

# 26

## CHAPTER

# Triumph of the Middle Class 1945–1963

### POSTWAR PROSPERITY AND THE AFFLUENT SOCIETY

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At the height of the Cold War, in 1959, U.S. vice president Richard Nixon debated Soviet premier Nikita Khrushchev on the merits of Pepsi-Cola, TV dinners, and electric ovens. Face-to-face at the opening of an American exhibition in Moscow, Nixon and Khrushchev strolled through a model American home, assembled to demonstrate the consumer products available to the typical citizen of the United States. Nixon explained to Khrushchev that although the Soviet Union may have had superior rockets, the United States was ahead in other areas, such as color television.

This was Cold War politics by other means—a symbolic contest over which country's standard of living was higher. What was so striking about the so-called **kitchen debate** was Nixon's insistence, to a disbelieving Khrushchev, that a modern home filled with shiny new toasters, televisions, and other consumer products was accessible to the average American worker. "Any steelworker could buy this house," Nixon told the Soviet leader. The kitchen debate settled little in the geopolitical rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union. But it speaks to us across the decades because it reveals how Americans had come to see themselves by the late 1950s: as home owners and consumers, as a people for whom the middle-class American Dream was a commercial aspiration.

The real story of the postwar period was the growing number of Americans who embraced that aspiration. In the two decades following the end of World War II, a new middle class was born in the United States. *Fortune* magazine estimated that in the 1950s, the middle class—which *Fortune* defined as families with more than \$5,000 in annual earnings after taxes (about \$40,000 today)—was increasing at the rate of 1.1 million people per year. Riding a wave of rising incomes, American dominance in the global economy, and Cold War federal spending, the postwar middle class enjoyed the highest standard of living in the world.

However, the success of the middle class could not hide deeper troubles. This was an era of neither universal conformity nor diminishing social strife. Jim Crow laws, contradictions in women's lives, a rebellious youth culture, and changing sexual mores were only the most obvious sources of social tension. Suburban growth came at the expense of cities, hastening urban decay and exacerbating racial segregation. Nor was prosperity ever as widespread as the Moscow exhibit implied. The suburban lifestyle was beyond the reach of the working poor, the elderly, immigrants, Mexican Americans, and most African Americans—indeed, the majority of the country.

### IDENTIFY THE BIG IDEA

Why did consumer culture become such a fixture of American life in the postwar decades, and how did it affect politics and society?



**The Middle-Class Family Ideal** A family eats breakfast at a campground in Zion National Park, Utah. Americans embraced a middle-class, nuclear family ideal in the postwar decades. Photo by Justin Locke/  
National Geographic/Getty Images.

## Postwar Prosperity and the Affluent Society

The United States enjoyed enormous economic advantages at the close of World War II. While the Europeans and Japanese were still clearing the war's rubble, America stood poised to enter a postwar boom. As the only major industrial nation not devastated by war, the United States held an unprecedented global position. The American economy also benefitted from an expanding internal market and heavy investment in research and development. Two additional developments stood out: First, for the first time in the nation's history, employers generally accepted collective bargaining, which for workers translated into rising wages, expanding benefits, and an increasing rate of home ownership. Second, the federal government's outlays for military and domestic programs gave a huge boost to the economy.

### Economy: From Recovery to Dominance

U.S. corporations, banks, and manufacturers so dominated the global economy that the postwar period has been called the Pax Americana (a Latin term meaning “American Peace” and harking back to the Pax Romana of the first and second centuries A.D.). *Life* magazine publisher Henry Luce was so confident in the nation's growing power that during World War II he had predicted the dawning of the “American century.” The preponderance of American economic power in the

postwar decades, however, was not simply an artifact of the world war—it was not an inevitable development. Several key elements came together, internationally and at home, to propel three decades of unprecedented economic growth.

**The Bretton Woods System** American global supremacy rested partly on the economic institutions created at an international conference in **Bretton Woods**, New Hampshire, in July 1944. The first of those institutions was the **World Bank**, created to provide loans for the reconstruction of war-torn Europe as well as for the development of former colonized nations—the so-called Third World or developing world. A second institution, the **International Monetary Fund (IMF)**, was set up to stabilize currencies and provide a predictable monetary environment for trade, with the U.S. dollar serving as the benchmark. The World Bank and the IMF formed the cornerstones of the Bretton Woods system, which guided the global economy after the war.

The Bretton Woods system was joined in 1947 by the first General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), which established an international framework for overseeing trade rules and practices. Together, the Bretton Woods system and GATT served America's conception of an open-market global economy and complemented the nation's ambitious diplomatic aims in the Cold War. The chief idea of the Bretton Woods system was to make American capital available, on cheap terms, to nations that adopted free-trade capitalist economies. Critics charged, rightly, that Bretton Woods and GATT favored the United States at the



### The Kitchen Debate

At the American National Exhibition in Moscow in 1959, the United States put on display the technological wonders of American home life. When Vice President Richard Nixon visited, he and Soviet premier Nikita Khrushchev got into a heated debate over the relative merits of their rival systems, with the up-to-date American kitchen as a case in point. This photograph shows the debate in progress. Khrushchev is the bald man pointing his finger at Nixon. To Nixon's left stands Leonid Brezhnev, who would be Khrushchev's successor. Getty Images.

expense of recently independent countries, because the United States could dictate lending terms and stood to benefit as nations purchased more American goods. But the system provided needed economic stability.

**The Military-Industrial Complex** A second engine of postwar prosperity was defense spending. In his final address to the nation in 1961, President Dwight D. Eisenhower spoke about the power of what he called the **military-industrial complex**, which by then employed 3.5 million Americans. Even though his administration had fostered this defense establishment, Eisenhower feared its implications: “We must guard against the acquisition of unwarranted influence, whether sought or unsought, by the military-industrial complex,” he said. This complex had its roots in the business-government partnerships of World War II. After 1945, though the country was nominally at peace, the

economy and the government operated in a state of perpetual readiness for war.

Based at the sprawling Pentagon in Arlington, Virginia, the Defense Department evolved into a massive bureaucracy. In the name of national security, defense-related industries entered into long-term relationships with the Pentagon. Some companies did so much business with the government that they in effect became private divisions of the Defense Department. Over 60 percent of the income of Boeing, General Dynamics, and Raytheon, for instance, came from military contracts, and the percentages were even higher for Lockheed and Republic Aviation. In previous peacetime years, military spending had constituted only 1 percent of gross domestic product (GDP); now it represented 10 percent. Economic growth was increasingly dependent on a robust defense sector.

### IDENTIFY CAUSES

What primary factors led to the growth of the American economy after World War II?



### The Military-Industrial Complex

Often, technology developed for military purposes, such as the complex design of jet airplanes, was easily transferred to the consumer market. The Boeing Aircraft Company—their Seattle plant is pictured here in the mid-1950s—became one of the leading commercial airplane manufacturers in the world in the 1960s, boosted in part by tax dollar-financed military contracts. Major American corporations—such as Boeing, McDonnell Douglas, General Electric, General Dynamics, and dozens of others—benefitted enormously from military contracts from the Department of Defense in the years after World War II. © Bettmann/Corbis.

As permanent mobilization took hold, science, industry, and government became intertwined. Cold War competition for military supremacy spawned both an arms race and a space race as the United States and the Soviet Union each sought to develop more explosive bombs and more powerful rockets. Federal spending underwrote 90 percent of the cost of research for aviation and space, 65 percent for electricity and electronics, 42 percent for scientific instruments, and even 24 percent for automobiles. With the government footing the bill, corporations lost little time in transforming new technology into useful products. Backed by the Pentagon, for instance, IBM and Sperry Rand pressed ahead with research on integrated circuits, which later spawned the computer revolution.

When the Soviet Union launched the world's first satellite, *Sputnik*, in 1957, the startled United States went into high gear to catch up in the Cold War space competition. Alarmed that the United States was falling behind in science and technology, Eisenhower persuaded Congress to appropriate additional money for college scholarships and university research. The **National Defense Education Act** of 1958 funneled millions of dollars into American universities, helping institutions such as the University of California at Berkeley, Stanford University, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and the University of Michigan become the leading research centers in the world.

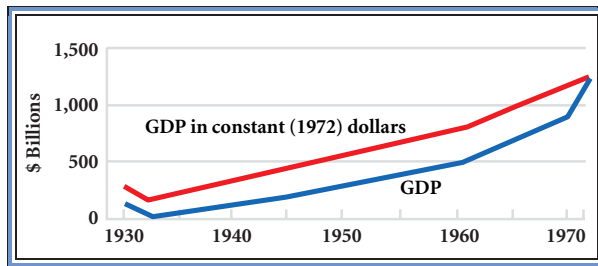
**Corporate Power** Despite its massive size, the military-corporate partnership was only one part of the nation's economy. For over half a century, the consolidation of economic power into large corporate firms had characterized American capitalism. In the postwar decades, that tendency accelerated. By 1970, the top four U.S. automakers produced 91 percent of all motor vehicles sold in the country; the top four firms in tires produced 72 percent; those in cigarettes, 84 percent; and those in detergents, 70 percent. Eric Johnston, former president of the American Chamber of Commerce, declared that “we have entered a period of accelerating bigness in all aspects of American life.” Expansion into foreign markets also spurred corporate growth. During the 1950s, U.S. exports nearly doubled, giving the nation a trade surplus of close to \$5 billion in 1960. By the 1970s, such firms as Coca-Cola, Gillette, IBM, and Mobil made more than half their profits abroad.

To staff their bureaucracies, the postwar corporate giants required a huge white-collar army. A new generation of corporate chieftains emerged, operating in a complex environment that demanded long-range forecasting. Companies turned to the universities, which

grew explosively after 1945. Postwar corporate culture inspired numerous critics, who argued that the obedience demanded of white-collar workers was stifling creativity and blighting lives. In *The Lonely Crowd* (1950), the sociologist David Riesman mourned a lost masculinity and contrasted the independent businessmen and professionals of earlier years with the managerial class of the postwar world. The sociologist William Whyte painted a somber picture of “organization men” who left the home “spiritually as well as physically to take the vows of organization life.” Andrew Hacker, in *The Corporation Take-Over* (1964), warned that a small handful of such organization men “can draw up an investment program calling for the expenditure of several billions of dollars” and thereby “determine the quality of life for substantial segments of society.”

Many of these “investment programs” relied on mechanization, or automation—another important factor in the postwar boom. From 1947 to 1975, worker productivity more than doubled across the whole of the economy. American factories replaced manpower with machines, substituting cheap fossil energy for human muscle. As industries mechanized, they could turn out products more efficiently and at lower cost. Mechanization did not come without social costs, however. Over the course of the postwar decades, millions of high-wage manufacturing jobs were lost as machines replaced workers, affecting entire cities and regions. Corporate leaders approved, but workers and their union representatives were less enthusiastic. “How are you going to sell cars to all of these machines?” wondered Walter Reuther, president of the United Auto Workers (UAW).

**The Economic Record** The American economy produced an extraordinary postwar record. Annual GDP jumped from \$213 billion in 1945 to more than \$500 billion in 1960; by 1970, it exceeded \$1 trillion (Figure 26.1). This sustained economic growth meant a 25 percent rise in real income for ordinary Americans between 1946 and 1959. Even better, the new prosperity featured low inflation. After a burst of high prices in the immediate postwar period, inflation slowed to 2 to 3 percent annually, and it stayed low until the escalation of the Vietnam War in the mid-1960s. Feeling secure about the future, Americans were eager to spend and rightly felt that they were better off than ever before. In 1940, 43 percent of American families owned their homes; by 1960, 62 percent did. In that period, moreover, income inequality dropped sharply. The share of total income going to the top tenth—the



**FIGURE 26.1**

**Gross Domestic Product, 1930–1972**

After a sharp dip during the Great Depression, the GDP rose steadily in both real and constant dollars in the postwar period.

richest Americans—declined by nearly one-third from the 45 percent it had been in 1940. American society had become not only more prosperous but also more egalitarian.

