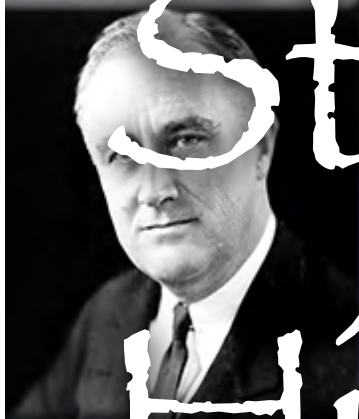MI OPEN BOOK PROJECT

# United States History

Reconstruction to Today

Kimberly Eikenberry, Troy Kilgus, Adam Lincoln, Kim Noga, LaRissa Paras, Mike Radcliffe, Dustin Webb, Heather Wolf

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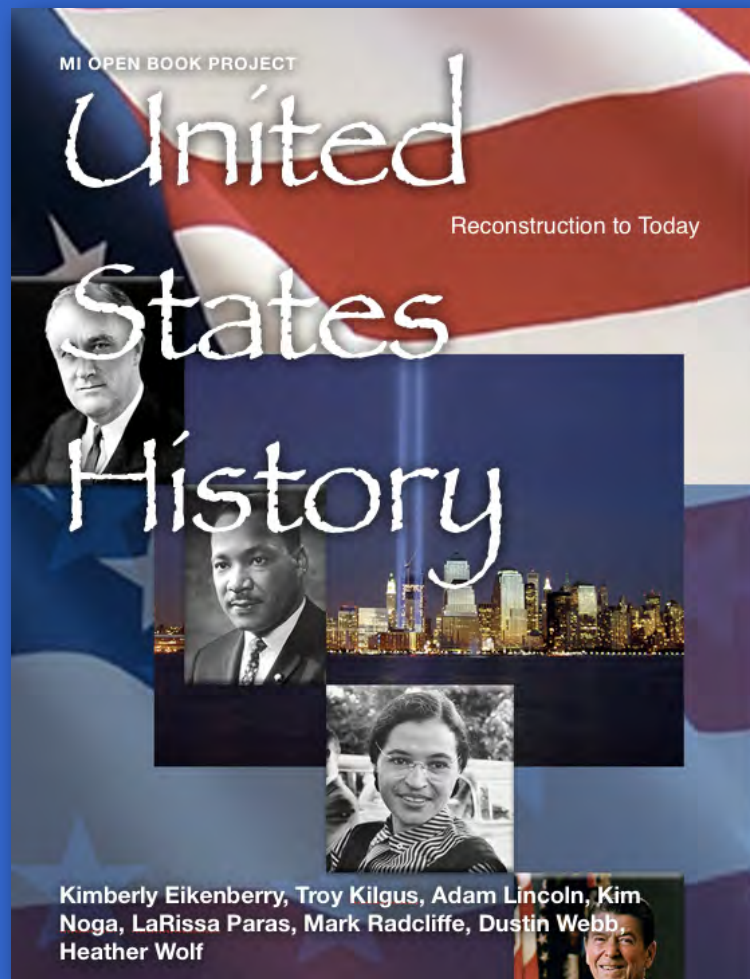
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Information on the latest version and updates are available on the project homepage: http://textbooks.wmisd.org/dashboard.html

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Kim has a B.A. in History and Social Studies and a M.A. in Educational Leadership, both from Western Michigan University. She has served in many roles during her thirteen years as an educator, including department chair, curriculum director, and administrator. Kim currently teaches World History and Economics at Grand Haven High School.

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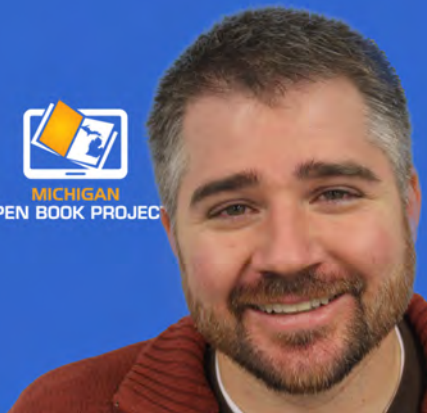
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Adam began his teaching career at Cadillac High School in Cadillac, Michigan where he taught US History, Global Studies, and AP World History. After 7 years, he moved back home to central Michigan to teach at Ithaca Public Schools. While his main charge has been teaching World History and starting the AP World History program, Adam also teaches 8th Grade History, US History, History in Popular Culture and all sorts of computer science classes. Adam coaches Model United Nations, and runs the Jumbotron at Ithaca Community Stadium during events. Adam has served as a member of the Michigan Council for the Social Studies for over a decade and has worked to unite his twin passions of Social Studies and effectively integrating technology into the classroom. Outside of school, Adam has served on the Content Advisory Committee, as a Social Studies item writer for the Department of Education, and worked for the PASST project. Adam teaches History and Social Studies methods classes at Alma College as adjunct faculty. Apart from the world of education, Adam enjoys spending time with his family especially traveling on new adventures.
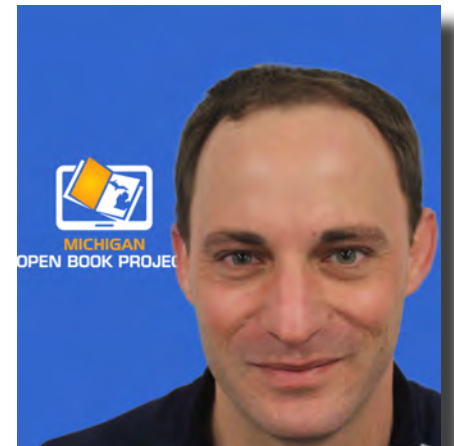
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Kim has a B.A. in History/ Social Studies and an M.A. in Curriculum and Teaching, both from Michigan State University. For the past 14 years she has been employed at Ionia High School where she teaches Economics, U.S. History, and Humanitarian Studies. Her hobbies include reading and traveling the world.

