

Modern America

Part One



Part One

Part Two

Part Three

Thematic Icons



Economics



Geography



Historical concepts



Government

Icons



Flash activity (these activities are not editable)



Teacher notes included in the Notes page

For more instructions, see the *User Guide*.





The 1950s and 1960s were a period of unprecedented economic growth, prosperity and rises in living standards.

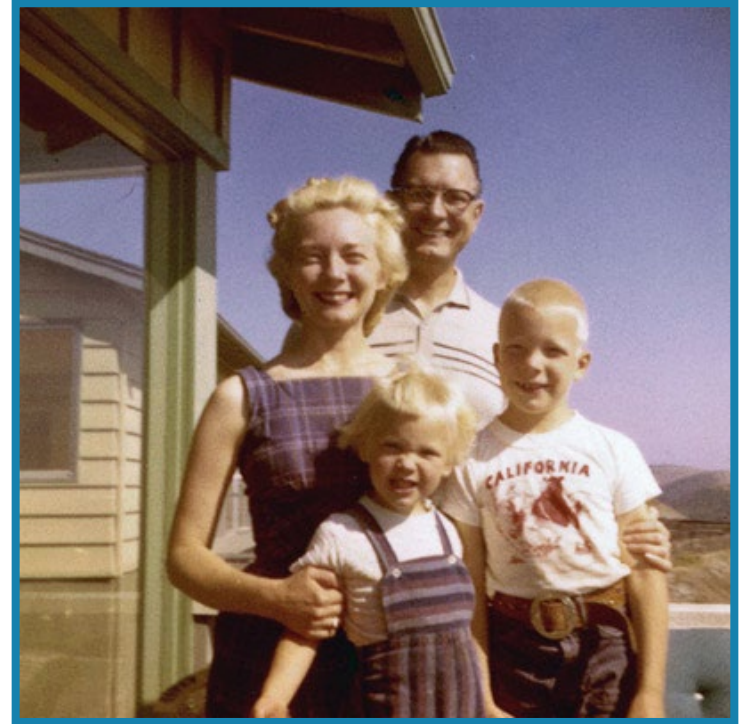
After over 20 years of economic stagnation and war, the U.S. entered the 1950s with a profound confidence in its scientific and technological abilities, a globally dominant military and economy, and an unprecedented standard of living. This period has been referred to as a **Golden Age** of economic prosperity.

In 1948, **Harry S. Truman** won re-election. Truman proposed a **Fair Deal** economic program to provide health insurance and crop subsidies for farmers. He increased both the hourly minimum wage and Social Security coverage.



In the years following the war, the birth rate increased at an unprecedented level. The **baby boom** ran from the late 1940s to the early 1960s, creating the biggest generation in U.S. history. Reasons for this population explosion included:

- lower marriage age
- reunion of families after war
- desirability of more children
- advances in medicine and childcare
- confidence in lasting economic prosperity.

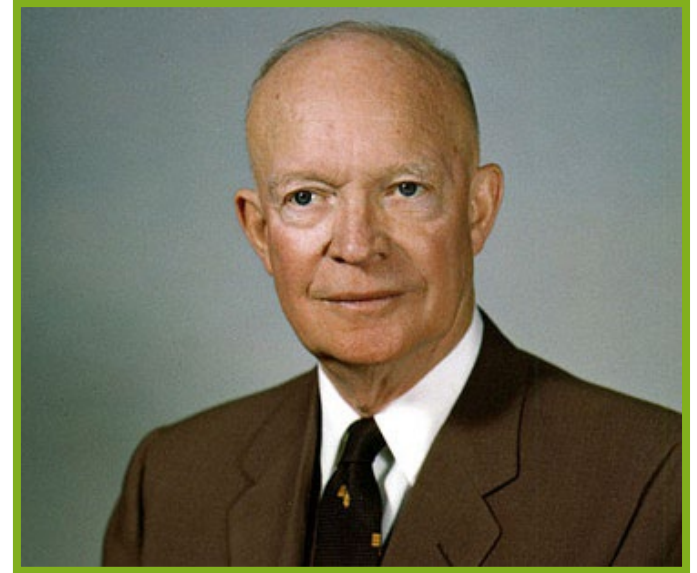




The politics of prosperity



Dwight D. Eisenhower was elected in 1952 and then re-elected in 1956. He practiced a “**New Republicanism**” that took a middle-of-the-road course between non-interventionism and rapid public spending.



