A RESILIENT PEOPLE
1945 - 2002

The final section of *The American People* traces the recent history of the United States and highlights themes developed earlier in the text. We will explore the sense of mission the Cold War inspired with the former Soviet Union and the tensions between the United States's efforts to support and spread democratic institutions and its pursuit of economic gain. This part traces the role of the federal government as it assumed greater responsibility for promoting the well-being of its citizens by extending the boundaries of the welfare state in the years after World War II. As American life became increasingly bureaucratized and regulated, a reaction against the role of government set in, building all the way through the Bush administration. The text examines the continuing struggle to realize national ideals of liberty and equality in racial, gender, and social relations as new waves of immigration from Latin America and Asia increased the diversity of America.

Chapters 26 and 27 are paired. Chapter 26, "Postwar America at Home, 1945-1960," describes the expansion of self-interest in an age of extensive material growth, but also shows how economic development promoted new patterns of regulation that transformed American life. Chapter 27, "Chills and Fever During the Cold War, 1945-1960," shows how the United States moved from an uneasy friendship with the Soviet Union to disillusionment and hostility. The Cold War shaped American policy around the world and also had a pronounced domestic impact as the nation faced a second Red Scare in the late 1940s and early 1950s. Cold War assumptions led directly to Vietnam.

Chapter 28, "Reform and Rebellion in the Turbulent Sixties, 1960-1969," traces the development of the welfare state in the 1960s, then describes the debate over the appropriate role of government. It reveals how both political parties accepted the need for greater federal activity in order to ensure the liberty and welfare of all citizens. The Kennedy-Johnson years in the 1960s marked a highwater era of liberalism that was soon lost in the emerging Republican majority.

Chapter 29, "Disorder & Discontent, 1969-1980," examines the reform impulse of the late 1960s and 1970s. With roots in the earliest days of American society, this effort required struggle on the part of blacks, women, Latinos, Native Americans, and others who sought to achieve the long-deferred American dream.


Chapter 31, "The Post-Cold War, 1992-2002," examines the changes during Clinton's two terms, that marked the resurgence of a Democratic White House, which was followed by an election in 2000 that returned the Republicans to power. The chapter—and text—concludes with a look at America's place in a world of collapsed communism and growing ethnic, national, and multicultural rivalries.
Ray Kroc starts the McDonald's drive-in hamburger chain in 1955 and makes a fortune, capitalizing on the conformist suburban American desire for the security and standardization represented by the bland fast-food hamburger. His success symbolizes the fulfillment of one version of the American dream.

Economic Boom
- The Thriving Peacetime Economy
- Postwar Growth Around the World
- The Corporate Impact on American Life
- Changing Work Patterns
- The Union Movement at High Tide
- Agricultural Workers in Trouble

Demographic and Technological Shifts
- Population Growth
- Movement West
- The New Suburbs
- The Environmental Impact
- Technology Supreme
- The Consumer Culture

Consensus and Conformity
- Contours of Religious Life
- Traditional Roles for Men and Women
- Cultural Rebels

Origins of the Welfare State
- Harry S. Truman
- Truman’s Struggles with a Conservative Congress
- The Fair Deal and Its Fate
- The Election of Ike
- Dwight D. Eisenhower
- “Modern Republicanism”
The Other America

Poverty Amid Affluence
Hard Times for African Americans
African-American Gains
Latinos on the Fringe
The Native-American Struggle
Asian-American Activism

Conclusion: Qualms Amid Affluence

(2) SIGNIFICANT THEMES AND HIGHLIGHTS

1. Ray Kroc's success with McDonald's almost perfectly suggests the domestic themes and social emphases of American life in the 1950s—the importance of the automobile, bland fast-food meals, and profitable franchises to standardize life. As symbolized by McDonald's, uniformity, conformity, materialism, and suburban security were the hallmarks of America in the 1950s.

2. This triumph of material self-interest was a white middle-class phenomenon. The experience of blacks, Native Americans, and Hispanics showed the limits of economic growth and of social policy in a conservative age.

3. The chapter also includes the extending of reforms in Truman’s Fair Deal and Eisenhower’s “dynamic conservatism,” which accepted government’s role in social programs.

4. An economic boom in a more highly structured era of social and technological change dominated the tone of the age. This chapter shows how such social phenomena as television, advertising, the birthrate, studies of sexual behavior, and clothing, as well as fast-food chains, can be used to understand the character of an age.

(3) LEARNING GOALS

Familiarity with Basic Knowledge

After reading this chapter, you should be able to:

1. Describe the postwar economic boom and its effects in the corporate world, workers' world, and agricultural world, as well as on the environment.

2. Describe the demographic growth patterns of the United States in the postwar years and state the appeal of suburban living and the automobile for the American people.

3. Give some examples of cultural conformity in the 1950s, particularly in women's lives, and describe the values espoused by cultural rebels.
4. Give some examples of challenges to that culture of conformity.

5. Describe five economic developments of the 1950s and explain both the importance of the auto industry and the pattern of business concentration.

