

An Era of Social Change

*Postwar United States
(1945–1975)*



The Golden Age

Social change

The Great Society

Thematic Icons



Economics and business



Geography and environment



Historical concepts and questions



Politics, government and citizenship



Society and culture



War, diplomacy and foreign policy

Icons: For more detailed instructions, see the *User Guide*



Flash activity (these activities are not editable)



Teacher notes included in the Notes page



By the end of this section, you will learn about the Golden Age of economic prosperity and be able to answer these key questions:

- What was the Golden Age?
- How did economic prosperity affect consumers and businesses?
- What impacts did the automobile have?
- Who was not affected by the prosperity?



Looking back timeline



In order to contextualize America in the 1950s and 1960s, use this timeline to recap previous key historical events. Either press on a date or drag the pointer along the timeline to find out information about what happened in each year.

Press **start** to begin.

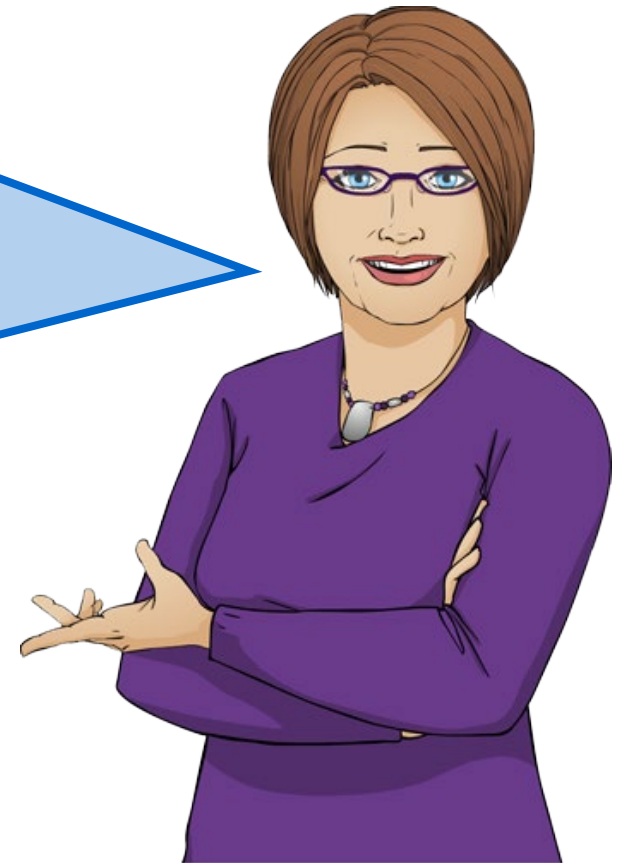
start





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

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



Why do you think this period is called a Golden Age?



In 1948, **Harry S. Truman** won reelection, despite opinion polls expecting him to lose. Truman proposed a **Fair Deal** economic program to provide health insurance and crop subsidies for farmers. He increased both the hourly minimum wage and Social Security coverage.

Dwight D. Eisenhower was elected in 1952 and again in 1956. He practiced a “**New Republicanism**” that took a middle-of-the-road course.



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



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





The American consumer

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



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

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



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

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

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

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The rise of advertising



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



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

Robert Sarnoff, President NBC





The American obsession with the automobile began in the 1950s. Car production increased massively and the growth of highways connected the country, giving people more freedom. Press the images to find out more about the growth of automobile culture.

Press **start** to begin.

start



What impacts did automobiles have on the economy?



Following World War II, the U.S. economy boomed and grew to a huge extent over a period of two decades. Press the buttons to find out about two of the key components of this growth, **corporations** and **franchises**.

Press **start** to begin.

start





The dark side of the prosperity



Despite the prosperity of the Golden Age, it did not affect everyone equally. Some groups missed out or were restricted in their prosperity, with many people remaining below the poverty level.

Drag each statement to the correct place, depending on whether it was an issue concerned with home ownership, urban problems or the standard of living.

Press **start** to begin.

start



What were the effects of white flight to the suburbs?