However, the picture was not as rosy at the bottom, where tenacious poverty accompanied the economic boom. In *The Affluent Society* (1958), which analyzed the nation’s successful, “affluent” middle class, economist John Kenneth Galbraith argued that the poor were only an “afterthought” in the minds of economists and politicians, who largely celebrated the new growth. As Galbraith noted, one in thirteen families at the time earned less than \$1,000 a year (about \$7,500 in today’s dollars). Four years later, in *The Other America* (1962), the left-wing social critic Michael Harrington chronicled “the economic underworld of American life,” and a U.S. government study, echoing a well-known sentence from Franklin Roosevelt’s second inaugural address (“I see one-third of a nation ill-housed, ill-clad, ill-nourished”), declared “one-third of the nation” to be poorly paid, poorly educated, and poorly housed. It appeared that in economic terms, as the top and the middle converged, the bottom remained far behind.

## A Nation of Consumers

The most breathtaking development in the postwar American economy was the dramatic expansion of the domestic consumer market. The sheer quantity of consumer goods available to the average person was without precedent. In some respects, the postwar decades seemed like the 1920s all over again, with an abundance of new gadgets and appliances, a craze for automobiles, and new types of mass media. Yet there was a significant difference: in the 1950s, consumption became associated with citizenship. Buying things, once a sign of personal indulgence, now meant participating

fully in American society and, moreover, fulfilling a social responsibility. What the suburban family consumed, asserted *Life* magazine in a photo essay, would help to ensure “full employment and improved living standards for the rest of the nation.”

**The GI Bill** The new ethic of consumption appealed to the postwar middle class, the driving force behind the expanding domestic market. Middle-class status was more accessible than ever before because of the Servicemen’s Readjustment Act of 1944, popularly known as the GI Bill. In the immediate postwar years, more than half of all U.S. college students were veterans attending class on the government’s dime. By the middle of the 1950s, 2.2 million veterans had attended college and another 5.6 million had attended trade school with government financing. Before the GI Bill, commented one veteran, “I looked upon college education as likely as my owning a Rolls-Royce with a chauffeur.”

Government financing of education helped make the U.S. workforce the best educated in the world in the 1950s and 1960s. American colleges, universities, and trade schools grew by leaps and bounds to accommodate the flood of students—and expanded again when the children of those students, the baby boomers, reached college age in the 1960s. At Rutgers University, enrollment went from 7,000 before the war to 16,000 in 1947; at the University of Minnesota, from 15,000 to more than 27,000. The GI Bill trained nearly half a million engineers; 200,000 doctors, dentists, and nurses; and 150,000 scientists (among many other professions). Better education meant higher earning power, and higher earning power translated into the consumer spending that drove the postwar economy. One observer of the GI Bill was so impressed with its achievements that he declared it responsible for “the most important educational and social transformation in American history.”

The GI Bill stimulated the economy and expanded the middle class in another way: by increasing home ownership. Between the end of World War II and 1966, one of every five single-family homes built in the United States was financed through a GI Bill mortgage—2.5 million new homes in all. In cities and suburbs across the country, the **Veterans Administration (VA)**, which helped former soldiers purchase new homes with no down payment, sparked a building boom that created jobs in the construction industry and fueled consumer spending in home appliances and automobiles. Education and home ownership were more than personal triumphs for the families of World



### College on the GI Bill

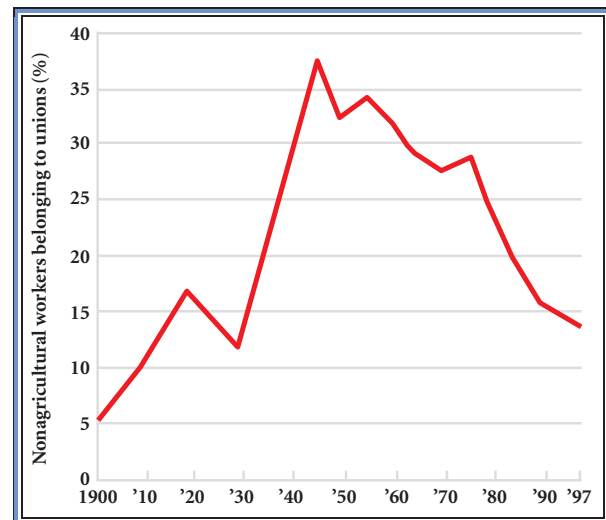
In 1947—the year this photo was taken of a crowded lecture hall at the University of Iowa—more than 6,000 of this university’s 10,000 students (60 percent) were veterans whose education was financed by the GI Bill. Across the country, American universities were bursting at the seams from the massive enrollment of World War II veterans. Government financing of college education for these vets made the U.S. workforce one of the best educated in the world in the 1950s and 1960s. Margaret Bourke-White/Time Life Pictures/Getty Images.

War II veterans (and Korean and Vietnam War veterans, after a new GI Bill was passed in 1952). They were concrete financial *assets* that helped lift more Americans than ever before into a mass-consumption-oriented middle class.

**Trade Unions** Organized labor also expanded the ranks of the middle class. For the first time ever, trade unions and **collective bargaining** became major factors in the nation’s economic life. In the past, organized labor had been confined to a narrow band of craft trades and a few industries, primarily coal mining, railroading, and the building and metal trades. The power balance shifted during the Great Depression, and by the time the dust settled after World War II, labor unions overwhelmingly represented America’s industrial workforce (Figure 26.2). By the beginning of the 1950s, the nation’s major industries, including auto, steel, clothing, chemicals, and virtually all consumer product manufacturing, were operating with union contracts.

That outcome did not arrive without a fight. Unions staged major strikes in nearly all American industries in 1945 and 1946, and employers fought back. Head of the UAW Walter Reuther and CIO president Philip Murray declared that employers could afford a 30 percent wage increase, which would fuel postwar consumption. When employers, led by the giant General

Motors, balked at that demand, the two sides seemed set for a long struggle. Between 1947 and 1950, however, a broad “labor-management accord” gradually



**FIGURE 26.2**  
Labor Union Strength, 1900–1997

Labor unions reached their peak strength immediately after World War II, when they represented close to 40 percent of the nonfarm workforce. Although there was some decline after the mid-1950s, unions still represented nearly 30 percent in 1973. Thereafter, their decline was precipitous.

AFL-CIO Information Bureau, Washington, DC.

emerged across most industries. This was not industrial peace, because the country still experienced many strikes, but a general acceptance of collective bargaining as the method for setting the terms of employment. The result was rising real income. The average worker with three dependents gained 18 percent in spendable real income in the 1950s.

In addition, unions delivered greater leisure (more paid holidays and longer vacations) and, in a startling departure, a social safety net. In postwar Europe, America's allies were constructing welfare states. But having lost the bruising battle in Washington for national health care during Truman's presidency, American unions turned to the bargaining table. By the end of the 1950s, union contracts commonly provided pension plans and company-paid health insurance. Collective bargaining, the process of trade unions and employers negotiating workplace contracts, had become, in effect, the American alternative to the European welfare state and, as Reuther boasted, the passport into the middle class.

The labor-management accord, though impressive, was never as durable or universal as it seemed. Vulnerabilities lurked. For one thing, the sheltered domestic markets—the essential condition for generous contracts—were quite fragile. In certain industries, the lead firms were already losing market share. Second, generally overlooked were the many unorganized workers with no middle-class passport—those consigned to unorganized industries, casual labor, or low-wage jobs in the service sector. A final vulnerability was the most basic: the abiding antiunionism of American employers. At heart, managers regarded the labor-management accord as a negotiated truce, not a permanent peace. The postwar labor-management accord turned out to be a transitory event, not a permanent condition of American economic life.

**Houses, Cars, and Children** Increased educational levels, growing home ownership, and higher wages all enabled more Americans than ever before to become members of what one historian has called a “consumer republic.” But what did they buy? The postwar emphasis on nuclear families and suburbs provides the answer. In the emerging suburban nation, three elements came together to create patterns of consumption that would endure for decades: houses, cars, and children.

A feature in a 1949 issue of *McCall's*, a magazine targeting middle-class women, illustrates the connections. “I now have three working centers,” a typical housewife explains. “The baby center, a baking center and a cleaning center.” Accompanying illustrations

reveal the interior of the brand-new house, stocked with the latest consumer products: accessories for the baby's room; a new stove, oven, and refrigerator; and a washer and dryer, along with cleaning products and other household goods. The article does not mention automobiles, but the photo of the house's exterior makes the point clear: father drives home from work in a new car.

Consumption for the home, including automobiles, drove the postwar American economy as much as, or more than, the military-industrial complex did. If we think like advertisers and manufacturers, we can see why. Between 1945 and 1970, more than 25 million new houses were built in the United States. Each required its own supply of new appliances, from refrigerators to lawn mowers. In 1955 alone, Americans purchased 4 million new refrigerators, and between 1940 and 1951 the sale of power mowers increased from 35,000 per year to more than 1 million. Moreover, as American industry discovered planned obsolescence—the encouragement of consumers to replace appliances and cars every few years—the home became a site of perpetual consumer desire.

Children also encouraged consumption. The baby boomers born between World War II and the late 1950s have consistently, throughout every phase of their lives, been the darlings of American advertising and consumption. When they were infants, companies focused on developing new baby products, from disposable diapers to instant formula. When they were toddlers and young children, new television programs, board games, fast food, TV dinners, and thousands of different kinds of toys came to market to supply the rambunctious youth. When they were teenagers, rock music, Hollywood films, and a constantly marketed “teen culture”—with its appropriate clothing, music, hairstyles, and other accessories—bombarded them. Remarkably, in 1956, middle-class American teenagers on average had a weekly income of more than \$10, close to the weekly disposable income of an entire family a generation earlier.

**Television** The emergence of commercial television in the United States was swift and overwhelming. In the realm of technology, only the automobile and the personal computer were its equal in transforming everyday life in the twentieth century. In 1947, there were 7,000 TV sets in American homes. A year later, the CBS and NBC radio networks began offering regular

#### EXPLAIN CONSEQUENCES

How did the tastes and values of the postwar middle class affect the country?





### Teenagers

These teenage girls and boys are being restrained by police outside an Elvis Presley concert in Florida in 1956. Elvis, who was instrumental in popularizing rock 'n' roll music among white middle-class teenagers in the mid-1950s, was one example of a broader phenomenon: the creation of the "teenager" as a distinct demographic, cultural category and, perhaps most significantly, consumer group. Beginning in the 1950s, middle-class teenagers had money to spend, and advertisers and other entrepreneurs—such as the music executives who marketed Elvis or the Hollywood executives who invented the "teen film"—sought ways to win their allegiance and their dollars. Photo by Charles Trainor/Time Life Pictures/Getty Images.

programming, and by 1950 Americans owned 7.3 million sets. Ten years later, 87 percent of American homes had at least one television set. Having conquered the home, television would soon become the principal mediator between the consumer and the marketplace.

Television advertisers mastered the art of manufacturing consumer desire. TV stations, like radio stations before them, depended entirely on advertising for profits. The first television executives understood that as long as they sold viewers to advertisers they would stay on the air. Early corporate-sponsored shows (such as *General Electric Theater* and *U.S. Steel Hour*) and simple product jingles (such as "No matter what the time or place, let's keep up with that happy pace. 7-Up your thirst away!") gave way by the early 1960s to slick advertising campaigns that used popular music, movie stars, sports figures, and stimulating graphics to captivate viewers.

