted in *The Fifties: A Women's Oral History*

After World War II ended, Americans turned their attention to their families and jobs. The economy prospered. New technologies and business ideas created fresh opportunities for many, and by the end of the decade Americans were enjoying the highest standard of living in the world. The American dream of a happy and successful life seemed within the reach of many people.



▲ The dream woman of the 1950s was depicted in advertising and on TV as doing constant housework, but always with a smile.

## The Organization and the Organization Man

During the 1950s, businesses expanded rapidly. By 1956, the majority of Americans no longer held blue-collar, or industrial, jobs. Instead, more people worked in higher-paid, white-collar positions—clerical, managerial, or professional occupations. Unlike blue-collar workers, who manufactured goods for sale, white-collar workers tended to perform services in fields like sales, advertising, insurance, and communications.

**CONGLOMERATES** Many white-collar workers performed their services in large corporations or government agencies. Some of these corporations continued expanding by forming **conglomerates**. (A conglomerate is a major corporation that includes a number of smaller companies in unrelated industries.) For example,

one conglomerate, International Telephone and Telegraph (ITT), whose original business was communications, bought car-rental companies, insurance companies, and hotel and motel chains. Through this diversification, or investment in various areas of the economy, ITT tried to protect itself from declines in individual industries. Other huge parent companies included American Telephone and Telegraph, Xerox, and General Electric.

**FRANCHISES** In addition to diversifying, another strategy for business expansion—franchising—developed at this time. A **franchise** is a company that offers similar products or services in many locations. (*Franchise* is also used to refer to the right, sold to an individual, to do business using the parent company’s name and the system that the parent company developed.) **A**

Fast-food restaurants developed some of the first and most successful franchises. McDonald’s, for example, had its start when the McDonald brothers developed unusually efficient service, based on assembly-line methods, at their small drive-in restaurant in San Bernardino, California. They simplified the menu, featured 15-cent hamburgers, and mechanized their kitchen.

Salesman Ray Kroc paid the McDonalds \$2.7 million for the franchise rights to their hamburger drive-in. In April 1955, he opened his first McDonald’s restaurant in Des Plaines, Illinois, where he further improved the assembly-line process and introduced the trademark arches that are now familiar all over the world.

**MAIN IDEA**

**Comparing**

**A** How were conglomerates and franchises alike and how were they different?

**NOW & THEN**

**FRANCHISES**

In the decades since Ray Kroc opened his first McDonald’s restaurant (shown below), franchising has become all but a way of life in the United States. Today, nearly 3,000 franchised companies operate over 500,000 businesses throughout the country. Officials estimate that franchises account for nearly one-third of all U.S. retail sales. American franchises today provide a wide array of goods and services, from car maintenance, to tax services, to hair care.

In an attempt to tap into the international market, hundreds of U.S. companies have established overseas franchises. The franchise with perhaps the greatest global reach is the one that started it all. In addition to its more than 13,000 U.S. franchises, McDonald’s now operates over 18,600 franchises in dozens of countries around the world.



**A PERSONAL VOICE RAY KROC**

“It requires a certain kind of mind to see the beauty in a hamburger bun. Yet is it any more unusual to find grace in the texture and softly curved silhouette of a bun than to reflect lovingly on the . . . arrangements and textures and colors in a butterfly’s wings? . . . Not if you view the bun as an essential material in the art of serving a great many meals fast.”

—quoted in *The Fifties*

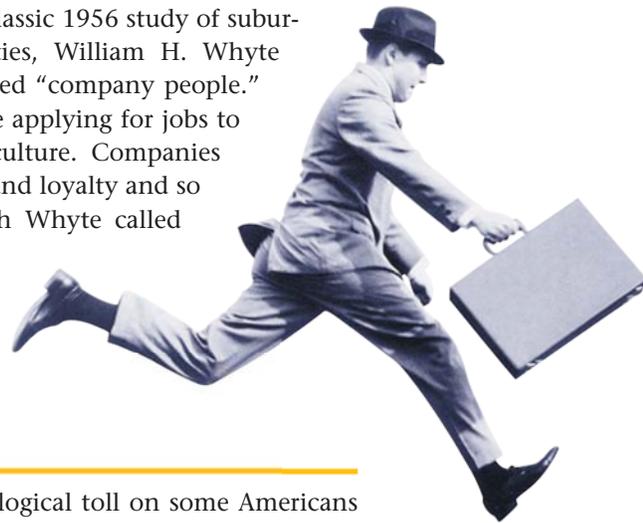
**SOCIAL CONFORMITY** While franchises like McDonald’s helped standardize what people ate, some American workers found themselves becoming standardized as well. Employees who were well paid and held secure jobs in thriving companies sometimes paid a price for economic advancement: a loss of their individuality.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

**MAIN IDEA**

**Analyzing Effects**

**B** What effects did the climate in many corporations have on some workers?

In *The Organization Man*, a book based on a classic 1956 study of suburban Park Forest, Illinois, and other communities, William H. Whyte described how the new, large organizations created “company people.” Companies would give personality tests to people applying for jobs to make sure they would “fit in” the corporate culture. Companies rewarded employees for teamwork, cooperation, and loyalty and so contributed to the growth of conformity, which Whyte called “belongingness.” Despite their success, a number of workers questioned whether pursuing the American dream exacted too high a price, as conformity replaced individuality. **B**



▲ The “organization man” had to step lively to keep up with the Joneses.

## The Suburban Lifestyle

Though achieving job security did take a psychological toll on some Americans who resented having to repress their own personalities, it also enabled people to provide their families with the so-called good things in life. Most Americans worked in cities, but fewer and fewer of them lived there. New highways and the availability and affordability of automobiles and gasoline made commuting possible. By the early 1960s, every large city in the United States was surrounded by suburbs. Of the 13 million new homes built in the 1950s, 85 percent were built in the suburbs. For many people, the suburbs embodied the American dream of an affordable single-family house, good schools, a safe, healthy environment for children, and congenial neighbors just like themselves.

**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.

**American Birthrate, 1940–1970**



\*First year for which figures include Alaska and Hawaii.

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

**SKILLBUILDER Interpreting Graphs**

1. What was the overall trend in the birthrate at the start of World War II, and after the war ended?
2. What was the difference in the birthrate between 1960 and 1970?



◀ Some of the 40 million new Americans who were born during the baby boom.

## KEY PLAYER



### JONAS SALK 1914–1995

One of the most feared diseases in the 1950s was polio, the disease that had partially paralyzed President Franklin D. Roosevelt. Polio afflicted 58,000 American children in 1952, killing some and making others reliant on crutches, wheelchairs, or iron lungs (machines that helped people with paralyzed chest muscles to breathe).

In the early 1950s, Dr. Jonas Salk (at right in photo above) developed an effective vaccine to prevent the disease, and the government sponsored a free inoculation program for children. The vaccine was extremely effective. By 1974, thanks to Salk's vaccine and a new oral vaccine developed by Dr. Albert Sabin, only seven new polio cases were reported in the country.

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.

**ADVANCES IN MEDICINE AND CHILDCARE** Among the medical advances that saved hundreds of thousands of children's lives was the discovery of drugs to fight and prevent childhood diseases, such as typhoid fever. Another breakthrough came when **Dr. Jonas Salk** developed a vaccine for the crippling disease poliomyelitis—polio.

Many parents raised their children according to guidelines devised by the author and pediatrician Dr. Benjamin Spock. His *Common Sense Book of Baby and Child Care*, published in 1946, sold nearly 10 million copies during the 1950s. In it, he advised parents not to spank or scold their children. He also encouraged families to hold meetings in which children could express themselves. He considered it so important for mothers to be at home with their children that he proposed having the government pay mothers to stay home.

The baby boom had a tremendous impact not only on child care but on the American economy and the educational system as well. In 1958, toy sales alone reached \$1.25 billion. During the decade, 10 million new students entered the elementary schools. The sharp increase in enrollment caused overcrowding and teacher shortages in many parts of the country. In California, a new school opened every seven days. ©

**WOMEN'S ROLES** 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. Betty Friedan, author of the groundbreaking 1963 book about women and society, *The Feminine Mystique*, described the problem.

### A PERSONAL VOICE BETTY FRIEDAN

“For the first time in their history, women are becoming aware of an identity crisis in their own lives, a crisis which . . . has grown worse with each succeeding generation. . . . I think this is the crisis of women growing up—a turning point from an immaturity that has been called femininity to full human identity.”

—*The Feminine Mystique*

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.

### MAIN IDEA

#### Analyzing Effects

© How did the baby boom affect American life in the 1950s?

#### Background

The percentage of women college students in the 1950s was smaller than in the 1920s.

### MAIN IDEA

#### Contrasting

**D** How did women's roles and opportunities in the 1950s differ from women's roles today?

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. **D**

**LEISURE IN THE FIFTIES** Most Americans of the 1950s had more leisure time than ever before. Employees worked a 40-hour week and earned several weeks' vacation per year. People owned more labor-saving devices, such as washing machines, clothes dryers, dishwashers, and power lawn mowers, which allowed more time for leisure activities. *Fortune* magazine reported that, in 1953, Americans spent more than \$30 billion on leisure goods and activities.