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LaRissa is an alumni of Central Michigan University and the State University of New York. She is a tenured teacher in New York and now in Michigan where she works and resides with her husband and two rambunctious boys. Currently she is teaching World History and Current Issues at Greenville High School. She and her husband founded LP Inspire, LLC to encourage young people to grow into their best selves. She is also the proud creator of The Lotus Project, a successful mentoring program to help young women become empowered and rise above adversity in a positive way. In her spare time she enjoys reading, yoga, and being outdoors.

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Mike Radcliffe is a native of South Lyon, Michigan. He received his Bachelor of Arts degree in history from Colorado State University, followed by a Masters of Arts degree in American Studies from the University of Colorado. Over his 23 years of teaching students in Colorado and Michigan, he has taught Advanced Placement United States History, American Popular Culture, World History, World Geography, Sociology, and Economics. He currently serves as the department chair for the social studies department at Greenville High School, where he has taught the past 15 years. His previous textbook projects include serving as a teacher consultant for textbooks in US History and World Geography for Teachers Curriculum Institute. His interests include his wife of twenty-five years, three amazing children, mountain biking, and really bad puns.
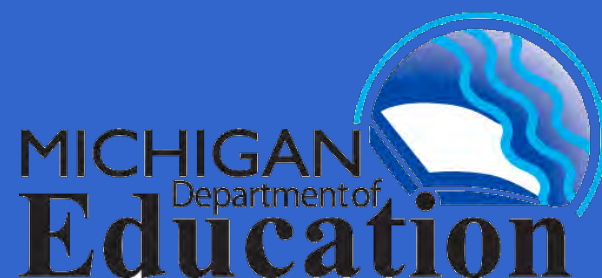
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Dustin graduated from the University of Michigan in 2009 with degrees in history and English. Since then, he has been teaching US History and directing the school play and forensics program at Lake City High School in Lake City, Michigan.

Outside of teaching, Dustin is an avid cyclist and competes in amateur mountain bike races. He is also an avid sailor and enjoys spending his summers in Northport, MI where he teaches sailing to young sailors. Dustin lives in Lake City with his wife and fur child (dog) Otis.

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Heather has taught Social Studies at Shepherd High School for 16 years. She currently teaches American History and Law, but has also taught Modern American History, Civics, Current Events, and History of American Wars in the past. Heather is a graduate of Central Michigan University, where she earned both her undergraduate degree, as well as a Master of Arts in History. She also teaches Social Studies Methods and Pre-Student Teaching courses at CMU. Heather also is the chair of the Social Studies Department at Shepherd High School and is involved in many other facets of the school and community. Heather was named 2009 High School Educator of the Year by the Michigan Council for the Social Studies. She enjoys reading, traveling and spending time with her family.
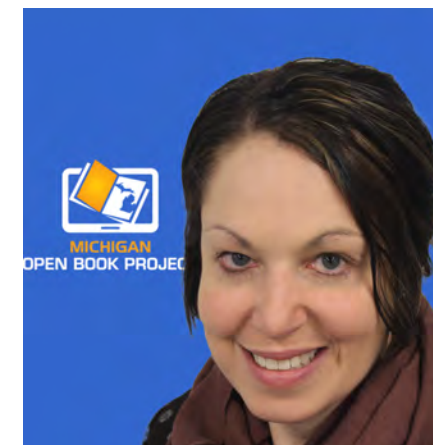
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Instructional Consultant
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Rebecca Bush is currently the Social Studies Consultant at the Ottawa Area Intermediate School District (OAISD), where she assists K-12 social studies teachers in developing curriculum, modeling instructional strategies in social studies literacy, and designing district-level formative and summative assessments. Additionally, as Project Director, she has written and received multiple Teaching American History grants, working with teachers throughout an eight-county radius. She has presented at various national conferences on multiple topics surrounding social studies instruction as well as innovative techniques and topics in formative and summative assessment design. Currently she is Co-Project Director of The Performance Assessments of Social Studies Thinking (PASST) Project and assists with the professional development of teacher writers for the MI Open Book Project where she serves as an editor of several of the project's texts. Rebecca currently leads the Michigan Social

Were the social, political, economic, and cultural issues and events of the 1950s more representative of a decade of progress and prosperity or one of stagnation and poverty?

What were the significant social, political, economic, and cultural readjustments that occurred in the U.S. after WWII and the 1950s?

Could the 1950s be considered a time of social, political, economic, and cultural prosperity and challenge simultaneously?

Did every American have equal access to the attainment of the "American Dream" of the 1950s?

How did the emergence of suburbia and the automobile culture impact lives of Americans in different ways?

How significant was the new era of mass media on American life in the 1950s?

Why did the emergence of "subcultures" occur when they did? What new characteristics were present in 1950s society that led to the emergence of subcultures?

How did the birth of rock and roll blur racial lines and lead to advancements in ending certain types of segregation across the nation?

What social, political, economic, and cultural factors led to the increasingly wide gap between white, middle class Americans and those living in the "other America?"

Post War America

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TERMS, PLACES, PEOPLE

GI Bill of Rights

Suburbs

Dixiecrats

The Cold War had a significant impact on domestic life in the decade after the WWII; however, for most Americans, economic prosperity and social aspects such as pop culture and the building of suburban lifestyles by the middle class dominated thoughts of anti-Communist fear. Even though the 1950s were known as a time of unprecedented prosperity, not every subgroup of American society benefitted. The urban poor, Mexican Americans, and Native Americans were left untouched by the economic boom, living in poverty.

