The Postwar Boom

Many Americans enjoy new material comforts and new forms of entertainment during the post-war economic boom. Yet racial gaps remain, and millions continue to live in poverty.
The Postwar Boom

SECTION 1  Postwar America
SECTION 2  The American Dream in the Fifties
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Section 1
Postwar America

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

The Impact of the GI Bill
- 1944 GI Bill of Rights eases veterans’ return to civilian life
- Pays partial tuition, unemployment benefits; provides loans

Housing Crisis
- 10 million returning veterans face housing shortage
- Developers use assembly-line methods to mass-produce houses
- Build suburbs—small residential communities around cities

Continued . . .
Redefining the Family
• Tensions from changed gender roles during war increase divorce rate

Economic Readjustment
• Over 1 million defense workers laid off; wages drop for many workers
• Price controls end; 25% increase in cost of scarce consumer goods
• Congress reestablishes price, wage, rent controls

Remarkable Recovery
• People have savings, service pay, war bonds; buy goods long missed
• Cold War keeps defense spending up; foreign aid creates markets
Meeting Economic Challenges

President Truman’s Inheritance
• **Harry S. Truman** can make difficult decisions, take responsibility

Truman Faces Strikes
• 1946, higher prices, lower wages lead 4.5 million to strike
• Truman seizes mines, threatens to take over railroads
• Threatens to draft workers; unions give in

“Had Enough?”
• Republicans win Senate, House; ignore Truman’s domestic policy
• Congress passes Taft-Hartley Act, overturns many union rights
Social Unrest Persists

Truman Supports Civil Rights
- African Americans, especially veterans, demand rights as citizens
- Congress rejects civil rights laws; Truman issues executive orders:
  - integrates armed forces; ends discrimination in government hiring

The 1948 Election
- Southern Democrats—Dixiecrats—protest civil rights, form own party
- Truman calls special session; asks Congress for social legislation
- Congress refuses; Truman goes on “whistlestop campaign”
continued Social Unrest Persists

Stunning Upset
• Truman defeats Thomas E. Dewey in close political upset
• Democrats regain control of Congress, lose some Southern states

The Fair Deal
• Truman’s Fair Deal is ambitious economic program, includes:
  - higher minimum wage, flood control projects, low-income housing
• Congress passes parts of Fair Deal
Republicans Take the Middle Road

I Like Ike!

- Truman’s approval rating drops over Korean War, McCarthyism
  - decides not to run for reelection
- Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower runs against IL governor Adlai Stevenson
- Newspapers accuse VP candidate Richard M. Nixon of corruption
  - defends self in televised “Checkers speech”
- Eisenhower wins; Republicans narrowly take Congress

Continued . . .
continued Republicans Take the Middle Road

Walking the Middle of the Road

• Eisenhower conservative about money, liberal on social issues
• Ike tries to avoid civil rights movement, which is gaining strength
• On economy, works for balanced budget, tax cut
• Pushes social legislation, new Dept. of Health, Education, Welfare
• Popularity soars; is reelected in 1956
Section 2
The American Dream in the Fifties
During the 1950s, the economy booms, and many Americans enjoy material comfort.
Employment in the U.S.
- By 1956, majority of Americans not in blue-collar (industrial) jobs
- More in higher-paying, white-collar (office, professional) positions
- Many in services, like sales, advertising, insurance, communications

Conglomerates
- Conglomerates—corporation that owns smaller, unrelated companies
- Diversify to protect from downturns in individual industries
Franchises
• **Franchise**—company offers similar products, services in many places
  - also the right to use company name and system
• Fast-food restaurants among first, most successful franchises

Social Conformity
• Many employees with well-paid, secure jobs lose individuality
• Personality tests see if job candidates fit in company culture
• Companies reward teamwork, loyalty, encourage conformity
The Suburban Lifestyle

The Baby Boom
• 1950s, 85% of new homes built in suburbs
• 1945–1965 baby boom—soaring birth rate after soldiers return

Advances in Medicine and Childcare
• New drugs fight, prevent childhood diseases
• Dr. Jonas Salk develops vaccine for poliomyelitis
• Pediatrician Dr. Benjamin Spock writes popular guide for parents
• Baby boom impacts economy, educational system

Continued . . .
continued The Suburban Lifestyle

Women’s Roles
• Magazines, TV, movies glorify role of homemaker, mother
• Over 1/5 of suburban wives dissatisfied with their lives
• 1960, 40% mothers work; limited opportunities, less pay than men

Leisure in the Fifties
• Shorter work week, paid vacation, labor-saving devices free up time
• People have time for recreational activities, spectator sports
• Book, magazine, comic book sales climb rapidly
The Automobile Culture

Automania
• Cheap, plentiful gas, easy credit, advertising increase car sales
• No public transit in suburbs; cars necessary