Americans also enjoyed a wide variety of recreational pursuits—both active and passive. Millions of people participated in such sports as fishing, bowling, hunting, boating, and golf. More fans than ever attended baseball, basketball, and football games; others watched professional sports on television.

Americans also became avid readers. They devoured books about cooking, religion, do-it-yourself projects, and homemaking. They also read mysteries, romance novels, and fiction by popular writers such as Ernest Hemingway, John Steinbeck, Daphne du Maurier, and J. D. Salinger. Book sales doubled, due in part to a thriving paperback market. The circulation of popular magazines like *Reader's Digest* and *Sports Illustrated* steadily rose, from about 148 million to more than 190 million readers. Sales of comic books also reached a peak in the mid-1950s.

**3-D comics and 3-D movies were two of the many fads that mesmerized the nation in the 1950s.** ▶

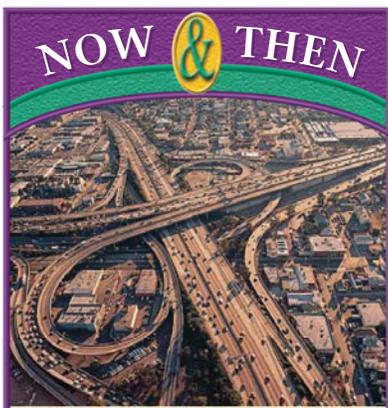
## History Through

### AFTER THE PROM (1957)

The artist, Norman Rockwell, chose an innocent junior-high couple to illustrate the easy emotions and the ordinary events of postwar America.

**What does this painting convey about life in the 1950s?**





### SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA AND THE AUTOMOBILE

No state has exemplified automania in the U.S. more than California. By the late 1990s, Californians owned more cars, held more driver's licenses, and traveled more miles on their roads than the people of any other state. The center of this automobile culture is the metropolitan area of Los Angeles.

Contributing to the importance of the automobile is Southern California's suburban lifestyle. This dependence on cars has contributed to problems of air pollution and traffic jams. But, California is addressing these problems by reviving public transportation systems and promoting the use of electric cars that produce no pollution.

## The Automobile Culture

During World War II, the U.S. government had rationed gasoline to curb inflation and conserve supplies. After the war, however, an abundance of both imported and domestically produced petroleum—the raw material from which gasoline is made—led to inexpensive, plentiful fuel for consumers. Easy credit terms and extensive advertising persuaded Americans to buy cars in record numbers. In response, new car sales rose from 6.7 million in 1950 to 7.9 million in 1955. The total number of private cars on the road jumped from 40 million in 1950 to over 60 million in 1960.

**AUTOMANIA** Suburban living made owning a car a necessity. Most of the new suburbs, built in formerly rural areas, did not offer public transportation, and people had to drive to their jobs in the cities. In addition, many of the schools, stores, synagogues, churches, and doctors' and dentists' offices were not within walking distance of suburban homes. **E**

**THE INTERSTATE HIGHWAY SYSTEM** The more cars there were, the more roads were needed. "Automania" spurred local and state governments to construct roads linking the major cities while connecting schools, shopping centers, and workplaces to residential suburbs. The Interstate Highway Act, which President Eisenhower signed in 1956, authorized the building of a nationwide highway network—41,000 miles of expressways. The new roads, in turn, encouraged the development of new suburbs farther from the cities.

Interstate highways also made high-speed, long-haul trucking possible, which contributed to a decline in the commercial use of railroads. Towns along the new highways prospered, while towns along the older, smaller roads experienced hard times. The system of highways also helped unify and homogenize the nation. As John Keats observed

in his 1958 book, *The Insolent Chariots*, "Our new roads, with their ancillaries, the motels, filling stations, and restaurants advertising Eats, have made it possible for you to drive from Brooklyn to Los Angeles without a change of diet, scenery, or culture." 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.

**MOBILITY TAKES ITS TOLL** As the automobile industry boomed, it stimulated production and provided jobs in other areas, such as drive-in movies, restaurants, and shopping malls. Yet cars also created new problems for both society and the environment. Noise and exhaust polluted the air. Automobile accidents claimed more lives every year. Traffic jams raised people's stress levels, and heavy use damaged the roads. Because cars made it possible for Americans to live in suburbs, many upper-class and middle-class whites left the crowded cities. Jobs and businesses eventually followed them to the suburbs. Public transportation declined, and poor people in the inner cities were often left without jobs and vital services. As a result, the economic gulf between suburban and urban dwellers and between the middle class and the poor widened. **F**

### MAIN IDEA

#### Analyzing Causes

**E** Why did auto sales surge in the 1950s?

#### Vocabulary

**homogenize:** to make the same or similar

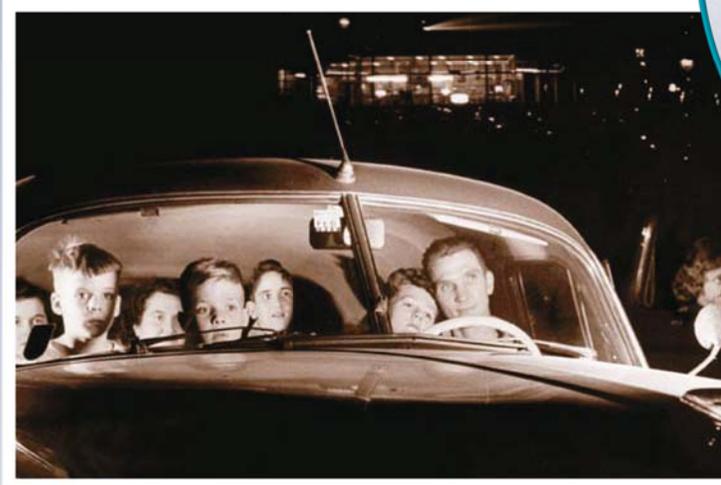
### MAIN IDEA

#### Analyzing Effects

**F** What positive and negative effects did the mass availability of the automobile have on American life in the 1950s?

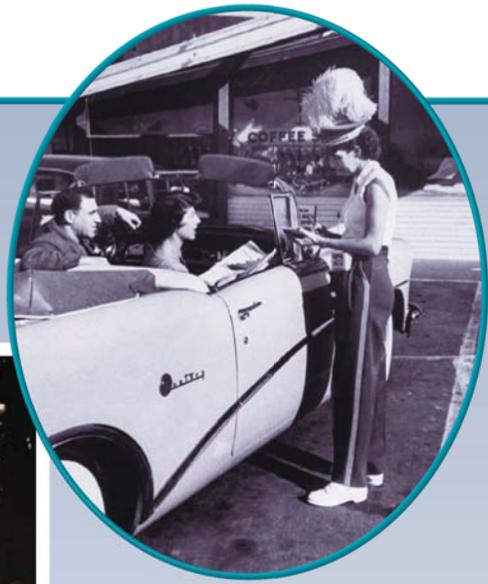
## Americans Hit the Road

In the 1950s Americans loved their cars—big, powerful, and flashy. Some car owners spent their leisure time maintaining their automobiles for the daily commute to work or for the annual family vacation on any one of the nation's 22 new interstate highways.



### ▲ The Drive-In

Young suburban families piled into their cars to see a movie at one of the country's 5,000 or so drive-in theaters.



