

Life in the 1950s

Readjustment and Recovery

The Impact of the GI Bill

- 1944 **GI Bill of Rights** eases veterans' return to civilian life
- Pays partial tuition, unemployment benefits; provides loans

Housing Crisis

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



Redefining the Family

- Tensions from changed gender roles during war increase divorce rate

Economic Readjustment

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

Remarkable Recovery

- People have savings, service pay, war bonds; buy goods long missed
- Cold War keeps defense spending up; foreign aid creates markets

Meeting Economic Challenges

President Truman's Inheritance

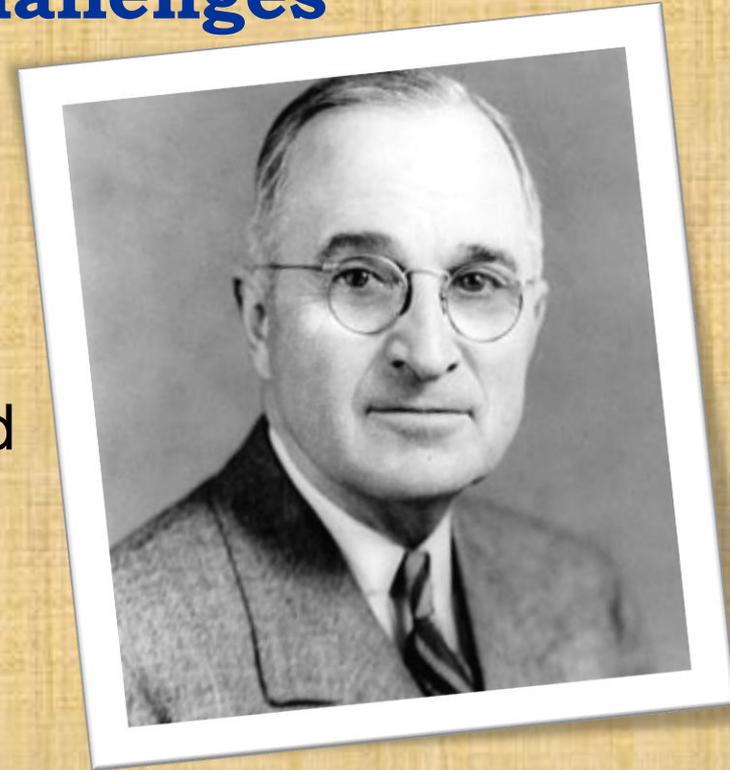
- **Harry S. Truman** can make difficult decisions, take responsibility

Truman Faces Strikes

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

“Had Enough?”

- Republicans win Senate, House; ignore Truman's domestic policy
- Congress passes Taft-Hartley Act, overturns many union rights



Social Unrest Persists

Truman Supports Civil Rights

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

The 1948 Election

- Southern Democrats—**Dixiecrats**—protest civil rights, form own party
- Truman calls special session; asks Congress for social legislation
- Congress refuses



Stunning Upset

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

The Fair Deal

- Truman's **Fair Deal** is ambitious economic program, includes:
 - higher minimum wage, flood control projects, low-income housing
- Congress passes parts of Fair Deal



Republicans Take the Middle Road

I Like Ike!

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



- Eisenhower conservative about money, liberal on social issues
- Ike tries to avoid civil rights movement, which is gaining strength
- On economy, works for balanced budget, tax cut
- Pushes social legislation, new Dept. of Health, Education, Welfare
- Popularity soars; is reelected in 1956



Business in the 1950s

Employment in the U.S.

- By 1956, majority of Americans not in blue-collar (industrial) jobs
- More in higher-paying, white-collar (office, professional) positions
- Many in services, like sales, advertising, insurance, communications

Conglomerates

- **Conglomerates**—corporation that owns smaller, unrelated companies
- Diversify to protect from downturns in individual industries

Franchises

- **Franchise**—company offers similar products, services in many places
 - also the right to use company name and system
- Fast-food restaurants among first, most successful franchises

Social Conformity

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

The Suburban Lifestyle

The Baby Boom

- 1950s, 85% of new homes built in suburbs
- 1945–1965 **baby boom**—soaring birth rate after soldiers return. From 1947 – 1953: 25 million babies

Advances in Medicine and Childcare

- New drugs fight, prevent childhood diseases
- **Dr. Jonas Salk** develops vaccine for polio
- Pediatrician Dr. Benjamin Spock writes popular guide for parents



Women's Roles

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

Leisure in the Fifties

- Shorter work week, paid vacation, labor-saving devices free up time
- People have time for recreational activities, spectator sports
- Book, magazine, comic book sales climb rapidly

The Automobile Culture

Automania

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

The Interstate Highway System

- Local, state roads link cities, suburbs to schools, shops, work
- **Interstate Highway Act (1956)** —nationwide highway network unites country: 41,000 miles.
- Highways enable long-haul trucking, new towns, family vacations
- Towns near highways prosper; those near older, smaller roads decline