By creating powerful visual narratives of comfort and plenty, television revolutionized advertising and changed forever the ways products were sold to American, and global, consumers. On *Queen for a Day*, a

show popular in the mid-1950s, women competed to see who could tell the most heartrending story of tragedy and loss. The winner was lavished with household products: refrigerators, toasters, ovens, and the like. In a groundbreaking advertisement for Anacin aspirin, a tiny hammer pounded inside the skull of a headache sufferer. Almost overnight, sales of Anacin increased by 50 percent.

By the late 1950s, what Americans saw on television, both in the omnipresent commercials and in the programming, was an overwhelmingly white, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant world of nuclear families, suburban homes, and middle-class life. A typical show was *Father Knows Best*, starring Robert Young and Jane Wyatt. Father left home each morning wearing a suit and carrying a briefcase. Mother was a full-time housewife and stereotypical female, prone to bad driving and tears. *Leave It to Beaver*, another immensely popular series about suburban family life, embodied similar late-fifties themes. Earlier in the decade, however, television featured grittier realities. *The Honeymooners*, starring Jackie Gleason as a Brooklyn bus driver, and

### Advertising in the TV Age

Aggressive advertising of new products such as the color television helped fuel the surge in consumer spending during the 1950s. Marketing experts emphasized television's role in promoting family togetherness, while interior designers offered decorating tips that placed the television at the focal point of living rooms and the increasingly popular "family rooms." In this 1951 magazine advertisement, the family is watching a variety program starring singer Dinah Shore, who was the television spokeswoman for Chevrolet cars. Every American probably could hum the tune of the little song she sang in praise of the Chevy. Courtesy of Motorola Museum © 1951 Motorola, Inc./Picture Research Consultants & Archives.

THE MODERN SCIENTIFIC WAY

March 21, 1951

# What Motorola TV means to your family!

**to Mom** - It makes family life more enjoyable by providing a new outlet for her interests and tastes. - See how!

**to Dad** - It makes relaxation after work, his favorite sport, the news, reading, etc. - See how!

**to the Kids** - It makes a new world of fun and excitement available to them. - See how!

**to the Older Folks** - It makes a new world of enjoyment available to them. - See how!

MODEL AND PHOTOGRAPHY BY WHITFIELD IN NEW YORK

**ONLY MOTOROLA GIVES YOU THESE EXCLUSIVE FEATURES... IN FASHION AWARD CABINETS!**

**GLARE GUARD** - For every eye, because you'll never see a glare again.

**NEW SHARP CONTROLS** - The most advanced of the Motorola television controls. They are sharp, clear, and easy to use. They are the only controls of their kind.

**TRIPLE-SPIND SYSTEM** - The only system of its kind. It gives you the best of both worlds. It gives you the best of both worlds. It gives you the best of both worlds.

**IMPROVED SPEAKERS** - The only speakers of their kind. They are sharp, clear, and easy to use. They are the only speakers of their kind.

**ELEGANT CABINETS!** - The only cabinets of their kind. They are sharp, clear, and easy to use. They are the only cabinets of their kind.

SEE YOUR CLASSIFIED DIRECTORY FOR THE NAME OF YOUR NEAREST MOTOROLA DEALER - Specifications subject to change without notice.

*The Life of Riley*, a situation comedy featuring a California aircraft worker, treated working-class lives. Two other early-fifties television series, *Beulah*, starring Ethel Waters and then Louise Beavers as an African American maid, and the comedic *Amos 'n' Andy*, were the only shows featuring black actors in major roles. Television was never a showcase for the breadth of American society, but in the second half of the 1950s broadcasting lost much of its ethnic, racial, and class diversity and became a vehicle for the transmission of a narrow range of middle-class tastes and values.

### Youth Culture

One of the most striking developments in American life in the postwar decades was the emergence of the **teenager** as a cultural phenomenon. In 1956, only

partly in jest, the CBS radio commentator Eric Sevareid questioned “whether the teenagers will take over the United States lock, stock, living room, and garage.” Sevareid was grumbling about American youth culture, a phenomenon first noticed in the 1920s and with its roots in the lengthening years of education, the role of peer groups, and the consumer tastes of young people. Market research revealed a distinct teen market to be exploited. *Newsweek* noted with awe in 1951 that the aggregate of the weekly spending money of teenagers was enough to buy 190 million candy bars, 130 million soft drinks, and 230 million sticks of gum. Increasingly, advertisers targeted the young, both to capture their spending money and to exploit their influence on family purchases.

Hollywood movies played a large role in fostering a teenage culture. Young people made up the largest

**UNDERSTAND  
POINTS OF VIEW**

How did rebellion become an integral part of consumer culture in the postwar period?

audience for motion pictures, and Hollywood studios learned over the course of the 1950s to cater to them. The success of films such as *The Wild One* (1953), starring Marlon Brando; *Blackboard Jungle* (1955), with Sidney Poitier;

and *Rebel Without a Cause* (1955), starring James Dean, convinced movie executives that films directed at teenagers were worthy investments. “What are you rebelling against?” Brando is asked in *The Wild One*. “Whattaya got?” he replies. By the early 1960s, Hollywood had retooled its business model, shifting emphasis away from adults and families to teenagers. The “teenpic” soon included multiple genres: horror, rock ’n’ roll, dangerous youth, and beach party, among others.

**Rock ’n’ Roll** What really defined the youth culture, however, was its music. Rejecting the romantic ballads of the 1940s, teenagers discovered rock ’n’ roll, which originated in African American rhythm and blues. The Cleveland disc jockey Alan Freed took the lead in introducing white America to the black-created sound

by playing what were called “race” records. “If I could find a white man who had the Negro sound and the Negro feel, I could make a billion dollars,” a record company owner is quoted as saying. The performer who fit that bill was Elvis Presley, who rocketed into instant celebrity in 1956 with his hit records “Hound Dog” and “Heartbreak Hotel,” covers of songs originally recorded by black artists such as Big Mama Thornton. Between 1953 and 1959, record sales increased from \$213 million to \$603 million, with rock ’n’ roll as the driving force.

Many unhappy adults saw in rock ’n’ roll music an invitation to interracial dating, rebellion, and a more flagrant sexuality. The media featured hundreds of stories on problem teens, and denunciations of the new music poured forth from many corners. Such condemnation only deflected off the new youth culture or, if anything, increased its popularity. Both Hollywood and the music industry had learned that youth rebellion sold tickets.

**Cultural Dissenters** Youth rebellion was only one aspect of a broader discontent with the sometimes

**Motown**

Mary Wilson, Diana Ross, and Florence Ballard (from left to right) were the founding members of the Motown singing group the Supremes (shown here in concert in 1964), which produced twelve number-one singles. Motown, a record label owned by African American entrepreneur Berry Gordy, specialized in so-called cross-over acts: black singers who sold records to white audiences. In the era of Jim Crow, Motown represented a small but noteworthy step toward a less racially segregated American culture. Photo by RB/Redferns/Getty Images.

saccharine consumer culture of the 1950s. Many artists, writers, and jazz musicians embarked on powerful new experimental projects in a remarkable flowering of intensely personal, introspective art forms. Black musicians developed a hard-driving improvisational style known as bebop. Whether the “hot” bebop of saxophonist Charlie Parker or the more subdued “cool” sound of the influential trumpeter Miles Davis, postwar jazz was cerebral, intimate, and individualistic. As such, it stood in stark contrast to the commercialized, dance-oriented “swing” bands of the 1930s and 1940s.

Black jazz musicians found eager fans not only in the African American community but also among young white **Beats**, a group of writers and poets centered in New York and San Francisco who disdained middle-class materialism. In his poem “Howl” (1956), which became a manifesto of the Beat generation, Allen Ginsberg lamented: “I saw the best minds of my generation destroyed by madness, starving hysterical naked, dragging themselves through the negro streets at dawn looking for an angry fix.” In works such as Jack Kerouac’s novel *On the Road* (1957), the Beats glorified spontaneity, sexual adventurism, drug use, and spirituality. The Beats were apolitical, but their cultural rebellion would, in the 1960s, inspire a new generation of young rebels disenchanted with both the political and cultural status quo.

## Religion and the Middle Class

In an age of anxiety about nuclear annihilation and the spread of “godless communism,” Americans yearned for a reaffirmation of faith. Church membership jumped from 49 percent of the population in 1940 to 70 percent in 1960. People flocked to the evangelical Protestant denominations, beneficiaries of a remarkable new crop of preachers. Most eloquent was the young Reverend Billy Graham, who made brilliant use of television, radio, and advertising. His massive 1949 revival in Los Angeles and his 1957 crusade at Madison Square Garden in New York, attended or viewed by hundreds of thousands of Americans, established Graham as the nation’s leading evangelical.

Rather than clashing with the new middle-class ethic of consumption, the religious reawakening was designed to mesh with it. Preachers such as Graham and the California-based Robert Schuller told Americans that so long as they lived moral lives, they deserved the material blessings of modern life. No one was more influential in this regard than the minister and author Norman Vincent Peale, whose best-selling book *The Power of Positive Thinking* (1952) embodied the

therapeutic use of religion as an antidote to life’s trials and tribulations. Peale taught that with faith in God and “positive thinking” anyone could overcome obstacles and become a success. Graham, Schuller, Peale, and other 1950s evangelicals laid the foundation for the rise of the televangelists, who created popular television ministries in the 1970s.

The postwar purveyors of religious faith cast Americans as a righteous people opposed to communist atheism. When Julius and Ethel Rosenberg were sentenced to death in 1953, the judge criticized them for “devoting themselves to the Russian ideology of denial of God.” Cold War imperatives drew Catholics, Protestants, and Jews into an influential ecumenical movement that downplayed doctrinal differences. The phrase “under God” was inserted into the Pledge of Allegiance in 1954, and U.S. coins carried the words



**Billy Graham**

Charismatic and inspiring, Billy Graham wore down shoe leather to bring Christian conversion to hundreds of thousands of Americans in the 1940s and 1950s, preaching to large crowds such as this one in Columbia, South Carolina. He also migrated onto the radio and television airwaves, using technology to reach even wider audiences. Graham used the Cold War to sharpen his message, telling Americans that “godless communism” was an inferior system, but that democracy in America required belief in God and a constant struggle against “sin.” Photo by John Dominis/Time Life Pictures/Getty Images.

“In God We Trust” after 1956. These religious initiatives struck a distinctly moderate tone, however, in comparison with the politicized evangelism that emerged in the 1960s and 1970s (Chapter 29).

## The American Family in the Era of Containment

Marriage, family structure, and gender roles had been undergoing significant changes since the turn of the twentieth century (Chapter 18). Beginning in the nineteenth century, middle-class Americans increasingly saw marriage as “companionate,” that is, based on romantic love and a lifetime of shared friendship. *Companionate* did not mean *equal*. In the mid-twentieth century, family life remained governed by notions of paternalism, in which men provided economic support and controlled the family’s financial resources, while women cared for children and occupied a secondary position in public life.

The resurgent postwar American middle class was preoccupied with the virtues of paternalism. Everyone from professional psychologists to television advertisers and every organization from schools to the popular press celebrated nuclear families. Children were prized, and women’s caregiving roles were valorized. This view of family life, and especially its emphasis on female “domesticity,” was bolstered by Cold War politics. Americans who deviated from prevailing gender and familial norms were not only viewed with scorn but were also sometimes thought to be subversive and politically dangerous. The word *containment* could apply to the home as easily as to foreign policy. The family had become politicized by the Cold War.

The model of domesticity so highly esteemed in postwar middle-class morality hid deeper, longer-term changes in the way marriage, gender roles, women’s work, and even sex were understood. To comprehend the postwar decades, we have to keep in mind both the value placed on domesticity and the tumultuous changes surging beneath its prescriptions.