### ▲ The Drive-Thru

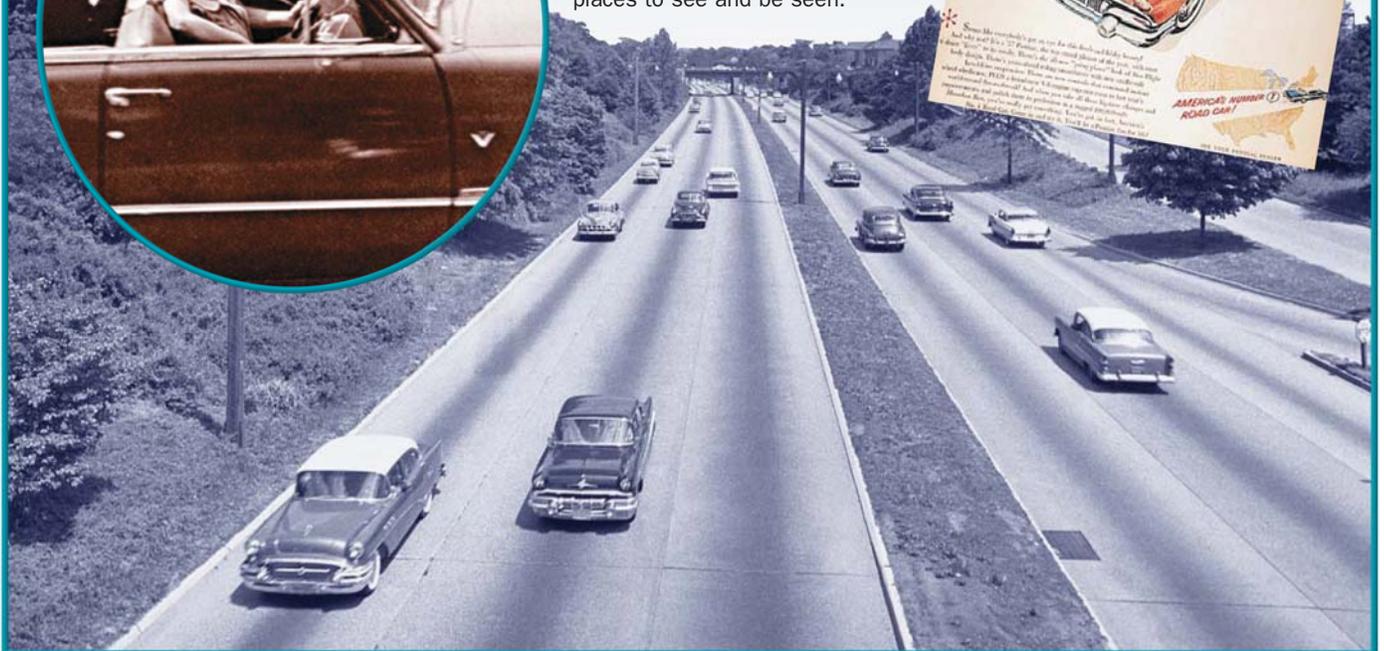
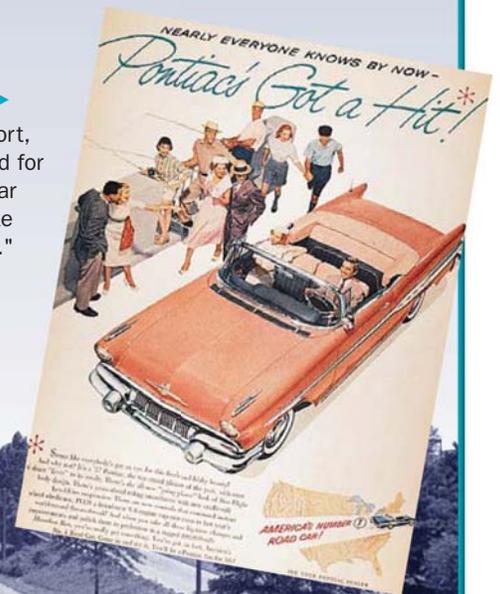
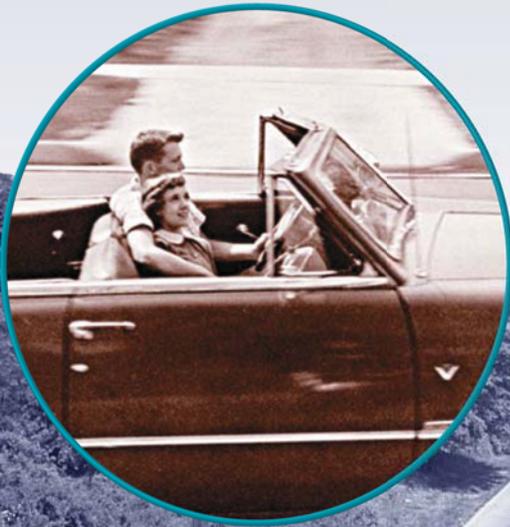
Fast-food restaurants catered to the car culture by offering drive-up service. Waitresses wearing fancy uniforms or roller skates added to the fun of front-seat dining.

### ▶ Car Ads

Not just for transport, cars were marketed for fashion and fun. Car ads used words like "fresh" and "frisky."

### ◀ Cruising Teens

Often teenagers drove around familiar neighborhoods ending up at popular teen meeting places to see and be seen.



## Consumerism Unbound

By the mid-1950s, nearly 60 percent of Americans were members of the middle class, about twice as many as before World War II. They wanted, and had the money to buy, increasing numbers of products. **Consumerism**, buying material goods, came to be equated with success.

**NEW PRODUCTS** One new product after another appeared in the marketplace, as various industries responded to consumer demand. *Newsweek* magazine reported in 1956 that “hundreds of brand-new goods have become commonplace overnight.” Consumers purchased electric household appliances—such as washing machines, dryers, blenders, freezers, and dishwashers—in record numbers.

With more and more leisure time to fill, people invested in recreational items. They bought televisions, tape recorders, and the new hi-fi (high-fidelity) record players. They bought casual clothing to suit their suburban lifestyles and power lawn mowers, barbecue grills, swimming pools, and lawn decorations for their suburban homes.

**PLANNED OBSOLESCENCE** In addition to creating new products, manufacturers began using a marketing strategy called **planned obsolescence**. In order to encourage consumers to purchase more goods, manufacturers purposely designed products to become obsolete—that is, to wear out or become outdated—in a short period of time. Carmakers brought out new models every year, urging consumers to stay up-to-date. Because of planned obsolescence, Americans came to expect new and better products, and they began to discard items that were sometimes barely used. Some observers commented that American culture was on its way to becoming a “throwaway society.” **G**

**BUY NOW, PAY LATER** Many consumers made their purchases on credit and therefore did not have to pay for them right away. The Diner’s Club issued the first credit card in 1950, and the American Express card was introduced in 1958. In addition, people bought large items on the installment plan and made regular payments over a fixed time. Home

mortgages (loans for buying a house) and automobile loans worked the same way. During the decade, the total private debt grew from \$73 billion to \$179 billion. Instead of saving money, Americans were spending it, confident that prosperity would continue.

**THE ADVERTISING AGE** The advertising industry capitalized on this runaway consumerism by encouraging even more spending. Ads were everywhere—in newspapers and magazines, on radio and television, and on billboards along the



▲ In the 1950s, advertisers made “keeping up with the Joneses” a way of life for consumers.

### MAIN IDEA

#### Analyzing Causes

**G** How did manufacturers influence Americans to become a “throwaway society”?

highways—prompting people to buy goods that ranged from cars to cereals to cigarettes. Advertisers spent about \$6 billion in 1950; by 1955, the figure was up to \$9 billion. Since most Americans had satisfied their basic needs, advertisers tried to convince them to buy things they really didn't need.

### A PERSONAL VOICE VANCE PACKARD

“On May 18, 1956, *The New York Times* printed a remarkable interview with a young man named Gerald Stahl, executive vice-president of the Package Designers Council. He stated: ‘Psychiatrists say that people have so much to choose from that they want help—they will like the package that hypnotizes them into picking it.’ He urged food packers to put more hypnosis into their package designing, so that the housewife will stick out her hand for it rather than one of many rivals.

Mr. Stahl has found that it takes the average woman exactly twenty seconds to cover an aisle in a supermarket if she doesn't tarry; so a good package design should hypnotize the woman like a flashlight waved in front of her eyes.”

—*The Hidden Persuaders*

More and more, ad executives and designers turned to psychology to create new strategies for selling. Advertisers appealed to people's desire for status and “belongingness” and strived to associate their products with those values.

Television became a powerful new advertising tool. The first one-minute TV commercial was produced in 1941 at a cost of \$9. In 1960, advertisers spent a total of \$1.6 billion for television ads. By 2001, a 30-second commercial during the Superbowl cost an advertiser \$2.2 million. Television had become not only the medium for mass transmission of cultural values, but a symbol of popular culture itself.

## SECTION 2

### ASSESSMENT

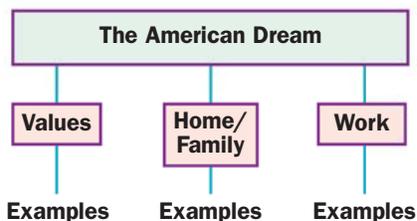
**1. TERMS & NAMES** For each term or name, write a sentence explaining its significance.

- conglomerate
- baby boom
- consumerism
- franchise
- Dr. Jonas Salk
- planned obsolescence

### MAIN IDEA

#### 2. TAKING NOTES

In a graphic organizer like the one below, list examples of specific goals that characterized the American dream for suburbanites in the 1950s.



What do you think the most important goal was?

### CRITICAL THINKING

#### 3. ANALYZING EFFECTS

In what ways do you think current environmental consciousness is related to the “throwaway society” of the 1950s? Support your answer.

**Think About:**

- the purchasing habits of 1950s consumers
- the effects of planned obsolescence
- today's emphasis on recycling

#### 4. EVALUATING

Do you think that the life of a typical suburban homemaker during the 1950s was fulfilling or not? Support your answer.



#### 5. INTERPRETING VISUAL SOURCES

This ad is typical of how the advertising industry portrayed housewives in the 1950s. What message about women is conveyed by this ad?

# The Road to Suburbia

“Come out to Park Forest where small-town friendships grow—and you still live so close to a big city.” Advertisements like this one for a scientifically planned Chicago suburb captured the lure of the suburbs for thousands of growing families in the 1950s. The publicity promised affordable housing, congenial neighbors, fresh air and open spaces, good schools, and easy access to urban jobs and culture. Good transportation was the lifeline of suburban growth a half century ago, and it continues to spur expansion today.



*Chicago's* COMPLETELY PLANNED Suburb

## SHARED PRIVACY ▶

By 1952, development in Park Forest, Illinois had expanded to include both low-cost rental units and single-family homes. All the streets were curved to slow traffic, present a pleasing sweep of space, and give residents maximum privacy and space for yards.