6. Describe the lives of those who did not benefit from this period of affluence.

7. Characterize the religious life of America in the 1950s.

8. Describe the consumer culture of the 1950s, the ways the media promoted it, and some of the results.

**Practice in Historical Thinking Skills**

After reading this chapter, you should be able to:

1. Analyze the social implications of the economic boom and population shifts in postwar American society.

2. Explain how Truman and Eisenhower extended the role of government in social programs.

3. Identify the roots of some enduring trends of contemporary American society.

4. Assess the gains and losses of groups in “the other America” in the postwar years.

**(4) IMPORTANT DATES AND NAMES TO KNOW**

1945   World War II ends

1946   Union strikes in the auto, coal, steel, and electrical industries (4.6 million workers)
ENIAC computer built
Benjamin Spock writes *Baby and Child Care*
Employment Act

1947   Defense budget of $13 billion
Taft-Hartley Act
Jackie Robinson breaks the color line in major league baseball

1948   GM offers UAW cost-of-living adjustment
Transistor developed at Bell Laboratories
Kinsey report on male sexuality
“Dixiecrat” party formed
Truman defeats Dewey

1949   Truman launches Fair Deal
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1950s</td>
<td>Each year a million farmers leave farms</td>
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<tr>
<td>1950</td>
<td>Diner’s card inaugurated</td>
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<td>Associación Nacional Mexico-Americana formed</td>
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<td>1951</td>
<td>J. D. Salinger writes <em>The Catcher in the Rye</em></td>
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<td>1952</td>
<td>Dwight D. Eisenhower elected president</td>
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<td>1953</td>
<td>Defense budget of $47 billion</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Operation Wetback begins</td>
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<td>Submerged Lands Act</td>
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<td>1954</td>
<td>Congress adds “Under God” to flag pledge</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Brown v. Board of Education</td>
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<td>1955</td>
<td>First McDonald's opens in Illinois</td>
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<td>AFL and CIO merge</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Congress adds “In God We Trust” to currency</td>
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<td>Montgomery, Alabama bus boycott begins</td>
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<td>1956</td>
<td>Interstate Highway Act</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Majority of U.S. workers hold white-collar jobs</td>
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<td>Allen Ginsberg writes “Howl”</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Eisenhower reelected</td>
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<td>1957</td>
<td>“Baby boom” peaks with 4.3 million births</td>
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<td>Vance Packard writes <em>The Hidden Persuaders</em></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Jack Kerouac writes <em>On the Road</em></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Little Rock, Arkansas school integration crises</td>
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<td>Civil Rights Act</td>
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<td>1960</td>
<td>Three-fourths of all American families own a TV set</td>
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<td>Civil Rights Act</td>
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<td>1962</td>
<td>Michael Harrington writes <em>The Other America</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>1963</td>
<td>California passes New York as most populated state</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Betty Friedan writes <em>The Feminine Mystique</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>1964</td>
<td>Peter Blake writes <em>God’s Own Junkyard</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>Thirty-eight percent of Americans live in suburbs</td>
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Other Names to Know

William Levitt     Benjamin Spock     James Baldwin
Betty Friedan     Jackson Pollock     Werner von Braun
Michael Harrington   Alfred Kinsey    Martin Luther King, Jr.
Billy Graham     Joe Louis
Elvis Presley     Jack Kerouac

(5) GLOSSARY OF IMPORTANT TERMS

“beat generation”: outsider group of young people who repudiated materialistic, conformist middle-class values in the 1950s, preferring those involving spontaneity, spirituality, intuition, and experimental lifestyles

Dixiecrats: states' rights party that opposed the Democratic party's move towards civil rights for African-Americans.

Fair Deal: Truman's liberal domestic agenda which raised the minimum wage, instituted farming and housing programs, and desegregated the military.

termination policy: a policy to limit Indian self-government by eliminating reservations as legitimate political entities and settling outstanding land claims

braceros: seasonal migrant workers (literally “arms”) who were brought into the United States from Mexico to aid in the harvest during World War II and stayed afterward

trickle-down theory: the theory that the benefits of economic expansion would eventually trickle down to all social classes

oligopoly: the domination of an industry by several large firms

conglomerates: firms that diversify their holdings by buying into a variety of industries

(6) ENRICHMENT IDEAS

1. After working through the way in which clothing reflects the historical values of men and women in the decades from the 1920s to the 1960s, notice the kinds of clothes and adornments people are wearing now. What do contemporary clothing styles say about changing values in men and women? Workers? Youth and older people? Different racial and ethnic groups?

2. In addition to the novels cited in the chapter, you might want to read Sylvia Plath's The Bell Jar. In this novel, the heroine is an intelligent student at Smith College who can find no clear sense of direction. How does the plight of the main character reflect some of the themes of this chapter? J. D. Salinger's Catcher in the Rye is an excellent novel in which to explore a young man's anxieties and search for purpose and direction to his life, as is Ralph Ellison's Invisible Man.
3. An interesting exercise that can lead to insights about the past and about your own family focuses on growing up in the 1950s. You can interview one of your parents or grandparents (even better both separately) about what it was like in the decade of the 1950s. How did they spend their leisure time? What was family life like? What kind of music did they listen to? What do they now see as the most important facet of the decade for them? How well do the themes outlined in this chapter seem to fit their experiences? How was their growing up different from that of their parents? Do you see significant differences between the experiences of your mother and your father? How has your own upbringing been the same as or different from that of your parents?

