

## Life in the 1950s

1. Who won the Election of 1952, what party was he from, and who did he beat? (800)
2. What was the new president's nickname? (800)
3. What did Eisenhower believe about government? (800)
4. What is a surplus? (801)
5. What was the Federal Highway Act of 1956, and what did it end up creating? (801)
6. How did the interstate highway system help the economy in the US? (801)
7. Define arms race. (801)
8. What 2 events increased tensions between the US and Soviet Union? Describe them. (802)

9. Who replaced Joseph Stalin? (802)
10. What was Sputnik, and what impact did it have? (802)
11. What factors led to a higher standard of living in the 1950s? (803)
12. What new products were available? (803)
13. What impact did TVs have on American culture? (803-804)
14. Describe medical advances of the 1950s. (804)
15. How did the nation deal with a housing shortage? (804)
16. Who faced economic struggles in the 1950s? (805)
17. Why did inner cities become “islands of poverty?” (806)
18. How did people criticize the values of the 1950s? (807)
19. What groups did not benefit from the prosperity of the 1950s?(806-807)

## networks

There's More Online!

- ✓ **BIOGRAPHY**  
Hank Williams
- ✓ **GRAPH** Per Capita  
Income in Appalachia
- ✓ **GRAPHIC ORGANIZER**  
Changes to American Society
- ✓ **PRIMARY SOURCE** "I Like Ike"  
Television Ad
- ✓ **SLIDE SHOW** Hank Williams
- ✓ **TIME LINE** Race to the Moon



## Lesson 4

# Life in the 1950s

**ESSENTIAL QUESTION** *How do new ideas change the way people live?*

## IT MATTERS BECAUSE

*While Cold War tensions lingered in the background, the United States built a new kind of society after the war.*

## Eisenhower in the White House

**GUIDING QUESTION** *What policies did Eisenhower promote for prosperity at home and to compete against the Soviets?*

American voters elected Dwight D. Eisenhower to the presidency in November 1952. Eisenhower defeated his Democratic opponent, Illinois governor Adlai E. Stevenson. The Republicans also won control of Congress.

Eisenhower was born in Texas and raised in rural Kansas. He rose steadily through the U.S. Army to become supreme commander of the Allied forces in Europe during World War II. People called him "Ike," and voters trusted him. He won wide support with his pledge to bring the Korean War to an "early and honorable end."

### Eisenhower Domestic Policy

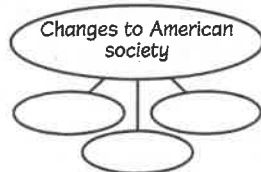
Eisenhower followed a middle-of-the-road domestic policy. He did not seek far-reaching new government programs. At the same time, he resisted the pressure to end popular older ones. Sometimes he even expanded them.

President Eisenhower wanted government to be "smaller rather than bigger." He backed free enterprise. That is, he favored letting businesses and people make economic decisions

## ReadingHELPDESK

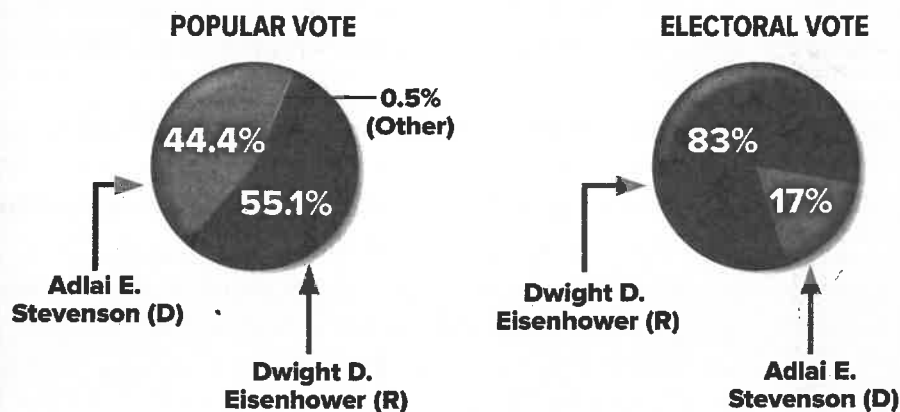
### Taking Notes: *Listing*

As you read, use a diagram like this one to list changes to American society in the 1950s.



### Content Vocabulary

- surplus
- arms race
- summit
- standard of living
- affluence
- materialism



Eisenhower won a clear victory over his opponent, Adlai Stevenson. Republican candidates for Congress also had success.