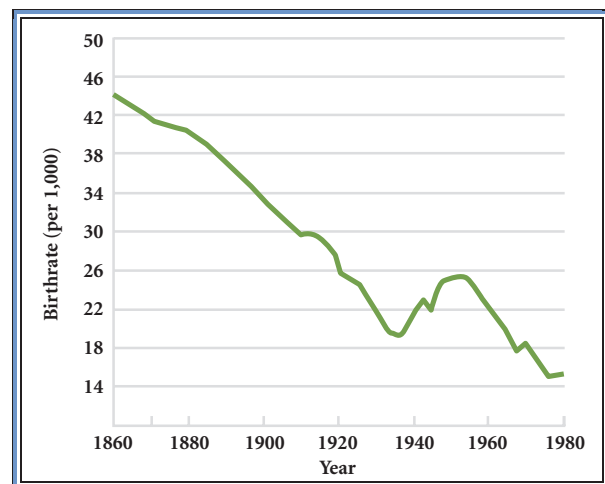
### The Baby Boom

A popular 1945 song was called “Gotta Make Up for Lost Time,” and Americans did just that. Two things were noteworthy about the families they formed after World War II: First, marriages were remarkably stable. Not until the mid-1960s did the divorce rate begin to rise sharply. Second, married couples were intent on

having babies. Everyone expected to have several children—it was part of adulthood, almost a citizen’s responsibility. After a century and a half of decline, the birthrate shot up. More babies were born in the six years between 1948 and 1953 than in the previous thirty years (Figure 26.3).

One of the reasons for this **baby boom** was that people were having children at the same time. A second was a drop in the average marriage age—down to twenty-two for men and twenty for women. Younger parents meant a bumper crop of children. Women who came of age in the 1930s averaged 2.4 children; their counterparts in the 1950s averaged 3.2 children. Such a dramatic turnaround reflected couples’ decisions during the Great Depression to limit childbearing and couples’ contrasting decisions in the postwar years to have more children. The baby boom peaked in 1957 and remained at a high level until the early 1960s. Far from “normal,” all of these developments were anomalies, temporary reversals of long-standing demographic trends. From the perspective of the whole of the twentieth century, the 1950s and early 1960s stand out as exceptions to declining birthrates, rising divorce rates, and the steadily rising marriage age.

The passage of time revealed the ever-widening impact of the baby boom. When baby boomers competed for jobs during the 1970s, the labor market became tight. When career-oriented baby boomers belatedly began having children in the 1980s, the birthrate jumped. And in our own time, as baby boomers



**FIGURE 26.3**  
The American Birthrate, 1860–1980

When birthrates are viewed over more than a century, the postwar baby boom is clearly only a temporary reversal of the long-term downward trend in the American birthrate.

begin retiring, huge funding problems threaten to engulf Social Security and Medicare. The intimate decisions of so many couples after World War II continued to shape American life well into the twenty-first century.

**Improving Health and Education** Baby boom children benefitted from a host of important advances in public health and medical practice in the postwar years. Formerly serious illnesses became merely routine after the introduction of such “miracle drugs” as penicillin (introduced in 1943), streptomycin (1945), and cortisone (1946). When Dr. Jonas Salk perfected a polio vaccine in 1954, he became a national hero. The free distribution of Salk’s vaccine in the nation’s schools, followed in 1961 by Dr. Albert Sabin’s oral polio vaccine, demonstrated the potential of government-sponsored public health programs.

The baby boom also gave the nation’s educational system a boost. Postwar middle-class parents, America’s first college-educated generation, placed a high value on education. Suburban parents approved 90 percent of school bond issues during the 1950s. By 1970, school expenditures accounted for 7.2 percent of the gross national product, double the 1950 level. In the 1960s, the baby boom generation swelled college enrollments. State university systems grew in tandem: the pioneering University of California, University of Wisconsin, and State University of New York systems added dozens of new campuses and offered students in their states a low-cost college education.

**Dr. Benjamin Spock** To keep baby boom children healthy and happy, middle-class parents increasingly relied on the advice of experts. Dr. Benjamin Spock’s *Common Sense Book of Baby and Child Care* sold 1 million copies every year after its publication in 1946. Spock urged mothers to abandon the rigid feeding and baby-care schedules of an earlier generation. New mothers found Spock’s commonsense approach liberating. “Your little paperback is still in my cupboard, with loose pages, rather worn from use because I brought up two babies using it as my ‘Bible,’” a California housewife wrote to Spock.

Despite his commonsense approach to child rearing, Spock was part of a generation of psychological experts whose advice often failed to reassure women. If mothers were too protective, Spock and others argued, they might hamper their children’s preparation for adult life. On the other hand, mothers who wanted to work outside the home felt guilty because Spock recommended that they be constantly available for their

children. As American mothers aimed for the perfection demanded of them seemingly at every turn, many began to question these mixed messages. Some of them would be inspired by the resurgence of feminism in the 1960s.

### PLACE EVENTS IN CONTEXT

Why was there an increase in births in the decades after World War II, and what were some of the effects of this baby boom?

## Women, Work, and Family

Two powerful forces shaped women’s relationships to work and family life in the postwar decades. One was the middle-class domestic ideal, in which women were expected to raise children, attend to other duties in the home, and devote themselves to their husbands’ happiness. So powerful was this ideal that in 1957 the *Ladies’ Home Journal* entitled an article, “Is College Education Wasted on Women?” The second force was the job market. Most working-class women had to earn a paycheck to help their family. And despite their education, middle-class women found that jobs in the professions and business were dominated by men and often closed to them. For both groups, the market offered mostly “women’s jobs”—in teaching, nursing, and other areas of the growing service sector—and little room for advancement (American Voices, p. 852).

The idea that a woman’s place was in the home was, of course, not new. The postwar obsession with femininity and motherhood bore a remarkable similarity to the nineteenth century’s notion of domesticity. The updated version drew on new elements of twentieth-century science and culture. Psychologists equated motherhood with “normal” female identity and suggested that career-minded mothers needed therapy. “A mother who runs out on her children to work—except in cases of absolute necessity—betrays a deep dissatisfaction with motherhood or with her marriage,” wrote one leading psychiatrist. Television shows and movies depicted career women as social misfits. The postwar consumer culture also emphasized women’s domestic role as purchasing agents for home and family. “Can a woman ever feel right cooking on a dirty range?” asked one advertisement.

The postwar domestic ideal held that women’s principal economic contribution came through consumption—women shopped for the family. In reality, their contributions increasingly took them outside their homes and into the workforce. In 1954, married women made up half of all women workers. Six years later, the 1960 census reported a stunning fact: the number of mothers who worked had increased four times, and over one-third of these women had children



## Coming of Age in the Postwar Years

At the dawn of the postwar era, Americans faced new opportunities and new anxieties. Many former soldiers attended college and purchased new homes on the GI Bill, which forever changed their lives. Women faced new pressures to realize the ideal role of housewife and mother. On the horizon, both in reality and in the American imagination, lurked communism, which Americans feared but little understood. And racial segregation continued to shape the ordinary lives of Americans. Recorded here are several different reactions to these postwar tensions, distinct experiences of coming of age in the 1940s and 1950s.

**Art Buchwald**

### Studying on the GI Bill

Art Buchwald was one of the best-known humorists in American journalism. But in 1946, he was an ordinary ex-serviceman using the GI Bill to go to college.

It was time to face up to whether I was serious about attending school. My decision was to go down to the University of Southern California and find out what I should study at night to get into the place. There were at least 4,000 ex-GIs waiting to register. I stood in line with them. Hours later, I arrived at the counter and said, “I would like to . . .” The clerk said, “Fill this out.”

Having been accepted as a full-time student under the G.I. Bill, I was entitled to seventy-five dollars a month plus tuition, books, and supplies. Meanwhile, I found a boardinghouse a few blocks from campus, run by a cheery woman who was like a mother to her thirteen boarders. . . . At the time, just after the Second World War had ended, an undeclared class war was going on at USC. The G.I.s returning home had little use for the fraternity men, since most of the frat boys were not only much younger, but considered very immature.

The G.I.s were intent on getting their educations and starting new lives.

by a returning veteran, and it wasn't so easy to find another job I really liked. I filled out the applications for *Time-Life* researcher, which I'd always scorned before. All the girls I knew had jobs like that, but it was official policy that no matter how good, researchers, who were women, could never become writers or editors. They could write the whole article, but the men they were working with would always get the by-line as writer. I was certainly not a feminist then — none of us were a bit interested in women's rights. But I could never bring myself to take that kind of job.

After the war, I had been very political, very involved, consciously radical. Not about women, for heaven's sake! If you were a radical in 1949, you were concerned about the Negroes, and the working class, and World War III, and the Un-American Activities Committee and McCarthy and loyalty oaths, and Communist splits and schisms, Russia, China and the UN, but you certainly didn't think about being a woman, politically.

Source: From *“It Changed My Life”: Writings on the Women's Movement*, by Betty Friedan (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1976). Copyright © 1963 by Betty Friedan. Reprinted by permission of Curtis Brown, Ltd.

**Susan Allen Toth**

### Learning About Communism

Toth is a writer who grew up in Ames, Iowa, surrounded by cornfields. She writes here about her experience learning just how anxious people could become in the 1950s when the issue of communism was raised.

Of course, we all knew there was Communism. As early as sixth grade our teacher warned us about its dangers. I listened carefully to Mr. Casper describe what Communists wanted, which sounded terrible. World domination. Enslavement. Destruction of our way of life. I hung around school one afternoon hoping to catch Mr. Casper, whom I secretly adored, to ask him why Communism was so bad. He stayed in another teacher's room so late I finally scrawled my question on our blackboard: “Dear Mr. Casper, why is Communism so bad . . . Sue Allen” and

Source: From *Leaving Home: A Memoir*, by Art Buchwald (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1993). Used by permission of Joel Buchwald.

**Betty Friedan**

### Living the Feminine Mystique

Like Buchwald, Betty Friedan would one day become famous as a writer—author of one of the most widely read books of the 1960s, *The Feminine Mystique*. In the late 1940s, Friedan was not yet a feminist, but she was deeply engaged in the politics of the era.

And then the boys our age had come back from the war. I was bumped from my job on a small labor news service

went home. Next morning the message was still there. Like a warning from heaven it had galvanized Mr. Casper. He began class with a stern lecture, repeating everything he had said about dangerous Russians and painting a vivid picture of how we would all suffer if the Russians took over the city government in Ames. We certainly wouldn't be able to attend a school like this, he said, where free expression of opinion was allowed. At recess that day one of the boys asked me if I was a "dirty Commie": two of my best friends shied away from me on the playground; I saw Mr. Casper talking low to another teacher and pointing at me. I cried all the way home from school and resolved never to commit myself publicly with a question like that again.

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Source: From Susan Allen Toth, "Boyfriend" from *Blooming: A Small-Town Girlhood*. Reprinted by permission of Molly Friedrich on behalf of the author.

### Melba Patillo Beals

## Encountering Segregation

Melba Patillo Beals was one of the "Little Rock Nine," the high school students who desegregated Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas, in 1957. Here she recounts an experience documenting what it was like to come of age as a black southerner under Jim Crow.

