

# Postwar America

## BEFORE YOU READ

In the last section, you read about the developments in the Cold War at home and abroad.

In this section, you will read about the economic boom in the United States after World War II.

## AS YOU READ

Take notes on the chart below. List the postwar changes in various segments of American society.

**TERMS AND NAMES**

**GI Bill of Rights** Law that provided financial and educational benefits for World War II veterans

**suburb** Residential town or community near a city

**Harry S. Truman** President after World War II

**Dixiecrat** Southern Democrat who left the party

**Fair Deal** President Truman's economic and social program

SEGMENT OF AMERICAN SOCIETY	POSTWAR CHANGES
<i>veterans</i>	
<i>economy</i>	
<i>labor</i>	
<i>civil rights</i>	

## Readjustment and Recovery

(pages 634–636)

### ***How** did the end of World War II affect America?*

After World War II, millions of returning veterans used the **GI Bill of Rights** to get an education and to buy homes. At first, there was a terrible housing shortage. Then developers such as William Levitt built thousands of inexpensive homes in the **sub-urbs**, small residential communities near the cities. Many veterans and their families moved in.

The United States changed from a wartime to a peacetime economy. After the war, many defense workers were laid off. Returning veterans added to unemployment. When wartime price controls ended, prices shot up. Congress eventually put back economic controls on wages, prices, and rents.

The economy began to improve on its own. There was a huge pent-up demand for consumer goods. People had been too poor to buy these goods during the Depression. Many items had not been available during the war. Now

Americans bought cars and appliances and houses. The Cold War increased defense spending and employment.

1. What were three effects of the end of World War II on American society?

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## Meeting Economic Challenges; Social Unrest Persists (pages 636–639)

### *What were postwar problems?*

President **Harry S. Truman** faced a number of problems immediately after the war. One was labor unrest. In 1946, a steel-workers' strike was followed by a coal miners' strike. In addition, the railroad unions threatened to stop all rail traffic in the nation.

Truman was pro-labor. But he would not let strikes cripple the nation. He threatened to draft striking workers into the army and then order them back to work. The unions gave in.

During this time, before the economy turned around, many Americans were disgusted with shortages, rising *inflation*, and strikes. Voters became more conservative. In the 1946 election, conservative Republicans gained control of Congress.

After the war, there was racial violence in the South. African-American veterans demanded their rights as citizens. Truman met with African-American leaders. They asked for a federal *anti-lynching law*, an end to the *poll tax*, and a commission to prevent discrimination in hiring.

Truman put his career on the line for civil rights. But Congress would not pass any of his civil rights measures. Finally, Truman acted on his own. In 1948, he issued an executive order to desegregate the armed forces. He also ordered an end to discrimination in hiring government employees.

Meanwhile, the Supreme Court said that African Americans could not be kept from living in certain neighborhoods. These acts marked the beginning of a federal commitment to deal with racial issues.

Truman was nominated for president in 1948. He insisted on a strong civil rights *plank* in the Democratic Party platform. This split the party. Many Southern Democrats left the Democratic Party. These **Dixiecrats** were against civil rights. They wanted to preserve the "Southern way of life."

They formed the States' Rights Party. Some liberals left the Democratic Party to form the Progressive Party.

It didn't look like Truman could win. But he took his ideas to the people. He criticized the "do-nothing Congress." Truman won a narrow victory. Democrats took control of Congress.

Truman tried to pass economic and social reforms. He called his program the **Fair Deal**. Health insurance and a *crop-subsidy program* for farmers were both defeated by Congress. But an increase in the minimum wage, extension of Social Security, and financial aid for cities passed.

2. What were some issues Truman fought for?

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## Republicans Take the Middle Road (pages 639–640)

### *Why did Eisenhower win?*

Truman did not run for reelection in 1952. The big issues of that campaign were (1) the stalemate in the Korean War, (2) anti-Communist hysteria and McCarthyism, (3) the growing power of the federal government, (4) strikes, and (5) inflation. Voters wanted a change. The Republicans nominated war hero General Dwight D. Eisenhower. He easily beat Democrat Adlai Stevenson.

Eisenhower was a low-key president with middle-of-the-road policies. He did have to deal with one controversial issue—civil rights. In 1954, the Supreme Court ruled in *Brown v. Board of Education* that public schools could not be segregated. Eisenhower believed that the federal government should not be involved in desegregation. But he upheld the law. When the governor of Arkansas tried to keep African-American students out of a white high school, Eisenhower sent federal troops to integrate the school.

The America of the mid-1950s was a place of "peace, progress, and prosperity." Eisenhower won a landslide reelection in 1956.

3. What two important civil rights actions occurred during Eisenhower's presidency?