Chapter 27

The Postwar Years at Home (1945–1960)
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Section 1: The Postwar Economy

Section 2: The Mood of the 1950’s

Section 3: Domestic Politics and Policy
The Postwar Economy

Chapter 27, Section 1

- How did businesses reorganize after World War II?
- How did technology transform life after World War II?
- In what ways did the nation’s work force change following World War II?
- Why did suburbs and highway systems grow after World War II?
- How did postwar conditions affect consumer credit?
The postwar years were a time of great economic growth in America. Between 1945 and 1960, the per capita income, or average annual income per person, rose considerably. American businesses switched from providing war needs to meeting increasing demand for consumer products. In order to protect against economic downturns, many formed conglomerates, corporations made up of three or more unrelated businesses. The franchise system, in which small businesses contract with larger parent companies for goods and services, flourished.
Developments in Technology During the 1950s

• **Television** — Television becomes a popular and powerful medium.

• **Computers and Electronics** — The invention of the transistor, a tiny circuit device that amplifies, controls, and generates electrical signals, revolutionizes computers and radios.

• **Nuclear Power** — Wartime nuclear research is put to peacetime use in nuclear power plants and nuclear-powered submarines.

• **Advances in Medicine** — Dr. Jonas Salk develops a vaccine against polio; advances in antibiotics and surgical techniques save countless lives.
Changes in the Work force

White Collar Workers
- Corporate expansion created more white-collar jobs.
- Office work was less dangerous and exhausting than factory work, and provided more opportunity for advancement.
- White collar workers often had little connection to their companies’ products, and often felt pressure to dress, think, and act alike.

Blue Collar Workers
- New machines reduced the number of manual labor-intensive jobs.
- Working conditions and wages improved.
- Labor unions won important gains; the American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations merged to form the powerful AFL-CIO.
The baby boom, or rise in birth rates, that had begun in the 1940s continued into the 1950s.

**Live Births, 1930–1960**

- **Number of births (in millions)**
- **Year**
  - 1930
  - 1935
  - 1940
  - 1945
  - 1950
  - 1955
  - 1960

**Peak year, 1957. 4,308,000 births**

**SOURCE:** *Historical Statistics of the United States, Colonial Times to 1970*
Suburban Growth

• The GI Bill of Rights gave returning soldiers low-income mortgages, enabling many to buy homes in newly built suburbs.

• Developers such as William J. Levitt built entire communities quickly and on one mold, using preassembled materials.

• Although most Americans enjoyed living in communities such as Levitt’s, others complained that the new developments lacked variety.

Cars and Highways

• The growth of suburbs led more Americans to rely on cars for everyday transportation.

• More and better roads were needed to support the increase in cars. The 1956 Federal-Aid Highway Act provided billions of dollars to build an interstate highway system.

• Cars became part of American culture as new businesses such as drive-in movies emerged.
Gasoline companies began offering credit cards with which consumers could purchase their product. Soon, lending agencies began to offer credit cards as well.

Consumer debt rose as Americans used their credit cards to purchase washing machines, vacuum cleaners, television sets, and other consumer products.
Which of the following was a characteristic of white collar jobs in the 1950s?

(A) work that was less dangerous than factory jobs
(B) lack of opportunity for advancement
(C) minimal pressure to conform to standards of dress
(D) close connection with a company’s product

How did the GI Bill of Rights contribute to suburban growth?

(A) It inspired Levitt to build suburban communities.
(B) It provided former soldiers with low-income mortgages.
(C) It established an interstate highway system.
(D) It led to rising credit card debt.

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The Mood of the 1950s

Chapter 27, Section 2

• Why were comfort and security so important to Americans in the 1950s?
• What were the accepted roles of men and women during the 1950s?
• How did some people challenge conformity during the 1950s?
Comfort and Security

Chapter 27, Section 2

• Enjoying prosperity and recovering from war and economic depression, most Americans in the 1950s valued security over adventure.
• Youth in the 1950s enjoyed more time for school, and for recreation, than youth in earlier generations.
• Businesses marketed products such as movies and magazines to youths, reinforcing images of what it meant to be a teenager.
• Partially in response to the threats of communism and nuclear war, many Americans renewed their interest in religion. References to God were added to the Pledge of Allegiance and imprinted on U.S. currency.
Men and women were expected to play strictly defined roles in the 1950s. While men were expected to hold jobs and support their families, women were expected to perform domestic duties.

