How did Truman’s and Eisenhower’s approaches to the superpower struggle differ?

During the 1952 campaign, Republicans vowed not just to end the Korean War but to liberate “enslaved” peoples under Soviet rule. Some, such as the new Secretary of State John Foster Dulles, attacked containment as “negative, futile, and immoral.” In practice, however, President Eisenhower pursued a containment policy much like that of his predecessor. His administration did not attempt to roll communism back, but instead chose to intervene at the margins of Communist power in Asia, Latin America, and the Middle East, where U.S. economic interests were often also at stake. Eisenhower’s defense strategy relied more on nuclear weapons and secret CIA operations than had Truman’s. Toward the end of Eisenhower’s presidency, he was also able to seize on political changes in the Soviet Union to reduce tensions between the superpowers.

The “New Look” in Foreign Policy

In his inaugural address, Eisenhower warned that the “forces of good and evil are massed and armed and

opposed as rarely before in history.” Like Truman, he saw communism as a threat to the nation’s security and economic interests, and he was intent on maintaining U.S. power around the globe. Eisenhower’s foreign policy differed, however, in three areas: its rhetoric, its means, and, after Stalin’s death in 1953, its steps toward accommodation with the Soviet Union.

Eisenhower was determined to control military expenditures in order to balance the budget and cut taxes. Reflecting American confidence in technology as well as public opposition to a large peacetime army, Eisenhower’s “New Look” in defense concentrated U.S. military strength in nuclear weapons. Instead of maintaining large ground forces of its own, the United States would arm friendly nations and back them up with an ominous nuclear arsenal, providing, according to one defense official, “more bang for the buck.” Dulles believed that America’s willingness to “go to the brink” of war with nuclear weapons — a strategy termed “brinksmanship” — would block any Soviet efforts to expand.

There was no way for the United States to defend itself from a nuclear strike, but the certainty of “massive retaliation” was intended to deter the Soviets from launching an attack. Because the Soviet Union could respond similarly to an American first strike, this nuclear standoff became known as

mutually assured destruction (MAD). Leaders of both nations joined an ever-escalating arms race, with the United States determined to outpace the Soviet Union in nuclear warheads and delivery missiles.

The growing U.S. nuclear stockpile did not alter the terms of the superpower struggle or reverse containment policy. When a revolt against the Soviet-controlled government broke out in Hungary in 1956, Dulles's liberation rhetoric proved hollow. A radio plea from Hungarian freedom fighters professed their hope that "American troops will be here within one or two hours." But help did not come. Eisenhower was unwilling to risk U.S. soldiers and possible nuclear war, and Soviet troops soon suppressed the insurrection, killing or wounding thousands of Hungarians.

Applying Containment to Vietnam

A major challenge to U.S. containment policy came in Southeast Asia, and specifically in French-occupied Indochina. During World War II, Ho Chi Minh and his nationalist coalition, the Vietminh, fought both the occupying Japanese forces and French colonial rulers. In 1945, the Vietminh — citing the American Declaration of Independence and the French *Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen* — claimed Vietnam's independence

from France. When France fought back, the area plunged into war. Because Ho declared himself a Communist, the Truman administration quietly funneled aid to the French. Once again, American rhetoric in support of national self-determination took a backseat to the battle against communism.

Eisenhower viewed the Communist threat in Vietnam much as Truman had regarded it in Greece and Turkey. In what became known as the **domino theory**, Eisenhower explained, “You have a row of dominoes, you knock over the first one, and what will happen to the last one is the certainty that it will go over very quickly.” A Communist victory in Southeast Asia, he warned, could set off the fall of Japan, Taiwan, and the Philippines. By 1954, the United States was paying 75 percent of the cost of France’s war in Vietnam. But with the Korean War fresh in his mind, Eisenhower resisted a larger role. When the French asked for American troops and planes to avert almost certain defeat in the battle for Dien Bien Phu, the president refused.

Dien Bien Phu fell to the Vietminh in May 1954, and two months later in Geneva, a truce was signed. The Geneva accords recognized Vietnam’s independence and temporarily partitioned it at the seventeenth parallel, separating the Vietminh in the north from the puppet government established by the French in the south. Within

two years, the Vietnamese people were to elect a unified government. Some officials warned against the continued American involvement in Vietnam, envisioning “nothing but grief in store for us if we remained in that area.” Eisenhower and Dulles nonetheless moved to shore up South Vietnam with a new alliance and put the CIA to work infiltrating and destabilizing North Vietnam. Fearing a Communist victory in the mandated elections, they supported South Vietnamese prime minister Ngo Dinh Diem’s refusal to hold the vote.

Between 1955 and 1961, the United States provided $800 million to the South Vietnamese army. Yet those troops proved grossly unprepared for the guerrilla warfare that began in the late 1950s. With help from Ho Chi Minh’s government in Hanoi, Vietminh rebels in the south stepped up their attacks on Diem’s government. The insurgents gained support from the largely Buddhist peasants, who were outraged by the repressive regime of the Catholic, Westernized Diem. Unwilling to abandon containment, Eisenhower left his successor with no clear path to resolution beyond the pledge to save South Vietnam from communism.

Interventions in Latin America and the Middle East

The Eisenhower administration propped up friendly governments in Asia, but it also sought to topple unfriendly ones in Latin America and the Middle East. Officials regularly — and often mistakenly — interpreted internal civil wars in terms of the Cold War conflict between the superpowers, treating homegrown nationalist movements as Communist challenges to democracy. The administration also acted forcefully against governments that threatened U.S. economic interests. Increasingly, such foreign policy decisions were enacted out of sight of Congress and the public, through the use of the CIA.

This was the case in Guatemala. Its government, under the popularly elected president Jacobo Arbenz, was not Soviet controlled, although it did accept support from the local Communist Party. In 1953, Arbenz moved to help landless, poverty-stricken peasants by nationalizing land owned, but not cultivated, by the United Fruit Company, a U.S. corporation whose annual profits were twice the size of Guatemala’s national budget. United Fruit rejected Arbenz’s offer to compensate the company. Equating Arbenz’s reformist government with a Communist threat, the CIA supplied pilots and other support to an opposition army that overthrew the elected government and installed a military dictatorship in 1954. United Fruit kept its land, and Guatemala was beset by destructive civil wars that lasted through the 1990s.

In 1959, when Cuban opposition to an authoritarian government erupted into a revolution led by Fidel Castro, a CIA agent promised “to take care of Castro just like we took care of Arbenz.” As in Guatemala, American companies controlled major Cuban resources, and the country’s internal affairs were monitored closely in Washington. The Cuban revolution of 1959 drove out the U.S.-supported dictator Fulgencio Batista and led the CIA to warn Eisenhower that “Communists and other extreme radicals appear to have penetrated the Castro movement.”

When the United States denied Castro’s requests for loans, he turned to the Soviet Union. And when U.S. companies refused Castro’s offer to purchase their Cuban holdings at their assessed value, he began to nationalize their property. Many anti-Castro Cubans fled to the United States and reported his atrocities. Before leaving office, Eisenhower broke off diplomatic relations with Cuba and authorized the CIA to train Cuban exiles for an invasion to overthrow Castro.

This pattern had been established early in Eisenhower’s administration. In the Middle East, the CIA intervened in Iran to oust an elected government, support an unpopular dictatorship, and maintain Western access to Iranian oil (see Map 29.3). In 1951, the Iranian parliament, led by Prime Minister Mohammed Mossadegh, nationalized the country’s

oil fields and refineries, the majority of which were held by a British company and from which Iran received less than 20 percent of the profits. Britain strongly objected to the takeover and eventually sought help from the United States.

Advisers convinced Eisenhower that Mossadegh, whom *Time* magazine had called “the Iranian George Washington,” left Iran vulnerable to communism. Moreover, the president was eager to keep oil-rich areas in friendly hands. With Eisenhower’s authorization, CIA agents instigated a coup, bribing army officers and financing demonstrations in the streets. In August 1953, Iranian army officers captured Mossadegh and reestablished the authority of the shah, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, known for favoring Western interests and the Iranian wealthy classes. U.S. companies received a 40 percent share of Iran’s oil concessions. But resentment over the intervention would poison U.S.-Iranian relations into the twenty-first century.

Elsewhere in the Middle East, Eisenhower continued Truman’s policy of support for Israel. He also pursued friendships with Arab nations to secure access to oil and create a bulwark against communism in the region, demanding their allegiance to America’s side in the Cold War even when they preferred neutrality. In 1955, as part of the effort to win Arab allies, U.S. officials began talks with Egypt about American support to build the Aswan Dam on

the Nile River. The following year, Egypt's leader, Gamal Abdel Nasser, sought arms from Communist Czechoslovakia, formed a military alliance with other Arab nations, and recognized the People's Republic of China. In retaliation, the U.S. called off the deal for the dam.

In July 1956, Nasser responded by seizing the Suez Canal, then owned by Britain and France but scheduled to revert to Egypt within seven years. In turn, Israel attacked Egypt, with help from Britain and France. Eisenhower in this case opposed the intervention, recognizing that the Egyptians had claimed their own territory and that Nasser "embodie[d] the emotional demands of the people … for independence." Calling on the United Nations to arrange a truce, he pressured Britain and France to pull back, forcing Israel to retreat.

Despite staying out of the Suez crisis, Eisenhower made it clear in a January 1957 speech that the United States would actively combat communism in the Middle East. Two months later, Congress approved aid to any Middle Eastern nation "requesting assistance against armed aggression from any country controlled by international communism." The president invoked this Eisenhower Doctrine to send aid to Jordan in 1957 and troops to Lebanon in 1958 to counter anti-Western pressures on those governments.

The Nuclear Arms Race

Eisenhower firmly resisted Communist inroads abroad through overt and covert actions. But he also sought to reduce superpower tensions. After Stalin's death in 1953, Nikita Khrushchev emerged as a more moderate Soviet leader. Like Eisenhower, who remarked privately that the arms race would lead "at worst to atomic warfare, at best to robbing every people and nation on earth of the fruits of their own toil," Khrushchev wanted to reduce defense spending and the threat of nuclear devastation. Eisenhower and Khrushchev met in Geneva in 1955 at the first summit conference between the two nations since the end of World War I, symbolizing what Eisenhower called "a new spirit of conciliation and cooperation." In August 1957, the Soviets test-fired their first intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM), and two months later, they beat the United States into space by launching ***Sputnik***, the first man-made satellite to circle the earth.