An experience I endured on a December morning would forever affect any decision I made to go "potty" in a public place. We were Christmas shopping when I felt the twinge of emergency. I convinced Mother and Grandmother that I knew the way to restroom by myself. I was moving as fast as I could when suddenly I knew I wasn't going to make it all the way down those stairs and across the warehouse walkway to the "Colored Ladies" toilet. So I pushed open the door marked "White Ladies" and, taking a deep breath, I crossed the threshold. It was just as bright and pretty as I had imagined it to be. . . . Across the room, other white ladies sat on a couch reading the newspaper. Suddenly realizing I was there, two of them looked at me in astonishment. Unless I was the maid, they said, I was in the wrong place. While they shouted at me to "get out," my throbbing bladder consumed my attention as I frantically headed for the unoccupied stall. They kept shouting "Good lord, do something." I was doing something by that time, seated comfortably on the toilet, listening to the hysteria building outside my locked stall. One woman even knelt down to peep beneath the door to make certain that I didn't put my bottom on the toilet seat. She ordered me not to pee.

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Source: Reprinted with permission of Atria Publishing Group, a Division of Simon & Schuster, Inc. *Warriors Don't Cry: A Searing Memoir of the Battle to Integrate Little Rock* by Melba Patillo Beals. Copyright © 1994, 1995 by Melba Beals. All rights reserved.

### David Beers

## California Suburbia

David Beers grew up in the suburbs of California, in what would eventually become known as Silicon Valley. In his memoir, he recalls the ritual of buying a house.

"We never looked at a used house," my father remembers of those days in the early 1960s when he and my mother went shopping for a home of their own in the Valley of Heart's Delight. "A used house did not interest us." Instead, they roved in search of balloons and bunting and the many billboards advertising *Low Interest! No Money Down!* to military veterans like my father. They would follow the signs to the model homes standing in empty fields and tour the empty floor plans and leave with notes carefully made about square footage and closet space. "We shopped for a new house," my father says, "the way you shopped for a car." . . . We were blithe conquerors, my tribe. When we chose a new homeland, invaded a place, settled it, and made it over in our image, we did so with a smiling sense of our own inevitability. . . . We were drawn to the promise of a blank page inviting *our* design upon it.

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Source: David Beers, *Blue Sky Dream: A Memoir of America's Fall from Grace* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, & Company, 1996), 31, 39.

### QUESTIONS FOR ANALYSIS

1. What do you think Buchwald meant by "an undeclared class war"? Why would the influx of GI Bill veterans into colleges create conflict?
2. Why do you think Friedan "didn't think about being a woman, politically" in the 1940s and 1950s? Why do you think she was "bumped from" her job by a "returning veteran"?
3. What does Toth's experience as a young student suggest about American anxieties during the Cold War? Why would her question cause embarrassment and ridicule?
4. What does Beals's experience suggest about the indignities faced by young people on the front lines of challenging racial segregation? Does it help explain why youth were so important in breaking racial barriers?
5. What do you think Beers means by "our tribe"? What was the "blank page"?





### Mom at Home and at Work

Middle-class women's lives grew increasingly complicated in the postwar decades. They may have dreamed of a suburban home with a brand-new kitchen, like the one shown in this 1955 photograph (left), but laboring all day over children, dirty dishes, and a hot stove proved dissatisfying to many. Betty Friedan called the confinement of women's identities to motherhood the "feminine mystique," but did the working woman have it much better? Hardly. Most women in the 1950s and 1960s were confined to low-level secretarial work (right), waitressing, and other service-sector work—or, worse, factory or domestic labor. By the end of the 1960s, women had begun to crack the "glass ceiling" and enter the professions in larger numbers. But regardless of their occupation, the majority of working women performed the "double day": a full day at work and a full day at home. Such were the expectations and double bind women faced. Elliott Erwitt/Magnum Photos./Inge Morath © The Inge Morath Foundation/Magnum Photos.

between the ages of six and seventeen. In that same year, 30 percent of wives worked, and by 1970, it was 40 percent. For working-class women, in particular, the economic needs of their families demanded that they work outside the home.

Despite rising employment rates, occupational segmentation still haunted women. Until 1964, the classified sections of newspapers separated employment ads into "Help Wanted Male" and "Help Wanted Female." More than 80 percent of all employed

women did stereotypical women's work as salesclerks, health-care technicians, waitresses, stewardesses, domestic servants, receptionists, telephone operators, and secretaries. In 1960, only 3 percent of lawyers and 6 percent of physicians were women; on the

flip side, 97 percent of nurses and 85 percent of librarians were women. Along with women's jobs went

women's pay, which averaged 60 percent of men's pay in 1963.

Contrary to stereotype, however, women's paid work was not merely supplementary. It helped lift families into the middle class. Even in the prosperous 1950s, many men found that their wages could not pay for what middle-class life demanded: cars, houses, vacations, and college education for the children. Many families needed more than one wage earner just to get by. Among married women, the highest rates of labor-force participation in the 1950s were found in families at the lower end of the middle class. Over the course of the postwar decades, from 1945 to 1965, more and more women, including married women, from all class backgrounds, entered the paid workforce.

How could American society steadfastly uphold the domestic ideal when so many wives and mothers were out of the house and at work? In many ways, the contradiction was hidden by the women themselves. Fearing public disapproval, women would explain

### TRACE CHANGE OVER TIME

What transformations in women's economic role took place in the 1950s and 1960s?

their work in family-oriented terms — as a way to save money for the children’s college education, for instance. Moreover, when women took jobs outside the home, they still bore full responsibility for child care and household management, contributing to the “double day” of paid work and family work. As one overburdened woman noted, she now had “two full-time jobs instead of just one — underpaid clerical worker and unpaid housekeeper.” Finally, the pressures of the Cold War made strong nuclear families with breadwinning fathers and domesticated mothers symbols of a healthy nation. Americans wanted to believe this even if it did not perfectly describe the reality of their lives.

### Challenging Middle-Class Morality

In many ways, the two decades between 1945 and 1965 were a period of cultural conservatism that reflected the values of domesticity. At the dawn of the 1960s, going steady as a prelude to marriage was the fad in high school. College women had curfews and needed permission to see a male visitor. Americans married young; more than half of those who married in 1963 were under the age of twenty-one. After the birth control pill came on the market in 1960, few doctors prescribed it to unmarried women, and even married women did not enjoy unfettered access to contraception until the Supreme Court ruled it a “privacy” right in the 1965 decision *Griswold v. Connecticut*.

#### The Kinsey Reports

Like the woman on the cover of this lighthearted 1953 book of photographs, many Americans reacted with surprise when Alfred Kinsey revealed the country’s sexual habits. In his 1948 book about men and his 1953 book about women, Kinsey wrote about American sexual practices in the detached language of science. But it still made for salacious reading. Evangelical minister Billy Graham (p. 849) warned: “It is impossible to estimate the damage this book will do to the already deteriorated morals of America.” Picture Research Consultants & Archives.

**Alfred Kinsey** Yet beneath the surface of middle-class morality, Americans were less repressed than confused. They struggled to reconcile new freedoms with older moral traditions. This was especially true with regard to sex. Two controversial studies by an unassuming Indiana University zoologist named Alfred Kinsey forced questions about sexuality into the open. Kinsey and his research team published *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* in 1948 and followed it up in 1953 with *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female* — an 842-page book that sold 270,000 copies in the first month after its publication. Taking a scientific, rather than moralistic, approach, Kinsey, who became known as “the sex doctor,” documented the full range of sexual experiences of thousands of Americans. He broke numerous taboos, discussing such topics as homosexuality and marital infidelity in the detached language of science.

Both studies confirmed that a sexual revolution, although a largely hidden one, had already begun to transform American society by the early 1950s. Kinsey estimated that 85 percent of men had had sex prior to marriage and that more than 25 percent of married women had had sex outside of marriage by the age of forty. These were shocking public admissions in the late 1940s and early 1950s, and “hotter than the Kinsey

#### EXPLAIN CONSEQUENCES

What were the contradictions in postwar domesticity and middle-class morality?



report” became a national figure of speech. Kinsey was criticized by statisticians — because his samples were not randomly selected — and condemned even more fervently by religious leaders, who charged him with encouraging promiscuity and adultery. But his research opened a national conversation with profound implications for the future. Even if Kinsey’s numbers were off, he helped Americans learn to talk more openly about sex.

**The Homophile Movement** Among the most controversial of Kinsey’s claims was that homosexuality was far more prevalent than most Americans believed. Although the American Psychiatric Association would officially define homosexuality as a mental illness in 1952, Kinsey’s research found that 37 percent of men had engaged in some form of homosexual activity by early adulthood, as had 13 percent of women. Even more important, Kinsey claimed that 10 percent of American men were *exclusively* homosexual. These claims came as little surprise, but great encouragement, to a group of gay and lesbian activists who called themselves “homophiles.” Organized primarily in the Mattachine Society (the first gay rights organization in the country, founded in 1951) and the Daughters of Bilitis (a lesbian organization founded in 1955), homophiles were a small but determined collection of activists who sought equal rights for gays and lesbians. “The lesbian is a woman endowed with all the attributes of any other woman,” wrote the pioneer lesbian activist Del Martin in 1956. “The salvation of the lesbian lies in her acceptance of herself without guilt or anxiety.”

Building on the urban gay and lesbian communities that had coalesced during World War II, homophiles sought to change American attitudes about same-sex love. They faced daunting obstacles, since same-sex sexual relations were illegal in every state and scorned, or feared, by most Americans. To combat prejudice and change the laws, homophile organizations cultivated a respectable, middle-class image. Members were encouraged to avoid bars and nightclubs, to dress in conservative shirts and ties (for men) and modest skirts and blouses (for women), and to seek out professional psychologists who would attest to their “normalcy.” Only in the 1960s did homophiles begin to talk about the “homophile vote” and their “rights as citizens,” laying the groundwork for the gay rights movement of the 1970s.

**Media and Morality** The homophile movement remained unknown to most Americans. But other challenges to traditional morality received national media attention, and the media themselves became a controversial source of these challenges. Concerned that excessive crime, violence, and sex in comic books

were encouraging juvenile delinquency, the U.S. Senate held nationally televised hearings in 1954. The Senate’s final report, written largely by the Tennessee Democrat Estes Kefauver, complained of the “scantily clad women” and “penchant for violent death” common in comic books aimed at teenagers. Kefauver’s report forced the comics industry to tame its wildest practices but did little to slow the growing frankness about both sex and violence in the nation’s printed media and films.



To see a longer excerpt from the Senate hearing on juvenile delinquency, along with other primary sources from this period, see *Sources for America’s History*.

A magazine entrepreneur from Chicago named Hugh Hefner played a leading role in that growing frankness. Hefner founded *Playboy* magazine in 1953, in which he created a countermorality to domesticity: a fictional world populated by “hip” bachelor men and sexually available women. Hefner’s imagined bachelors condemned marriage and lived in sophisticated apartments filled with the latest stereo equipment and other consumer products. While domesticated fathers bought lawn mowers and patio furniture, Hefner’s magazine encouraged men to spend money on clothing and jazz albums for themselves, and for the “scantily clad women” that filled its pages. Hefner and his numerous imitators became powerful purveyors of sex in the media. But Hefner was the exception that proved the rule: marriage, not swinging bachelorhood, remained the destination for the vast majority of men. Millions of men read *Playboy*, but few adopted its fantasy lifestyle.

## A Suburban Nation

Prosperity — how much an economy produces, how much people earn — is more easily measured than is quality of life. During the 1950s, however, the American definition of the good life emerged with exceptional distinctness: a high value on consumption, a devotion to family and domesticity, and preference for suburban living. In this section, we consider the third dimension of that definition: suburbanization. What drove the nation to abandon its cities for the suburbs, and what social and political consequences did this shift have?

## The Postwar Housing Boom

Migration to the suburbs had been going on for a hundred years, but never before on the scale that the country experienced after World War II. Within a decade,

farmland on the outskirts of cities filled up with tract housing and shopping malls. Entire counties that had once been rural—such as San Mateo, south of San Francisco, or Passaic and Bergen in New Jersey, west of Manhattan—went suburban. By 1960, one-third of Americans lived in suburbs. Home construction, having ground to a halt during the Great Depression, surged after the war. One-fourth of the country's entire housing stock in 1960 had not even existed a decade earlier.