He cut taxes, produced a balanced budget and built on Truman’s social policies. He also created the Department of Health, Education and Welfare, and funded public housing.

What gave the U.S. such confidence in the economy?





After the hard years of the depression and war, the American people were ready to spend money. With sustained economic prosperity and growth, **consumer culture** boomed.



Average per capita incomes rose from \$1,526 in 1945 to \$2,788 in 1960. This rise in disposable income promoted increased demand for goods and services of all kinds.

Huge shopping malls began to develop away from city centers with the growth of suburbs and the rise of automobile culture.



A constant desire for new goods drove consumption. Some items, particularly fashionable ones, were planned to become out-of-date or not last so that people kept buying new things.

People desired labor-saving devices to free up leisure time. Many people took pride in their homes, cars and having the latest goods, often paying for them with installment plans and credit cards.

As people sought the best goods and to keep up with their neighbors, patterns of standardization and conformity developed across the country.

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The rise of advertising

During the prosperity, **advertising** became a big business due to the amount of money people had. With the added medium of television, along with print and radio, advertising agencies flooded the media with ads for all types of goods and services.



“The reason we have such a high standard of living is because advertising has created an American “frame of mind” that makes people want more things, better things, and newer things.”

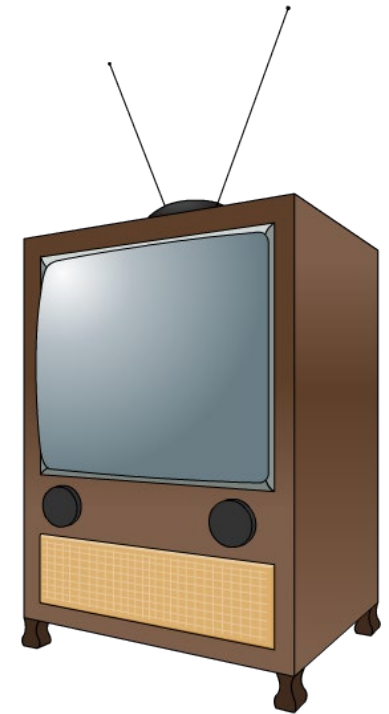
Robert Sarnoff, President NBC



Television first became widely available in 1948, changing the way people received information and entertainment. By 1960, 90% of households had a TV. By 1959, the typical American family was watching six hours of TV a day, seven days a week.

TV changed family social dynamics. The rise of TV dinners shows how family entertainment became centered around the television.

Critics worried that televised portrayals of violence could have a damaging effect on children. Others complained about the limited, and often stereotypical, depictions of women and ethnic minorities in TV shows.



Why did television have such a huge impact?





As millions of soldiers returned home after the war, the U.S. experienced a severe housing crisis.

The response to this crisis was the creation of the **suburbs** – residential areas on the outskirts of a city – by applying techniques of mass production to home construction.



William Levitt is credited with the idea of the modern, mass-produced suburb. The first such planned community was Levittown on Long Island, New York, which was started in 1947 with 150 affordable, single-family homes being constructed each week.

Why did people want to move to the suburbs?

The suburbs created an entirely new social dynamic built around the single family home, located in neighborhoods outside urban areas. This image of American life is strongly associated with the Golden Age.

Americans began escaping from the city to enjoy a new kind of social life. This included barbecues in the backyard, cocktail parties, Little League sports and neighborhood school meetings.



Population shifts



Despite the indispensable role women played in the war effort, after the war, they were once again relegated to the home. Jobs that had been open during the war were now closed.



A new image of the perfect housewife came into existence in the 1950s with the birth of television. Men were seen as providers and protectors while women ran the domestic sphere.

During the 1960s more women entered the workforce but they were paid significantly less than men. Spurred on by the other civil rights movements around them, women began to demand equal treatment.

Do you know what equal rights women achieved?



The dark side of the prosperity



What were the effects of “white flight”?