The United States launched a successful satellite of its own in January 1958, but *Sputnik* raised fears that the Soviets led not only in missile development and space exploration but also in science and education. In response, Eisenhower established the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) with a huge budget increase for space exploration. He also signed the National Defense

Education Act, providing support for students in math, foreign languages, and science and technology. As the legislation's title suggested, domestic policies even in areas seemingly far removed from the Cold War could be justified in national security terms.

Eisenhower assured the public of the United States' nuclear superiority. In fact, during his presidency, the stockpile of American nuclear weapons more than quadrupled. With ICBMs at home and in Britain, the United States was prepared to deploy more in Italy and Turkey. In 1960, the United States launched the first Polaris submarine carrying nuclear missiles.

Yet nuclear weapons could not guarantee security for either superpower, each of which possessed sufficient capacity to devastate the other. In drills, school children were trained to "duck and cover" in case of nuclear attack, and the Civilian Defense Administration issued similar guidelines for adults. Most Americans did not follow the recommendation to construct home bomb shelters, but they recognized the unprecedented perils of a nuclear age. A new organization, the Committee for a Sane Nuclear Policy, called the nuclear arms race "a danger unlike any danger that has ever existed."

Helped by the thaw in U.S.-Soviet relations, the superpowers began to discuss possible resolutions of the arms race in the Eisenhower years. By 1960, the two sides were close to a ban on nuclear testing. But just before a planned summit in Paris, a Soviet missile shot down an American U-2 spy plane over Soviet territory. When the State Department denied that U.S. planes had been violating Soviet airspace, the Soviets produced the pilot and the photos taken on his flight. The incident dashed all prospects for a nuclear arms agreement.

Photo: American Stock Archive/Getty Images.

The Age of Nuclear Anxiety Children directly experienced the insecurity of the Cold War nuclear arms race through routine school drills instructing them to “duck and cover” in the event of a Soviet strike. Although such techniques would not have offered much of a safeguard, civil defense agencies also distributed pamphlets about how to protect oneself in the event of an atomic attack.

In the name of deterrence, Eisenhower promoted the development of more destructive atomic weapons. But he was uneasy with the expansion of defense budgets. Indeed, as the president left office, he warned about the growing influence of the “**military-industrial complex**,” the insatiable demand of defense contractors and the U.S. military for newer, more powerful weapons systems. In his farewell address, he warned that the “conjunction of an immense military establishment and a large arms industry … exercised a total influence … in every city, every state house, every office of the federal government.” His administration had done little, however, to curtail the defense industry’s power. The Cold War had created a warfare state.

REVIEW

Where and how did Eisenhower practice containment?

Conclusion: What were the costs and consequences of the Cold War?

Hoping for continued U.S.-Soviet cooperation rather than unilateral American intervention to resolve foreign crises, some liberal members of Congress, such as Helen Gahagan Douglas, initially opposed the implementation of containment. By 1948, however, most politicians and public figures had lined up squarely behind Truman's decision to fight communism throughout the world. It was perhaps the most momentous foreign policy initiative in the nation's history.

More than any other development in the postwar world, the Cold War defined American politics and society for decades to come. It changed the U.S. government, greatly expanding the federal budget and substantially increasing the power of the president and executive branch. It altered policymaking, shifting priorities from internal to external affairs and linking domestic spending to national security. And it transformed the U.S. economy, which was boosted by the reconstruction of Western Europe and Japan as well as Cold War defense outlays. The nuclear arms race put the people of the world at risk, consumed resources that might have been used to

improve living standards, and skewed the economy toward dependence on military projects.

Another cost of the early Cold War years was the anti-Communist wave that swept the nation, denying Douglas a Senate seat, intimidating radicals and liberals, and narrowing the range of ideas acceptable for political discussion. Partisan politics and Truman’s warnings about the Communist menace fueled McCarthyism, as did popular frustrations over the failure of containment to defeat the nation’s enemies. The Korean War, which ended in stalemate rather than victory, prompted the Eisenhower administration to seek new tools for winning the Cold War, including covert CIA operations and aid to authoritarian leaders around the world — in Guatemala, Iran, and Vietnam — so long as they promised to stave off communism. The conviction that the United States must fight communism everywhere led to infringements on the constitutional rights of U.S. citizens. As the basis for postwar foreign policy, it provoked anti-Americanism and led to military commitments and interventions that would plague future generations.

Chapter Review

EXPLAIN WHY IT MATTERS

iron curtain
containment
Truman Doctrine
Marshall Plan
North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)
Central Intelligence Agency (CIA)
House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC)
Korean War
NSC 68
mutually assured destruction (MAD)
domino theory
Sputnik
military-industrial complex

PUT IT ALL TOGETHER

The United States and the Postwar World

- What interests did American and Soviet policymakers think were at stake in Eastern Europe? How did events in the region contribute to the growing Cold War?
- What was the policy of containment? What assumptions did it make about Soviet power and intentions?

Anticommunism as Policy and Politics

- How did the United States address the Communist threat in Asia as compared to Europe? What impact did the Korean War have on American domestic politics and on future military decision making?
- What explains the rise of McCarthyism? Why did some Americans believe that their country faced a grave internal threat to its security?

Foreign Policy in the Eisenhower Years

- How did Eisenhower's approach to the Cold War compare to Truman's?
- Why did the United States turn to military intervention and covert CIA activities as tools of foreign policy in the 1950s? What were the immediate and longer-term consequences in Asia, the Middle East, and Latin America?

LOOKING BACKWARD, LOOKING AHEAD

How did American and Soviet experiences between 1918 and 1945 lay the groundwork for the Cold War?

How did the Cold War redirect U.S. foreign and domestic priorities into the 1950s and beyond? What were its effects on the U.S. government and military?

CHRONOLOGY

1945
- Roosevelt dies; Truman becomes president.
- Korea divided at thirty-eighth parallel after World War II, with American and Soviet occupation zones.
- Vietnam claims independence from France, and war breaks out.

1946
- George F. Kennan drafts containment policy.
- United States grants independence to Philippines.

1947
- National Security Act passes, forming Central Intelligence Agency.
- Truman Doctrine.
- United States sends aid to Greece and Turkey.
- Truman executive order creates loyalty review boards.
- "Hollywood Ten" jailed for contempt of Congress.

1948
- Marshall Plan approved.

- United States recognizes Israel.

1948–1949

- Berlin crisis precipitates airlift drops.

1949

- North Atlantic Treaty Organization formed.
- Soviet Union explodes atomic bombs.
- Truman approves hydrogen bomb.
- Program of aid to developing nations begins.
- Communists win civil war in China.

1950

- Senator Joseph McCarthy claims U.S. government harbors Communists.
- NSC 68 report urges massive military buildup.
- Korean War begins when North Korea invades South Korea.
- Truman authorizes crossing of thirty-eighth parallel.

1951

- U.S. military occupation of Japan ends.
- Truman fires General Douglas MacArthur for insubordination.

1952

- Dwight D. Eisenhower elected president.

1953

- Julius and Ethel Rosenberg are executed.
- Armistice ends Korean War.
- CIA organizes coup against Iranian government.

1954

- Senate condemns Senator McCarthy.
- CIA organizes coup against Guatemalan government.
- Geneva accords end French presence in Vietnam.

1955

- Eisenhower and Khrushchev meet for summit in Geneva.

1956

- Suez crisis breaks out.

1957

- Soviets launch *Sputnik.*

1958

- National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) established.
- National Defense Education Act passes.

1959

- Cuban revolution installs Fidel Castro in power.

1960

- U.S. launches first submarine with nuclear missiles.
- Soviets shoot down U.S. U-2 spy plane.

CHAPTER 27 POSTWAR CULTURE AND POLITICS

1945–1960

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

This chapter will explore the following questions:

- What were the prospects for domestic reform in the Truman years?
- To what extent did Eisenhower dismantle the New Deal?
- What fueled postwar prosperity?
- How did economic growth affect American society, politics, and culture?
- What mobilized African Americans to fight for civil rights in the 1950s?
- Conclusion: What challenges did peace and prosperity mask?

AN AMERICAN STORY

TRAILED BY REPORTERS, VICE PRESIDENT RICHARD M. NIXON LED Soviet premier Nikita Khrushchev through the American National Exhibition in Moscow in July 1959. The cultural exchange reflected a slight thaw in the Cold War after Khrushchev replaced Stalin. It was nevertheless an excellent opportunity for propaganda. As they examined a display of American consumer goods, Khrushchev and Nixon took part in a slugfest of words that reporters dubbed “the kitchen debate.”

Showing off a new color television set, Nixon remarked that the Soviet Union “may be ahead of us … in the thrust of your rockets,” but he insisted that the United States outpaced the Soviets in consumer goods. Linking capitalism with democracy, Nixon asserted that such products and “our right to choose” were the very substance of American freedom. As the two leaders walked through a model of a six-room ranch-style home, Nixon boasted that “any steelworker could buy this house.” Khrushchev retorted that in his country citizens were “entitled to housing,” whereas in the United States the homeless slept on the pavement. Moving on, Nixon declared that household appliances were “designed to make

things easier for our women." Khrushchev disparaged this "capitalist attitude," maintaining that the Soviets appreciated women's contributions to the economy rather than their domesticity.

Nixon got Khrushchev to agree that it was "far better to be talking about washing machines than machines of war." Yet cultural exchanges aside, the two nations remained locked in Cold War animosity and an intense arms race throughout the postwar decades. Free enterprise and capitalist abundance would be enlisted in this struggle, providing a key justification for "the American way."

Americans' soaring standard of living in the 1950s was unparalleled. It was also unanticipated. Many in the United States feared a recession as troops returned from Europe and Asia in 1945, and the conversion from a war footing was not easy. Even at the time of the kitchen debate, poverty clung stubbornly to one of every five Americans. Yet the Moscow display testified to the unheard-of material gains savored by many in the postwar era.

Cold War weapons production spurred the economy, whose vitality stimulated suburban development, contributed to the growth of the South and

Southwest (the Sun Belt), and enabled millions of Americans to buy a host of new products. As new homes, television sets, and household appliances transformed living patterns, Americans took part in a consumer culture that celebrated the family and traditional gender roles, even as growing numbers of married women took jobs outside the home.