Readjustment and Recovery in Postwar America

Within a year after the surrender of Axis forces bringing an end to WWII, approximately 10 million men and women had been released from the U.S. armed forces. To assist with the transition of veterans into civilian life, Congress passed the **GI Bill of Rights**--legislation that paid for college tuition, guaranteed unemployment benefits during job searches, and offered low-interest federally guaranteed loans for veterans. The short-term gains of the GI Bill were immediately evident--millions of men and women received financial support while fulfilling a sense of purpose by either receiving training as they entered the workforce or studying at college in pursuit of a career. One of the long-term impacts was a substantial increase in the middle class of American society that would last for at least 50 years. Historian Milton Greenberg estimated that the GI Bill enriched U.S. society by producing 450,000 engineers, 240,000 accountants,

238,000 teachers, 91,000 scientists, 67,000 doctors and 22,000 dentists. This feat led these men and women to earn the moniker of the "Greatest Generation"--with their legacy returning $7 to the American economy for every $1 invested in the GI Bill. This was a serious return on investment.

Additionally with the assistance provided by the GI Bill, many veterans were able to purchase homes in the **suburbs**--small residential communities outside of surrounding cities, to help alleviate the effects of a severe housing shortage that occurred shortly after the war had ended. One of the first suburbs was created by William Levitt. Contracted by the federal government during the war to quickly build housing for military personnel, Levitt applied the techniques of mass production to construction after the war. In 1947, Levitt set out to build the largest planned-living community in the U.S. on farmland he had purchased on Long Island, New York. Levitt identified 27 different steps to build a house. Therefore, 27 different teams of builders were hired to construct the homes. Levitt boasted that his teams could build a house in sixteen minutes--each house had two bedrooms, one bathroom, and no basement. The kitchen was situated near the back of the house so mothers could keep an eye on their children in the backyard. Within one year, Levitt was building 36 houses in a day. His assembly-line approach made the houses extremely affordable. At first, Levitt's home could only be purchased by veterans. Eventually, though, Levittown was opened to others as well.
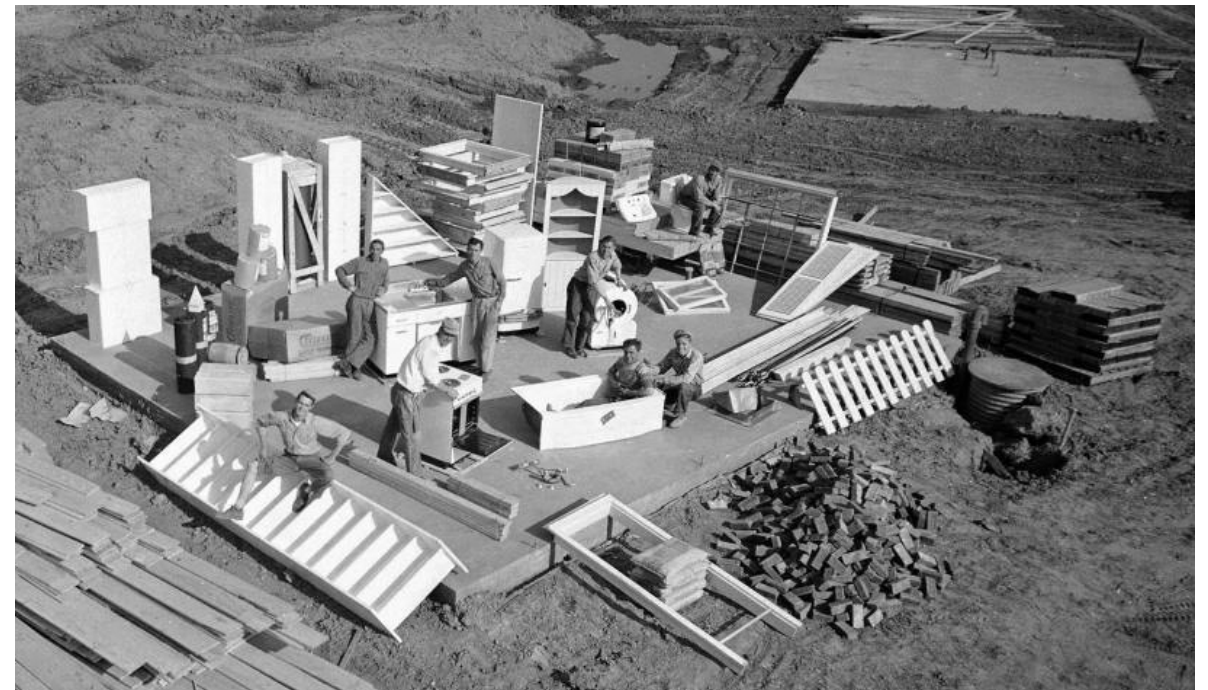

Image source: https://helmofthepublicrealm.files.wordpress.com/2012/10/house-materials-shot-smaller.jpg

Image source: http://projects.ecfs.org/Fieldston57/since40/units/unit1/supplements/Image3.jpg

Additional Postwar SPECtacles

No matter which historical time period is under investigation, using the SPEC strategy is a terrific way to organize information and analyze multiple causes and effects of events across sometimes broader historical contexts. Here are the basics behind the SPEC strategy:

S=SOCIAL

Having to do with people in groups. Social includes issues such as gender, economic status, and ethnicity. An example of a social aspect of life in postwar America would be the birth of suburbia in hundreds of cities across the country.