4. Read some of the popular magazines of the period—*Ladies Home Journal* or *Sports Illustrated*. Study both the articles and the advertisements. What can they tell you about values and norms and about the lifestyle of middle-class Americans?

(7) SAMPLE TEST AND EXAMINATION QUESTIONS

**Multiple choice:** Choose the best answer.

1. All of the following describe the postwar boom EXCEPT
   a. a scarcity of consumer goods
   b. families had more discretionary income to spend
   c. enormous housing and highway construction
   d. increasing federal defense budget

2. Rising population was a result of all of the following EXCEPT
   a. rising birthrates
   b. rising marriage rates
   c. immigration
   d. falling death rates

3. Population shifted after World War II
   a. to the North
   b. to the North and Midwest
   c. to the South
   d. to the West and Southwest

4. By the end of the 1950s, what portion of Americans lived in the suburbs?
   a. one-fifth
   b. one-third
   c. one-half
   d. two-thirds
5. After 1945, which is true?
   a. antitrust activity controlled corporate growth
   b. oligopoly characterized the American economy
   c. conglomerates characterized the economy
   d. (b) and (c)

6. Despite the reaffirmation of traditional gender roles in the 1950s,
   a. many women entered the professions
   b. married women composed over half of all working women
   c. single women made up three-quarters of the female work force
   d. women began to close the income gap between women's and men's wages

7. The central city declined in the 1950s as a result of movement to the suburbs by all
   but the
   a. middle-class
   b. department stores
   c. high-paying jobs
   d. government offices

8. In the 1950s, Americans
   a. returned to churches in large numbers
   b. had a strong working knowledge of the Bible
   c. showed extreme denominational loyalties
   d. separated religious and business values

9. The “beats”
   a. represented American mainstream culture
   b. were a black musical group
   c. were a patriotic group devoted to beating back the Russians
   d. criticized the conformity and stuffiness of the 1950s

10. In the 1950s, the idea of working mothers was supported by
    a. Benjamin Spock
    b. Betty Friedan
    c. Alfred Kinsey
    d. Marjorie Sutton

11. According to government statistics, what percentage of the population lived in
    poverty in 1960?
    a. 10 percent
    b. 15 percent
    c. 20 percent
    d. 25 percent
12. African American women during the post-World War II period
   a. were confined to domestic jobs
   b. stayed home with their children
   c. got white-collar jobs and increased their income
   d. entered the military

13. Operation Wetback
   a. brought braceros into the country to work for American farmers
   b. examined the terrible conditions under which migrant laborers lived and worked
   c. deported illegal immigrants and braceros who had not returned to Mexico
   d. was an effort to man the border with Mexico to prevent all illegal immigration

14. The city of the 1950s did not see the influx of
   a. African-Americans
   b. Latino-Americans
   c. Chicano-Americans
   d. Jewish-Americans

15. The Taft-Hartley Act of 1947
   a. extended the powers given to labor by the Wagner Act
   b. won Truman's support
   c. limited the power of unions
   d. was a banking bill

16. Eisenhower as President
   a. hoped to turn back the clock and revive the Republicanism of the 1920s
   b. as a former general had no defined governmental philosophy
   c. espoused dynamic conservatism
   d. wanted to increase governmental spending if that would ensure Republican dominance

17. Eisenhower sent federal troops to Little Rock because
   a. he energetically pursued a civil rights policy
   b. Governor Orval Faubus was a political threat
   c. he could not tolerate resistance to the law
   d. he was eager to remind black voters of the historical connections between blacks and the Republican party

18. Jackie Robinson was most noted for
   a. his efforts to gain support for Civil rights legislation in Congress
   b. breaking the color barrier in major league baseball
   c. the first black student at the University of Alabama
   d. the first black player in pro football
19. His nonviolent protest was instrumental in winning support for civil rights legislation in the 1950s and early 1960s
   a. Martin L. King, Jr.
   b. Adam Clayton Powell
   c. Bill Cosby
   d. Jessie Jackson

20. The Supreme Court decision in Brown vs. Board of Education was to
   a. protect the lives of migrant workers
   b. create new controls for Indians living on reservations
   c. set new limits on immigration law
   d. strike down laws that permitted segregated schools

Essays

1. In the 1950s, the American dream came true for many Americans and revealed some of the limits of that dream. Discuss with evidence.

2. The rise of suburbia not only explains middle-class gender roles and patterns of consumption but also an American indifference to social problems. Discuss with relevant supporting evidence.

3. Discuss the lives and frustrations of women during this decade. What basis do you see for the women's movement?

4. If you have read The Catcher in the Rye, look at the character of Holden Caulfield. What does he rebel against? How successful is his rebellion? Can he stand for a certain segment of 1950s culture?