The prosperity of the postwar period also made way for challenges to dominant norms and practices by dissenting writers known as the Beats and an emerging youth culture. Most dramatically, the Cold War and the economic boom of the 1950s helped African Americans to mount protests against the system of segregation and disfranchisement that had replaced slavery. The organizations, leadership, and strategies that African American activists developed in this period built a civil rights movement of unprecedented size and influence.

What were the prospects for domestic reform in the Truman years?

Referring to the Civil War general who coined the phrase “War is hell,” the newly installed president Harry Truman joked in 1945 that “Sherman was wrong. I’m telling you I find peace is hell.” Challenged by crises abroad, Truman also faced shortages, strikes, and inflation as the economy shifted to peacetime production. The president had vowed to expand on New Deal reforms with his own “Fair Deal” program focused on health care, housing, civil rights, and education. But Cold War commitments around the globe, anticommunism at home, and Republican gains in Congress prevented Truman from enacting much of his domestic agenda.

Reconverting to a Peacetime Economy

As World War II came to a close, economic experts and ordinary citizens feared a peacetime recession. They also worried about providing jobs for millions of returning soldiers. To that end, Truman asked Congress for a twenty-one-point program of social and economic reforms. He proposed continued regulation of the economy while the nation adjusted to peacetime production. He also called for

new government programs in housing and health care for those in need. “Not even President Roosevelt ever asked for as much at one sitting,” exploded Republican leader Joseph W. Martin Jr.

Congress approved just one of Truman’s key proposals — full-employment legislation — and then only after watering it down. The Employment Act of 1946 called on the federal government “to promote maximum employment, production, and purchasing power,” thereby formalizing the state’s responsibility for maintaining a healthy economy. It created the Council of Economic Advisors to assist the president, but it authorized no new powers to translate the government’s obligations into effective action.

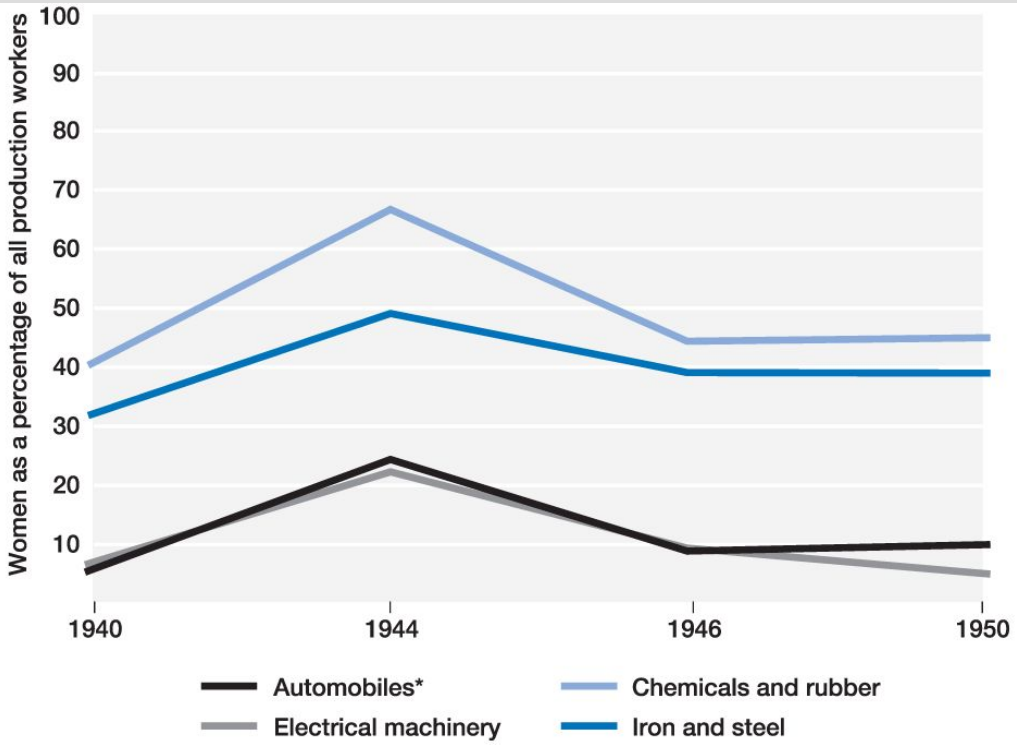
Inflation, not unemployment, turned out to be the biggest economic problem facing the postwar United States. Consumers had $30 billion in wartime savings to spend, but shortages of meat, automobiles, housing, and other items drove up prices. Some in Congress sought to maintain price and rent controls, but those efforts were dashed by pressures from business groups and others determined to trim government powers.

Labor relations were another thorn in Truman’s side. Organized labor emerged from the war 14.5 million members strong, a full 35 percent of the nonagricultural

workforce. Yet unions feared the erosion of wartime gains and turned to the weapon they had surrendered during the war. Five million workers went out on strike in 1946, affecting nearly every major industry. One former Marine and his coworkers voted to strike after calculating that an executive had spent more on a party than they would earn in a whole year at the steel mill. “That sort of stuff made us realize, hell we had to bite the bullet…. The bosses sure didn’t give a damn for us.” Although most Americans approved of unions in principle, many became fed up with strikes and blamed unions for shortages and rising prices. When the strikes subsided, workers had won wage increases of about 20 percent, but the loss of overtime pay coupled with rising prices left their purchasing power only slightly higher than it was in 1942.

Women workers fared even worse. Polls indicated that 68 to 85 percent wanted to keep their wartime jobs, but most who remained in the workforce had to settle for relatively low-paying jobs in light industry or the service sector (**Figure 27.1**). Displaced from her shipyard work, Marie Schreiber took a cashier’s job, lamenting, “You were back to women’s wages, you know … practically in half.” Women’s organizations and union women called for bills to require equal pay for equal work, provide child care for employed mothers, and create a government commission to study women’s status. But it was clear that many others viewed

women primarily as wives and mothers — and their wartime work as temporary. At a time of rising opposition to further expansion of federal powers, initiatives on equal pay and child care went nowhere.



Roark et al., *The American Promise*, 8e, Value Edition © 2020 Bedford/St. Martin's

FIGURE 27.1 Women Workers in Selected Industries, 1940–1950

Women demolished the idea that some jobs were "men's work" during World War II, but they lost ground in the manufacturing sector after the war.

Description

"The map has years along the horizontal axis and women as a percentage of all production workers along the vertical axis. The automobile industry employed less than 10 percent women workers in

1940 and added on more women employees gradually to account for 26 percent by 1944. However, it dropped below 10 percent by 1946 again and continued with a very slight increase thereafter.

The women workforce of iron and steel industry in 1940 was 9 percent and climbed to 22 percent by 1944. As with the automobile industry, it dropped to 10 percent by 1946 and further to 6 percent by 1950.

The electrical machinery industry had 31 percent women workers which increased to 50 percent in 1944. By 1946, the number reduced to 40 percent and continued through 1950.

The highest female representation was in chemicals and rubber industry as it accounted for 41 percent of workers in 1945 and shot to 68 percent in 1944. Thereafter it declined to 45 percent in 1946 and remained there through 1950.

A note to Automobiles reads, During World War II, the automobile industry did not produce cars, but rather military transportation such as jeeps, tanks, aircraft, etc.)

All data are approximate."

The most successful of the reconversion measures was the **Servicemen's Readjustment Act**, or GI Bill, enacted in 1944. Addressing concerns about absorbing returning veterans into the postwar economy, it offered sixteen million veterans vocational training and education. It also provided unemployment compensation until they found jobs, and low-interest loans to purchase homes, farms, and small businesses. By 1948, some 1.3 million veterans had bought houses with government loans. A drugstore clerk before his military service, Don Condren was able to pursue

an engineering degree and buy his first house. “The GI Bill gave the whole country an upward boost economically,” he said.

The impact of the GI Bill was uneven, however. As wives and daughters of veterans, women benefited indirectly from the GI subsidies, but few women qualified for the employment and educational preferences available to some fifteen million men. Soldiers dishonorably discharged for “homosexual conduct” were barred from GI benefits. Because GI programs were administered at the state and local levels, they also resulted in systematic racial and ethnic discrimination, especially in the South.

Southern universities remained segregated, and historically black colleges could not accommodate demand. Federal housing loans also heavily favored white applicants. Despite the employment assistance offered by the GI Bill, black veterans were often shuttled into low-skill jobs. One decorated WWII veteran reported that “my color bars me from most decent jobs, and if, instead of accepting menial work, I collect my $20 a week readjustment allowance, I am classified as a ‘lazy nigger.’” Thousands of black Americans did see some benefits, but the GI Bill disproportionately helped white male veterans.

The Fair Deal Falters

Truman hoped through his **Fair Deal** to shore up and expand the New Deal. The president favored universal health care, federally protected civil rights, public assistance for housing, and federal aid to education. But apart from a public housing act, these ambitions were hindered by a series of opponents: business lobbies resistant to the regulation of “free enterprise,” white southerners determined to block civil rights legislation, and a reinvigorated Republican Party. Broader anti-Communist sentiment played a role too, casting suspicion on a powerful federal government and state-backed ventures of all kinds. As a consequence, the only large social welfare measure to pass after the New Deal would be the GI Bill. In sharp contrast to the bipartisan support Truman won for his foreign policy, major domestic reforms were elusive during his administration.

The Democratic dominance that Franklin Roosevelt had presided over during the depression and New Deal years hit roadblocks in the postwar period. Accusing the Truman administration of “confusion, corruption, and communism,” Republicans capitalized on public frustrations with postwar strikes and shortages, capturing control of Congress in 1946 for the first time in fourteen years. Many had campaigned against the New Deal. Once elected, they weakened some

reform programs and enacted tax cuts favoring higher-income groups.

Organized labor took the most severe blow when Congress passed the **Taft-Hartley Act** over Truman's veto in 1947. Called a "slave labor" law by unions, the measure amended the Wagner Act (see chapter 24), reducing unions' power to bargain with employers and making it more difficult to organize workers. States could now pass "right-to-work" laws, which banned the practice of requiring all workers to join a union once a majority had voted for it. Many states, especially in the South and West, rushed to enact such laws, encouraging industries to relocate there. Taft-Hartley maintained the New Deal principle of government protection for collective bargaining, but it tipped the balance of power toward management.