P=POLITICAL

Having to do with gaining, seeking, and organizing power, events related to the function of government including making laws, enforcing laws, and interpreting laws. A political example in postwar America is the passage of the GI Bill. It should be noted that some of the impacts of the bill could also be economic, social, and cultural.

E=ECONOMIC

Having to do with how people meet their basic material needs; the production, distribution, and consumption of goods and services; includes such issues as domestic and international trade, monetary policies, and taxation. An example of an economic aspect of postwar America would be the booming economy that occurred as demands for goods outstripped supply and production was increased thus creating additional new jobs.

C=CULTURAL

Having to do with the technology, arts, and institutions of a given group of people at a given time. It is a tangible representation of interactions. Examples of cultural characteristics might include: literature, music, poetry, art, food, dialects, and slang. An example in the postwar time period would be the role of advertising in creating demand for new products as suburbanites wanted to "keep up with the Jones's."

Create a SPEC graphic organizer, record additional examples of SPEC characteristics as you continue to read this chapter.

Economic Challenges Faced by President Truman

When Harry S. Truman inherited the Presidency after the death of FDR in April of 1945, he faced two significant challenges: dealing with the rising threat of communism and restoring the economy. By 1946, with higher prices and lower wages, at least 4.5 million workers went on strike. Steelworkers, coal miners, and railroad workers significantly impacted many facets of economic activity. President Truman, refusing to allow the nation to be crippled by the many strikes, appeared before a special session of Congress to request authority to draft striking workers into the army where

as soldiers they wouldn't be allowed to strike. Before the President could finish his speech, unions gave in and ended their strikes but the damage was done. The American public had had enough and made this point during the 1946 elections. For the first time since 1928, Republicans had won control of both houses of Congress. The new 80th Congress ignored President Truman's domestic economic proposals, in 1947, passing the Taft-Hartley Act over the President's veto. The main purpose of the act was to restrict power of labor unions.

Persisting Social Unrest and Political Ramifications

In addition to a problematic economy, President Truman also had to address a wave of racial violence in the South after the war had ended. After meeting with African American leaders and seeking their top priorities, Truman took their requests to Congress. When members of Congress failed to cooperate, Truman appointed a biracial Committee on Civil Rights to investigate race relations. When Congress failed to act a second time upon recommendations including anti-lynching, poll-tax, and other anti-discriminatory measures, Truman issued an executive order in 1948 integrating the armed forces and ending discrimination in the hiring of government employees.

As the 1948 election drew closer, Democrats again nominated Truman. However, Truman's insistence upon a strong civil rights platform cost him the unanimous support of the Democratic Party. **Dixiecrats**--Southern delegates to the national convention who opposed civil rights formed their own party, the States' Rights Democratic Party, nominating South Carolina governor Strom Thurmond. Additionally on the far left of the party, there was also dissent resulting in the nomination of Henry A. Wallace to represent the more liberal Progressive Party. Although the election was close, Truman ultimately won re-election and began to try to implement his Fair Deal program. Despite the defeat of some of Truman's proposed programs, in other instances the President was successful. Congress raised the minimum wage, extended social security coverage to more Americans, initiated flood control and irrigation projects, and provided financial support to cities to build low-income family housing units.

Despite some social and economic victories for the Truman administration, the President's approval rating sank to an all-time low by 1951. As the President decided not to run for re-election, the Democrats nominated Adlai Stevenson from Illinois to run against General Dwight D. Eisenhower, the Republican Party's nominee. A respected war hero, Eisenhower was no match for Truman who had accumulated too much negativity from a failed attempt at peace during the beginning of the Korean War from 1950-1951. Combined with Truman's inability to calm anti-Communist fears and a resurgence of disputes between labor unions and the corporate world, Eisenhower easily won the election with his calm and steady demeanor, his easy smile and his straight talk. For the first time since 1932, a Republican

President would have a chance at trying to secure both domestic stability and foreign diplomacy.

Living the American Dream

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TERMS, PLACES, PEOPLE

Conglomerate	Franchise
Baby Boom	Interstate highway system
Consumerism	Planned obsolescence

The emergence of the suburbs wasn't the only rapid expansion in the 1950s. By the mid 50s, the majority of Americans no longer held industrial or blue-collar jobs. The American workforce was changing as more people worked in white-collar positions such as clerical, managerial, or professional occupations. As the shift from an industrial-based to a service-based economy took place, numbers of workers in fields like sales, advertising, insurance, and communications rose rapidly.

American Dream in the 1950s - The Organization and the Organization Man

As white-collar workers dominated a new corporate America, the **conglomerate** was born. A conglomerate is a major corporation that includes a number of smaller companies in unrelated industries.

Interactive 9.1 Living in the 1950s

This video will give you an overview of life in the 1950s.

Interactive 9.2 What are Conglomerates?

To see how expansive conglomerates have become today, this short video provides some excellent examples.

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During the 1950s, one example of one of the first conglomerates was International Telephone and Telegraph (ITT). Although its original business was communications, ITT purchased insurance companies, car-rental companies, and hotel chains. Other conglomerates included American Telephone and Telegraph (AT&T), Xerox, and General Electric. Although there were many conglomerates built in the 1950s, the ultimate goal was the same--to protect the conglomerate from decline in individual industries through diversification.

In addition to the diversification that took place under a conglomerate, another business strategy that developed during this time was the **franchise**. A franchise is a company that offers similar products or services in many locations. Fast food restaurants like McDonald's were some of the first franchises to

Interactive 9.3 Large and Small Businesess in the 1950s

An example of what this looked like from the business standpoint in the 1950s is illustrated in this video.

Interactive 9.4 How do Franchises Work?

View this short video to see how franchises make profits.

occur.