- 1 CALCULATING** Was Eisenhower's margin of victory over Stevenson larger in the popular vote or in the electoral vote?
- 2 CRITICAL THINKING**  
*Drawing Conclusions* What does the size of the electoral vote victory suggest about Eisenhower's popularity?

with as little government interference as possible. He cut federal spending. When Eisenhower completed his second term, the federal budget had a surplus of \$300 million. A budget **surplus** is an amount left over after meeting all expenses.

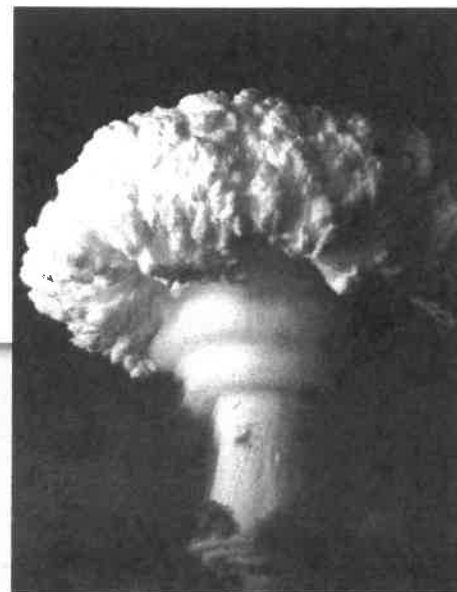
One big government program from the Eisenhower years was the Federal Highway Act of 1956. This act funded the building of more than 40,000 miles (64,374 km) of highways. The new roads tied the nation together. They linked people to areas that had been remote and hard to reach. They were called interstate highways. The program helped the **economy** grow, especially the automobile and oil industries. It also improved the military's ability to move its forces in case of an attack.

## Rivalry With the Soviet Union

During the 1950s, the United States and the Soviet Union engaged in an **arms race**, a competition for military supremacy. Both sides built more and more **nuclear** weapons, which used energy stored in atoms. These enormously powerful weapons gave each side the power to destroy the other side many times over. With the threat so great, the United States and the Soviet Union had to act carefully.

By the mid-1950s, the superpowers wanted to ease Cold War tensions. In July 1955, Eisenhower, NATO leaders, and Soviets held a meeting—a **summit**—in Geneva, Switzerland. Yet in spite of the good feeling, tensions remained. In 1956 the superpowers faced two new crises that threatened the fragile peace.

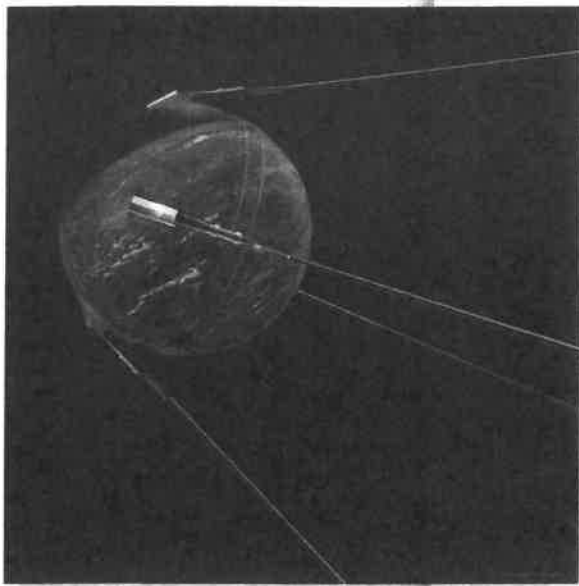
The growing threat of nuclear weapons, such as the one being tested in this photograph, added a layer of tension to the Cold War.



**surplus** an amount left over  
**arms race** competition between countries for stronger military power  
**summit** meeting of heads of government

### Academic Vocabulary

**economy** the overall system by which goods are made, distributed, and used  
**nuclear** relating to the energy contained in the nucleus of an atom



The Soviet Union took an early lead in the space race when it successfully launched *Sputnik* in October 1957. This was the first artificial satellite, or object that circles the Earth.

#### ► CRITICAL THINKING

**Analyzing** How do you think the rivalry between the Soviet Union and the United States influenced scientific developments in the “space race”? How would scientific and engineering advances have progressed without this competition?