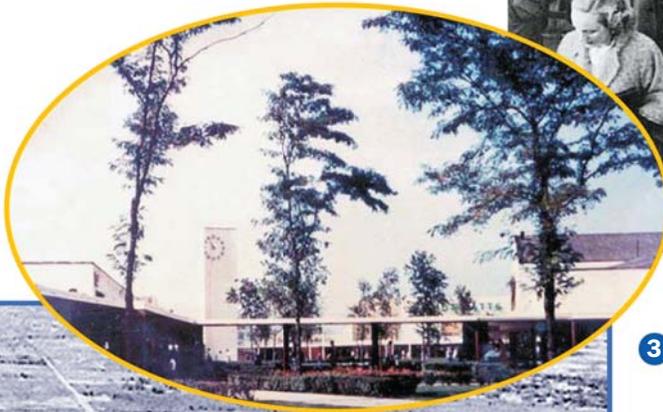
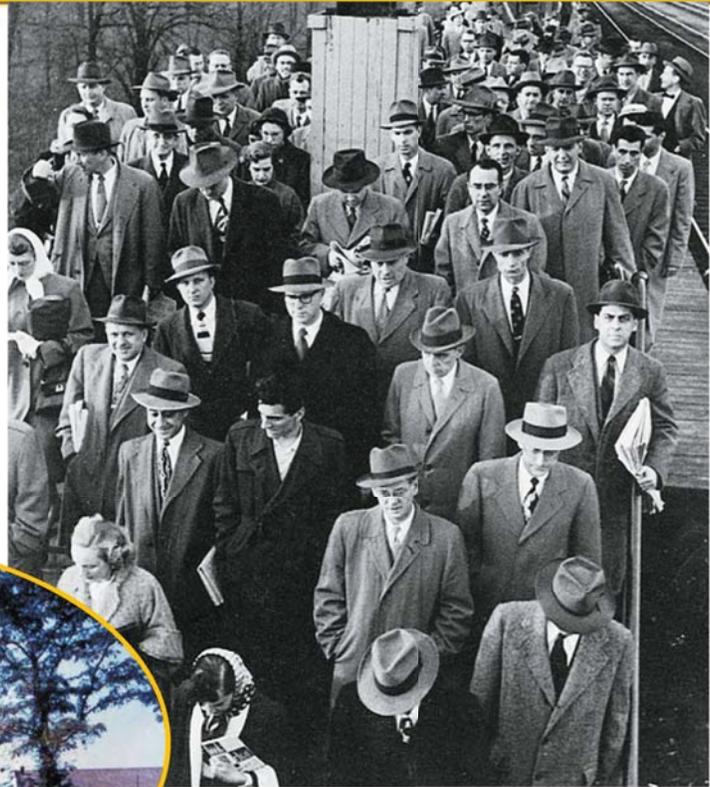


## 1 WHERE THE 'BURBS ARE

Park Forest was planned from its conception in 1945 to be a “complete community for middle-income families with children.” The setting was rural—amidst cornfields and forest preserves about 30 miles south of Chicago. But it was convenient to commuter lines, like the Illinois Central (IC) Railroad, and to major roads, such as Western Avenue.

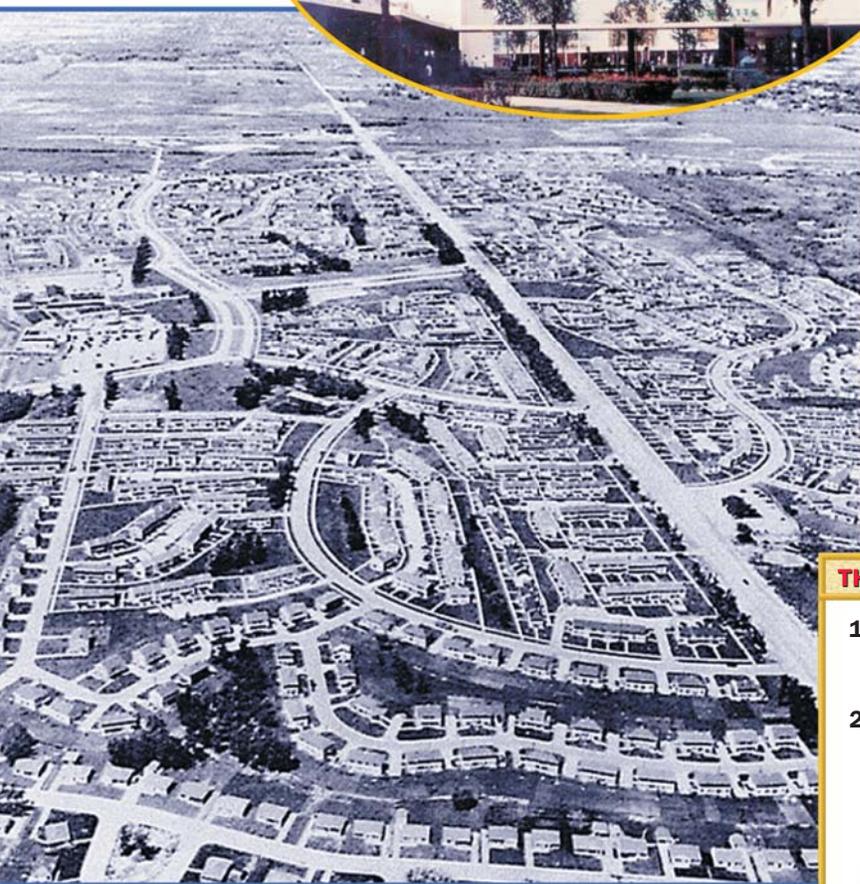
## 2 THE COMMUTER CRUSH

Men commuted to work on the IC railroad, while their wives usually stayed home to take care of the children, who thrived in Park Forest's safe, wholesome family environment.



## 3 SHOPPING CENTERS

Consumerism became a driving force in the 1950s, and Park Forest kept up with the trend. The central shopping center served the community well until the late 1960s. When Interstate 57 was built, a mammoth mall, built just off the highway, caused the original shopping area to decline. Park Forest is still struggling to revive its central shopping area.



### THINKING CRITICALLY

- Analyzing Patterns** How did the availability of transportation influence the creation and ongoing development of Park Forest?
- Creating a Database** Pose a historical question about a suburb near you. Collect statistics about changes in population, living patterns, income, and economic development in that suburb. Use those statistics to create a database that will help answer your questions.



SEE SKILLBUILDER HANDBOOK, PAGE R33.



RESEARCH LINKS [CLASSZONE.COM](https://www.classzone.com)

# Popular Culture

## MAIN IDEA

Mainstream Americans, as well as the nation's subcultures, embraced new forms of entertainment during the 1950s.

## WHY IT MATTERS NOW

Television and rock 'n' roll, integral parts of the nation's culture today, emerged during the postwar era.

## Terms & Names

- mass media
- Federal Communications Commission (FCC)
- beat movement
- rock 'n' roll
- jazz

## One American's Story

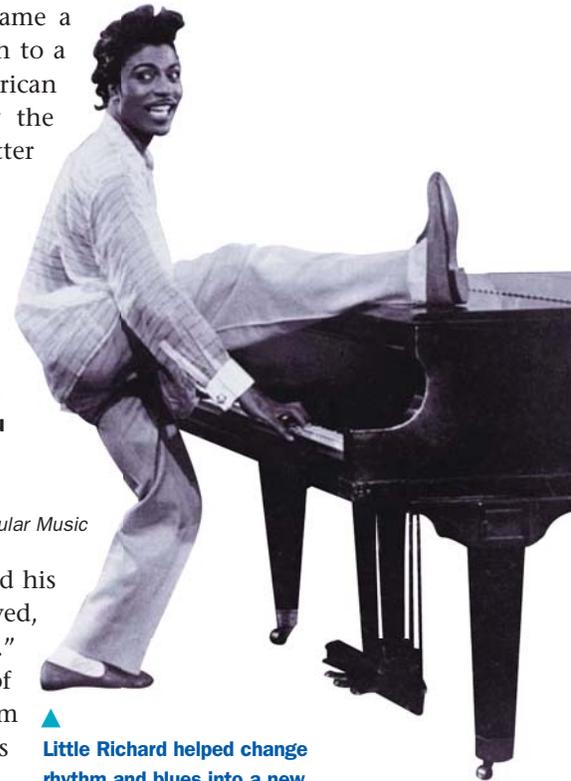
H. B. Barnum, a 14-year-old saxophone player who later became a music producer, was one of many teenagers in the 1950s drawn to a new style of music that featured hard-driving African-American rhythm and blues. Barnum described the first time he saw the rhythm-and-blues performer Richard Wayne Penniman, better known as Little Richard.

### A PERSONAL VOICE H. B. BARNUM

“He'd just burst onto the stage from anywhere, and you wouldn't be able to hear anything but the roar of the audience. . . . He'd be on the stage, he'd be off the stage, he'd be jumping and yelling, screaming, whipping the audience on. . . . Then when he finally did hit the piano and just went into di-di-di-di-di-di, you know, well nobody can do that as fast as Richard. It just took everybody by surprise.”

—quoted in *The Rise and Fall of Popular Music*

Born poor, Little Richard wore flashy clothes on stage, curled his hair, and shouted the lyrics to his songs. As one writer observed, “In two minutes [he] used as much energy as an all-night party.” The music he and others performed became a prominent part of the American culture in the 1950s, a time when both mainstream America and those outside it embraced new and innovative forms of entertainment.