Even though the emergence of franchises and conglomerates was at first glance an advancement in what would be known as "corporate America," franchises like McDonald's accomplished another task--it aided in the standardization of America. While fast food franchises standardized what people ate, other franchises standardized other actions in American life. Conformity was seen as acceptable for not only advancement in the business world but in other aspects of life in America.

In the struggle between conformity and individuality, conformity was rewarded; individuality was not. This value was reflected in workplace practices as well as projected in literature, television, and other cultural aspects of society. Some Americans, however, began to feel dissatisfied, questioning whether or not the American dream could only be achieved through conformity instead of individuality.

Interactive 9.5 Lets Be Good Citizens at School

Other institutions followed this cue as well as you will see in this video about conformity in school.

Life in Suburbia

Suburbs grew rapidly in the 1950s. Of the 13 million homes built in the 1950s, 85% of them were built in suburbs which quickly embodied an affordable single-family home, children's attendance in good schools, a safe, healthy living environment for the family, and congenial neighbors with extremely similar interests and desires to achieve "the American dream."

The Baby Boom and Dr. Spock impact Women's roles

As soldiers returned home from fighting overseas after WWII, many considered the following factors with regard to the state of the nation to which they had returned:

- Confidence in economic prosperity that was long-term

- Decreasing marriage age

- Reunion of families after the war

- Advances in medicine

- Desires to have large families

The added result of these factors was the largest generation in the nation's history. Known as the **baby boom**--an unprecedented population explosion between 1946 and 1964, at the height of the baby boom in 1957, one infant was born every seven minutes in America. And thanks to Dr. Jonas Salk and his discovery of a vaccine to prevent polio, along with the development of drugs to fight and prevent typhoid fever and diphtheria, hundreds of thousands of children's lives kept the children of the baby boom alive and well.

The babies of the baby boom continued to grow and thrive as suburban life revolved around children and the family. Many mothers turned to Dr. Spock for his advice on how to best parent. Dr. Benjamin Spock, an author and pediatrician, published his book, the Common Sense Book of Baby and Child Care, offering such advice as to not spank children, to hold family meetings where children could express themselves, and for mothers to stay at home with their children as opposed to working outside the home. Combined with other influences (values of conformity, media, advertising, and other well-noted experts) the message for women to focus on the family and the creation of a loving

home was a consistent reminder as to how the ideal women of the 1950s was to spend her time.

Fantasy vs Reality: The Inner Conflict Many Women Faced

Though millions of Americans did not have the lifestyle portrayed in popular magazines, movies, and television shows, the role of women in the 1950s was often depicted as that of a satisfied homemaker and mother. Although TV programs such as Father Knows Best and

Image source: http://ak-cache.legacy.net/UserContent/ns/Photos/Spock_160x244.jpg

Leave it to Beaver showed the 1950s mom as the key figure to maintaining the ideal image of life in suburbia, some women did find themselves unhappy in what was supposed to be the aspirational norm. Subjected to extremely idealized gender roles combined with expectations of conformity, many women felt isolated, bored, and unfulfilled. One person whose experiences mirrored those feelings was Betty Friedan. A reporter in New York City who lost her job because of a second pregnancy, Friedan stayed at home to raise three children in the early 1950s. As she became restless as a homemaker she began to wonder if other women felt the same way. To answer this question, Friedan surveyed other graduates of Smith College, her almamateur. The

results of this research formed the basis of The Feminine Mystique. The book became a sensation and created a social revolution by dispelling the myth that all women aspired only to be happy homemakers. Friedan encouraged women to seek new opportunities for themselves.

Image source: https://www.marxists.org/glossary/people/f/pics/friedan-betty.jpg

Despite the consistent pressure for women to not work outside the home, some women did work outside the home, the number of which, rose steadily throughout the decade. By 1960, almost 40% of women with children between the ages of 6 and 17 held jobs outside of the home. Disparities did continue to exist, however with regard to gender. Career opportunities for women tended to be limited to certain fields--teaching, nursing, and clerical office positions. And despite the fact that women earned less than men for comparable work, women continued to move their gender forward in the workplace as numbers of women attending four-year colleges increased steadily throughout the decade.

Changes in Leisure in the 50s

Another substantial change in the 1950s was the amount of leisure time Americans had. The 40-hour work week was a norm along with earned vacation time. Additionally, households

consisted of more labor-saving devices than ever before resulting in increased time spent on both active and passive leisure activities. Millions of Americans participated in sports such as bowling, hunting, fishing, boating, and golf. Attendance at team sports such as baseball, basketball, and football increased while hundreds of thousands started to watch professional sports on TV. Another leisure activity to experience a substantial increase was reading. Due to a thriving paperback market, mysteries, romance novels, and fiction by popular authors such as John Steinbeck, J.D. Salinger, and Ernest Hemingway along with the circulation of popular magazines and comic book sales reached a peak in the mid-1950s. And in most suburban communities activities toward youth such as scouting and little league became commonplace.

The Automobile Culture Grabs Hold of America

Living in suburbia made owning a car a necessity since many who lived in suburbia worked in cities and had to commute daily. And as many other necessary services (schools, churches, doctors' offices, etc.) were not within walking distance of suburbs, a family vehicle was a must.

As more and more cars came into existence, more roads were needed which spurred substantial construction of local, state, and eventually an **interstate highway system**.

The result of the combination of the need for more travel by automobile and the need for additional roads was the birth of the automobile culture--a culture that would pervade American culture for decades. To grasp an idea of how dominant the automobile culture became in the 1950s, view the following video:

Interactive 9.6 1950s Car Culture

To grasp how dominant the idea of automobile culture came, view this brief video.