First, trouble arose when Egypt’s president Gamal Abdel Nasser seized the Suez Canal from its European owners. Nasser then blockaded Israeli shipping. In October, Britain, France, and Israel invaded Egypt. Britain and France hoped to get rid of Nasser. Israel wanted to end Egypt’s military threat. The Soviet Union then threatened to crush the invaders, raising American concerns. The crisis ended when the invading forces pulled out of Egypt.

Hungary was the scene of the second 1956 crisis. This Eastern European country lived under Soviet domination. A new government there called for Soviet troops to leave the country.

In November 1956, Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev (kroosh·CHAWF) ordered Soviet forces to stop the revolt. President Eisenhower criticized the crackdown but took no further action.

The United States and Soviet Union competed for influence around the globe—and beyond. Soon the superpowers were engaged in a “space race.” In October 1957, the Soviets sent the world’s first artificial satellite into outer space. The device was called *Sputnik*. The United States set up a space program headed by the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA).

#### ✓ PROGRESS CHECK

**Describing** How did the interstate highway system help the economy in the United States?

## Prosperity and Change

**GUIDING QUESTION** *How did a booming economy change the social and cultural life in America in the 1950s?*

The U.S. economy grew rapidly during the 1950s. Americans were earning higher wages than ever before. They bought more consumer goods. As a result, factory production soared. A “baby boom,” or increased birth rate, promised even more economic growth in the future.

Women in large numbers left the workforce to stay home and raise children. The demand for baby products and services grew. School enrollment soared as the “baby boomers” reached school age. This put a strain on the educational system.

### ReadingHELPDESK

**standard of living** a measure of the necessities and comforts enjoyed by an individual or group

**affluence** having wealth

## COMPARING THE COST OF LIVING

## CHART SKILL

1950	Comparing by Cost	2010
\$0.88	Milk, per gallon	\$3.15
\$0.67	Eggs, per dozen	\$1.41
\$0.15	Loaf of bread	\$1.61
\$0.13	Bananas, per pound	\$0.40
\$0.44	Chicken, per pound	\$3.44
\$0.03	Cost of first-class postage stamp	\$0.44
\$0.49	Movie ticket	\$7.95
\$250	Television set	\$375
\$1,510	Average cost of a new car	\$28,400
\$3,300	Median income for a family of four	\$74,000

Source: From various sources

Median means “in the middle.” A median family income is one in which there is the same number of people earning more as there is people earning less.

- 1 CALCULATING** What share of a median family income did a new car represent in 1950? What did it represent in 2010?
- 2 CRITICAL THINKING**  
*Drawing Conclusions* Would you rather be a family with a median income in 2010 or in 1950? Why?

## The Consumer Society

Overall, Americans of the 1950s enjoyed a higher **standard of living**, or economic comfort, than in previous decades. Spurred by several factors, the nation went on a buying spree. One of these factors was **affluence** (A·floo·uhns), or greater wealth. Another was the growing number and types of products available. Increased advertising also played a role. Buying goods became easier, too. Americans used credit cards, charge accounts, and easy payment plans to purchase goods. With these tools, a person could buy a product today and pay for it later, a little bit at a time.

Consumers were eager to buy the latest products—dishwashers, washing machines, television sets, stereos, and clothes made from new fabrics. The market for cars was growing. Automakers tried to outdo one another by making bigger, faster, and flashier cars. New models added stylish features, such as chrome-plated bumpers and soaring tail fins.

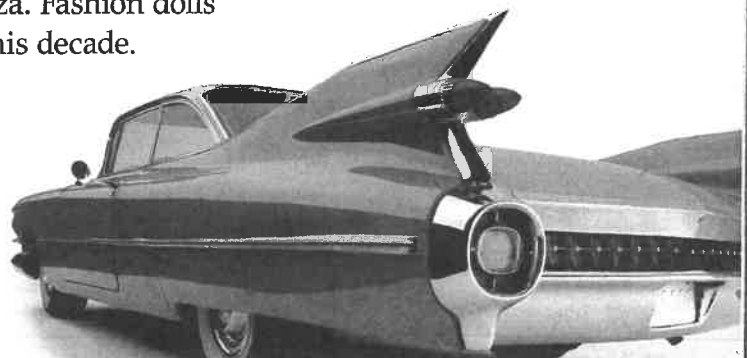
Television ads, along with radio and magazines, helped create fads. These quickly swept the nation. In the late 1950s, Americans bought millions of hula hoops—large plastic rings they twirled around their waists. Other popular fads included crew cuts for boys, poodle skirts for girls, and a new snack—pizza. Fashion dolls such as Barbie™ were another fad introduced in this decade.

