

# **Packet: Domestic Policy - 1945 - 1960**

## **Truman and Eisenhower**

World War II dramatically changed the United States from an isolationist country into a military superpower and leader in world affairs. After World War II, most of the Americans at home and the millions coming back from military service wished to return to normal domestic life and enjoy the revitalized national economy. However, during the Truman presidency, the growing conflict between the Communist Soviet Union and the United States - a conflict that came to be known as the Cold War - would dampen the nation's enjoyment of the postwar boom

### **Characteristics of Postwar America**

- I. Postwar America
  - A. 15 million American soldiers, sailors, marines return to civilian life in 1945 & 1946
    1. problem of finding jobs and housing
    2. many feared the end of war might mean return of economic hard times
  - B. War years had increased per capita income of Americans
    - income saved during war years because of consumer rationing
  - C. Consumer demands for autos and housing
    - government road-building projects
  - D. By 1950s, Americans enjoyed highest standard of living achieved by any society in history
- II. GI Bill (Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944)
  - A. Allowed returning servicemen to continue their education at government expense
    1. over 2 million GI's attended college on GI bill
    2. started a postwar boom in higher education
  - B. Provided over \$16 billion in low-interest, government-backed loans to buy homes and farms and start businesses
- III. Baby Boom
  - A. Younger marriages and larger families resulted in 50 million babies born between 1945 and 1960
  - B. Baby Boom generation affected social institutions (schools, etc.) as it moved through American society
  - C. By 1960, one-third of all married women worked outside the home
- IV. Suburban Growth
  - A. Desperate need for housing after war resulted in construction boom
    1. William Levitt - developed post-war suburbia with Levittown
      - a. 17,000 mass-produced low-priced family homes on Long Island, NY
      - b. low-interest rates for mortgages allowed most Americans to move to suburbs
    2. In a single generation, the majority of middle-class Americans became suburbanites
  - B. Mass Movement to suburbia caused dramatic increase in the poor, minority population of inner cities
- V. Rise of the Sunbelt

- A. warmer climate, lower taxes, and economic opportunities (defense-related industries) led many Americans to move to Sunbelt states (Florida to California)
- B. Transfer of tax dollars from Northeast and Midwest to South and West, military spending during the Cold War helped finance the shift of industry, people, and ultimately political power from one region to the other.

## Postwar Politics - Truman

Harry S. Truman, a moderate Democratic senator from Missouri, replaced the more liberal Henry Wallace as FDR's vice president in the 1944 election. Thrust into the presidency after Roosevelt's death in April 1945, Truman matured into a decisive leader whose basic honesty and unpretentious style appealed to average citizens. President Truman attempted to continue in the New Deal tradition of his predecessor.

- I. Economic Program and Civil Rights
 

Truman's proposals for full employment and for civil rights for African Americans ran into opposition from more conservative Congresses

  - A. Employment Act of 1946
    1. created the Council of Economic Advisers to counsel both the president and Congress on means of promoting national economic welfare.
    2. Over the next seven years, conservative Congresses and the beginning of the Cold War would hinder the passage of most of Truman's domestic programs.
  - B. Inflation and Strikes
    1. Truman asked Congress to continue the price controls of wartime in order to hold inflation in check
    2. southern Democrats and Republicans joined forces to relax the controls of the Office of Price Administration ... result: inflation rate of 25% in 1945-1946
    3. 1946 - 4.5 million workers went on strike
    4. railroad and mine workers strikes threatened public safety - Truman seized the mines and used soldiers to keep them operating until UMW finally called off strike.
  - C. Civil Rights
    1. Truman used executive powers (thus bypassing southern Democrats who controlled key committees in Congress) to establish Committee on Civil Rights in 1946
    2. strengthened the civil rights division of the Justice Department (aided efforts to end segregation in public schools)
    3. 1948 - ordered the end of racial discrimination in the departments of the federal government and all branches of the military
    4. urged Congress to create a Fair Employment Practices Commission that would prevent employers from discriminating against the hiring of African Americans - Southern Democrats blocked the legislation
  - D. Twenty-second amendment (1951)
    1. Constitutional amendment to limit a president to a maximum of two full terms in office
    2. reaction against FDR's four terms – led by Republican dominated Congress
  - E. Taft-Hartley Act (1947)
    1. Probusiness bill which would check the growing power of unions
      - a. outlawed the closed shop (contract requiring workers to join a union before being hired)
      - b. permitted states to pass “right to work” laws outlawing the union shop (contract requiring workers to join a union after being hired)
      - c. outlawed secondary boycotts (the practice of several unions giving support to striking union by joining a boycott of a company's products)