**William J. Levitt and the FHA** Two unique postwar developments remade the national housing market and gave it a distinctly suburban shape. First, an innovative Long Island building contractor, William J. Levitt, revolutionized suburban housing by applying mass-production techniques and turning out new homes at a dizzying speed. Levitt's basic four-room house, complete with kitchen appliances, was priced at \$7,990 when homes in the first Levittown went on sale in 1947 (about \$76,000 today). Levitt did not need to advertise; word of mouth brought buyers flocking to his developments (all called Levittown) in New York, Pennsylvania, and New Jersey. Dozens of other developers were soon snapping up cheap farmland and building subdivisions around the country.

Even at \$7,990, Levitt's homes would have been beyond the means of most young families had the traditional home-financing standard—a down payment of half the full price and ten years to pay off the balance—still prevailed. That is where the second postwar development came in. The Federal Housing Administration (FHA) and the Veterans Administration (VA)—that is, the federal government—brought the home mortgage market within the reach of a broader range of Americans than ever before. After the war, the FHA insured thirty-year mortgages with as little as 5 percent down and interest at 2 or 3 percent. The VA was even more generous, requiring only a token \$1 down for qualified ex-GIs. FHA and VA mortgages best explain why, after hovering around 45 percent for the previous half century, home ownership jumped to 60 percent by 1960.

What purchasers of suburban houses got, in addition to a good deal, were homogeneous communities. The developments contained few elderly people or unmarried adults. Even the trees were young. Levitt's company enforced regulations about maintaining lawns and not hanging out laundry on the weekends. Then there was the matter of race. Levitt's houses came with restrictive covenants prohibiting occupancy “by members of other than the Caucasian Race.” (Restrictive covenants often applied to Jews and, in California,

Asian Americans as well.) Levittowns were hardly alone. Suburban developments from coast to coast exhibited the same age, class, and racial homogeneity (Thinking Like a Historian, p. 858).

In *Shelley v. Kraemer* (1948), the Supreme Court outlawed restrictive covenants, but racial discrimination in housing changed little. The practice persisted long after *Shelley*, because the FHA and VA continued the policy of redlining: refusing mortgages to African Americans and members of other minority groups seeking to buy in white neighborhoods. Indeed, no federal law—or even Court decisions like *Shelley*—actually prohibited racial discrimination in housing until Congress passed the Fair Housing Act in 1968.

**Interstate Highways** Without automobiles, suburban growth on such a massive scale would have been impossible. Planners laid out subdivisions on the assumption that everybody would drive. And they did—to get to work, to take the children to Little League, to shop. With gas plentiful and cheap (15 cents a gallon), no one cared about the fuel efficiency of their V-8 engines or seemed to mind the elaborate tail fins and chrome that weighed down their cars. In 1945, Americans owned twenty-five million cars; by 1965, just two decades later, the number had tripled to seventy-five million (America Compared, p. 860). American oil consumption followed course, tripling as well between 1949 and 1972.

More cars required more highways, and the federal government obliged. In 1956, in a move that drastically altered America's landscape and driving habits, the **National Interstate and Defense Highways Act** authorized \$26 billion over a ten-year period for the construction of a nationally integrated highway system—42,500 miles (Map 26.1). Cast as a Cold War necessity because broad highways made evacuating crowded cities easier in the event of a nuclear attack, the law changed American cities forever. An enormous public works program surpassing anything undertaken during the New Deal, and enthusiastically endorsed by the Republican president, Dwight Eisenhower, federal highways made possible the massive suburbanization of the nation in the 1960s. Interstate highways rerouted traffic away from small towns, bypassed well-traveled main roads such as the cross-country Route 66, and cut wide swaths through old neighborhoods in the cities.

### PLACE EVENTS IN CONTEXT

Place postwar suburbanization in the context of the growing size and influence of the federal government. How did the national government encourage suburbanization?



## The Suburban Landscape of Cold War America

Between the end of World War II and the 1980s, Americans built and moved into suburban homes in an unprecedented wave of construction and migration that changed the nation forever. New home loan rules, and government backing under the Federal Housing Administration and Veterans Administration, made new suburban houses cheaper and brought home ownership within reach of a larger number of Americans than ever before. Commentators cheered these developments as a boon to ordinary citizens, but by the 1960s a generation of urban critics, led by journalist Jane Jacobs, had begun to find fault with the nation's suburban obsession. The following documents provide the historian with evidence of how these new suburban communities arose and how they began to transform American culture.

1. "Peacetime Cornucopia," *The New Yorker*, October 6, 1945.



© Constanin Alajalov/New Yorker/Conde Nast Publications.

2. *Life* magazine, "A Life Round Table on Housing," January 31, 1949.

The most aggressive member of *Life's* Round Table, whether as builder or debater, was William J. Levitt, president of Levitt and Sons, Inc. of Manhasset, NY. He feels that he has started a revolution, the essence of which is size. Builders in his estimation are a poor and puny lot, too small to put pressure on materials manufacturers or the local czars of the building codes or the bankers or labor. A builder ought to be a manufacturer, he said, and to this end must be big. He himself is a nonunion operator.

The Levitt prescription for cheaper houses may be summarized as follows: 1) take infinite pains with infinite details; 2) be aggressive; 3) be big enough to throw your weight around; 4) buy at wholesale; and 5) build houses in concentrated developments where mass-production methods can be used on the site.

3. Site plan sketch for Park Forest, Illinois, 1946.



The Park Forest Historical Society.

4. **William H. Whyte Jr., *The Organization Man*, 1956.** *Whyte, a prominent journalist, wrote about the decline of individualism and the rise of a national class of interchangeable white-collar workers.*

And is this not the whole drift of our society? We are not interchangeable in the sense of being people without differences, but in the externals of existence we are united by a culture increasingly national. And this is part of the momentum of mobility. The more people move about, the more similar American environments become, and the more similar they become, the easier it is to move about.

More and more, the young couples who move do so only physically. With each transfer the décor, the architecture, the faces, and the names may change; the people, the conversation, and the values do not — and sometimes the décor and architecture don't either. . . .

Suburban residents like to maintain that their suburbia not only looks classless but is classless. That is, they are apt to add on second thought, there are no extremes, and if the place isn't exactly without class, it is at least a one-class society — identified as the middle or upper middle, according to the inclination of the residents. "We are all," they say, "in the same boat."

5. **Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, 1961.** *A classic celebration of vibrant urban neighborhoods by a New York writer and architectural critic.*

Although it is hard to believe, while looking at dull gray areas, or at housing projects or at civic centers, the fact is that big cities are natural generators of diversity and prolific incubators of new enterprises and ideas of all kinds. . . .

This is because city populations are large enough to support wide ranges of variety and choice in these things. And again we find that bigness has all the advantages in smaller settlements. Towns and suburbs, for instance, are natural homes for huge supermarkets and for little else in the way of groceries, for standard movie houses or drive-ins and for little else in the way of theater. There are simply not enough people to support further variety, although there may be people (too few of them) who would draw upon it were it there. Cities, however, are the natural homes of supermarkets and standard movie houses plus delicatessens, Viennese bakeries, foreign groceries, art movies, and so on. . . .

The diversity, of whatever kind, that is generated by cities rests on the fact that in cities so many people are so close together, and among them contain so many different tastes, skills, needs, supplies, and bees in their bonnets.

6. **Herbert J. Gans, *The Levittowners*, 1967.** *One of the first sociological studies of the new postwar suburbs and their residents.*

The strengths and weakness of Levittown are those of many American communities, and the Levittowners closely resemble other young middle class Americans. They are not America, for they are not a numerical majority of the population, but they represent the major constituency of the latest and more powerful economic and political institutions in American society — the favored customers and voters whom these seek to attract and satisfy. . . .

Although they are citizens of a national polity and their lives are shaped by national economic, social, and political forces, Levittowners deceive themselves into thinking that the community, or rather the home, is the single most important unit of their lives. . . .

In viewing their homes as the center of life, Levittowners are still using a societal model that fit the rural America of self-sufficient farmers and the feudal Europe of self-isolating extended families.

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Sources: (2) *Life*, January 31, 1949, 74; (4) William H. Whyte Jr., *The Organization Man* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1956), 276, 299; (5) Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (Westminster, MD: Vintage, 1992), 145–147; (6) Herbert J. Gans, *The Levittowners* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 417–418.

### ANALYZING THE EVIDENCE

1. Compare sources 1, 4, and 6. How do they reinforce or contradict one another?
2. In source 4, what does Whyte mean by "classless"? Why would suburbanites wish to think of their communities as not beset by class inequality? Were they right in this point of view?
3. Do you see evidence in source 2 of the ways the postwar housing market was transformed? How does Levitt's vision of the home-building industry relate to other kinds of American industries?
4. In source 5, what advantages does Jacobs see in large cities over suburbs? Can you interpret source 3 from the perspective that Jacobs outlines in source 5?

### PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

Write an essay in which you use the knowledge you've gained from this chapter and the documents provided above to explore postwar suburbanization. What did it mean to the American economy? To ordinary Americans? What flaws did its critics see?



## Hanoch Bartov: Everyone Has a Car

One of Israel's foremost writers and journalists, Hanoch Bartov spent two years in the United States working as a correspondent for the newspaper *Lamerchav*. As a newcomer to Los Angeles in the early 1960s, he was both fascinated and appalled by Americans' love affair with the automobile.

Our immediate decision to buy a car sprang from healthy instincts. Only later did I learn from bitter experience that in California, death was preferable to living without one. Neither the views from the plane nor the weird excursion that first evening hinted at what I would go through that first week.

Very simple — the nearest supermarket was about half a kilometer south of our apartment, the regional primary school two kilometers east, and my son's kindergarten even farther away. A trip to the post office — an undertaking, to the bank — an ordeal, to work — an impossibility. . . .

There are no tramways. No one thought of a subway. Railroads — not now and not in the future. Why? Because everyone has a car. A man invited me to his house, saying, "We are neighbors, within ten minutes of each other." After walking for an hour and a half I realized what he meant — "ten minute drive within the speed limit." Simply put, he never thought I might interpret his remark to refer to the walking distance. The moment a baby sees the light of day in Los Angeles, a car is registered in his name in Detroit. . . .

At first perhaps people relished the freedom and independence a car provided. You get in, sit down, and grab the steering wheel, your mobility exceeding that of any other generation. No wonder people refuse to live down-

town, where they can hear their neighbors, smell their cooking, and suffer frayed nerves as trains pass by bedroom windows. Instead, they get a piece of the desert, far from town, at half price, drag a water hose, grow grass, flowers, and trees, and build their dream house.

The result? A widely scattered city, its houses far apart, its streets stretched in all directions. Olympic Boulevard from west to east, forty kilometers. Sepulveda Boulevard, from Long Beach in the south to the edge of the desert, forty kilometers. Altogether covering 1,200 square kilometers. As of now.

Source: "Measures of Affluence" by Hanoch Bartov (1963) in Chapter 16 from *The Outer World*, edited by Oscar Handlin and Lilian Handlin (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997). © 1997. Reprinted by permission of Oscar and Lillian Handlin.