The Interstate Highway System
• Local, state roads link cities, suburbs to schools, shops, work
• Interstate Highway Act—nationwide highway network unites country
• Highways enable long-haul trucking, new towns, family vacations
• Towns near highways prosper; those near older, smaller roads decline

Continued . . .
Mobility Takes Its Toll

• Auto boom stimulates new businesses—e.g. drive-in movies
• Cars create social, environmental problems—e.g. accidents, pollution
• Upper-, middle-class whites leave cities; jobs, businesses follow
• Economic gulf widens between suburban and urban
  - also widens gap between middle class and the poor
Consumerism Unbound

New Products
• 60% of Americans in middle class; twice as many as before WW II
• Consumerism (buying material goods) equated with success
• Numerous new products appear on market in response to demand

Planned Obsolescence
• Planned obsolescence—making products that get outdated, wear out
  - makes consumers buy or want to buy new ones

Continued . . .
continued Consumerism Unbound

Buy Now, Pay Later
- Credit purchases, credit cards, installments extend payment period
- Private debt grows; consumers confident of future prosperity

The Advertising Age
- Most people have satisfied basic needs; ads encourage extra spending
- Psychological appeals in ads lure consumers to particular products
- Ads appear in all media; television emerges as powerful new tool
Section 3

Popular Culture

Mainstream Americans, as well as the nation’s subcultures, embrace new forms of entertainment during the 1950s.
New Era of the Mass Media

The Rise of Television

- **Mass media**—means of communication that reach large audiences
- TV first widely available 1948; in almost 90% of homes in 1960
- **Federal Communications Commission (FCC)** regulates communications
- By 1956, FCC allows 500 stations to broadcast
- Programs: comedies, news, dramas, variety shows, children’s shows
- Lifestyle changes: *TV Guide* is popular magazine; TV dinners

*Continued . . .*
continued New Era of the Mass Media

**Stereotypes and Gunslingers**
- Women, minorities on TV are stereotypes; few blacks, Latinos
- Westerns glorify historical frontier conflicts
- Raise concerns about effect of violence on children

**Radio and Movies**
- Television cuts into radio, movie markets
- Radio turns to local news, weather, music, community affairs
- Movies capitalize on size, color, sound advantages; try gimmicks
A Subculture Emerges

The Beat Movement

- **Beat movement**—writers, artists express social, literary nonconformity
- Poets, writers use free, open form; read works aloud in coffeehouses
- Beatnik attitudes, way of life attract media attention, students
African Americans and Rock ‘n’ Roll

Rock ‘n’ Roll
- Black musicians add electric instruments to blues—rhythm and blues
- **Rock ‘n’ roll**—mix of rhythm and blues, country, pop
- Has heavy rhythm, simple melodies, lyrics about teenage concerns
- Music appeals to newly affluent teens who can buy records
- Many adults concerned music will lead to delinquency, immorality

Continued . . .
The Racial Gap

- African-American singers like Nat “King” Cole, Lena Horne popular
- Many black artists play jazz, music characterized by improvisation
- African-American shows mostly broadcast on black radio stations
  - content, advertising target black audiences
- Important to black audiences with fewer TV sets, no presence on TV
Section 4
The Other America
Amidst the prosperity of the 1950s, millions of Americans live in poverty.
The Urban Poor

White Flight

- 1962, 25% of Americans below poverty level
- Post WW II–1960, 5 million blacks go from rural South to urban North
- White flight results in loss of businesses, tax payers to cities
- Cities can no longer afford to maintain or improve: - schools, public transportation, police and fire departments

Continued . . .
The Inner Cities
• Poverty grows rapidly in decaying inner cities
• Poor economic conditions lead to illness and terrible conditions

Urban Renewal
• **Urban renewal**—replace rundown buildings with new low-income housing
• Housing and Urban Development Dept. created to improve conditions
• Not enough housing built for displaced people
Poverty Leads to Activism

Mexicans Seek Employment
• Many Southwest Mexicans become U.S. citizens after Mexican War
• 1942–47, Mexican braceros, hired hands, allowed into U.S. to work
• After war, many remain illegally; many others enter to look for work

The Longoria Incident
• Undertaker refuses funeral services to Felix Longoria, WW II veteran
• Outraged Mexican-American veterans organize G.I. Forum
• Unity League of CA registers voters, promotes responsive candidates

Continued . . .
Native Americans Continue their Struggle

• During Depression, U.S. policy of Native American autonomy
• National Congress of American Indians: civil rights, maintain customs
• U.S. stops family allotments, wages; outsiders take tribal lands

The Termination Policy

• Termination policy cuts economic support, gives land to individuals
• Bureau of Indian Affairs helps resettlement in cities
• Termination policy is a failure; abandoned in 1963

continued Poverty Leads to Activism
This is the end of the chapter presentation of lecture notes. Click the HOME or EXIT button.