**Focus Question:** How did the nation experience recovery and economic prosperity after World War II?

List the problems raised by the shift to a peacetime economy and the steps taken to solve them.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Problem</th>
<th>Solution</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Returning soldiers need jobs.</td>
<td>• GI Bill</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Striking union workers</td>
<td>•</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
When World War II ended, the production of military supplies stopped. Millions of American workers lost their jobs. Many feared the return of economic problems. Instead, America experienced the longest period of economic growth in its history.

President Harry Truman demobilized, or sent members of the army home. To calm fears about the economy, the government passed the GI Bill of Rights. The bill gave veterans unemployment benefits and financial aid for college. Veterans also received home loans, leading to an upsurge in home construction. Many veterans started families, creating a baby boom. Between 1940 and 1955, the U.S. population grew by 27 percent.

At the same time, demand for consumer products increased. Businesses employed more people to produce these goods. The United States soon dominated the world economy, producing nearly 50 percent of the world’s total output.

Prices and inflation rose. Trade unionists demanded pay increases to keep up with inflation. Employers refused and millions of workers went on strike. Congress then enacted the Taft-Hartley Act to outlaw closed shops, workplaces that hired only union members.

Truman supported civil rights by desegregating the military. However, his support for civil rights angered Southern Democrats. During the 1948 presidential election, unhappy Democrats established two new political parties. Many thought that the Republican candidate, Thomas Dewey, would win. However, Truman won by a narrow margin.

Truman introduced the Fair Deal to strengthen existing New Deal reforms and establish new ones. However, Congress did not pass many of the proposals. In 1952, Republican Dwight Eisenhower won the presidency. Eisenhower’s presidency was one of the most prosperous, peaceful, and politically tranquil in the twentieth century.

Review Questions
1. Why did many people worry about economic problems after World War II?

2. Why did Congress enact the Taft-Hartley Act?
Focus Question: What social and economic factors changed American life during the 1950s?

A. Complete the chart below to capture the main ideas.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Postwar Changes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Society</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Growth of suburbs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Interstate highways</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Economy</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Service economy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Education</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• More people attended college.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

B. As you read, identify the effects of the population shift to the Sunbelt.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Moving to the Sunbelt</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Causes</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Jobs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Effects</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Population growth</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| • 

© Pearson Education, Inc., publishing as Pearson Prentice Hall. All rights reserved.
In the years following World War II, many Americans moved to the suburbs. Developers built affordable housing in a hurry. The government provided low-interest loans so that more people could purchase homes.

The growth of suburbs caused Americans to become even more dependent on their cars. In 1956, Congress passed the Interstate Highway Act. This act approved the building of new highways to connect the nation’s major cities. These highways eased the commute from suburbs to cities.

Southern and western states, known as the Sunbelt, also experienced rapid growth. The climate in the Sunbelt appealed to many Americans. In addition, the Sunbelt held a large number of jobs in the defense industry. As people moved, their political power moved with them.

At the same time, the American economy was changing dramatically. Many people took jobs in the service sector, where they provided services such as healthcare, law, retail, banking, or insurance. Others worked in information industries, including those related to computers. Franchise businesses allowed companies to sell their products and services through retail outlets owned by independent operators. Multinational corporations also expanded. These companies produced and sold their goods and services all over the world.

Unions experienced change as well. In 1955, the AFL and the CIO joined to form the AFL-CIO. The new organization had more political power.

As the economy grew, so did educational opportunities. By the early 1960s, more Americans were going to college. The federal government and many states increased funding to public universities. California undertook a California Master Plan. This plan created three levels of higher education: research universities, state colleges, and community colleges.

**Review Questions**

1. Name the three things that fostered suburban growth.

2. What industries and types of businesses saw job growth in the postwar period?
Focus Question: How did popular culture and family life change during the 1950s?

Identify postwar changes in daily life and popular culture.

## I. The Culture of Consumerism

A. Americans spend more
   1. Increased family income
   2. 

B. New conveniences
   1. Supermarkets
   2. 

## II. Family life in the Fifties

A. 
   1. Nuclear family
   2. 

B. 
   1. 
   2. 

C. 
   1. 
   2. 

D. 
   1. 
   2. 

## III. Television Takes Center Stage

A. 

B. 

## IV. Rock-and-Roll Shakes the Nation

A. 

B. 
   1. 
   2. 
After World War II, the U.S. economy began to prosper. Americans bought as much as they could in a wave of consumerism. Median family income is average family income. It rose dramatically during this period. Shopping became a national pastime.

During the 1950s, a more traditional image of the family took hold. According to this image, men worked and women stayed home. A nuclear family is a household made up of a mother and father and their children. The nuclear family was seen as the backbone of American society. For the nuclear family to function smoothly, experts claimed, women had to accept their role as homemakers. Nevertheless, as the 1950s progressed, more women challenged this view.

More so than in the past, family life revolved around children. Dr. Benjamin Spock’s Common Sense Book of Baby and Child Care was the best-selling book of the era. Spock emphasized the importance of nurturing children. He suggested that children could not get too much comfort and love. Parents were also spending more money on their children. Some parents defended their spending. They thought it would stop a recurrence of economic depression.

During this period, regular church attendance rose. At the same time, several advances in medicine were made. Antibiotics were widely used to help control infectious diseases.

Television changed American society, particularly family life. Children watched cartoons. Sitcoms about families strengthened the ideal of the 1950s family. Television also helped to create a national culture because Americans in every region of the country watched the same shows.


Review Questions
1. Why did shopping become a new national pastime?

2. Who was Dr. Benjamin Spock?
Focus Question: Why were some groups of Americans dissatisfied with conditions in postwar America?

Record the main ideas and supporting details.

- Social critics
- Poverty
- Alienation
Not everyone benefited from the economic prosperity of the 1950s. Some Americans were unhappy with the changes brought by affluence. A small group of writers and artists known as beatniks criticized the middle class for encouraging materialism and conformity. Popular authors wrote about alienation, or the feeling of being cut off.

At the same time, many Americans faced urban slums, rural poverty, and discrimination. In his book *The Other America*, Michael Harrington argued that poverty was widespread in the United States. According to Harrington, poverty afflicted inner-city African Americans, rural whites, and Hispanics in migrant farm camps and urban barrios. Harrington’s statements shocked many Americans.

As the middle class moved from the cities to the suburbs, cities lost revenue and political power. Minorities in search of better economic opportunities moved to these inner cities. Strained city services such as garbage removal deteriorated, and crime increased. The government funded urban renewal projects to try to restore downtowns by creating developments. These projects often pushed people from their homes into areas that were already overcrowded. The federal government also tried to ease the shortage of affordable housing by constructing public housing. However, the housing was often built in poor neighborhoods. This, in turn, further concentrated poverty and problems such as crime.

Rural poor also relocated to cities. Small farmers slipped into poverty. They could not compete with the corporations that dominated farm production.

Latinos and Native Americans struggled with many of the same problems as African Americans. In 1953, the federal government enacted the termination policy. This law sought to end tribal government and to relocate Native Americans to the nation’s cities. Supporters thought it would help Native Americans assimilate, or merge, into American society.

**Review Questions**

1. List three problems many minorities faced in the 1950s.

2. How did cities change in this period?