▲ Little Richard helped change rhythm and blues into a new musical genre—rock 'n' roll.

## New Era of the Mass Media

Compared with other **mass media**—means of communication that reach large audiences—television developed with lightning speed. First widely available in 1948, television had reached 9 percent of American homes by 1950 and 55 percent of homes by 1954. In 1960, almost 90 percent—45 million—of American homes had television sets. Clearly, TV was the entertainment and information marvel of the postwar years.

**THE RISE OF TELEVISION** Early television sets were small boxes with round screens. Programming was meager, and broadcasts were in black and white. The first regular broadcasts, beginning in 1949, reached only a small part of the East Coast and offered only two hours of programs per week. Post–World War II innovations such as microwave relays, which could transmit television waves over long distances, sent the television industry soaring. By 1956, the **Federal Communications Commission (FCC)**—the government agency that regulates and licenses television, telephone, telegraph, radio, and other communications industries—had allowed 500 new stations to broadcast.

This period of rapid expansion was the “golden age” of television entertainment—and entertainment in the 1950s often meant comedy. Milton Berle attracted huge audiences with *The Texaco Star Theater*, and Lucille Ball and Desi Arnaz’s early situation comedy, *I Love Lucy*, began its enormously popular run in 1951.

At the same time, veteran radio broadcaster Edward R. Murrow introduced two innovations: on-the-scene news reporting, with his program, *See It Now* (1951–1958), and interviewing, with *Person to Person* (1953–1960). Westerns, sports events, and original dramas shown on *Playhouse 90* and *Studio One* offered entertainment variety. Children’s programs, such as *The Mickey Mouse Club* and *The Howdy Doody Show*, attracted loyal young fans.

American businesses took advantage of the opportunities offered by the new television industry. Advertising expenditures on TV, which were \$170 million in 1950, reached nearly \$2 billion in 1960.

Sales of *TV Guide*, introduced in 1953, quickly outpaced sales of other magazines. In 1954, the food industry introduced a new convenience item, the frozen TV dinner. Complete, ready-to-heat individual meals on disposable aluminum trays, TV dinners made it easy for people to eat without missing their favorite shows. **A**

**MAIN IDEA**

**Analyzing Effects**

**A** How did the emergence of television affect American culture in the 1950s?

**HISTORICAL SPOTLIGHT**

**TV QUIZ SHOWS**

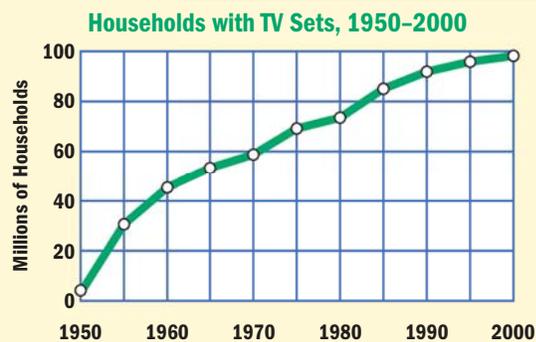


Beginning with *The \$64,000 Question* in 1955, television created hit quiz shows by adopting a popular format from radio and adding big cash prizes.

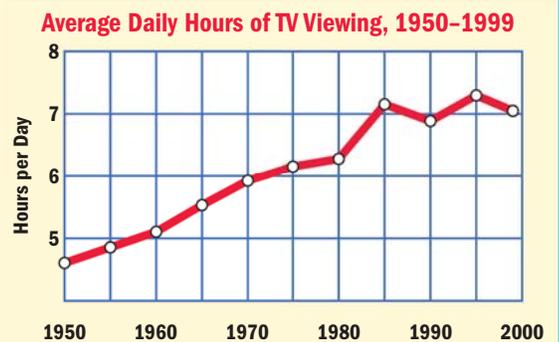
The quiz show *Twenty-One* made a star of a shy English professor named Charles Van Doren. He rode a wave of fame and fortune until 1958, when a former contestant revealed that, to heighten the dramatic impact, producers had been giving some of the contestants the right answers.

A scandal followed when a congressional subcommittee confirmed the charges. Most of the quiz shows soon left the air.

**Glued to the Set**



Source: Nielsen Media Research, 2000



Source: Nielsen Media Research, 2000

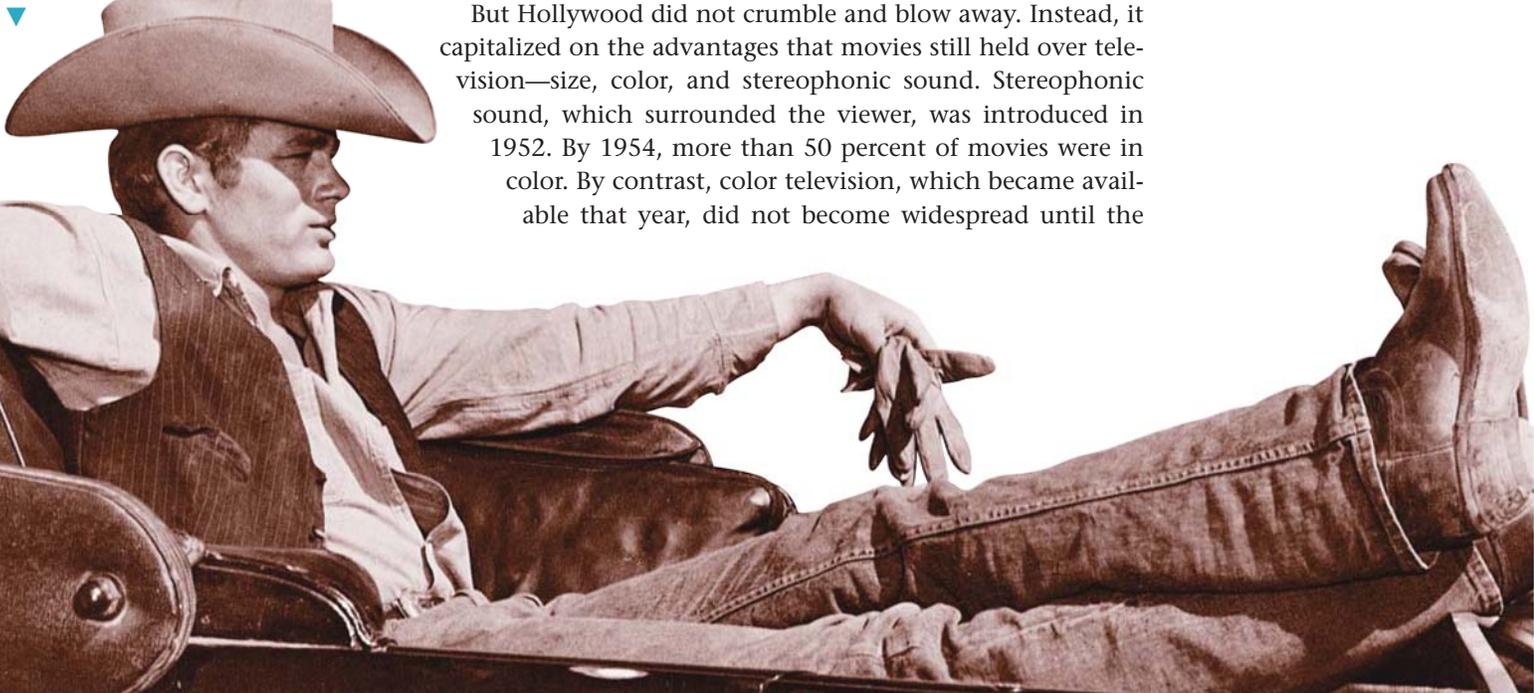
**SKILLBUILDER Interpreting Graphs**

1. During which decade did the number of households with TV sets increase the most?
2. What might account for the drop in TV viewing from 1995–1999?



▲ Lucille Ball had to fight to have her real-life husband, Cuban-born Desi Arnaz, cast in the popular TV series *I Love Lucy*.

James Dean, seen here in the movie *Giant*, had a self-confident indifference that made him the idol of teenagers. He died in a car accident at age 24.



**STEREOTYPES AND GUNSLINGERS** Not everyone was thrilled with television, though. Critics objected to its effects on children and its stereotypical portrayal of women and minorities. Women did, in fact, appear in stereotypical roles, such as the ideal mothers of *Father Knows Best* and *The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet*. Male characters outnumbered women characters three to one. African Americans and Latinos rarely appeared in television programs at all.

Television in the 1950s portrayed an idealized white America. For the most part, it omitted references to poverty, diversity, and contemporary conflicts, such as the struggle of the civil rights movement against racial discrimination. Instead, it glorified the historical conflicts of the Western frontier in hit shows such as *Gunsmoke* and *Have Gun Will Travel*. The level of violence in these popular shows led to ongoing concerns about the effect of television on children. In 1961, Federal Communications Commission chairman Newton Minow voiced this concern to the leaders of the television industry.