- d. gave the president the power to invoke an 80-day cooling off period before a strike endangering the national safety could be called.
- 2. Passed by Congress over Truman's veto

F. The Election of 1948

- 1. Truman's popularity at a low point – Republicans confident of a victory, especially after both a liberal and a conservative faction in the Democratic party abandoned Truman to organize their own third parties.
  - a. liberal Democrats – led by Henry Wallace (Progressives)
  - b. Southern Democrats – led by Strom Thurmond (Dixiecrats)
- 2. Republican nominee – Thomas E. Dewey
  - so confident of victory that he ran a cautious campaign
- 3. Truman toured the nation by rail – attacking the Republican Congress with “give-'em hell” speeches.
- 4. Truman confounded the experts by winning a 2 million majority of the popular vote and 303-189 electoral count.



II. The Fair Deal

- A. 1949 – Truman urged Congress to enact national health care insurance, federal aid to education, civil rights legislation, funds for public housing and a new farm program
- B. Conservatives in Congress managed to block most of the proposed reforms, except for an increase in the minimum wage (from .40 to .75 cents an hour) and the inclusion of more workers under Social Security.
- C. Most of the Fair Deal bills were defeated for two reasons:
  - a. Truman's political conflicts with Congress
  - b. pressing foreign policy concerns of the Cold War

**\* the Fair Deal is mostly defeated by a coalition of conservative Southern Democrats and Republicans (who oppose Civil Rights, etc.) This coalition prevents further reform until LBJ breaks through it in the 1960s.**

## Domestic Policy in the Eisenhower Years (1953 - 1960)

The 1950s have the popular image of the “happy days,” when the nation prospered and teens enjoyed the new beat of rock and roll music. To a certain extent, this nostalgic view of the views is correct – but limited. The decade started with a war in Korea and the incriminations of McCarthyism. From the point of view of African Americans, what mattered about the 1950s was not so much the music of Elvis Presley but the resistance of Rosa Parks and Martin Luther King, Jr., to segregation in the South. While middle-class suburbanites enjoyed their chrome-trimmed cars and tuned in to “I Love Lucy” on their new television sets, the Cold War and threat of nuclear destruction loomed in the background.

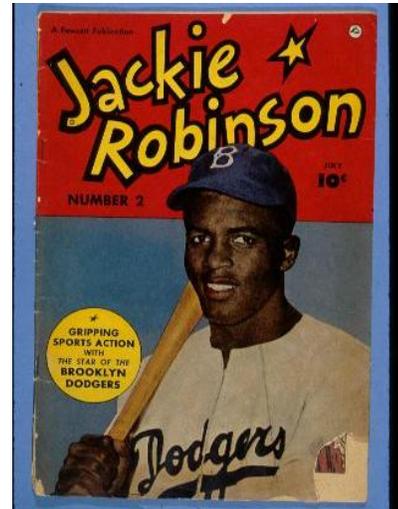
- I. The Election of 1952
  - a. Republican candidates – Eisenhower and Richard Nixon
  - b. Democratic candidate – Adlai Stevenson (gov. of Illinois)
  - c. As a nonpolitician, Eisenhower had a spotless reputation for integrity that was almost spoiled by reports that his running-mate Richard Nixon, had used campaign funds for his own personal use. Nixon managed to save his political future by using the new medium of television to defend himself in his so-called Checkers speech. (Checkers was the dog given to the Nixon family as a gift)
  