Unbound Consumerism

By the mid-1950s, almost 60% of Americans were members of the middle class who wanted increasing numbers of products and had the money to buy those products. **Consumerism**, the preoccupation with the purchasing of material goods, knew no limits in the 1950s. Equated with social and economic success, the combination of new products in response to consumer demand along with **planned obsolescence**, designing products to wear out or to become quickly outdated so that people will feel a need to replace their possessions, helped fuel the shift from spending earned income mostly on needs to those of wants. Advances in credit (the birth of the credit card and installment plans) was additionally another reason that instead of saving their money, Americans, especially those in the middle class, were spending it confidently with the expectation that times of

prosperity would continue for decades to come. Not to be left out, the advertising industry capitalized on this decade of unbounded consumerism by encouraging even more spending by inundating the American consumer with ads to be found everywhere. Endless advertising in newspapers, magazines, and billboards prompted people to buy everything from food to cigarettes to cars and appliances. Television along with radio became a powerful advertising tool, dominating the new industry of advertising. Not only did TV transmit cultural values through advertising, it became a symbol of popular culture itself. You'll learn more about this in the next section.

The Culture that Defined the 50s

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TERMS, PLACES, PEOPLE

Mass media

Beat movement

Beat generation

Mass Media in a New Era

First available in 1948, television developed in the 1950s with lightning speed. Compared to other forms of **mass media**--means of communication reaching large audiences, television was in 55% of American homes by 1954--a number that would soar to 90% by 1960. Although tv sets were small boxes that only broadcast in black and white and only reached a small part of the East Coast at first, once microwave relays were developed, the tv industry boomed.

The Golden Age of Television

Although originally founded in 1934, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) which was created to regulate all interstate communications (i.e., wire, satellite, cable, telephone, radio,etc.) and international communications originating or terminating in the United States, experienced a huge surge in activity with requests nationwide to launch tv stations. By 1956, there were almost 500 stations across the U.S.   The "golden age" of television had begun.

Interactive 9.7 Vintage Television Commercials

To get a sense of what some of the first tv models looked like, click here:

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What was on TV in the 1950s?

At the time, television broadcasting was seen as a somewhat risky business because programs usually had to be broadcast live with mistakes and bloopers intact. Despite this, many shows still attracted wide audiences. In 1955, the top 10 television shows were:

1. The $64,000 Question (CBS)

2. I Love Lucy (CBS)

3. The Ed Sullivan Show (CBS)

4. Disneyland (ABC)

5. The Jack Benny Show (CBS)

6. December Bride (CBS)

7. You Bet Your Life (NBC)

8. Dragnet (NBC)

9. The Millionnaire (CBS)

10. I've Got a Secret (CBS)

By 1956, the introduction of videotape eliminated some of the risks of the practice of broadcasting. Prerecording and editing

Image source: https://img.buzzfeed.com/buzzfeed-static/static/2014-01/enhanced/webdr07/6/13/original-23943-1389033512-16.jpg

yielded greater flexibility but spontaneity was diminished. Additional changes in the television industry included mass advertising on a whole new scale (from $170 million in 1950 to nearly $2 billion by the beginning of the next decade) which resulted in the emergence of children's programs such as The Mickey Mouse Club and The Howdy Doody Show as children were glued to advertisements for their kind of products like Silly Putty, Hula-Hoops, and coonskin caps. Product-wise, TV Guide

was introduced in 1953 and quickly outsold any other magazine on the market. Even the food industry was impacted, especially with the introduction of the TV dinner.

Television's Idealized White America

Although the television industry soared during the decade, not everyone in America was thrilled with stereotypes that were portrayed. Some critics objected to the effects of tv viewing on children's behavior; others objected to the stereotypical portrayal of women and minorities. Male characters in television shows outnumbered female characters by a 3-1 ratio and African American and Latino minorities rarely appeared at all. Additionally, plots were absent of references to diversity, poverty, contemporary and/or controversial issues. Safe topics such as the glorification of historical events led to a strong focus on the historical conflicts of the Western frontier. Shows like Gunsmoke

Interactive 9.9 The Effects of Television on 1950s Culture

For a student-produced documentary on the effects of television on mainstream American society, view this clip.

Interactive 9.8 Western Clips

A short clip of a western is included in this video.

and Have Gun, Will Travel were hugely popular, so much so, that by 1959, the top three television shows were westerns.

The Emergence of a Subculture

Even though mass media appealed to a majority of white popular culture, messages of the **beat movement** in both literature and music clashed with the squeaky

Interactive 9.10 The Beat Generation

For a very short video embedded with images of the movement,click on this video.

http://theuglyearring.files.wordpress.com/2008/05/beat.jpg

clean, materialistic image of suburban life. Born in 1955, as Allen Ginsberg read his lengthy, free-verse poem, Howl, at a cafe in San Francisco, the **Beat Generation** quickly emerged as a reaction against the conformity and materialism of the 1950's. Rejecting the so-called security of Cold War America, the Beats embraced gritty reality, Eastern traditions, non-materialistic things, and altered states of consciousness.

Beat literature was more bold, straightforward, and expressive than anything that had come before and because of that, it was widely criticized as a fleeting, unintelligent, superficial movement. Criticism of the Beat Generation's aesthetics and behavior came from many corners of society. Academics labeled the Beats as anti-intellectual and unrefined. Mainstream America was horrified by their supposed illicit drug use. Established poets and novelists looked down upon the freewheeling abandon of Beat literature. Politicians such as Joseph McCarthy identified elements of Beat ideology as Communist and a threat to the nation's security. The Beat Generation effectively absorbed all of these criticisms without disintegrating. However, their relatively short time in the spotlight of literature and culture could be attributed to the amount of negativity tossed their way.

