

Read the following article.

After reading each section, write a one sentence summary under its heading on the last page.



### Changes in Farming and Industry

Between 1940 and 1960 output increased while number of farm workers decreased by 1/3. Increases were due to crop specialization, intensive use of fertilizers, and mechanization. Mechanical pickers substituted for human power – a single mechanical cotton picker replaced fifty 50 people and cut the costs of harvesting a bale of cotton from \$40 to \$5.

Decline in family farms and growth of commercial farming were both causes and consequences of mechanization. Technology also increased industrial production and decreased the number of labor hours needed to manufacture large products – i.e. automobiles, planes. Technology also changed industries – promoted the growth of television, plastics, and other new industries.

Labor Unions enjoyed great success as well – merger of AFL and Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) which improved the bargaining position. Toward the end of the decade the number of workers represented by unions declined – technological advances decreased the number of jobs in heavy industry.

The economy as a whole was shifting – moving to a service economy. Instead of making products more and more workers distributed goods, performed services, provided education, or kept records. These jobs (clerical and service occupations)

intensified the demand for female workers – by the end of the 1950s 35% of all women over 16 worked outside the home – which was twice as many as in 1940, but earned 40% less than men.



## SUBURBS

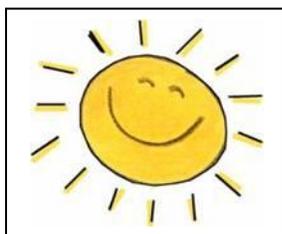
Expanded drastically in the 1950s, one in four lived there by the end of the decade and out of the 13 million new homes built in the 1950s 11 million were located in suburbs.

William Levitt created the factory assembly line process for homes – this would drive down the cost of homes and allowed construction workers to move

from house to house performing the same operation on each home. Planned neighborhoods went up throughout the nation – most famous Levittown, New York – the cost of home was under \$8,000.

The increase of home ownership was a result of government subsidized home ownership with low interest mortgages through FHA and Veterans Administration as well as allowing interest on mortgages tax deductible. With the passing of the Highway Act 1956 indirectly subsidized suburban development.

As white left the cities for the suburbs – blacks flocked to the cities looking for economic opportunity. Cities were in decline as commerce and industry moved to the south and west. New businesses began to ring cities and shoppers gradually chose suburban malls over downtown shopping. Many of the new jobs were out of reach to the new black residents in the cities.



## Rise of the Sun Belt

The rise of the defense industry in the west and southwest spurred economic growth as well as fueled population increases. California's population doubled after WWII and 1 in 3 workers were employed in the defense industry – making bombers and missiles or other weapons.

The technology of the air conditioner made it possible for industrial development in the south, southwest, and west. Air conditioning meant companies in the south and west did not have to shut down and send workers home when heat and humidity became unbearable, and air quality inside businesses improved as well as homes! On the down

side – air conditioning homes and businesses meant an increase in energy consumption and contributed to pollution.

## The Culture of Abundance

### Consumer Culture

In the 1950s consumption became the reigning value and essential to individual's identity and status and satisfaction was achieved through the purchase and use of new products.

4 out of 5 families owned television sets, nearly all had refrigerators, and most owned at the least one car. The number of shopping centers quadrupled between 1957 and 1963.

What spurred this abundance? A population surge which expanded demand for products and boosted industries ranging from housing to baby goods. Consumer borrowing also fueled economic boom, as consumers increasingly made more purchases on installment plans. Diner's Club issued the first credit card in 1951 – as a result private debt more than doubled during the decade.



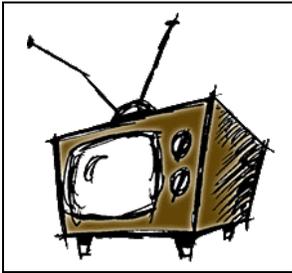
### Resurgence of the Cult of Domesticity and Religion

In the 50s popular culture and public figures defined the ideal family as a male breadwinner, a full time homemaker, and three or four children. The emphasis on the home and family reflected to some extent the anxieties of the cold war.

Feminist Betty Friedan gave a name to the idealization of women's domestic roles in her book *Feminine Mystique*. Friedan criticized advertisers, social scientists, educators, women's magazines, and public officials for pressuring women to seek fulfillment in serving others.