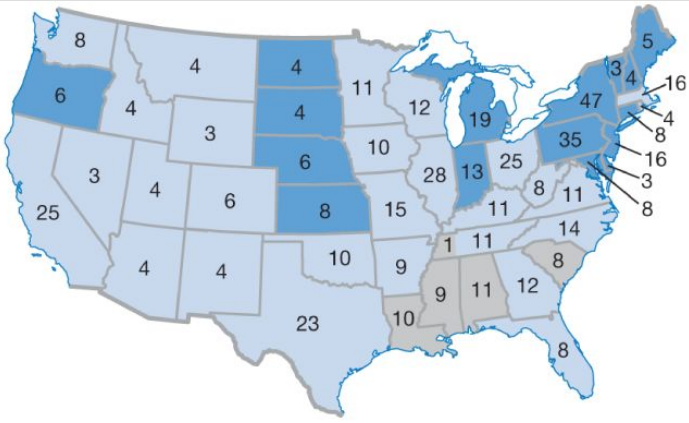
In the 1948 elections, Truman faced not only a resurgent Republican Party headed by New York governor Thomas E. Dewey but also two revolts within his own party. On the left, Henry A. Wallace, whose foreign policy views had cost him his cabinet seat, led the new Progressive Party. On the right, South Carolina governor J. Strom Thurmond headed the States' Rights Party — the **Dixiecrats** — formed by southern Democrats who walked out of the 1948 Democratic Party convention when it passed a liberal civil rights plank.

W. Eugene Smith/Getty Images.

Truman's 1948 Victory Large crowds turned out for Truman's coast-to-coast "whistle-stop" campaign in 1948, but experts thought he had little chance to win, given the defections from his party on both the left and right. Polls predicted a Dewey victory, with the *Chicago Tribune* prematurely handing the Republican the election. Truman gloats over the error and his surprise win before a crowd of supporters.

Truman's prospects looked so bleak on election night that the *Chicago Daily Tribune* printed its next day's issue with the headline "Dewey Defeats Truman." But even though the Dixiecrats won four southern states, Truman took 303

electoral votes to Dewey's 189, and his party regained control of Congress (**Map 27.1**). His unexpected victory attested to the broad support for his foreign policy and the enduring popularity of New Deal reform.



MAP 27.1 The Election of 1948

Description
"The map shows the following data:

Harry S. Truman (Democrat): Electoral Vote, 303; Popular Vote, 24,105,695; Percent of Popular Vote, 49.1 percent.

Electoral vote by state: Massachusetts, 16; Rhode Island, 4; Virginia, 11; West Virginia, 8; Ohio, 25; Tennessee, 11; Kentucky, 11; North Carolina, 14; Georgia, 12; Florida, 8; Wisconsin, 12; Illinois, 28; Minnesota, 11;

Iowa, 10; Missouri, 15; Arkansas, 9; Oklahoma, 10; Texas, 23; New Mexico, 4; Colorado, 6; Wyoming, 3; Montana, 4; Arizona, 4; Utah, 4; Idaho,4; Washington, 8; Nevada, 3; and California, 25.

Thomas E. Dewey (Republican): Electoral Vote, 189; Popular Vote, 21,969,170; Percent of Popular Vote, 45.1 percent.

Electoral vote by state: Maine, 5; Vermont, 3; New Hampshire, 4; Connecticut, 8; New Jersey, 16; New York, 47; Pennsylvania, 35; Delaware, 3; Maryland: 8; North Dakota, 4; South Dakota, 4; Nebraska, 6; Kansas, 8; and Oregon, 6.

J. Strom Thurmond (States' Rights): Electoral Vote, 39; Popular Vote, 1,169,021; Percent of Popular Vote, 2.4 percent.

Electoral vote by state: South Carolina, 8; Alabama, 11; Mississippi, 9; Tennessee, 1; and Louisiana, 10.

Henry A. Wallace (Progressive): Electoral Vote, 0; Popular Vote, 1,156,103; Percent of Popular Vote, 2.4 percent."

While most New Deal programs survived Republican attacks, Truman failed to enact his Fair Deal agenda. Congress made modest improvements in Social Security and raised the minimum wage, but it passed only one significant reform measure. The **Housing Act of 1949** authorized 810,000 units of government-constructed housing over the next six years, representing a landmark commitment by the government to address the housing needs of poor Americans. Yet it fell far short of actual need, and it created new problems when slum clearance displaced people from

their homes and neighborhoods without providing alternatives.

The rest of Truman’s Fair Deal did not materialize. With southern Democrats playing a pivotal role, Congress rejected Truman’s proposals for civil rights. A powerful medical lobby blocked plans for national health insurance, attacking it as “socialized medicine” and the Truman administration as “followers of the Moscow party line.” Conflicts over race and religion thwarted federal aid to education.

Truman’s efforts to revise immigration policy were mixed. The McCarran-Walter Act of 1952 ended the outright ban on immigration and citizenship for Japanese and other Asians, but it authorized the government to bar suspected Communists and homosexuals and maintained the discriminatory quota system established in the 1920s.

Truman’s foreign policy contributed to the failure of his Fair Deal. By late 1950, the Korean War embroiled the president in controversy and depleted his power as a legislative leader. Truman’s inability to make good on his domestic proposals set the United States apart from most European nations, which by the 1950s had established comprehensive health, housing, and employment programs to underwrite the material well-being and security of their populations.

Race and Rights in the 1940s

“I spent four years in the army to free a bunch of Frenchmen and Dutchmen,” an African American corporal declared, “and I’m hanged if I’m going to let the Alabama version of the Germans kick me around when I get home.” Truman’s civil rights legislation may have languished in Congress, but black veterans and civilians alike resolved to root out the racial injustices of postwar America. The migration of two million African Americans to northern and western cities made the ballot a newly powerful tool, strengthening ongoing efforts to end discrimination in housing and education. Pursuing civil rights through the courts and Congress, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) counted half a million members.

Individual African Americans broke through the color barrier in the postwar years. Jackie Robinson integrated major league baseball, playing for the Brooklyn Dodgers and braving abuse from fans and players to win the Rookie of the Year Award in 1947. In 1950, Ralph J. Bunche received the Nobel Peace Prize for his United Nations work, and Gwendolyn Brooks won the Pulitzer Prize for poetry. Some organizations, such as the American Medical Association in 1949, opened their doors to black members.

Still, little had changed for most African Americans, especially in the South, where violence met their attempts to assert even the most basic rights of U.S. citizens. Armed white men prevented Medgar Evers (who would become a key civil rights leader in the 1960s) and four other veterans from voting in Mississippi. A mob lynched Isaac Nixon for voting in Georgia, and an all-white jury acquitted the men accused of his murder. White supremacy was not confined to the South. Segregation and economic discrimination were widespread in the North as well.

The Cold War, however, compelled U.S. leaders to pay attention to racial issues. Soviet propaganda repeatedly highlighted racial injustice in the United States — a liability in the superpowers' competition for the allegiance of newly independent nations with nonwhite populations. Secretary of State Dean Acheson reported that systematic segregation and discrimination jeopardized "our moral leadership of the free and democratic nations of the world."

"My very stomach turned over when I learned that Negro soldiers just back from overseas were being dumped out of army trucks in Mississippi and beaten," wrote Truman. Risking the loss of support from southern white voters, Truman spoke more boldly on civil rights than had any previous president. In 1946, he created the President's Committee on Civil Rights, and in 1948, he asked Congress

to enact the committee’s comprehensive recommendations. The first president to address the NAACP, Truman asserted that all Americans should have equal rights to housing, education, employment, and the ballot.

Truman did not match those bold words with effective action. Congress rejected his proposals for national civil rights legislation, although some states outside the South did pass laws against discrimination in employment and public accommodations. Truman’s most significant step was an executive order desegregating the armed services. In part an appeal to northern black and liberal voters leading up to the 1948 election, the order was not implemented until the Korean War, when the cost of segregation to military efficiency became apparent. Officers gradually integrated their ranks, so that by 1953, nearly all African Americans served in mixed units — making the military among the most integrated of all U.S. institutions. Although Truman’s accomplishments fell far short of his proposals, desegregation of the military and federal support of civil rights cases in the Supreme Court seeded far-reaching changes.

Discussion of race and civil rights often focused on African Americans, but Mexican Americans fought similar injustices. In 1929, activists had formed the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) to combat discrimination and

segregation in the Southwest. Like black soldiers, Mexican American veterans believed, as one insisted, that “we had earned our credentials as American citizens.” Problems with obtaining their veterans’ benefits spurred the formation of the American GI Forum in 1948 in Corpus Christi, Texas. Dr. Héctor Peréz García, president of the local LULAC and a Bronze Star combat surgeon, led the organization, which became a national force for battling discrimination and electing sympathetic officials.

Mexican American children were routinely subject to segregation in public schools. In 1945, with the help of LULAC, parents filed a class action suit in southern California, challenging school districts that barred their children from white schools. In the resulting decision, *Mendez v. Westminster* (1947), a federal court for the first time struck down school segregation, arguing that forced attendance at “Mexican schools” was unconstitutional and opposed to the principle of social equality.

NAACP lawyer Thurgood Marshall filed a supporting brief in the case, which foreshadowed the landmark *Brown* decision of 1954. Efforts to gain equal education, challenges to employment discrimination, and campaigns for political representation made evident the growing mobilization of Mexican Americans.

REVIEW

How had the context for domestic reform changed between the mid-1930s and mid-1940s?

To what extent did Eisenhower dismantle the New Deal?

Truman’s successor did not roll back popular New Deal programs, but neither did he extend them. Dwight D. Eisenhower, a national military hero, was elected in 1952 in large part based on his promise to end the Korean War. The first Republican president to take office since 1928, Eisenhower charted a path between progressive and conservative agendas. Although Eisenhower favored corporations with tax cuts and resisted federal interventions in health care, education, and race relations, he stayed the course on domestic policy.

A Republican “Middle Way”

Moderation was the guiding principle of Eisenhower’s domestic agenda and leadership style. In 1953, he pledged a “middle way between untrammeled freedom of the individual and the demands for the welfare of the whole Nation,” promising that his administration would “avoid government by bureaucracy as carefully as it avoids neglect of the helpless.” Eisenhower generally resisted expanding the federal government’s power. He only reluctantly stepped in when the Supreme Court ordered schools to desegregate,

and his administration terminated the federal trusteeship of dozens of Indian tribes.

As a moderate Republican, however, Eisenhower supported the continuation of existing social welfare programs. In the name of national defense he even extended the reach of the federal government with a massive highway act and federal funding for education in math, foreign languages, and the sciences.