Rock 'N' Roll

While the Beats were expressing themselves through literature, musicians were experimenting with a new sound. First made popular in 1951 by Alan Freed, a Cleveland radio disc jockey, the combination of electric instruments with the sounds of gospel, blues, country, jazz and R&B gave birth to the new sound of rock and roll. The newest musical genre was an instant success--the music's heavy rhythm combined with simple lyrics and melodies captivated teenagers from one coast to another.

Within a few short years, some of the musical genre's first singers such as Little Richard, Bill Haley, Chuck Berry, Fats Domino and Buddy Holly brought rock and roll to an unimaginable level of popularity not to mention a hugely lucrative component of the entertainment industry. However, while television mostly appealed to adults and children, the stars of rock and roll mesmerized teens across the country--at first through the medium of radio and eventually through television.

Interactive 9.11 The Birth of Rock and Roll Music

As you watch this video clip, listen closely to the lyrics reflective of the birth of rock and roll.

Interactive 9.12 The Best of Rock and Roll

Click on the following links to sample some of the various melodies that the rock-n-roll genre of music had to offer:

No surprise to anyone, adults (many of whom were parents of teens) condemned rock and roll, believing that the music would most certainly lead to widespread juvenile delinquency and immorality. And to most adults who condemned rock and roll, a young singer by the name of Elvis Presley quickly became "Public Enemy Number One." By the spring of 1956, Presley's "Heartbreak Hotel" was number one on the rock and roll charts and a movie debut was imminent. Everywhere Presley performed, his sultry looks, swinging hips, and dynamic vocal style drove teenage listeners from around the nation wild. Even though Presley had already performed in front of a national audience six times previously, it was his appearance on The Milton Berle Show in June of 1956 that triggered huge controversy.

Even though a large adult population condemned rock and roll (parents were appalled by the dance moves associated with the music, some churches referred to it as Satan's music, and members of the middle class didn't approve of its creation by the lower class), exposure by the mass media brought rock and roll

Interactive 9.13 Elvis on Ed Sullivan

To view a short clip of Elvis Presley's performance on the Ed Sullivan Show in 1956, click here:

into the mainstream with record sales reaching 600 million in 1960.

Culturally and socially, rock and roll was responsible for blurring racial lines. It had an overwhelming influence on social interactions and intermingling of black and white teenagers in the 1950s. Even record companies who were reticent to sign black musicians at first, succumbed to economic demand because the music was so popular and profitable. And with a giant step in ending segregation in 1954 with the Brown v. Bd. of Education of Topeka Kansas Supreme Court's ruling that separate was not equal, records from both black and white artists were sold in the same record stores and black and white artists were signed to the same record labels. And thanks to television, specifically shows like the Ed Sullivan Show and American Bandstand, black and white teenagers interacted socially increasing the chances that their generation would break barriers of prejudice as they ascended into adulthood. Rock and Roll also brought people together,

Interactive 9.14 Fats Domino

For an in-depth look at the history of rock and roll and its cultural and social milestones, watch the PBS American Masters series, Fats Domino and the Birth of Rock and Roll. This 30 second video clip gives you an idea of what the American Masters series is all about:

from across regions, across race and class lines, and, finally, across oceans. It was the beginning of a historical turn that would change daily life in the modern world.

The Other America

QUESTIONS TO GUIDE INQUIRY

1. What were the significant social, political, economic, and cultural readjustments that occurred in the U.S. after WWII and the 1950s?

2. Could the 1950s be considered a time of social, political, economic, and cultural prosperity and challenge simultaneously?

3. Did every American have equal access to the attainment of the "American Dream" of the 1950s?

4. How did the emergence of suburbia and the automobile culture impact lives of Americans in different ways?

5. How significant was the new era of mass media on American life in the 1950s?

6. Why did the emergence of "subcultures" occur when they did? What new characteristics were present in 1950s society that led to the emergence of subcultures?

7. How did the birth of rock and roll blur racial lines and lead to advancements in ending certain types of segregation across the nation?

8. What social, political, economic, and cultural factors led to the increasingly wide gap between white, middle class Americans and those living in the "other America?"

TERMS, PLACES, PEOPLE

Issei	Nisei	White Flight
De facto segregation	Urban renewal	Braceros
Operation wetback	Wetback	Assimilation
National Congress of American Indians		
Termination policy		

While teens in the 1950s were rocking around the clock, life in postwar America did not exemplify the "nifty fifties" for all Americans. Despite the emerging affluence of the new American middle class, challenges of poverty, racism, and alienation were in full abundance. The "other America" that was comprised of the poor in the inner cities, disenfranchised Mexican Americans (some of whom were in the U.S. illegally), and Native Americans who had been forced to assimilate for the past 100 years. The immense hardships that each of these minority groups faced were rarely depicted on TV.

The Issei and the Nisei

After WWII ended, Japanese internees were freed and left to rebuild their lives as best they could. Although the **Issei** (first generation Japanese immigrants) and **Nisei** (second generation Japanese immigrants) attempted to return to their pre-WWII lives, both generations experienced two significant challenges. The first was impoverishment as many Issei had lost their businesses, occupations and property. Most were too old to restart their careers and were forced to depend on their children, the Nisei. The second challenge that young and old faced was prejudice that lingered long after the war had ended. Although the biggest challenge for the older generation of Japanese that were interned was that of financial security, the second challenge of assimilation back into society was the most difficult for the Nisei. Thanks to various religious and civic organizations who

helped welcome many internees back to their homes, the challenge of acceptance and eventually **assimilation** was a bit easier.

The Urban Poor Struggle

With the birth and rapid growth of the suburbs in the early 1950s, millions of white, middle-class Americans left the cities for life in the suburbs and along with them went economic resources. Further isolated from middle-class white Americans, the rural poor migrated to the inner cities.