### A PERSONAL VOICE NEWTON MINOW

“When television is bad, nothing is worse. I invite you to sit down in front of your television set when your station goes on the air . . . and keep your eyes glued to that set until the station signs off. I can assure you that you will observe a vast wasteland.” **B**

—speech to the National Association of Broadcasters, Washington, D.C., May 9, 1961

**RADIO AND MOVIES** Although TV turned out to be wildly popular, radio and movies survived. But instead of competing with television’s mass market for drama and variety shows, radio stations turned to local programming of news, weather, music, and community issues. The strategy paid off. During the decade, radio advertising rose by 35 percent, and the number of radio stations increased by 50 percent.

From the beginning, television cut into the profitable movie market. In 1948, 18,500 movie theaters had drawn nearly 90 million paid admissions per week. As more people stayed home to watch TV, the number of moviegoers decreased by nearly half. As early as 1951, producer David Selznick worried about Hollywood:

“It’ll never come back. It’ll just keep on crumbling until finally the wind blows the last studio prop across the sands.”

But Hollywood did not crumble and blow away. Instead, it capitalized on the advantages that movies still held over television—size, color, and stereophonic sound. Stereophonic sound, which surrounded the viewer, was introduced in 1952. By 1954, more than 50 percent of movies were in color. By contrast, color television, which became available that year, did not become widespread until the

**Vocabulary**  
**stereotypical:**  
conventional,  
formulaic, and  
oversimplified

### MAIN IDEA

#### Evaluating

**B** Do you think the rise of television had a positive or a negative effect on Americans? Explain.

**MAIN IDEA****Summarizing**

**C** How did radio and movies maintain their appeal in the 1950s?

next decade. In 1953, 20th Century Fox introduced CinemaScope, which projected a wide-angle image on a broad screen. The industry also tried novelty features: Smell-O-Vision and Aroma-Rama piped smells into the theaters to coincide with events shown on the screen. Three-dimensional images, viewed through special glasses supplied by the theaters, appeared to leap into the audience. **C**

## 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.

### A PERSONAL VOICE JACK KEROUAC

“[T]he only people for me are the mad ones, the ones who are mad to live, mad to talk, mad to be saved . . . 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.”

—*On the Road*



▲ Novelist Jack Kerouac’s *On the Road*, published in 1957, sold over 500,000 copies.

**MAIN IDEA****Analyzing Causes**

**D** Why do you think many young Americans were attracted to the beat movement?

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. **D**

## African Americans and Rock ‘n’ 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.



▲ Chuck Berry is as much known for his “duck walk” as for his electric guitar-playing heard on hit records including “Johnny B. Goode” and “Maybellene.”

**ROCK ‘N’ ROLL** In the early and mid-1950s, Richard Penniman, Chuck Berry, Bill Haley and His Comets, and especially Elvis Presley brought rock ‘n’ roll to a frantic pitch of popularity among the newly affluent teens who bought their records. The music’s heavy rhythm, simple melodies, and lyrics—featuring love, cars, and the problems of being young—captivated teenagers across the country.

Elvis Presley, the unofficial “King of Rock ‘n’ Roll,” first developed his musical style by singing in church and listening to gospel, country, and blues music on the radio in Memphis, Tennessee. When he was a young boy, his mother gave him a guitar, and years later he paid four dollars of his own money to record two songs in 1953. Sam Phillips, a rhythm-and-blues producer, discovered Presley and produced his first records. In 1955, Phillips sold Presley’s contract to RCA for \$35,000.

Presley’s live appearances were immensely popular, and 45 of his records sold over a million copies, including “Heartbreak Hotel,” “Hound Dog,” “All Shook Up,” “Don’t Be Cruel,” and “Burning Love.” Although *Look* magazine dismissed him as “a wild troubadour who wails rock ‘n’ roll tunes, flails erratically at a guitar, and wriggles like a peep-show dancer,” Presley’s rebellious style captivated young audiences. Girls screamed and fainted when he performed, and boys tried to imitate him. **E**

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.

**MAIN IDEA**

**Making Inferences**

**E** Based on Elvis Presley’s song titles, what do you think were teenagers’ concerns in the 1950s?

**History Through Music**

**“HOUND DOG”—  
A ROCK ‘N’ ROLL CROSSOVER**

Few examples highlight the influence African Americans had on rock ‘n’ roll—and the lack of credit and compensation they received for their efforts—more than the story of Willie Mae “Big Mama” Thornton.

In 1953, she recorded and released the song “Hound Dog” to little fanfare. She received a mere \$500 in royalties. Only three years later, Elvis Presley recorded a version of the tune, which sold millions of records. Despite her contributions, Thornton reaped few rewards and struggled her entire career to make ends meet.

**SKILLBUILDER  
Developing Historical Perspective**

1. Why might black musicians have been commercially less successful than white musicians in the 1950s? Explain.
2. What concerns of the current generation are reflected in today’s popular music?

SEE SKILLBUILDER HANDBOOK, PAGE R11.



▲ Willie Mae “Big Mama” Thornton is remembered as the first artist to record “Hound Dog.”



▶ Elvis Presley recorded “Hound Dog” in 1956—making it a popular hit.

**THE RACIAL GAP** African-American music had inspired the birth of rock ‘n’ roll, and many of the genre’s greatest performers were—like Berry and Penniman—African Americans. In other musical genres, singers Nat “King” Cole and Lena Horne, singer and actor Harry Belafonte, and many others paved the way for minority representation in the entertainment fields. Musicians like Miles Davis, Sonny Rollins, Charlie Parker, Dizzy Gillespie, and Thelonius Monk played a style of music characterized by the use of improvisation, called **jazz**. These artists entertained audiences of all races.

But throughout the 1950s, African-American shows were mostly broadcast on separate stations. By 1954, there were 250 radio stations nationwide aimed specifically at African-American listeners. African-American stations were part of radio’s attempt to counter the mass popularity of television by targeting specific audiences. These stations also served advertisers who wanted to reach a large African-American audience. But it was the black listeners—who had fewer television sets than whites and did not find themselves reflected in mainstream programming—who appreciated the stations most. Thulani Davis, a poet, journalist, and playwright, expressed the feelings of one listener about African-American radio (or “race radio” as the character called it) in her novel *1959*.



▲ Innovative American jazz trumpeter and composer Miles Davis, shown during a recording session in 1959, continued to blaze musical trails throughout his career.

**A PERSONAL VOICE** THULANI DAVIS

“Billie Holiday died and I turned twelve on the same hot July day. The saddest singing in the world was coming out of the radio, race radio that is, the radio of the race. The white stations were on the usual relentless rounds of Pat Boone, Teresa Brewer, and anybody else who couldn’t sing but liked to cover songs that were once colored. . . . White radio was at least honest—they knew anybody in the South could tell Negro voices from white ones, and so they didn’t play our stuff.”

—1959

At the end of the 1950s, African Americans were still largely segregated from the dominant culture. This ongoing segregation—and the racial tensions it fed—would become a powerful force for change in the turbulent 1960s.

**SECTION 3**

**ASSESSMENT**

**1. TERMS & NAMES** For each term, write a sentence explaining its significance.

- mass media
- beat movement
- rock ‘n’ roll
- jazz
- Federal Communications Commission (FCC)

**MAIN IDEA**

**2. SUMMARIZING**

Create a “Who’s Who” chart of popular culture idols of the 1950s. Identify the art form and major achievements associated with each person.

Person	Art Form	Achievements

Why do you think they appealed to the young people of the 1950s?

**CRITICAL THINKING**

**3. EVALUATING**

Do you agree with Newton Minow’s statement, on page 860, that TV was “a vast wasteland”? Support your answer with details from the text.

**4. ANALYZING EFFECTS**

How did radio, TV, and the movies contribute to the success of rock ‘n’ roll?