“Ike,” as he was nicknamed, was very popular with the U.S. public, but so were Democratic social welfare programs. In contrast to the old guard conservatives in his party who wanted to repeal much of the New Deal, Dwight D. Eisenhower preached “modern Republicanism.” This meant curbing additional federal intervention in economic life, but not turning the clock back to the 1920s. “Should any political party attempt to abolish social security and eliminate labor laws and farm programs,” he wrote privately in 1954, “you would not hear of that party again in our political history.” Democratic control of Congress after the midterm elections of 1954 further contributed to Eisenhower’s middle-of-the-road approach.

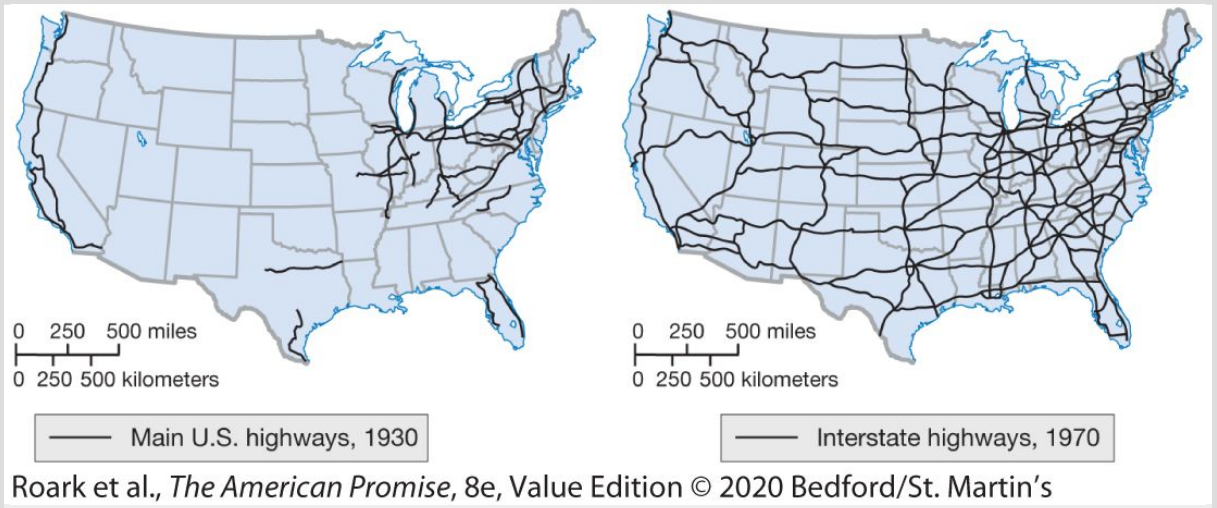
Eisenhower sometimes echoed conservative Republicans’ conviction that government was best left to the states and economic decisions to private business. Yet he signed laws

that brought ten million more workers under the umbrella of Social Security, increased the minimum wage, and created a new Department of Health, Education, and Welfare. When the spread of polio — a viral disease that could lead to paralysis — neared epidemic proportions, Eisenhower obtained funds from Congress to distribute a vaccine, a responsibility that conservatives thought individual states should bear.

Hulton Archive/Getty Images.

The Polio Vaccine Building on the work of other scientists, Dr. Jonas Salk, a researcher at the University of Michigan and the University of Pittsburgh, was the first to develop a successful polio vaccine. In this 1953 photo, he injects a girl during the trials that established the drug's success. Salk became a national hero when the vaccine became available to millions of children in 1955.

Eisenhower's most significant domestic initiative was the **Interstate Highway and Defense System Act of 1956** (**Map 27.2**). Promoted as essential to the nation's defense and an impetus to economic growth, the act authorized construction of a national highway system, with the federal government shouldering most of the costs through fuel and vehicle taxes. The new highways and associated federal outlay were justified in part by the need for escape arteries in the case of nuclear attack. More immediately, the highway network accelerated the mobility of people and goods, spurring suburban expansion. It also benefited the trucking, construction, and automobile industries that had lobbied for the law. Eventually, the monumental highway project exacted unforeseen costs in the form of air pollution, energy consumption, declining railroads and mass transportation, and decay of central cities.



MAP 27.2 The Interstate Highway System, 1930 and 1970

Built with federal funds authorized in the Interstate Highway and Defense System Act of 1956, superhighways soon crisscrossed the nation. Trucking, construction, gasoline, and travel were among the industries that prospered, while railroads suffered from the subsidized competition.

Description
The map of 1930 shows highways connecting the northern regions of New York, Pennsylvania, New Hampshire, Ohio, West Virginia, Indiana, Illinois, Kentucky, Iowa, Missouri, and Wisconsin; a road link running from Washington to California across Oregon; and roads running within Texas, and Florida. The map of 1970 shows an elaborate and intricate highway system connecting every state. However, the network is dense in the eastern states.

In other areas, Eisenhower reined in federal activity in favor of state governments and private enterprise. His large tax cuts benefited business and the wealthy, and he resisted federal aid to primary and secondary education. The president likewise opposed national health insurance,

preferring the growing practice of private insurance provided by employers. And whereas Democrats sought to keep nuclear power in government hands, Eisenhower signed legislation authorizing the private manufacture and sale of nuclear energy. The first commercial nuclear power plant opened in 1958 in northwest Pennsylvania. Most consequentially, Eisenhower avoided White House leadership on civil rights, believing such matters were best left to the states and refusing to endorse desegregation.

Eisenhower was easily reelected in 1956, defeating Adlai Stevenson and doubling his victory margin of 1952. Yet Democrats kept control of Congress, and in the midterm elections two years later, they all but wiped out the Republican Party, gaining a 64–34 majority in the Senate and a 282–135 advantage in the House. Although Ike captured voters' hearts, a majority of Americans appeared wedded to the programs and policies of the Democrats.

Eisenhower faced more serious leadership challenges in his second term. When the economy plunged into a recession in 1957, he fought with Congress over the budget and vetoed bills to expand housing, urban development, and public works projects. The president and Congress did agree on the first, although largely symbolic, civil rights law in a century. Eisenhower also supported a larger federal role in education, largely in the interest of national security.

Overall, during his two terms, Eisenhower tipped policy benefits somewhat toward corporate interests. But the first Republican administration after the New Deal largely left the functions of the federal government intact.

A Shifting Indian Policy

Eisenhower's efforts to limit the federal government were consistent with a new direction in Indian policy. After World War II, when some twenty-five thousand Indians had left their homes for military service and another forty thousand for work in defense industries, policymakers began to call for assimilating Native Americans and ending their special relationships with the government. This would amount to a reversal of the New Deal emphasis on strengthening tribal governments and preserving Indian cultures (see chapter 24).

To some officials, influenced by Cold War rhetoric, the communal practices of Indians resembled socialism and stifled individual initiative. Eisenhower's commissioner of Indian affairs urged that Indians wanted to "work and live like Americans," although he recognized that tribal lands could not produce income sufficient to eliminate poverty. There were economic interests at stake as well: Indians held rights to water, land, minerals, and other natural resources

that were increasingly attractive to state governments and private entrepreneurs.

In the decade and a half after World War II, the government implemented a three-part Indian policy of compensation, termination, and relocation. In 1946, Congress established the Indian Claims Commission to hear outstanding claims by Native Americans for land taken by the government. When it closed in 1978, the commission had settled 285 cases, with compensation exceeding $800 million. This was only a partial victory for Native Americans, however, since the awards significantly underestimated the land's worth.

The second policy, called termination, also originated in the Truman administration as a pledge to do "nothing for Indians which Indians can do for themselves." Beginning in 1953, Eisenhower signed bills transferring jurisdiction over tribal land to state and local governments, ending the trusteeship relationship between Indians and the federal government. The loss of federal hospitals, schools, and other special arrangements devastated Indian tribes. As had happened after passage of the Dawes Act in 1887 (see chapter 17), corporate interests and private individuals took advantage of the opportunity to purchase Indian land cheaply. The government abandoned termination in the 1960s, but only after more than one million acres of Native American land had been transferred to others' hands.

The **Indian Relocation Program**, the third piece of Native American policy, began in 1948 and involved more than one hundred thousand Native Americans by 1973. The government encouraged Indians to move to cities, where relocation centers were supposed to help with housing, job training, and medical care. The effects were dramatic: The percentage of Indians living in urban areas grew from 13.4 in 1950 to 44 in 1970.

Approximately one-third of the Indians who moved to urban areas, however, returned to reservations. Most who stayed in cities faced racism, unemployment, poor housing, and the loss of their traditional culture. “I wish we had never left home,” said one woman whose husband was out of work. “It’s dirty and noisy, and people all around, crowded…. It seems like I never see the sky or trees.” Reflecting long-standing disagreements among Indians themselves, some who overcame these obstacles applauded the program. But most urban Indians remained poor, and some worried that “we would lose our identity as Indian people, lose our culture and our [way] of living.” Within two decades, a national pan-Indian movement — a by-product of this urbanization — emerged to resist assimilation and to demand Native American rights (see chapter 28).

REVIEW

In what areas did the Eisenhower administration depart from or reverse prior domestic policies?

What fueled postwar prosperity?

Despite scarcities and inflation, World War II delivered to most Americans a higher standard of living than ever before. By 1947, the economy had stabilized, escaping the postwar depression that so many had feared. Wartime profits enabled businesses to expand, and consumers could now spend their savings on items that had been beyond their reach during the depression and war.

By the 1950s, the economy was booming, in part a product of the Cold War defense buildup. As Nixon and Khrushchev's "kitchen debate" attested, American life would be transformed by an array of modern conveniences along with suburban development, federally funded highways, and broad access to higher education. Prosperity was far from universal. Rural deprivation was particularly pronounced, as was poverty among the elderly, African Americans, Native Americans, and Latinos. But a remarkable economic boom lasted through the 1960s, prompting economist John Kenneth Galbraith to label the United States "the affluent society."

Technology Transforms Agriculture and Industry

Stimulated by Cold War spending and technological advances, economic productivity increased enormously in the 1950s. Mechanization meant that work itself was changing in the postwar era. Fewer people labored on farms, service sector employment overtook manufacturing jobs, women's employment grew and union membership soared. These changes created prosperity for many but caused precariousness for those who were shut out of their old livelihoods. Economic transformations also prompted far-reaching shifts in where — and how — Americans lived.