Mobility Takes Its Toll

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

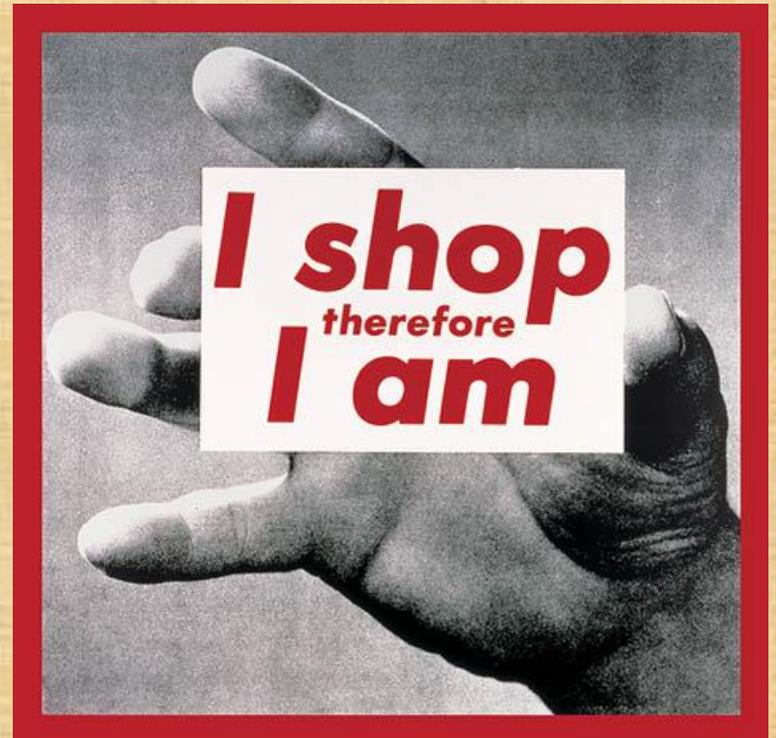
Consumerism Unbound

New Products

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

Planned Obsolescence

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



Buy Now, Pay Later

- Credit purchases, credit cards (1950), installments extend payment period
- Private debt grows; consumers confident of future prosperity

The Advertising Age

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



New Era of the Mass Media

The Rise of Television

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



A Subculture Emerges

The Beat Movement

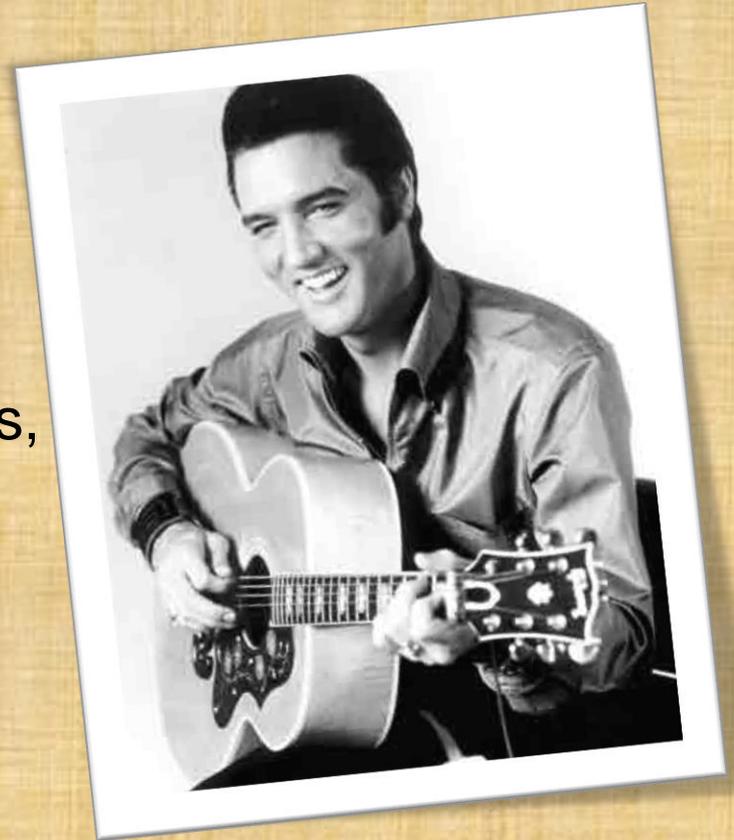
- **Beat movement**—writers, artists express social, literary nonconformity
- Poets, writers use free, open form; read works aloud in coffeehouses
- Beatnik attitudes, way of life attract media attention, students



African Americans and Rock 'n' Roll

Rock 'n' Roll

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



The Racial Gap

- Many black artists play **jazz**, music characterized by improvisation
- African-American shows mostly broadcast on black radio stations
 - content, advertising target black audiences
- Important to black audiences with fewer TV sets, no presence on TV



The Urban Poor

White Flight

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

The Inner Cities

- Poverty grows rapidly in decaying inner cities
- Poor economic conditions lead to illness and terrible conditions

Urban Renewal

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

Minority Groups

Mexican Immigrants

- 1942–47, Mexican **braceros**, hired hands, allowed into U.S. to work
- After war, many remain illegally; many others enter to look for work

Native Americans Continue their Struggle

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

The Termination Policy

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