This "white flight" as it was sometimes called, directly impacted the poor whites and nonwhites now living in the cities. Business was lost along with property and income taxes which greatly diminished the city governments' abilities to maintain public transportation including roads, police and fire departments, and public schools.

While poverty continued to grow as inner cities decayed, those living in suburbia became increasingly unaware of what was happening. The urban poor lacked advocacy to call attention to the segregated ghettos that were now the result of the migration of suburbanites. Even most journalists focused on writing about the highest standard of middle class living the nation had ever seen failed to bring the plight of the urban poor to the white, middle class living room televisions across the nation's suburbs.

Although millions of suburban homes had been built in the 1950s, the fact was that most African Americans, Native Americans, and Latinos couldn't afford to live in them nor would they have been welcomed into suburbia if they could afford to do so. This type of segregation that happened by fact (in this case due to economic factors) is known as **de facto segregation** and it increased rapidly during the 1950s.

One proposed solution to the ever-growing problem of dilapidated inner cities was **urban renewal**--the redevelopment of areas within a large city, typically involving the clearance of slums. Passed in 1949, the National Housing Act was to provide a "decent home and a suitable living environment for every American family." Although the most dilapidated areas were razed, new homes were not built in newly vacant lots. Instead parking lots, highways, parks, factories, and shopping centers were built instead, resulting in a huge shortage of new housing to accommodate those who had been displaced. Many of those critical of the idea of urban renewal saw it as merely removing the ugliest eyesores of poverty without solving the original problem.

The Plight of Mexican Americans and Native Americans

Despite the plight of poverty that African Americans faced (In 1959, 55.1% of African Americans were living below the poverty line), they were able to make significant strides in reducing racial discrimination and segregation. Mexican Americans, inspired by

these gains, also developed a deeper level of political awareness and activism as did Native Americans during this decade.

A shortage of agricultural laborers during WWII initiated a program by the U.S. government to allow Mexican **braceros**, or hired hands to harvest crops. Many of these workers remained in the U.S. illegally after the war had ended. Additionally, hundreds of thousands of Mexicans also entered the country illegally during the post war period. Launched in 1954, Operation Wetback (named after the term **wetback**, used to label those Mexicans who swam across the Rio Grande River to reach the U.S. by illegal means), was designed to find illegal aliens and return them to Mexico. Many who remained in the U.S. legally faced prejudice and discrimination. After the war had ended in which almost 350,000 Mexican Americans fought in the armed forces, change did occur as these war veterans, determined to fight for democracy at home, fought to end wage discrimination and poor living conditions. Some were even shocked into organized action by the Longoria Incident, in which a decorated Mexican American soldier killed in battle during WWII couldn't be waked in the only funeral home in his hometown of Three Rivers, Texas. The owner of the funeral home had told Longoria's widow "the whites wouldn't like it." As those words became front page news across the country the outrage that was produced across the nation came to be known as The Longoria Affair.

UPDATE:

Today, 60 years after the Longoria Affair, Three Rivers continues to struggle with its past. Santiago Hernandez, a local musician and member of the American GI Forum, has proposed honoring Felix Longoria by naming the local post office after him.

Many Anglo residents are angered by the proposal. They believe discrimination against Mexican Americans never existed in their town and that the Longoria Affair never happened.

The past and present have collided as Three Rivers continues to struggle to come to terms with a brutal history of segregation that has long haunted South Texas.

Soon after the Longoria incident, a man by the name of Ignacio Lopez founded the Unity League of California. It's mission was to register Mexican American voters and to promote candidates who would represent them at local and state levels of government. Because of the actions of this league, California outlawed segregated classrooms for Mexican Americans. Similar groups were started in Arizona and Texas as efforts to end discrimination continued creating for Mexican Americans a nationwide voice in politics.

Similarly, Native Americans continued to fight for their identity and rights. Even though in 1924, all Native Americans were granted citizenship, the policy of the federal government had mostly been one of assimilation--a minority group's adoption of the beliefs and way of life of the dominant culture as opposed to autonomy by Native American peoples. In 1934, the Indian Reorganization Act moved away official government policies regarding assimilation to one of autonomy. The Act was important because it mandated change in economic, cultural, and political areas. From an economic standpoint, Native American lands would no longer be divided into individual farms and would belong to a tribe collectively. Culturally, the number of boarding schools for Native American children was greatly reduced and children could attend schools during the day on their reservation as opposed to being sent away from family and tribal members to attend boarding schools far from home. Politically, tribes were granted permission to elect tribal councils to govern their reservations.

Native Americans took the initiative to improve their situation as a minority group as well. In 1944, they established the National Congress of American Indians, an organization that worked to ensure for Native Americans the same civil rights that whites had and to enable Native Americans on reservations to retain their own customs and traditions. By 1953, with the government's new approach known as the termination policy where the federal government eliminated all economic support and discontinued the reservation system resulting in tribal lands being sold to private developers by state government actions, the Bureau of Indian Affairs began a voluntary relocation program. Helping Native Americans resettle in cities, the bureau helped them find jobs and adjust to their new communities. You will learn more about this in the next chapter.

Although the termination policy was a massive failure, the bureau did help relocate 35,000 Native Americans to urban areas during the decade of the 1950s. However, Native Americans were often unable to find or keep jobs due to poor training and racial prejudice. Without access to medical care once federal programs had been abolished, the number of Native Americans on state welfare rolls greatly increased. In 1963, the termination policy was abandoned but great damage had been done to the future of many Native Americans.

Interactive 9.15 Indian Country Diaries

Click here to view an interactive map with information about relocation cities and boarding schools.