Between 1940 and 1960, agricultural output mushroomed even as the number of farmworkers declined by almost one-third. Farmers achieved unprecedented productivity through greater crop specialization, intensive use of fertilizers, and, above all, mechanization. A single mechanical cotton picker replaced fifty people and cut the cost of harvesting a bale of cotton from $40 to $5.

The decline of family farms and the growth of large commercial farming, or agribusiness, were causes as well as consequences of mechanization. Benefiting handsomely from federal price supports begun during the New Deal, larger farmers could afford technological improvements, but smaller producers lacked capital to purchase the machinery necessary to compete. Consequently, the average farm size

more than doubled between 1940 and 1964, and the number of farms fell by more than 40 percent.

Many small farmers who hung on constituted a core of rural poverty. Others were forced off the land altogether as southern landowners replaced sharecroppers and tenants with machines. Hundreds of thousands of African Americans moved to cities, where racial discrimination and a lack of jobs mired many in urban poverty. A Mississippi mother reported that most of her relatives headed for Chicago when they realized that “it was going to be machines now that harvest the crops.” Worrying that “it might be worse up there” for her children, she agonized, “I’m afraid to leave and I’m afraid to stay.”

New technologies also transformed industrial production. Between 1945 and 1960, the number of labor-hours needed to manufacture a car fell by 50 percent. Technology revolutionized industries from electronics to chemicals to air transportation. New industrial sectors emerged in television, plastics, and computers. American businesses benefited from U.S. global power in the form of access to cheap oil, ample markets abroad, and little foreign competition. Even with Eisenhower’s conservative fiscal policies, government spending reached $80 billion annually and created new jobs.

The strength of labor unions contributed to prosperity by putting money into the hands of people who would spend it. Real earnings for production workers shot up 40 percent. A steelworker's son marveled, "In 1946, we did not have a car, a television set, or a refrigerator. By 1952 we had all those things." In most industrial nations, government programs underwrote their citizens' economic security, but the United States developed a mixed system in which company-funded programs won by unions provided for retirement, health care, paid vacations, supplementary unemployment benefits, and more. This system of worker welfare — privately funded rather than state-funded — resulted in wide disparities among workers. Those who did not belong to strong unions or who worked irregularly received fewer benefits.

While the number of organized workers continued to grow, union membership peaked at 27.4 percent of all workers in 1957. Technological advances eliminated jobs in heavy industry. "You are going to have trouble collecting union dues from all of these machines," commented a Ford manager to union leader Walter Reuther. The U.S. economy as a whole was shifting from the production of goods to services. Beginning in 1957, white-collar jobs outnumbered blue-collar jobs, as more workers distributed goods, performed services, provided education, and carried out government work. Unions made some headway in these

fields, especially among government employees, but most service industries resisted unionization.

The growing clerical and service occupations swelled the demand for female workers, who held nearly one-third of all jobs by the end of the 1950s. The vast majority worked in offices, light manufacturing, domestic service, teaching, and nursing. Because these occupations were dominated by women, wages remained relatively low. In 1960, the average female full-time worker earned just 60 percent of the average male worker's wages. At the bottom of the employment ladder, black women took home only 42 percent of what white men earned.

Suburban Migrations

Housing was another growth industry of the postwar era. Although suburbs had existed since the nineteenth century, nothing symbolized the affluent society more than their tremendous expansion in the 1950s. Eleven million new homes went up in the suburbs, and by 1960, one in four Americans lived in a suburban neighborhood.

As Vice President Nixon boasted to Khrushchev during the 1959 kitchen debate, these homes were accessible to families with modest incomes. Builder William J. Levitt erected nearly identical units, adapting the factory

assembly line to home construction. In 1949, families could purchase mass-produced houses in his 17,000-home development, called Levittown, on Long Island, New York, for just under $8,000 each (approximately $80,000 in current dollars). Similar developments, as well as more luxurious ones, quickly went up throughout the country.

Suburbanization was underwritten by federal policy. The government subsidized home ownership by guaranteeing low-interest mortgages and by making interest on mortgages tax deductible. Government-funded interstate highways also encouraged suburban development. After years of depression and war, most families were thrilled to be able to own new homes. “It was a miracle to them,” one man said of his working-class parents who moved to Levittown. They left behind dense urban neighborhoods and extended family networks. For the white working class, including many immigrants, private home ownership became a key piece of the American dream.

That opportunity was not open to all. Government loans were less available to aspiring black homeowners, and the new housing tracts observed strict racial lines. Each Levittown resident, for example, signed a contract pledging not to rent or sell to a non-Caucasian. The Supreme Court had declared such covenants unenforceable in 1948, but the

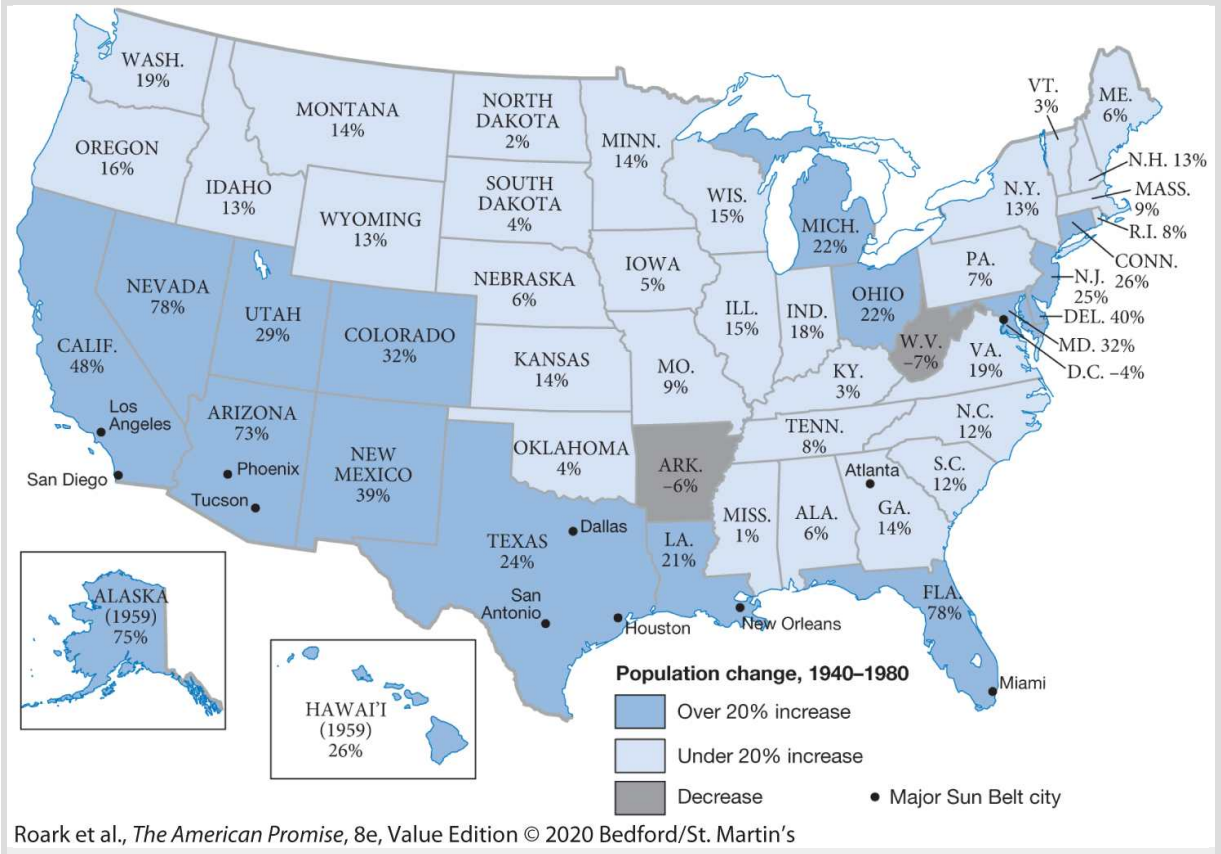
new suburbs would nevertheless be sharply — and deliberately — segregated.

Although some African Americans joined the suburban migration, most headed to urban centers in search of economic opportunity, doubling their numbers in major cities during the 1950s. They moved to cities that were already in decline, losing not only population but also commerce, industry, and jobs to the suburbs or to southern and western states. Plant closings and unemployment in the urban core were the flip side of rapid suburbanization.

By the 1960s, suburbs came under attack for bulldozing the natural environment, creating groundwater contamination, and disrupting wildlife patterns. They were also the target of social critics, who decried the new communities as hothouses of conformity. Lewis Mumford, for example, disparaged suburbia as “a multitude of uniform, unidentifiable houses in a treeless communal wasteland, inhabited by people of the same class, the same income, the same age group.” In the late 1940s, the suburbs were a symbol of economic security and class mobility; a decade later, suburbia would come to represent for some dissenters all that was wrong with American consumer society.

The Rise of the Sun Belt

Although every section of the nation enjoyed the new abundance, the Southwest and South especially thrived in production, commerce, and population (**Map 27.3**). California overtook New York as the most populous state. Sports franchises followed fans: In 1958, the Brooklyn Dodgers moved to Los Angeles, joined by the Minneapolis Lakers three years later.



Roark et al., *The American Promise*, 8e, Value Edition © 2020 Bedford/St. Martin's

MAP 27.3 The Rise of the Sun Belt, 1940–1980

The growth of defense industries, a non-unionized labor force, and the spread of air-conditioning all helped spur economic development and population growth in the Southwest and the South. This made the Sun Belt the fastest-growing region of the country between 1940 and 1980.

Description
“The places marked on the map are as follows.

Over 20 percent increase: California, 48 percent; Nevada, 78 percent; Utah, 29 percent; Arizona, 73 percent; Colorado, 32 percent; New Mexico, 39 percent; Texas, 24 percent; Louisiana, 21 percent; Florida, 78 percent; Connecticut, 26 percent; New Jersey, 25 percent; Delaware, 40 percent; Maryland, 32 percent; Ohio, 22 percent; and Michigan, 22 percent. An inset shows Alaska (1959), 75 percent; and Hawaii, (1959) 26 percent.