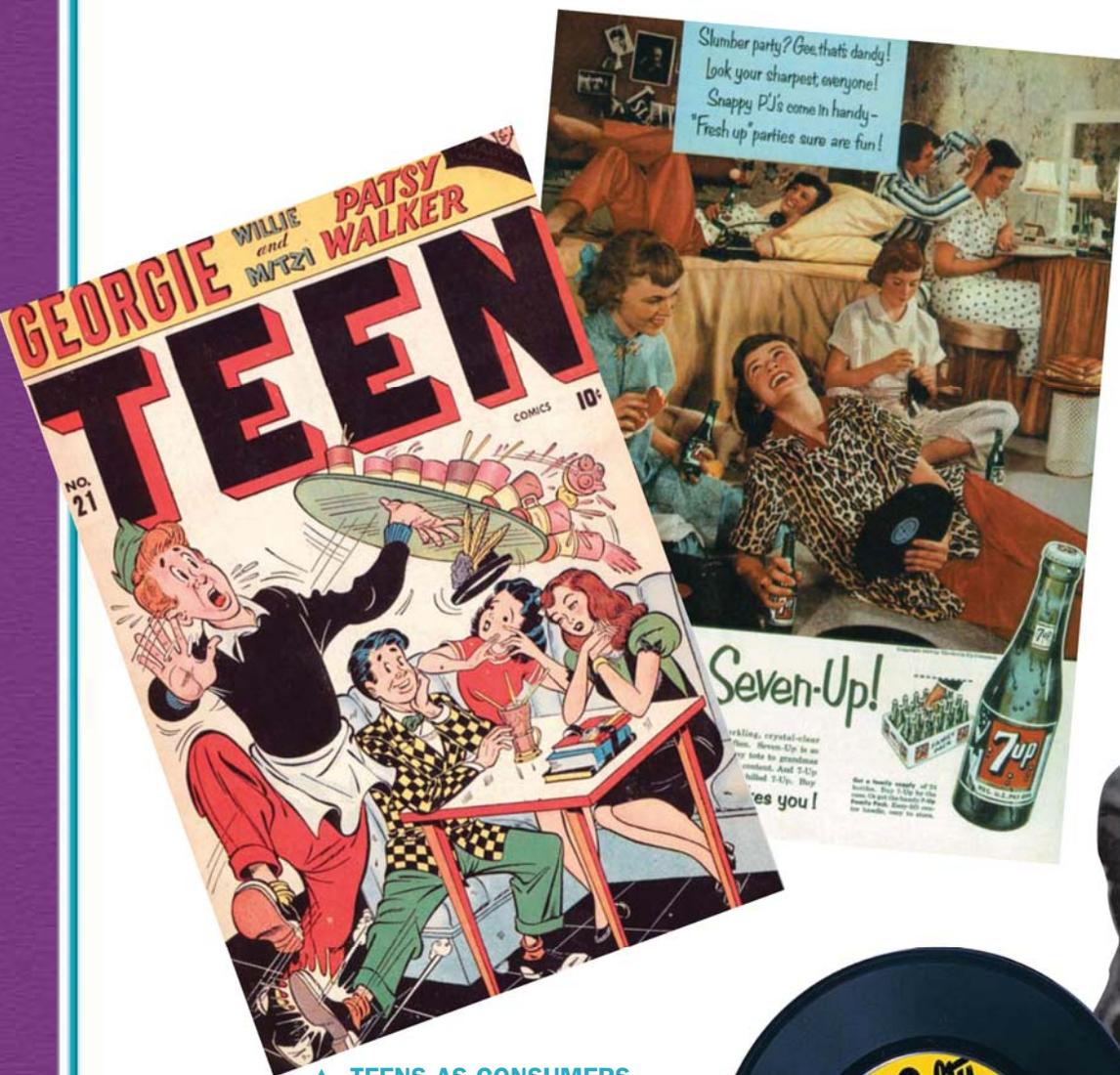
**5. COMPARING AND CONTRASTING**

In what ways were the rock ‘n’ roll musicians and the beat poets of the 1950s similar and different? Support your answer with details from the text. **Think About:**

- the values the musicians and poets believed in
- people’s reactions to the musicians, poets, and writers

# The Emergence of the Teenager

Life after World War II brought changes in the family. For the first time, the teenage years were recognized as an important and unique developmental stage between childhood and adulthood. The booming postwar economy made it possible for teenagers to stay in school instead of working to help support their families, and allowed their parents to give them generous allowances. American business, particularly the music and movie industries, rushed to court this new consumer group.



## ▲ TEENS AS CONSUMERS

Comic books, pimple creams, and soft drinks were just a few of the products aimed at teenagers with money to spend.



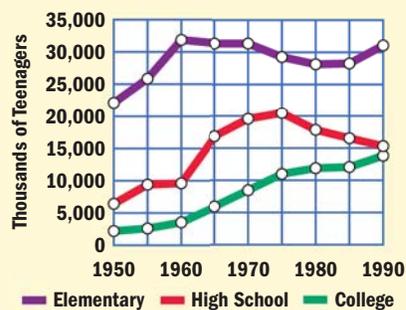
# DATA

## FILE

### TEENAGE TIDBITS

- A *Life* magazine survey showed that, during the 1950s, teens spent \$20 million on lipstick alone.
- In 1956, a total of 42,000 drive-in movie theaters—heavily frequented by teenagers—took in one-quarter of the year's total box-office receipts.
- College enrollments more than doubled between 1946 and 1960.
- A weekly credit payment for a record player was \$1.

### U.S. School Enrollments, 1950-1990



Source: Statistical Abstract of the United States, 1995

### Teenagers and Employment, 1950-1990



Source: Statistical Abstract of the United States, 1995

### THE TEEN MOVIE SCENE ▲

Teenagers with money in their pockets often found themselves at the movies. Hollywood responded by producing films especially for teens. *Rebel Without a Cause* (1955) told the story of a troubled youth driven by anger and fear. It starred teen heart-throbs James Dean and Natalie Wood.



### ◀ ROCKING TO A NEW BEAT

Teenagers seeking a collective identity found it in rock 'n' roll, a fresh form of music that delighted teenagers and enraged their parents. Dick Clark's *American Bandstand* (shown at left) showcased young performers playing music ranging from doo-wop (shown above) to hard-driving rhythm and blues. The songs they sang underscored themes of alienation and heartbreak.

### THINKING CRITICALLY

#### CONNECT TO HISTORY

- 1. Interpreting Data** What were some causes of the booming teenage market in the 1950s? To answer the question, review the entire feature, including the Data File.

 SEE SKILLBUILDER HANDBOOK, PAGE R28.

#### CONNECT TO TODAY

- 2. Analyzing Movies Today** What types of movies do American studios make for the teenage market today? How do these movies differ from those of the 1950s?

# The Other America

## MAIN IDEA

Amidst the prosperity of the 1950s, millions of Americans lived in poverty.

## WHY IT MATTERS NOW

America today continues to experience a marked income gap between affluent and nonaffluent people.

## Terms & Names

- urban renewal
- bracero
- termination policy

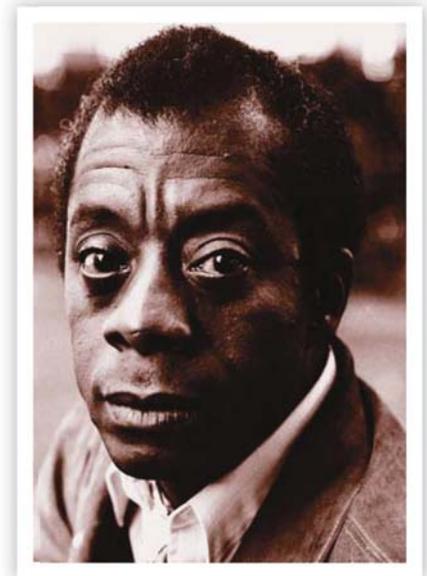
## One American's Story

James Baldwin was born in New York City, the eldest of nine children, and grew up in the poverty of the Harlem ghetto. As a novelist, essayist, and playwright, he eloquently portrayed the struggles of African Americans against racial injustice and discrimination. He wrote a letter to his young nephew to mark the 100th anniversary of emancipation, although, in his words, “the country is celebrating one hundred years of freedom one hundred years too soon.”

### A PERSONAL VOICE JAMES BALDWIN

“[T]hese innocent and well-meaning people, your countrymen, have caused you to be born under conditions not very far removed from those described for us by Charles Dickens in the London of more than a hundred years ago. . . . This innocent country set you down in a ghetto in which, in fact, it intended that you should perish. . . . You were born where you were born and faced the future that you faced because you were black and *for no other reason.*”

—*The Fire Next Time*



▲ James Baldwin

For many Americans, the 1950s were a time of unprecedented prosperity. But not everyone experienced this financial well-being. In the “other” America, about 40 million people lived in poverty, untouched by the economic boom.

## The Urban Poor

Despite the portrait painted by popular culture, life in postwar America did not live up to the “American dream.” In 1962, nearly one out of every four Americans was living below the poverty level. Many of these poor were elderly people, single women and their children, or members of minority groups, including African Americans, Latinos, and Native Americans.

**WHITE FLIGHT** In the 1950s, millions of middle-class white Americans left the cities for the suburbs, taking with them precious economic resources and isolating themselves from other races and classes. At the same time, the rural poor migrated to the inner cities. Between the end of World War II and 1960, nearly 5 million African Americans moved from the rural South to urban areas.

The urban crisis prompted by the “white flight” had a direct impact on poor whites and nonwhites. The cities lost not only people and businesses but also the property they owned and income taxes they had paid. City governments could no longer afford to properly maintain or improve schools, public transportation, and police and fire departments—and the urban poor suffered.

**THE INNER CITIES** While poverty grew rapidly in the decaying inner cities, many suburban Americans remained unaware of it. Some even refused to believe that poverty could exist in the richest, most powerful nation on earth. Each year, the federal government calculates the minimum amount of income needed to survive—the poverty line. In 1959, the poverty line for a family of four was \$2,973. In 2000, it was \$17,601. **A**

**MAIN IDEA**  
**Analyzing Effects**

**A** What effect did white flight have on America’s cities?

**Background**  
See *poverty* on page R43 in the Economics Handbook.

After living among the nation’s poor across America, Michael Harrington published a shocking account that starkly illuminated the issue of poverty. In *The Other America: Poverty in the United States* (1962), he not only confirmed that widespread poverty existed but also exposed its brutal reality.

**A PERSONAL VOICE** MICHAEL HARRINGTON

“The poor get sick more than anyone else in the society. . . . When they become sick, they are sick longer than any other group in the society. Because they are sick more often and longer than anyone else, they lose wages and work, and find it difficult to hold a steady job. And because of this, they cannot pay for good housing, for a nutritious diet, for doctors.”