### QUESTIONS FOR ANALYSIS

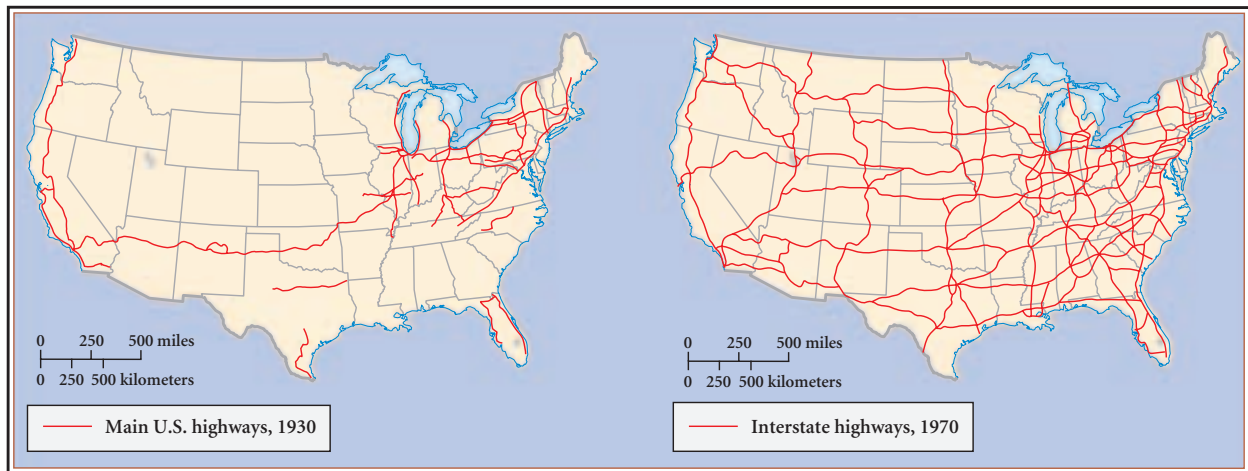
1. From Bartov's observations, what are the pluses and minuses of America's car culture? In what ways was the automobile changing American society?
2. Why did Bartov find that owning a car was necessary, especially in southern California?
3. How would suburbanization have contributed to the construction of new highways in the United States? How would highway construction have facilitated suburbanization?

**Fast Food and Shopping Malls** Americans did not simply fill their new suburban homes with the latest appliances and gadgets; they also pioneered entirely new forms of consumption. Through World War II, downtowns had remained the center of retail sales and restaurant dining with their grand department stores, elegant eateries, and low-cost diners. As suburbanites abandoned big-city centers in the 1950s, ambitious entrepreneurs invented two new commercial forms that would profoundly shape the rest of the century: the shopping mall and the fast-food restaurant.

By the late 1950s, the suburban shopping center had become as much a part of the American landscape as the Levittowns and their imitators. A major developer of shopping malls in the Northeast called them

"crystallization points for suburbia's community life." He romanticized the new structures as "today's village green," where "the fountain in the mall has replaced the downtown department clock as the gathering place for young and old alike." Romanticism aside, suburban shopping centers worked perfectly in the world of suburban consumption; they brought "the market to the people instead of people to the market," commented the *New York Times*. In 1939, the suburban share of total metropolitan retail trade in the United States was a paltry 4 percent. By 1961, it was an astonishing 60 percent in the nation's ten largest metropolitan regions.

No one was more influential in creating suburban patterns of consumption than a Chicago-born son of Czech immigrants named Ray Kroc. A former jazz

**MAP 26.1****Connecting the Nation: The Interstate Highway System, 1930 and 1970**

The 1956 National Interstate and Defense Highways Act paved the way for an extensive network of federal highways throughout the nation. The act not only pleased American drivers and enhanced their love affair with the automobile but also benefitted the petroleum, construction, trucking, real estate, and tourist industries. The new highway system promoted the nation's economic integration, facilitated the growth of suburbs, and contributed to the erosion of America's distinct regional identities.

musician and traveling salesman, Kroc found his calling in 1954 when he acquired a single franchise of the little-known McDonald's Restaurant, based in San Bernardino, California. In 1956, Kroc invested in twelve more franchises and by 1958 owned seventy-nine. Three years later, Kroc bought the company from

the McDonald brothers and proceeded to turn it into the largest chain of restaurants in the world. Based on inexpensive, quickly served hamburgers that hungry families could eat in the restaurant, in their cars, or at home, Kroc's vision transformed the way Americans consumed food. "Drive-in" or "fast" food became a

**Fast Food, 1949**

The sign atop this suburban Los Angeles restaurant says it all. Suburbanization laid the foundation for a unique post-war phenomenon that would forever change American life: the rise of fast food. Cheap, convenient, and "fast," the food served in the new restaurants, modeled after the industry's pioneer, McDonald's, was not necessarily nutritious, but its chief advantage was portability. Loomis Dean/Time Life Pictures/Getty Images.





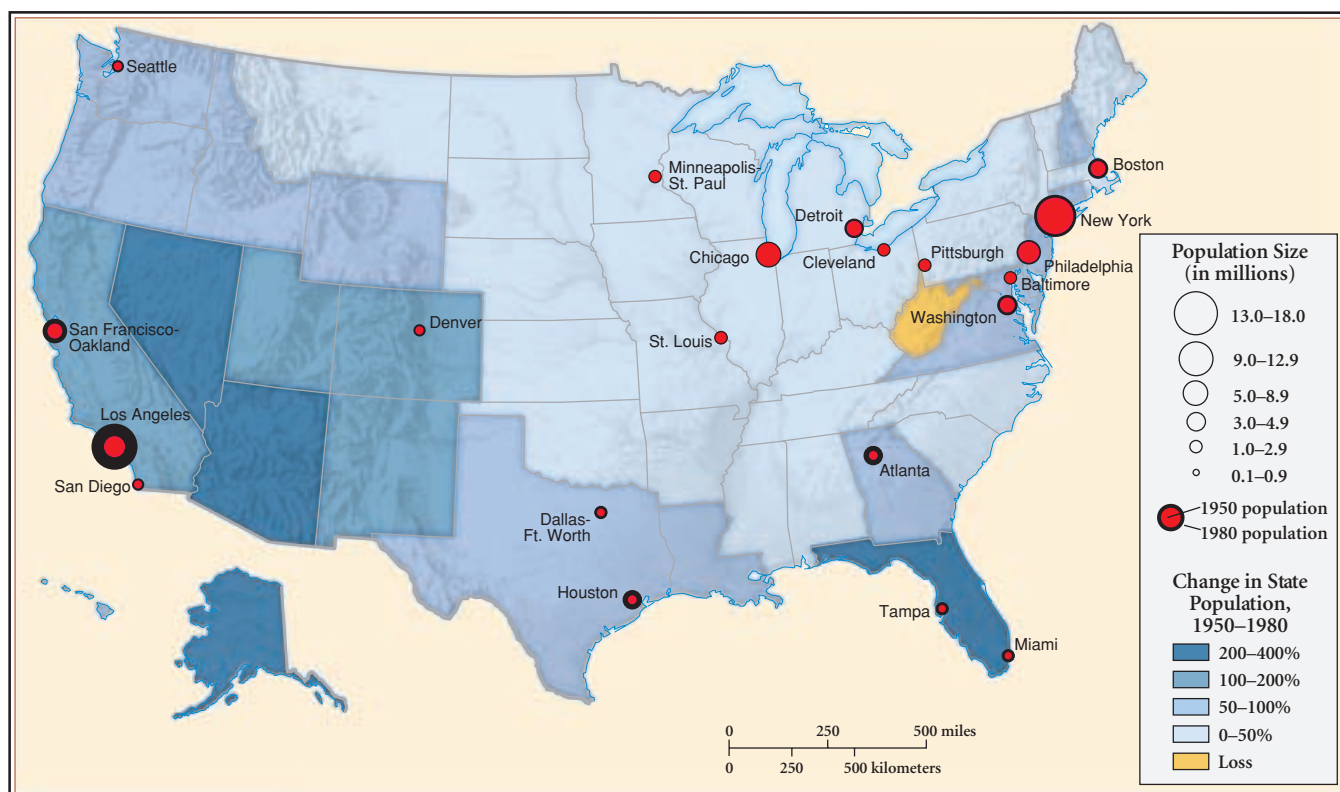
staple of the American diet in the subsequent decades. By the year 2000, fast food was a \$100 billion industry, and more children recognized Ronald McDonald, the clown in McDonald's television commercials, than Santa Claus.

## Rise of the Sunbelt

Suburban living, although a nationwide phenomenon, was most at home in the **Sunbelt** (the southern and southwestern states), where taxes were low, the climate was mild, and open space allowed for sprawling subdivisions (Map 26.2). Florida added 3.5 million people, many of them retired, between 1940 and 1970. Texas profited from expanding petrochemical and defense industries. Most dramatic was California's growth, spurred especially by the state's booming defense-related aircraft and electronics industries. By 1970,

California contained one-tenth of the nation's population and surpassed New York as the most populous state. At the end of the century, California's economy was among the top ten largest in the world—among nations.

A distinctive feature of Sunbelt suburbanization was its close relationship to the military-industrial complex. Building on World War II expansion, military bases proliferated in the South and Southwest in the postwar decades, especially in Florida, Texas, and California. In some instances, entire metropolitan regions—such as San Diego County, California, and the Houston area in Texas—expanded in tandem with nearby military outposts. Moreover, the aerospace, defense, and electronics industries were based largely in Sunbelt metropolitan regions. With government contracts fueling the economy and military bases providing thousands of jobs, Sunbelt politicians had every



**MAP 26.2**  
Shifting Population Patterns, 1950–1980

This map shows the two major, somewhat overlapping, patterns of population movement between 1950 and 1980. Most striking is the rapid growth of the Sunbelt states. All the states experiencing increases of over 100 percent in that period are in the Southwest, plus Florida. The second pattern involves the growth of metropolitan areas, defined as a central city or urban area and its suburbs. The central cities were themselves mostly not growing, however. The metropolitan growth shown in this map was accounted for by the expanding suburbs. And because Sunbelt growth was primarily suburban growth, that's where we see the most rapid metropolitan growth, with Los Angeles the clear leader.

incentive to support vigorous defense spending by the federal government.

Sunbelt suburbanization was best exemplified by Orange County, California. Southwest of Los Angeles, Orange County was until the 1940s mostly just that — a land of oranges, groves of them. But during World War II, boosters attracted new bases and training facilities for the marines, navy, and air force (at the time the army air corps). Cold War militarization and the Korean War kept those bases humming, and Hughes Aircraft, Ford Aeronautics, and other defense-related manufacturers built new plants in the sunny, sprawling groves. So did subdivision developers, who built so many new homes that the population of the county jumped from 130,760 in 1940 to 703,925 in 1960. Casting his eye on all this development in the early 1950s, an entrepreneurial filmmaker and cartoonist named Walt Disney chose Anaheim in Orange County as the place for a massive new amusement park. Disneyland was to the new generation of suburbanites what Coney Island had been to an earlier generation of urbanites.

## Two Societies: Urban and Suburban

While middle-class whites flocked to the suburbs, an opposite stream of working-class migrants, many of them southern African Americans, moved into the cities. In the 1950s, the nation's twelve largest cities lost 3.6 million whites while gaining 4.5 million nonwhites. These urban newcomers inherited a declining economy and a decaying infrastructure. To those enjoying prosperity, the “other America,” as the social critic Michael Harrington called it, remained largely invisible. In 1968, however, a report by the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders (informally known as the **Kerner Commission** and formed by the president to investigate the causes of the 1967 urban riots), delivered to President Lyndon Johnson, warned that “our nation is moving toward two societies, one black, one white, separate and unequal.”

American cities had long been the home of poverty, slum housing, and the hardships and cultural dislocations brought on by immigration from overseas or migration from rural areas. But postwar American cities, especially those in the industrial Northeast and Midwest, experienced these problems with new intensity. By the 1950s, the manufacturing sector was contracting, and mechanization was eliminating thousands upon thousands of unskilled and semiskilled jobs, the kind traditionally taken up by new urban residents. The disappearing jobs were the ones “in which [African Americans] are disproportionately

concentrated,” noted the civil rights activist Bayard Rustin.