Under 20 percent increase: Washington, 19 percent; Oregon, 16 percent; Idaho, 13 percent; Montana, 14 percent; Wyoming, 13 percent; North Dakota, 2 percent; South Dakota, 4 percent; Nebraska, 6 percent; Minneapolis, 14 percent; Iowa, 5 percent; Kansas, 14 percent; Oklahoma, 4 percent; Missouri, 9 percent; Wisconsin, 15 percent; Illinois, 15 percent; Indiana, 18 percent; Kentucky, 3 percent; Tennessee, 8 percent; North Carolina, 12 percent; Virginia, 19 percent; Pennsylvania, 7 percent; New York, 13 percent; Vermont, 3 percent; Rhode Island, 8 percent; Massachusetts, 9 percent; New Hampshire, 13 percent; Maine, 6 percent; Mississippi, 1percent; Alabama, 6 percent; Georgia, 14 percent; and South Carolina, 12 percent.

Decrease: Arkansas, negative 6 percent; Washington D. C., Negative 4 percent; and West Virginia, negative 7 percent.

Major Sun Belt city: Los Angeles, San Diego, Phoenix, Tucson in the West; Dallas, San Antonio, Houston, and New Orleans in the South; Florida 78 percent in the Southeast; Washington D.C. in the North.”

A pleasant natural environment attracted new residents to the **Sun Belt**, but the real magnet was economic opportunity. Just as railroads had fueled western development in the nineteenth century, the automobile and

the airplane spurred post–World War II growth. New technologies made the Sun Belt livable. Air-conditioning cooled nearly eight million homes by 1960, fostering industrial development and tourism. Asked a journalist: “Can you conceive a Walt Disney World in central Florida without its air-conditioned hotels?”

So important was the defense industry to the South and Southwest that the area was later referred to as the “Gun Belt.” The aerospace industry boomed in Los Angeles and Dallas–Fort Worth, and military bases underwrote prosperity in San Diego and San Antonio. Although defense dollars flowed to other regions as well — military bases and aerospace plants were numerous in the Northwest, for example — the Sun Belt captured the lion’s share of Cold War spending. By the 1960s, nearly one of every three California workers held a defense-related job.

Surging populations and industries soon presented environmental dilemmas. Providing sufficient water and power to cities and to agribusiness meant building dams and reservoirs on free-flowing rivers. Native Americans lost fishing sites on the Columbia River, and dams on the Upper Missouri displaced nine hundred Indian families. Sprawling suburban settlement without efficient public transportation ensured that the new highway system was clogged with

cars, contributing to blankets of smog over Los Angeles and other cities.

High-technology industries drew well-educated, skilled workers to the West, but economic promise also attracted those bereft of other opportunities. Between 1945 and 1960, more than one-third of African Americans leaving the South moved west. The Mexican American population also grew, especially in California and Texas.

To supply California's vast agribusiness industry, the government continued the ***bracero* program** begun in 1942, under which Mexicans were temporarily permitted to work in the United States. Until the program ended in 1964, more than one hundred thousand Mexicans entered the United States each year to labor in the fields — and many of them stayed, legally or illegally. But permanent Mexican immigration was not as welcome as Mexicans' low-wage labor. In 1954, the government launched a series of raids called "Operation Wetback," sending more than one million Mexicans back across the border.

That same year, Mexican American citizens gained a victory in their ongoing struggle for civil rights in ***Hernandez v. Texas***. The Supreme Court ruled unanimously that Mexican Americans were a distinct group entitled to equal protection under the Fourteenth Amendment and that their systematic

exclusion from juries was unconstitutional. The lawyers who won the case were the first Mexican Americans in U.S. history to argue before the Supreme Court.

Free of the discrimination faced by minorities, white Americans enjoyed the fullest prosperity in the West. In 1950, when California developers opened Lakewood, a 17,500-home development in Los Angeles County, thirty thousand people lined up to buy houses at prices averaging $92,000 in today's dollars. Many of the new homeowners were veterans, blue-collar and lower-level white-collar workers who worked in defense-based jobs at aerospace corporations. A huge shopping mall, Lakewood Center, displayed the fruits of a consumer culture, and the workers' children lived within commuting distance of community colleges and six state universities.

The Democratization of Higher Education

California's postwar university system exemplified a spectacular transformation of higher education. A college education had once been reserved for the affluent. But between 1940 and 1960, college enrollments in the United States more than doubled, with more than 40 percent of young Americans attending college by the mid-1960s. State governments vastly expanded the number of public colleges

and universities, while municipalities began to build two-year community colleges.

Higher education in these years would become central not only to individuals' economic prospects but also to a variety of state projects. The Cold War channeled millions of federal dollars to universities for defense-related research in fields ranging from engineering and chemistry to anthropology, linguistics, and psychology.

Like private home ownership, a college degree became newly accessible to working-class Americans. Thanks to the GI Bill, the federal government subsidized the higher education of more than two million veterans, many of whom were immigrants or the first in their family to attend college. As one servicewoman who enrolled at the University of Minnesota in 1946 put it, "Without the GI Bill, I never would have gone to college and I would have lived with disappointment." The following year, when photographer Margaret Bourke-White traveled to the University of Iowa on behalf of *Life* magazine, she found that a remarkable sixty percent of the student body had served in World War II. She discovered, too, that the new veteran-student was "getting better grades than the non-veteran and has forced higher standards on everyone else."

The democratization of higher education had its limits. Although their college enrollments surged from 37,000 in 1941 to 90,000 in 1961, African Americans constituted just 5 percent of all college students while comprising 10 percent of the U.S. population. Women's enrollments increased, but the educational gap between white men and women widened as veterans flocked to college campuses. In 1940, women had earned 40 percent of undergraduate degrees, but their proportion dropped to 25 percent after World War II, rising to just 33 percent by 1960. Women were also more likely than men to drop out of college after marriage, taking jobs to support their husbands in school. Reflecting gender norms of the 1950s, white college women were assured that "it is natural for a woman to be satisfied with her husband's success and not crave personal achievement."

These important limitations aside, the tremendous growth of universities opened up new pathways to the middle class for large numbers of Americans. A better-educated and higher-paid workforce was another ingredient fueling the extraordinary prosperity of the postwar years.

REVIEW

How did technology contribute to changes in the economy, suburbanization, and the growth of the Sun Belt?

How did economic growth affect American society, politics, and culture?

The United States in the 1950s became a full-fledged consumer society. The easy availability of credit, the wide array of products on offer, and the growing centrality of purchasing power to social status and personal identity changed the way Americans lived. The new medium of television both reflected and stimulated a consumer culture focused less on work than on the fruits of one's labor. More certain of a stable future, Americans married at earlier ages, and the birthrate soared. This "baby boom" led to celebrations of family life. Less predictably, reassertions of traditional gender roles accompanied a modern consumer culture. But undercurrents of rebellion, especially among young people, and women's growing participation in the workforce would defy these dominant norms, as would an emerging critique of consumerism from environmentalists and social critics.

A Consumer Culture

Scorned by Khrushchev during the kitchen debate as unnecessary gadgets, consumer items flooded American society in the 1950s. Although the purchase and display of consumer goods was not new (see chapter 23), at

midcentury consumption became a reigning value, vital for economic prosperity and equated in some quarters with patriotism and the American way of life. Televisions and automobiles but also washing machines and refrigerators would become commonplace rather than luxury items. In place of a traditional emphasis on work and savings, advertisements encouraged satisfaction and happiness through the acquisition of new products. Marketers dreamed up campaigns to persuade Americans that their lives would be improved through ever-newer and better goods.

U.S. consumer culture at midcentury rested on a firm material base. Between 1950 and 1960, both the gross national product (the value of all goods and services produced) and median family income grew by 25 percent in constant dollars (**Figure 27.2**). Economists claimed that 60 percent of Americans enjoyed middle-class incomes in 1960. By then, four-fifths of all families owned a television set, nearly all had a refrigerator, and most owned at least one car. The number of shopping centers quadrupled between 1957 and 1963.

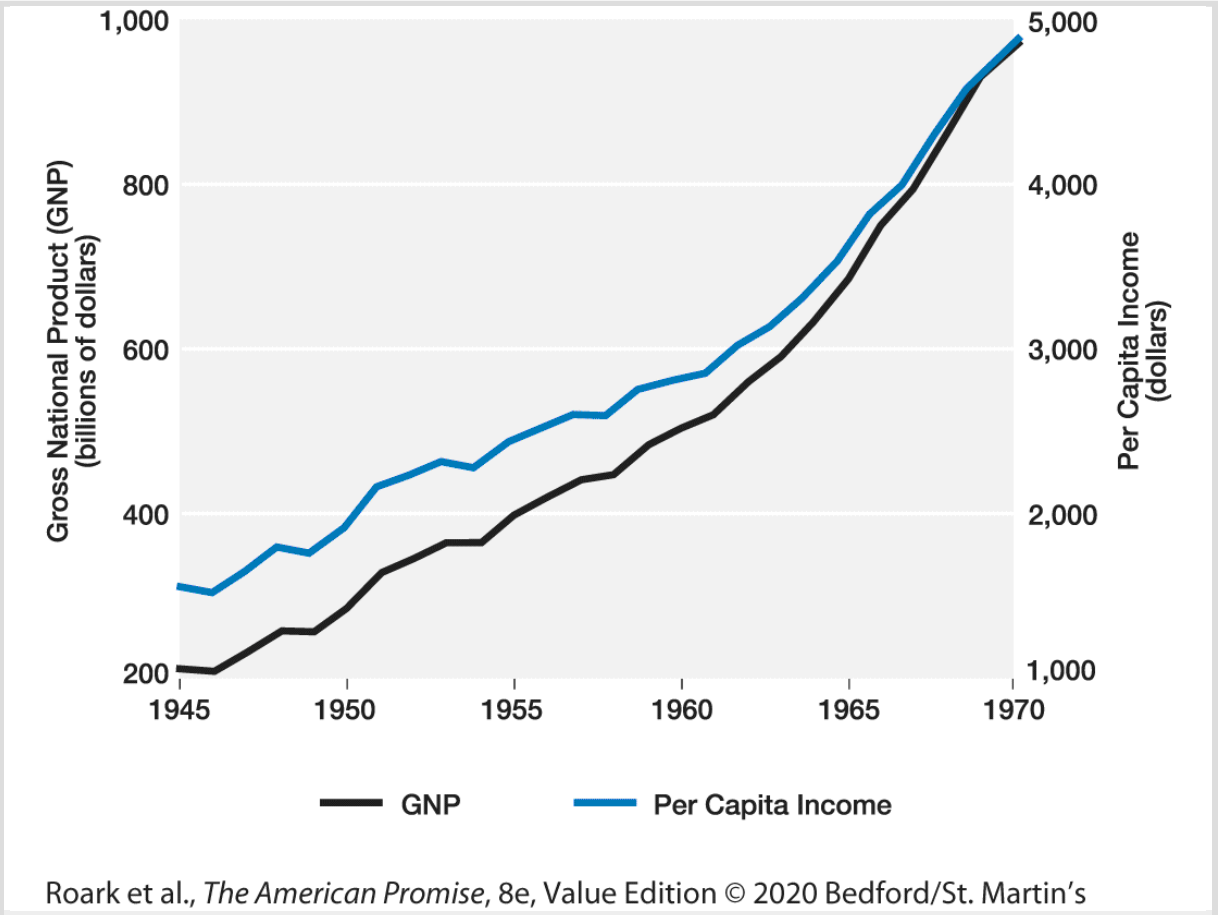


FIGURE 27.2 The Postwar Economic Boom: GNP and Per Capita Income, 1945–1970

American dominance of the worldwide market, innovative technologies that led to new industries such as computers and plastics, population growth, and increases in worker productivity all contributed to the enormous economic growth of the United States after World War II.