- II. Domestic Policies
  - a. leadership style that emphasized delegation of authority – filled his cabinet with successful corporate executives who gave his administration a business-like tone.
  - b. Fiscal conservative whose first priority was balancing the budget after years of deficit spending. Although his annual budgets weren’t always balanced, he came closer to curbing federal spending than any of his successors
  - c. Extended Social Security to 10 million more citizens
  - d. Raised minimum wage
  - e. Built additional public housing
  - f. 1953 – created Department of Health, Education and Welfare and appointed Oveta Culp Hobby (of TX) as secretary – the first woman in a Republican cabinet.
  - g. Opposed federal health care insurance and federal aid to education
  
- III. Interstate Highway System (1956)
  - a. most permanent legacy of the Eisenhower years
  - b. authorized construction of 42,000 miles of interstate highways linking all the nation’s major cities.
  - c. Justified as necessary for defense – in case of attack, needed to transport military personnel/equipment quickly across country. In stretches, straight lines of highway could be used for airplane landing strips if airports were attacked.
  - d. Emphasized necessity of cars – spawned development of motels, drive-in movie theaters, restaurants, etc.
  
- IV. Prosperity
  - a. between 1945 and 1960, the per-capita disposable income of Americans more than tripled
  - b. by the mid-1950’s, the average American family had twice the real income of a comparable family during the boom years of the 1920s
  - c. postwar economy gave Americans the highest standard of living in the world

# Civil Rights

While Eisenhower was concentrating on Cold War issues, events of potentially revolutionary significance were developing in the relations between African-Americans and other Americans.

## *Origins of the Movement*

The baseball player Jackie Robinson had broken the color line in 1947 by being hired by the Brooklyn Dodgers as the first African-American to play on a major league team. President Truman had integrated the armed forces in 1948 and introduced Civil Rights legislation in Congress. These were the first well-publicized indications that race relations after World War II were changing. As the 1950s began, however, African Americans in the South were still by law segregated from whites in schools and in most public facilities. They were also kept from voting by poll taxes, literacy tests, grandfather clauses, and intimidation. Social segregation left most of them poorly educated, while economic discrimination kept them in a state of poverty.



## **Changing demographics.**

The origins of the modern civil rights movement can be traced back to the movement of millions of African Americans from the rural South to the urban centers of the South and the North. In the North, African Americans could vote and by the 1940s and 1950s had become a factor in the politics of the Democratic party.

## **Changing attitudes in the Cold War.**

The Cold War also played an indirect role in changing both government policies and social attitudes. The U.S. reputation for freedom and democracy was competing against Communist ideology for the hearts and minds of the peoples of Africa and Asia. Against this global background, racial segregation and discrimination stood out as glaring wrongs that needed to be corrected.

## *Desegregating the Schools*

The NAACP had been working through the courts for decades trying to overturn the Supreme Court's 1896 decision, *Plessy v. Ferguson*, which allowed segregation in "separate but equal" facilities. In the late 1940s, the NAACP won a series of cases involving higher education.

## **Brown Decision.**

One of the great landmark cases in Supreme Court history was argued in the early 1950s by a team of NAACP lawyers led by **Thurgood Marshall**. In the case of *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*, they argued that segregation of black children in the public schools was unconstitutional because it violated the Fourteenth Amendment's guarantee of "equal protection of the laws." In May 1954, the Supreme Court agreed with Marshall and overturned the *Plessy* case. Writing for a unanimous Court, Chief Justice **Earl Warren** ruled that (1) "separate facilities are inherently unequal" and unconstitutional and (2) segregation in the schools should end with "all deliberate speed".