**The Urban Crisis** The intensification of poverty, the deterioration of older housing stock, and the persistence of racial segregation produced what many at the time called the urban crisis. Unwelcome in the shiny new suburbs built by men such as William J. Levitt, African Americans found low-paying jobs in the city and lived in aging, slumlike apartment buildings. Despite a thriving black middle class — indeed, larger than ever before — for those without resources, upward mobility remained elusive. Racism in institutional forms frustrated African Americans at every turn: housing restrictions, increasingly segregated schools, and an urban infrastructure that stood underfunded and decaying as whites left for the suburbs.

Housing and job discrimination were compounded by the frenzy of urban renewal that hit black neighborhoods in the 1950s and early 1960s. Seeking to revitalize declining city centers, politicians and real estate developers proposed razing blighted neighborhoods to make way for modern construction projects that would appeal to the fleeing middle class. In Boston, almost one-third of the old city — including the historic West End, a long-established Italian neighborhood — was demolished to make way for a new highway, high-rise housing, and government and commercial buildings. In San Francisco, some 4,000 residents of the Western Addition, a predominantly black neighborhood, lost out to an urban renewal program that built luxury housing, a shopping center, and an express boulevard. Between 1949 and 1967, urban renewal nationwide demolished almost 400,000 buildings and displaced 1.4 million people.

The urban experts believed they knew what to do with the dislocated: relocate them to federally funded housing projects, an outgrowth of New Deal housing policy, now much expanded. However well intended, these grim projects too often took the form of cheap high-rises that isolated their inhabitants from surrounding neighborhoods. The impact was felt especially strongly among African Americans, who often found that public housing increased racial segregation and concentrated the poor. The Robert Taylor Homes in Chicago, with twenty-eight buildings of sixteen stories each, housed 20,000 residents, almost all of them black. Despite the planners' wish to build

### COMPARE AND CONTRAST

In what sense was the United States becoming, in the language of the Kerner Commission report, “two societies”?



### Urban Crisis

This Pittsburgh neighborhood, photographed in 1955, typified what many came to call the “urban crisis” of the 1950s and 1960s. As suburbanization drew middle-class residents, investment, and jobs away from the core of older cities, those cities began to rot from the inside. Urban neglect left many working-class neighborhoods, increasingly occupied by the nation’s poor, with few jobs, little industry, and dilapidated housing. W. Eugene Smith/Black Star/Stockphoto.com.

decent affordable apartments, the huge complex became a notorious breeding ground for crime and hopelessness.

**Urban Immigrants** Despite the evident urban crisis, cities continued to attract immigrants from abroad. Since the passage of the National Origins Act of 1924 (Chapter 22), U.S. immigration policy had aimed mainly at keeping foreigners out. But World War II and the Cold War began slowly to change American policy. The Displaced Persons Act of 1948 permitted the entry of approximately 415,000 Europeans, many of them Jewish refugees. In a gesture to an important war ally, the Chinese Exclusion Act was repealed in 1943. More far-reaching was the 1952 McCarran-Walter Act, which ended the exclusion of Japanese, Koreans, and Southeast Asians.

After the national-origins quota system went into effect in 1924, Mexico replaced Eastern and Southern Europe as the nation’s labor reservoir. During World War II, the federal government introduced the Bracero Program to ease wartime labor shortages (Chapter 24) and then revived it in 1951, during the Korean War. The federal government’s ability to force workers to return to Mexico, however, was strictly limited. The Mexican immigrant population continued to grow, and by the time the Bracero Program ended in 1964, many of that group—an estimated 350,000—had settled permanently in the United States. Braceros were joined by other Mexicans from small towns and villages, who immigrated to the United States to escape

poverty or to earn money to return home and purchase land for farming.

As generations of immigrants had before them, Mexicans gravitated to major cities. Mostly, they settled in Los Angeles, Long Beach, San Jose, El Paso, and other southwestern cities. But many also went north, augmenting well-established Mexican American communities in Chicago, Detroit, Kansas City, and Denver. Although still important to American agriculture, Mexican Americans were employed in substantial numbers as industrial and service workers by 1960.

Another major group of Spanish-speaking migrants came from Puerto Rico. American citizens since 1917, Puerto Ricans enjoyed an unrestricted right to move to the mainland United States. Migration increased dramatically after World War II, when mechanization of the island’s sugarcane agriculture left many Puerto Ricans jobless. Airlines began to offer cheap direct flights between San Juan and New York City. With the fare at about \$50 (two weeks’ wages), Puerto Ricans became America’s first immigrants to arrive en masse by air. Most Puerto Ricans went to New York, where they settled first in East (“Spanish”) Harlem and then scattered in neighborhoods across the city’s five boroughs. This massive migration, which increased the Puerto Rican population to 613,000 by 1960, transformed the ethnic composition of the city. More Puerto Ricans now lived in New York City than in San Juan.

Cuban refugees constituted the third-largest group of Spanish-speaking immigrants. In the six years after Fidel Castro’s seizure of power in 1959 (Chapter 25), an

estimated 180,000 people fled Cuba for the United States. The Cuban refugee community grew so quickly that it turned Miami into a cosmopolitan, bilingual city almost overnight. Unlike other urban migrants, Miami's Cubans quickly prospered, in large part because they had arrived with money and middle-class skills.

Spanish-speaking immigrants — whether Mexican, Puerto Rican, or Cuban — created huge barrios in major American cities, where bilingualism flourished, the Catholic Church shaped religious life, and families sought to join the economic mainstream. Though distinct from one another, these Spanish-speaking communities remained largely segregated from white, or Anglo, neighborhoods and suburbs as well as from African American districts.

## SUMMARY

We have explored how, at the same time it became mired in the Cold War, the United States entered an unparalleled era of prosperity in which a new middle class came into being. Indeed, the Cold War was one of the engines of prosperity. The postwar economy was

marked by the dominance of big corporations and defense spending.

After years of depression and war-induced insecurity, Americans turned inward toward religion, home, and family. Postwar couples married young, had several children, and — if they were white and middle class — raised their children in a climate of suburban comfort and consumerism. The profamily orientation of the 1950s celebrated traditional gender roles, even though millions of women entered the workforce in those years. Not everyone, however, shared in the postwar prosperity. Postwar cities increasingly became places of last resort for the nation's poor. Black migrants, unlike earlier immigrants, encountered an urban economy that had little use for them. Without opportunity, and faced with pervasive racism, many of them were on their way to becoming an American underclass, even as sparkling new suburbs emerged outside cities to house the new middle class. Many of the smoldering contradictions of the postwar period — Cold War anxiety in the midst of suburban domesticity, tensions in women's lives, economic and racial inequality — helped spur the protest movements of the 1960s.

# C H A P T E R R E V I E W

**MAKE IT STICK** Go to **LearningCurve** to retain what you've read.



**TERMS TO KNOW** Identify and explain the significance of each term below.

### Key Concepts and Events

**kitchen debate** (p. 838)

**Bretton Woods** (p. 840)

**World Bank** (p. 840)

**International Monetary Fund (IMF)** (p. 840)

**military-industrial complex** (p. 841)

**Sputnik** (p. 842)

**National Defense Education Act** (p. 842)

**The Affluent Society** (p. 843)

**The Other America** (p. 843)

**Veterans Administration** (p. 843)

**collective bargaining** (p. 844)

**teenager** (p. 847)

**Beats** (p. 849)

**baby boom** (p. 850)

**Shelley v. Kraemer** (p. 857)

**National Interstate and Defense Highways Act** (p. 857)

**Sunbelt** (p. 862)

**Kerner Commission** (p. 863)

### Key People

**Dwight D. Eisenhower** (p. 841)

**Miles Davis** (p. 849)

**Allen Ginsberg** (p. 849)

**Jack Kerouac** (p. 849)

**Billy Graham** (p. 849)

**Dr. Benjamin Spock** (p. 851)

**William J. Levitt** (p. 857)

## REVIEW QUESTIONS

Answer these questions to demonstrate your understanding of the chapter's main ideas.

1. What factors led to the economic prosperity of the postwar era?
2. Why did the suburbs become so significant for Americans in the 1950s? How was suburban life related to middle-class consumption?
3. Who were the people left out of the postwar boom? How do you account for their exclusion?
4. **THEMATIC UNDERSTANDING** Review the events listed under “America in the World” and “Work, Exchange, and Technology” for the period 1930–1945 on the thematic timeline on page 671 and for 1945–1960 on page 803. Explain how the United States began the 1930s in deep depression with unemployment near 25 percent and ended the 1950s with an expanded middle class and a consumption-driven economy.

## MAKING CONNECTIONS

Recognize the larger developments and continuities within and across chapters by answering these questions.

1. **ACROSS TIME AND PLACE** Think back to earlier chapters that discussed gender roles, marriage, and American family life in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Chapters 18, 19, 22, 24). How had the American family changed by the 1950s? What aspects of family life remained similar across many decades? For example, how did the working-class immigrant family of the 1890s differ from the middle-class family of the 1950s?
2. **VISUAL EVIDENCE** Examine the Motorola TV advertisement featured on page 847. What different types of appeals does this advertisement make, and what do they suggest about family and gender roles in this period? How many distinct themes from the chapter can you explain using this image?

## MORE TO EXPLORE

Start here to learn more about the events discussed in this chapter.

Lizabeth Cohen, *A Consumers' Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* (2003). An important interpretation of the United States as a consumer society.

James Gilbert, *Men in the Middle: Searching for Masculinity in the 1950s* (2005). An engaging account of cultural figures from the 1950s, including Billy Graham and John Wayne.

David Halberstam, *The Fifties* (1993). An engaging and accessible introduction to postwar American society.

Karal Ann Marling, *As Seen on TV* (1996). An insightful explanation of the impact of television.

Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound* (1988). The classic introduction to postwar family life.

Thomas J. Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit* (1996). The best account of the urban crisis.

**TIMELINE** Ask yourself why this chapter begins and ends with these dates and then identify the links among related events.

|      |                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
|------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1944 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bretton Woods economic conference</li> <li>• World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) founded</li> <li>• GI Bill (Servicemen's Readjustment Act)</li> </ul> |
| 1946 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• First edition of Dr. Spock's <i>Common Sense Book of Baby and Child Care</i></li> </ul>                                                                             |
| 1947 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• First Levittown built</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                    |
| 1948 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Beginning of network television</li> <li>• <i>Shelley v. Kraemer</i></li> <li>• Alfred Kinsey's <i>Sexual Behavior in the Human Male</i> published</li> </ul>       |
| 1949 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Billy Graham revival in Los Angeles</li> </ul>                                                                                                                      |
| 1951 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bracero Program revived</li> <li>• Mattachine Society founded</li> </ul>                                                                                            |
| 1952 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• McCarran-Walter Act</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                      |
| 1953 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Kinsey's <i>Sexual Behavior of the Human Female</i> published</li> </ul>                                                                                            |
| 1954 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ray Kroc buys the first McDonald's franchise</li> </ul>                                                                                                             |
| 1955 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Daughters of Bilitis founded</li> </ul>                                                                                                                             |
| 1956 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• National Interstate and Defense Highways Act</li> <li>• Elvis Presley's breakthrough records</li> <li>• Allen Ginsberg's poem "Howl" published</li> </ul>           |
| 1957 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Peak of postwar baby boom</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                |
| 1961 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Eisenhower warns nation against military-industrial complex</li> </ul>                                                                                              |
| 1965 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Griswold v. Connecticut</i></li> </ul>                                                                                                                           |

**KEY TURNING POINTS:** What were the major turning points in the creation of postwar suburbia?