Description

The graph has years along the horizontal axis and gross national product (G N P) in billions of dollars along the vertical axis. The line for G N P shows a continuous increase from 210 billion dollars in 1945 to 400 dollars in 1956, 600 billion dollars in 1964, and 980 billion dollars in 1970 with a few fluctuations in the early years. The line for per capita income stands at 1,500 dollars in 1945, 2,000 dollars in 1951, 3,000

dollars in 1962, 4,000 dollars in 1966, and nears 5,000 dollars in 1970. All data are approximate.

This unparalleled abundance was linked to the **baby boom** and new financial practices. The U.S. population surged from 152 million to 180 million during the 1950s, heightening demand for products and boosting industries ranging from housing to baby items. Consumer borrowing also drove the economy, as buyers made purchases on installment plans and began to use credit cards. Increasingly, Americans enjoyed their possessions while they paid for them instead of waiting until they could buy items in full.

Although the sheer need to support themselves and their families motivated most women's employment, a desire to partake in "the good life" sent growing numbers of women into the workforce. As one explained, "My Joe can't put five kids through college … and the washer had to be replaced, and Ann was ashamed to bring friends home because the living room furniture was such a mess, so I went to work." Anxiety about "keeping up with the Joneses," or staying up to date with the latest products and appliances, was a pressure peculiar to an affluent society. The rising cost — and standard — of living increasingly required a second income, even as television shows and magazine

advertisements portrayed middle-class white women as homemakers first and foremost.

The Revival of Domesticity and Religion

In a reversal of — and partly in response to — the social trends of prior decades, traditional family life and gender roles were celebrated in the 1950s. Popular culture and public figures defined the ideal family as a male breadwinner, a full-time female homemaker, and three or four children. Feminist Betty Friedan gave a name to the idealization of women's domestic roles in her 1963 book *The Feminine Mystique*. Friedan criticized health professionals, scholars, advertisers, and public officials for assuming that biological differences dictated distinct roles for men and women. The belief that women should find exclusive fulfillment in devotion to their homes, marriages, and families was increasingly questioned. The women's magazine *Redbook* sponsored a contest in 1960 asking readers to write in with responses to the question of "Why Young Mothers Feel Trapped." The magazine was shocked to receive twenty-four thousand letters.

Although the glorification of female domesticity clashed with working women's realities, many Americans' lives did outwardly embody the family ideal. Higher incomes enabled

people to marry earlier and to have more children. Reversing the century's downward trend, the American birthrate soared between 1945 and 1965, peaking in 1957 with 4.3 million births, producing both the baby boom generation and a marked emphasis on stronger relationships within the nuclear family. Experts like Dr. Benjamin Spock encouraged mothers to devote even more attention to child rearing, while they urged fathers to cultivate family "togetherness" by spending more time at home with their offspring.

Interest in religion also swelled in the 1950s. From 1940 to 1960, membership in churches and synagogues rose from 50 to 63 percent of all Americans. Polls reported that 95 percent of the population believed in God. Evangelism took on new life, notably in the nationwide crusades of Southern Baptist minister Billy Graham. The U.S. Congress linked Judeo-Christian religion more closely to the state by adding "under God" to the pledge of allegiance and by requiring that "In God We Trust" be printed on all currency.

Religion helped many find meaning and comfort in the nuclear age. Ministers such as Graham linked spiritual faith to American victory in the Cold War, painting communism as a "sinister anti-Christian movement masterminded by Satan." Some critics questioned the depth of the religious revival, attributing the growth in church membership to a

desire for conformity and a need for social outlets. One commentator noted that 53 percent of Americans could not name a single book of the Christian New Testament. Yet the trend was striking, countering earlier predictions of religion's waning significance in a scientific, secular nation.

Television Transforms Culture and Politics

The new medium of television altered American life as much as any other development in the 1950s. TV was both a product of midcentury consumer culture and a mirror held up to it, carrying Billy Graham's sermons as well as conventional gender norms into suburban living rooms. By 1960, nearly 90 percent of American homes contained a television set, and the average viewer spent more than five hours each day watching it. Audiences were especially attracted to situation comedies like *I Love Lucy* and *Father Knows Best*. Such programs promoted the white nuclear family ideal alongside new leisure habits and consumer desires.

Television would also have a major impact on politics. Eisenhower's 1952 presidential campaign was the first to air TV ads, although he begrudged the fact that "an old soldier should come to this." By 1960, television played a key role in election campaigns. Reflecting on his narrow victory that

year, president-elect John F. Kennedy remarked, “We wouldn’t have had a prayer without that gadget.” The expense of TV ads meant that fundraising would play an ever-larger role in politics. The ability to appeal directly to voters in their living rooms put a premium on personal attractiveness and encouraged candidates to build their own campaign organizations, relying less on political parties. While the declining strength of parties and the growing power of money in elections were not new trends, television greatly accelerated them.

Unlike government-financed television in Europe, private enterprise — meaning advertising — paid for American TV. What NBC called a “selling machine in every living room” became the major vehicle for fostering consumption, and advertisers did not hesitate to interfere with shows that might jeopardize the sale of their products. In 1961, Newton Minow, chairman of the Federal Communications Commission, called television a “vast wasteland.”

While acknowledging some of TV’s achievements, particularly documentaries and drama, Minow depicted it as “a procession of game shows, … formula comedies about totally unbelievable families, blood and thunder, mayhem, violence, sadism, murder, … and cartoons.” But viewers kept tuning in. In little more than a decade, television came to dominate Americans’ leisure time, influence their

consumption patterns, and shape their perceptions of the nation’s leadership.

Countercurrents

Most Americans — recalling the deprivations of depression and war — embraced the bounty and convenience of a modern consumer society. Others, however, worried that the new materialism had altered Americans’ values as well as their habits. In *The Lonely Crowd* (1950), sociologist David Riesman lamented a shift from the “inner-directed” to the “other-directed” individual, as Americans seemingly replaced independent thinking with a desire to adapt to external standards of behavior and belief. William H. Whyte Jr., in his popular book *The Organization Man* (1956), likewise criticized Americans’ quest for “belonging,” blaming the modern corporation for making employees tailor themselves to the group. Best-selling exposés of subliminal advertising and the use of psychological manipulation to sell products reflected general unease with the priorities of a culture based around consumption.

A growing environmental critique blamed rapid development and unchecked consumerism for the despoliation of natural resources and the American countryside. Economist John Kenneth Galbraith, who had described the United States as “the affluent society,”

warned in 1958 that the quest for private comforts was endangering public goods and public spaces. “The family which takes its … air-conditioned, power-steered and power-braked automobile out for a tour,” he chided, “passes through cities that are badly paved” and “made hideous by litter.”

Some critiques of consumer culture stemmed from concern about the weakening of traditional masculinity, given that consumption was associated with women and that white-collar jobs no longer seemed to demand independence or aggressive action. If men were now required to conform to get ahead in the workplace, would their autonomy be compromised? The increase in married women’s employment further undercut the presumed male role of breadwinner. Into this context arrived *Playboy*, which began publication in 1953 and quickly gained a circulation of one million. The new magazine redefined masculine independence as sophisticated bachelorhood and sexual freedom, pushing against middle-class norms of domesticity and respectability.

In fact, two best-selling studies published by Alfred Kinsey and other researchers at Indiana University — *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* (1948) and *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female* (1953) — indicated that Americans’ sexual practices regularly departed from the postwar family

ideal. Large numbers of men and women reported that they had engaged in premarital sex and extramarital affairs; one-third of the men and one-seventh of the women reported homosexual experiences. The Kinsey Reports shocked many Americans but lent support to legal efforts to decriminalize homosexuality and to the midcentury homophile movement, which sought equal rights for individuals regardless of sexual orientation.

Challenges to mainstream standards also appeared in the everyday behavior of young Americans. “Roll over Beethoven and tell Tchaikovsky the news!” belted out Chuck Berry in his 1956 hit record celebrating rock and roll, a new form of music that grew out of black rhythm and blues and mingled with the country and western traditions of the 1940s. White teenagers idolized Elvis Presley, who shocked their parents with his tight pants, hip-rolling gestures, and sensuous rock-and-roll music. “Before there was Elvis … I started going crazy for ‘race music,’” recalled a white man of his teenage years. His words underscored African Americans’ contributions to rock and roll, as well as the importance of black music to the rebellions of white youth.

The most overt revolt against the social conformity of the 1950s came from the self-proclaimed Beat generation, a small group of mostly male literary figures based in New York City and San Francisco. Rejecting the values of the

dominant culture — patriotism, consumerism, technology, conventional family life and morality — writers such as Allen Ginsberg and Jack Kerouac celebrated spontaneity and absolute personal freedom, including drug consumption and freewheeling sex. The Beats scandalized “square” Americans, but both they and their lifestyles would provide a model for a new movement of youthful dissidents in the 1960s.

Bold new styles in the visual arts also showed the 1950s to be much more than a decade of bland conformity. In New York City, action painting or abstract expressionism flowered, countering the idea that art should represent recognizable forms. Jackson Pollock and other abstract expressionists poured, dripped, and threw paint on canvases or substituted sticks and other implements for brushes. The new form of painting so captivated the Western art world that New York replaced Paris as its center.

REVIEW

Why did American consumer culture expand so dramatically in the 1950s, and what aspects of society did it influence?