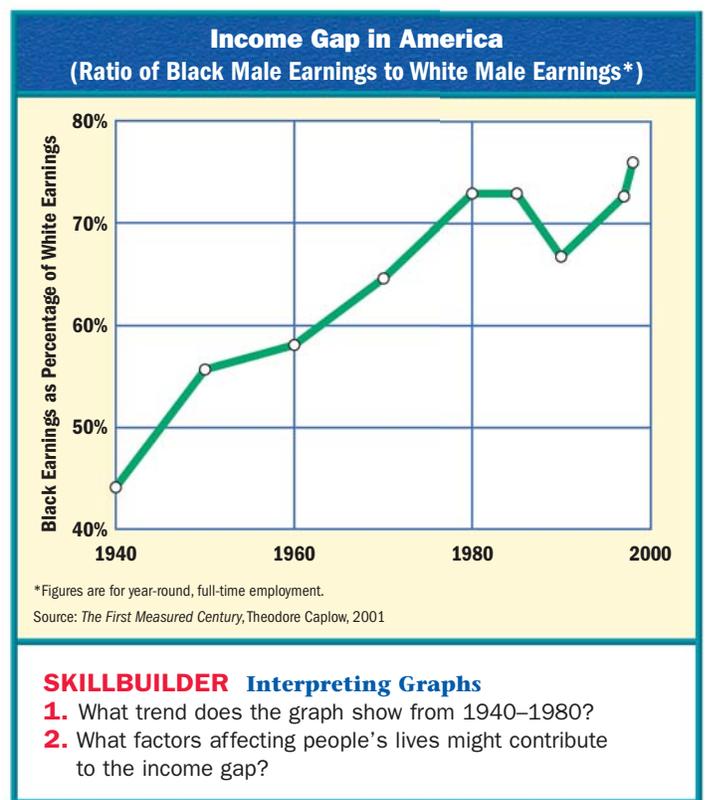
—*The Other America*

**URBAN RENEWAL** Most African Americans, Native Americans, and Latinos in the cities had to live in dirty, crowded slums. One proposed solution to the housing problem in inner cities was **urban renewal**. The National Housing Act of 1949 was passed to provide “a decent home and a suitable living environment for every American family.” This act called for tearing down rundown neighborhoods and constructing low-income housing. Later, the nation’s leaders would create a new cabinet position, Housing and Urban Development (HUD), to aid in improving conditions in the inner city.

Although dilapidated areas were razed, parking lots, shopping centers, highways, parks, and factories were constructed on some of the cleared land, and there was seldom enough new housing built to accommodate all the displaced people. For example, a *barrio* in Los Angeles was torn down to make way for Dodger Stadium, and poor people who were displaced from their homes simply moved from one ghetto to another. Some critics of urban renewal claimed that it had merely become **urban removal**. **B**

**MAIN IDEA**  
**Analyzing Effects**

**B** Why were attempts at urban renewal viewed as less than successful?



## Poverty Leads to Activism

Despite ongoing poverty, during the 1950s, African Americans began to make significant strides toward the reduction of racial discrimination and segregation. Inspired by the African-American civil rights movement, other minorities also began to develop a deeper political awareness and a voice. Mexican-American activism gathered steam after veterans returned from World War II, and a major change in government policy under Eisenhower's administration fueled Native American protest.



▲ In 1942, Mexican farm workers on their way to California bid farewell to their families.

**MEXICANS SEEK EMPLOYMENT** 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* (bră-sâr'ōs), 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.

### Background

In 1954, the U.S. launched a program designed to find and return undocumented immigrants to Mexico. Between 1953 and 1955, the U.S. deported more than 2 million illegal Mexican immigrants.

**THE LONGORIA INCIDENT** 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. **C**

**NATIVE AMERICANS CONTINUE THEIR STRUGGLE** Native Americans also continued to fight for their rights and identity. From the passage of the Dawes Act, in 1887, until 1934, the policy of the federal government toward Native Americans had been one of "Americanization" and assimilation. In 1924, the Snyder Act granted citizenship to all Native Americans, but they remained second-class citizens.

In 1934, the Indian Reorganization Act moved official policy away from assimilation and toward Native American autonomy. Its passage signaled a change in federal policy. In addition, because the government was reeling from

### MAIN IDEA

#### Analyzing Issues

**C** How did the Longoria incident motivate Mexican Americans to increase their political and social activism?

## Vocabulary

### subsidizing:

financial assistance given by a government to a person or group to support an undertaking regarded as being in the public interest

the Great Depression, it wanted to stop subsidizing the Native Americans. Native Americans also took the initiative to improve their lives. In 1944, they established the National Congress of American Indians. The congress had two main goals: (1) to ensure for Native Americans the same civil rights that white Americans had, and (2) to enable Native Americans on reservations to retain their own customs.

During World War II, over 65,000 Native Americans left their reservations for military service and war work. As a result, they became very aware of discrimination. 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.

**THE TERMINATION POLICY** 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.



▲ Native Americans like the man above received job training from the Bureau of Indian Affairs to help them settle in urban areas.

## SECTION 4

### ASSESSMENT

**1. TERMS & NAMES** For each term, write a sentence explaining its significance.

•urban renewal

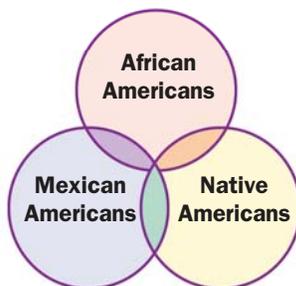
•bracero

•termination policy

### MAIN IDEA

#### 2. TAKING NOTES

In overlapping circles like the ones below, fill in the common problems that African Americans, Mexican Americans, and Native Americans faced during the 1950s.



What do these problems illustrate about life in the 1950s?

### CRITICAL THINKING

#### 3. EVALUATING

Do you think that urban renewal was an effective approach to the housing problem in inner cities?

Why or why not? **Think About:**

- the goals of the National Housing Act of 1949
- the claims made by some critics of urban renewal
- the residents' best interest

#### 4. ANALYZING ISSUES

How did Native Americans work to increase their participation in the U.S. political process?

#### 5. DRAWING CONCLUSIONS

Which major population shift—"white flight," migration from Mexico, or relocation of Native Americans—do you think had the greatest impact on U.S. society? Why? **Think About:**

- the impact of "white flight"
- the influx of "braceros"
- the effects of the termination policy

**TERMS & NAMES**

For each item below, write a sentence explaining its historical significance in the 1950s.

- |                 |                    |
|-----------------|--------------------|
| 1. suburb       | 6. mass media      |
| 2. Dixiecrat    | 7. beat movement   |
| 3. Fair Deal    | 8. rock 'n' roll   |
| 4. conglomerate | 9. urban renewal   |
| 5. baby boom    | 10. <i>bracero</i> |

**MAIN IDEAS**

Use your notes and the information in the chapter to answer the following questions.

**Postwar America** (pages 840–846)

- How did the GI Bill of Rights help World War II veterans?
- What domestic and foreign issues concerned voters during the 1952 presidential election?

**The American Dream in the Fifties**

(pages 847–855)

- What shift in employment trends had occurred by the mid-1950s?
- How did life in the suburbs provide the model for the American dream?

**Popular Culture** (pages 858–863)

- What strategies did radio stations use to counteract the mass popularity of television?

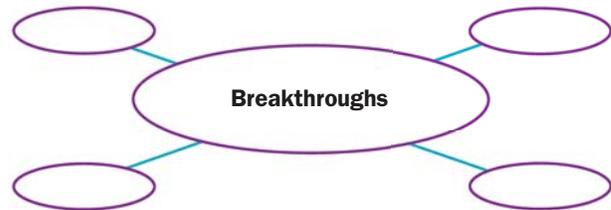
- How did African-American performers influence American popular culture in the 1950s?

**The Other America** (pages 866–869)

- How did many major cities change in the 1950s?
- What obstacles to improving their lives did Native Americans face in the 1950s?

**CRITICAL THINKING**

- USING YOUR NOTES** In a web like the one below, show the postwar technological advances you consider most influential.



- HYPOTHESIZING** During America's first two centuries, the national character was marked by individualism. Why do you think conformity became the norm in the 1950s?
- ANALYZING PRIMARY SOURCES** Do you agree or disagree with the following quotation from *Life* magazine on American culture in 1954: "Never before so much for so few"? Support your answer with evidence.

**VISUAL SUMMARY**

**THE POSTWAR BOOM**

**LIFE IN POSTWAR AMERICA  
1945–1960**

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>SUBURBAN GROWTH</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Baby boom causes population growth.</li> <li>• Demand for goods exceeds supply.</li> <li>• Highways and affordable homes make suburban living desirable.</li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>POLITICS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Eisenhower's presidency brings prosperity and political conservatism.</li> <li>• Equal rights remains a problem.</li> <li>• The Cold War creates fear and anxiety.</li> </ul>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>POPULAR CULTURE</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rock 'n' roll and jazz pave the way for minority representation.</li> <li>• The beat movement rejects conformity.</li> <li>• Recreation and consumerism flourish.</li> <li>• Television portrays an idealized white America.</li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>UNEQUAL OPPORTUNITIES</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Urban areas fall into decay.</li> <li>• Minorities experience prejudice and discrimination.</li> <li>• Minorities establish organizations to improve civil rights.</li> </ul>