### **Resistance in the South.**



States in the Deep South fought the Supreme Court's decision with a variety of tactics, including the temporary closing of the public schools. In Arkansas in 1956, Governor Orval Faubus used the state's National Guard to prevent nine African American students from entering Little Rock High School, as ordered by a federal court. President Eisenhower then intervened. While the president did not actively support desegregation and had reservations about the *Brown* decision, he understood his constitutional responsibility to uphold federal authority. Eisenhower ordered federal troops to stand guard in Little Rock and protect black students as they walked to school. He thus became the first president since Reconstruction to use federal troops to protect the rights of African Americans.

### **Montgomery Bus Boycott**

Segregation of public transportation also came under attack as a result of one woman's refusal to take a back seat. In Montgomery, Alabama, in 1955, **Rosa Parks** was too tired after a long day at work to move to the back of the bus to the section reserved for African Americans. Her protest for violating the segregation law sparked a massive African American protest in Montgomery in the form of a boycott against riding the city buses. The **Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr.**, minister of the Baptist church where the boycott started, soon emerged as the inspiring leader of a nonviolent movement to achieve integration. The protest touched off by Rosa Parks and the Montgomery boycott eventually triumphed when the Supreme Court in 1956 ruled that segregation laws were unconstitutional.



### **Federal Laws**

Signed into law by President Eisenhower, two civil rights laws of 1957 and 1960 were the first such laws to be enacted by the U.S. Congress since Reconstruction. They were modest in scope, providing for a permanent Civil Rights Commission and giving the Justice Department new powers to protect the voting rights of blacks. Despite this legislation, southern officials still used an arsenal of obstructive tactics to discourage African Americans from voting.

### **Nonviolent Protests**

What the government would not do, the African American community did for itself. In 1957, Martin Luther King, Jr. formed the **Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC)**, which organized ministers and churches in the South to get behind the civil rights struggle. In February 1960, college students in Greensboro, North Carolina, started the **sit-in movement** after being refused service at a segregated Woolworth's lunch counter. To call attention to the injustice of segregated facilities, students would deliberately invite arrest by sitting in restricted areas. The **Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC)** was formed a few months later to keep the movement organized. In the 1960s African Americans used the sit-in tactic to integrate restaurants, hotels, buildings, libraries, pools, and transportation throughout the South.

The actions of the Supreme Court, Congress, and President Eisenhower marked a turning point in the Civil Rights Movement - as did the Montgomery bus boycott. Progress was slow, however. In the 1960s, a growing impatience among many African Americans would be manifested in violent confrontations in the streets.

# Popular Culture in the Fifties

Among white suburbanites, the 1950s were marked by conformity to social norms. Consensus about political issues and conformity in social behavior were safe harbors for Americans troubled by the foreign ideology of communism. At the same time, they were the hallmarks of a consumer-driven mass economy.

## **Consumer Culture and Conformity**

Television, advertising, and the middle-class move to the suburbs contributed mightily to the growing homogeneity of American culture.

### **Television.**

Little more than a curiosity in the late 1940s, television suddenly became a center of family life in millions of American homes. By 1961, there were 55 million TV sets, about one for every 3.3 Americans.



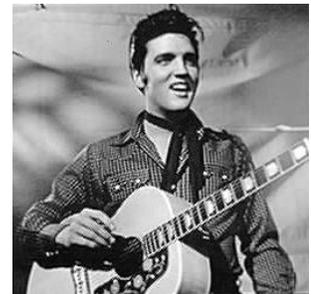
Television programming in the fifties was dominated by three national networks, which presented viewers with a bland menu of situation comedies, westerns, quiz shows, and professional sports. Such critics as FCC chairman Newton Minnow called television a "vast wasteland" and worried about the impact on children of a steady dose of five or more hours of daily viewing. Yet the culture portrayed on television - especially for third and fourth generations of white ethnic Americans - provided a common content for their common language.