Nevertheless, more and more married women began working outside the home, some to support their families and others for the sense of satisfaction they derived from holding jobs.

Some women, notably Betty Friedan, desired more freedom in choosing social roles than the 1950s cultural climate allowed.
Youthful Rebellions

Chapter 27, Section 2

Rock-and-Roll

- **Rock-and-roll**, a style of music based on black rhythm and blues, became popular among teenagers in the 1950s.
- Many adults disliked rock-and-roll music, claiming that it encouraged immorality.
- Popular with both black and white teenagers, rock-and-roll threatened those who were comfortable with racial segregation.

Beatniks

- **Beatniks**, many of whom were artists and writers, launched a movement that stressed spontaneity and rejected money and power.
- Beatniks shocked many Americans with their open sexuality and use of illegal drugs.
- Author Jack Kerouac embodied the Beatnik spirit for many Americans.
Which of these trends was a reason for the resurgence in religion during the 1950s?

(A) Increasing popularity of rock-and-roll music  
(B) Rise of media targeted at teenagers  
(C) Fear of nuclear war  
(D) Frustration with traditional women’s roles

Why did many adults oppose rock-and-roll music?

(A) They did not have the money to buy records.  
(B) They felt it encouraged immorality.  
(C) They disliked the philosophy of the Beatniks.  
(D) They preferred music with more complicated melodies.

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The Mood of the 1950s—Assessment

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• What were Truman’s domestic policies as outlined in his Fair Deal?
• How did Truman win the election of 1948?
• What was the Republican approach to government during the Eisenhower presidency?
Truman’s Domestic Policies

The Peacetime Economy — Reconversion, the social and economic transition from wartime to peacetime, resulted in discrepancies between wages and prices. The Taft-Hartley Act of 1947 required a cooling-off period during which workers on strike from industries affecting the national interest had to return to work.

The Fair Deal — Modeled on Roosevelt’s New Deal, Truman’s Fair Deal was a set of proposals for postwar economic improvement. Although some measures passed, many were rejected by Congress.

Truman on Civil Rights — Truman formed the biracial Committee on Civil Rights in 1946 to address concerns of African Americans; opposition in Congress meant that change came slowly.
The Election of 1948

- Although Truman’s Democratic Party was splitting and support for him was disintegrating, Truman chose to seek another term as President in 1948.
- With a blunt but effective campaign style, Truman won the election despite polls’ predictions against him.
- In response to Roosevelt’s unprecedented four terms as President, the Twenty-second Amendment was passed in 1951. This amendment specified that no President could serve more than two elected terms.
Although the language of the Twenty-second Amendment allowed Truman to run for President again in 1952, he chose not to do so.

Republican Dwight Eisenhower and his running mate, Richard Nixon, were able to turn accusations about illegal campaign funding into support for their campaign.

As President, Eisenhower advocated Modern Republicanism, an approach to government involving conservative economic policies but liberal social policies.

Eisenhower’s administration favored big business and ending government competition for offshore oil lands. However, his presidency was marked by several economic recessions.
NASA

• In response to Americans’ fears that Soviet technology was superior to their own, the United States formed the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) in 1958.

• NASA was created as an independent agency dedicated to space exploration.

National Defense Education Act

• To meet the scientific and technical challenge from the Soviet Union, the National Defense Education Act was passed in 1958.

• This act provided low-cost loans to college students, incentives for teaching math and science, and money for building science and foreign language facilities in schools.
What did the Taft-Hartley Act require?
(A) Economic improvements provided by the Fair Deal  
(B) Civil rights for all Americans  
(C) Reporting of all campaign funding  
(D) A cooling-off period for workers striking from certain industries

Why did civil rights reforms come slowly during Truman’s presidency?
(A) Truman campaigned against them.  
(B) A majority in Congress disagreed with them.  
(C) They were not realistically formulated.  
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