Along with a renewed emphasis on family life, the 1950s witnessed a surge of interest in religion. By 1960, 63% of all Americans belonged to a church or synagogue and 95% of Americans believed in God. Evangelism took on a new life with the help of TV and Billy Graham crusades. Congress linked religion more closely to the state by adding "under God" to the Pledge of Allegiance in 1954 and requiring in 1955 that "In God We Trust" be printed on all currency.

Religion calmed anxieties in the nuclear age, while ministers like Graham made the cold war a holy war, labeling communism a great sinister anti-Christian movement. Critics stated the religious resurgence was superficial – that it was basically a desire for conformity and a need for social outlet.



## Television      **Impact on Culture and Politics**

In the 1950s fewer than 10% of homes had a television, but by 1960 87% of all households owned a TV. On average, Americans spent more than five hours a day in front of the TV.

Programs projected the ideal family and the feminine mystique into millions of homes. On TV, married women did not have jobs and they deferred to their husbands, though they often got the upper hand through subtle manipulation.

TV affected politics –McCarthy’s reckless attacks were televised nationwide and contributed to his downfall. Eisenhower’s presidential campaign used TV ads for the first time, and by 1960, president –elect JFK remarked “We would not have had a prayer without that gadget”

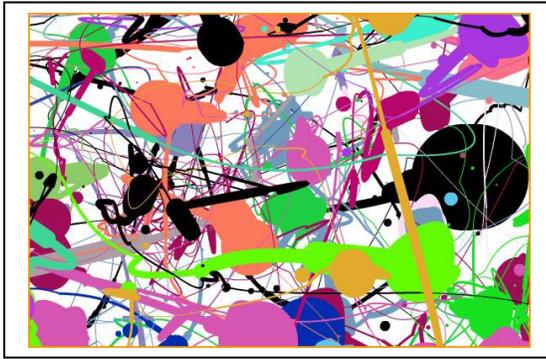
Television transformed politics in other ways. Money played a much larger role in elections because candidates need to pay for expensive TV spots. The ability to appeal directly to voters in their living rooms put a premium on personal attractiveness and encouraged candidates to build their own campaign organizations, relying less on political parties.

TV also had an impact on the consumer culture – commercials for the products of the affluent society. Advertisers spent \$10 billion to push their goods. Television dominated leisure time, influenced consumption patterns, and shaped perceptions of the nation’s leadership.



## Beatniks – Revolt against Conformity

A small group of literary figures based in New York City’s Greenwich Village and San Francisco. Rejecting mainstream culture – patriotism, consumerism, conventional family life, and discipline, Beatniks celebrated spontaneity and personal freedom – including drugs and sex. Jack Kerouac gave the Beat generation its name in his *On the Road* book published in 1957. Their rebellion would provide the model for a larger movement in the 1960s.



Bold new styles in art emerged in New York City known as action painting or abstract expressionism. This new art form rejected the idea that painting should represent recognizable forms. Jackson Pollock was the leading artist in this new movement. He poured, dripped, and threw paint on canvases. New York replaced Paris as the center of the Western art world.

African Americans posed the most remarkable challenge to the status quo in the 1950s as they sought to overcome the political and social barriers that were imposed after reconstruction.



In the 1950s a grassroots movement attracted national attention and support of white liberals. The Supreme Court delivered significant institutional reforms, but blacks themselves directed the most important changes. Ordinary African Americans in substantial numbers sought liberation, building a movement that would transform race relations in the US.

### Conclusion

The tremendous economic growth in the 1950s raised the standard of living for most Americans, resulted in part from the Cold War. One in ten Americans had a job that depended directly on defense spending.



Suburban housing developments sprang up everywhere, interstate highways began to divide cities and connect the country, farms declined in number but grew in size and population and industry moved south and west. Values of ordinary people changed as the economy became more service oriented and the opportunity to buy a wide variety of new products intensified the growth of consumer culture.

The general prosperity and seeming conformity, however, masked a number of developments and problems that Americans would face head on in later years. Although Eisenhower presided over eight years of peace and prosperity, his foreign policy inspired anti-Americanism, established dangerous precedents for the expansion of executive power, and forged commitments that future generations would deem unwise. The 1950s will give way to the turbulence and conflict of the 1960s.

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