### **Advertising.**

In all the media (television, radio, newspapers, and magazines), aggressive advertising by name brands also promoted common material wants, and the introduction of suburban shopping centers and the plastic credit card in the 1950s provided a quick means of satisfying them. The phenomenal proliferation of McDonald's yellow arches on the roadside was one measure of how successful were the new marketing techniques and standardized products as the nation turned from "mom and pop" stores to franchise operations.

### **Paperbacks and records.**

Despite television, Americans read more than ever. Paperback books, an innovation in the 1950s, were selling almost a million copies a day by 1960. Popular music was revolutionized by the mass marketing of inexpensive long-playing (LP) record albums and stacks of 45 rpm records. Teenagers fell in love with rock and roll music, a blend of African American rhythm and blues with white country music, popularized by the gyrating Elvis Presley.



### **Corporate America.**

In the business world, conglomerates with diversified holdings begin to dominate such industries as food processing, hotels, transportation, insurance, and banking. For the first time in history, more American workers held white-collar jobs than blue-collar jobs. Many hoped to work for one of *Fortune* magazine's top 500 companies. Belonging to such organizations came at the expense of one's individuality, learning to conform to the corporate team, and for male managers, dressing in a dark suit, white dress shirt, and conservative tie. The social scientist William Whyte documented this loss of individuality in his book *The Organization Man* (1956).

Big unions became more powerful after the merger of the AF of L and the CIO in 1955. They also became more conservative, as blue-collar workers began to enjoy middle-class incomes.

For most Americans, conformity was a small price to pay for the new affluence of a home in the suburbs, a new automobile every two or three years, good schools for the children, and maybe a vacation at the recently opened Disneyland (1955).

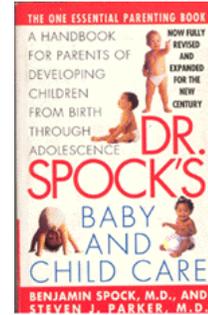
## Religion.

Organized religions expanded dramatically after World War II with the building of thousands of new churches and synagogues. Will Herberg's book *Catholic, Protestant, Jew* (1955) commented on the new religious tolerance of the times and the lack of interest in doctrine, as religious membership became a source of both individual identity and socialization.

## Women's Roles

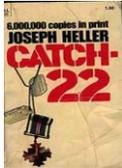
The baby boom and running a home in the suburbs made homemaking a full-time job for millions of women. In the postwar era, the traditional view of a woman's role as caring for home and children was reaffirmed in the mass media and in the best-selling self-help book, *Baby and Child Care* (1946) by Dr. Benjamin Spock.

At the same time, evidence of dissatisfaction was growing, especially among well-educated women of the middle class. More married women, especially as they reached middle age, entered the workforce. Yet male employers in the 1950s saw female workers primarily as wives and mothers, and women's lower wages reflected this attitude.



## Social Critics

Not everybody approved of the social trends of the 1950s. In *The Lonely Crowd* (1958), Harvard sociologist David Riesman criticized the replacement of "inner-directed" individuals in society with "other-directed" conformists. In *The Affluent Society* (1958), the economist John Kenneth Galbraith wrote about the failure of wealthy Americans to address the need for increased social spending for the common good. (Galbraith's ideas were to influence the Kennedy and Johnson administrations in the next decade.) The sociologist C. Wright Mills portrayed dehumanizing corporate worlds in *White Collar* (1951) and threats to freedom in *The Power Elite* (1956).



**Novels.** Some of the most popular novelists of the fifties wrote about the individual's struggle against conformity. J.D. Salinger provided a classic commentary on "phoniness" as viewed by a troubled teenager in *The Catcher in the Rye* (1951). Joseph Heller satirized the stupidity of the military and war in *Catch-22* (1961).

**"Beatniks."** A group of rebellious writers and intellectuals made up the so-called Beat generation of the 1950s. Led by Jack Kerouac (*On The Road*, 1957) and poet Allen Ginsberg ("Howl," 1956), they advocated spontaneity, use of drugs, and rebellion against societal standards. The Beatniks of the fifties would become models for the youth rebellion of the sixties.