## TV and American Culture

More than 900,000 U.S. households had television sets by 1949. The sets had small screens that showed grainy black-and-white pictures. Still, people loved them.

This car was an example of the kind popular in the late 1950s.

► **CRITICAL THINKING**  
*Analyzing Visuals* How do you think this car reflects the ongoing space race between the United States and Soviet Union?





Beginning in the 1950s, television became the primary source of entertainment in many households.

During the 1950s, factories made an average of 6.5 million sets each year. By the end of the decade, most American families had one.

Television changed American life. It became the main form of entertainment. It was also an important source of news and information. Millions of Americans gathered to watch weekly episodes of programs such as *I Love Lucy* and *Father Knows Best*. The images shown in many programs—of happy families in neat homes—helped

shape people's goals for their own lives.

Teenagers took up rock 'n' roll in the 1950s. This new form of music grew from the rhythm-and-blues music African American musicians had been making for years. Rock also borrowed from country music. In rock 'n' roll, the tempo was fast. It used electrically amplified guitars and other instruments. One of the first rock hits was Bill Haley and the Comets' *Rock Around the Clock*. It topped the charts in 1955. Borrowing styles from African American performers such as Chuck Berry and Little Richard, Elvis Presley burst on the scene in 1956. Presley quickly became an idol to millions of young Americans. Many young men copied his haircut and swaggering style.

Sharing music helped teens forge a common identity. The differing attitudes of the older and younger generation toward music and other forms of popular culture would widen in the years ahead.

Vaccines prevented numerous childhood diseases and improved the lives of many.



## ReadingHELPDESK

### Reading Strategy: Summarizing

When you summarize a reading, you find the main idea of the passage and restate it in your own words. Read the paragraph headed "Medical Advances" on the next page. Summarize the reading in one or two sentences.

## Medical Advances

By the 1950s, medical science had made great strides in fighting disease. Antibiotics and vaccines helped control diseases such as diphtheria, influenza, and typhoid fever. A vaccine for polio continued to elude the medical profession. Polio left many of its victims paralyzed for life. It became the era's most dreaded disease.

Dr. Jonas Salk developed the first safe and effective vaccine against polio. School children began receiving the vaccine in large numbers beginning in 1955. The vaccine almost completely eliminated polio. The nation hailed Salk as a hero.

## Expanding Suburbs

After World War II, the nation faced a severe housing shortage. During the war, building of new homes had slowed to a standstill. Then hundreds of thousands of GIs came home. Many of them got married and began looking for homes.

Affordable open land for building was scarce in the cities. The solution was to create new planned communities in the suburbs—the land on the outskirts of the cities. Suburbs had existed since the late 1800s, but they grew rapidly after World War II.

One early planned community was started in 1946 about 30 miles (48 km) from New York City. Called Levittown, it had row upon row of single-family homes. It also had parks, playgrounds, and shopping centers. Each home was exactly the same and sold for the same price: \$7,990.

Suburban housing appealed to many Americans. The homes were affordable. They offered privacy and escape from urban problems. They had space for cars. The suburbs, however, were not an option for everyone. Builders of the nation's postwar suburbs often refused to sell homes to minorities.

## New Technologies

Technological advances helped the economy grow. Business, industry, and agriculture adopted new technology and new production methods. The result was greater productivity. This means workers were able to produce more goods with the same amount of labor.

The computer represented one of the 1950s important technological advances. Unlike today's small personal computers, early computers were huge, weighing tons and filling whole rooms. Used only by the military and the government at first, computers soon appeared in large corporations.

### PROGRESS CHECK

**Explaining** The United States in the 1950s was called a consumer society. What does this mean?

## BIOGRAPHY



### Hank Williams (1923–1953)

Hank Williams was a musical superstar of the era. Born in the small town of Mount Olive, Alabama, Williams made many popular country music and gospel recordings. His death at the age of 29 added to his legend. Artists from the fields of popular music and jazz as well as country music have recorded his songs.

### ► CRITICAL THINKING

**Drawing Conclusions** Why do you think Williams's early death added to his legend?



## Problems in a Time of Plenty

**GUIDING QUESTION** *Why did many Americans not share in the prosperity of the 1950s?*

Not everyone prospered in the 1950s. In fact, more than one in five Americans lived in poverty. Millions more struggled to survive on incomes just above the poverty level. Such poverty marred the landscape of the so-called affluent society.

Many farmers did not share in the success of the 1950s. Businesses created large farms. These used new technology to

grow huge amounts of food. Small farms could not compete. Many small-farm families sold their land and migrated to urban areas. Small farmers who continued to farm struggled to make a living.

Appalachia—a rural region stretching along the Appalachian Mountains—went through a decline in the coal industry. This plunged thousands of people into poverty. During the 1950s, about 1.5 million people left Appalachia to seek a better life in the nation's cities.

### The Urban Poor

A growing number of Americans moved to the suburbs in the 1950s. They left the poor behind. Some inner cities became islands of poverty.

Still, people came to cities looking for work. African Americans continued their migration from rural areas of the South. More than 3 million of them moved to cities in the North and the Midwest between 1940 and 1960. For many, however, life proved to be little better in Northern cities. Many poor Latinos—Puerto Ricans in the East and Mexicans in the Southwest and West—also moved to U.S. cities.

The shift of poor African Americans and Latinos to Northern cities helped push many whites to the suburbs. This “white flight” turned some areas of cities into ghettos. These are neighborhoods filled with poor people from a minority group.

By 1950, when this photo was taken, the neighborhood of Spanish Harlem in New York City was home to a large Latino community. Many Spanish Harlem residents trace their roots to Puerto Rico.



### ReadingHELPDESK

**materialism** focus on collecting money and possessions

There were few good jobs for the urban poor. Many factories and businesses also moved to suburban areas. In addition, many factories began using machines to do numerous factory jobs. This meant less work in the industries that remained. It became more and more difficult for the urban poor to rise from poverty and improve their lives.

The urban poor struggled not only with poverty. They also faced discrimination in employment, housing, and education. Crime and violence often grew out of inner-city poverty, especially among young people who saw no hope for escape from life in the ghetto.

### Social Critics of the 1950s

Americans living in poverty had good reason to wonder about the nation in the 1950s. They were not the only ones who were concerned. Some people took a critical look at the values of the era. In the workplace and in suburban life, they saw millions of people living, acting, and even thinking in the same way. This sameness caused some to regret a loss of independent thinking. Others criticized American **materialism** (muh·TIHR·ee·uh·lih·zuhm)—a focus on collecting money and possessions. Materialism, critics said, caused people to ignore many more important things, including the plight of the nation's poor. A group of writers known as the "Beats" had a sharper view of the situation. Renowned Beat writer Jack Kerouac (KEHR·oo·wahk) expressed it as "weariness with all forms of the modern industrial state."

The changes in U.S. society were dramatic and ongoing. Soon groups such as women and African Americans would begin asking difficult questions about what was taking place in the United States.

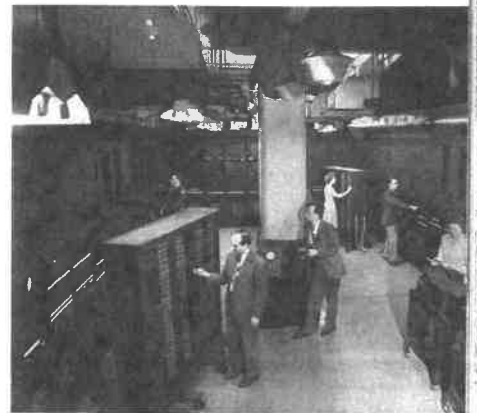
#### PROGRESS CHECK

**Identifying** What groups did not benefit from the prosperity of the 1950s?

## Connections to TODAY

### Dawn of the Computer Age

The ENIAC machine shown here could perform about 5,000 calculations per second. It took up an entire room, and it took days for a team to program the machine to do a single job. Today's computers can fit in a backpack and do many millions of calculations per second.



This 1946 photograph shows the size and scale of the earliest computers.

## LESSON 4 REVIEW

### Review Vocabulary

1. Use the terms *arms race* and *summit* in a sentence about the 1950s.
2. Write a sentence explaining what the terms *affluence* and *materialism* have in common.

### Answer the Guiding Questions

3. **Discussing** How did the U.S. space program extend American competition with the Soviet Union?
4. **Listing** What are four new products or cultural changes that Americans were introduced to in the 1950s?
5. **Explaining** How did life in the inner city differ from life in the suburbs in the 1950s?
6. **INFORMATIVE/EXPLANATORY** Write a short essay that answers these questions: How did the interstate highway system change U.S. society? How did it change urban areas and the suburbs?