

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE: IN A LAND OF PLENTY: CONTENTMENT AND DISCORD, 1945–1960

READING AND STUDY GUIDE

- I. Securing the New Deal Legacy
 - A. The Labor Movement Curtailed
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- III. Popular Culture in the Fifties
 - A. The Television Age Arrives
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- IV. Freedom Now: The Civil Rights Movement
 - A. Separate and *Unequal*: Challenging Segregated Schools
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 - C. Montgomery Bus Boycott, 1955
 - D. The Little Rock Nine, 1957
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On September 3, 1955, a young black teenager, Elizabeth Eckford, walked past an angry mob after state troopers refused to let her enter the all-white Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas.

This image challenges the traditional image of the fifties as a tranquil period of material contentment and ideological consensus. Americans did enjoy unprecedented prosperity during the decade. They also, however, experienced a fair amount of domestic discord along racial, generational, and political lines. New energy surged into the Civil Rights Movement in the 1950s. Acts of extraordinary bravery by Elizabeth Eckford and others like her took on new significance in an era of favorable Supreme Court rulings that pushed the federal government to take an active role in protecting the civil rights of African Americans. Leadership from black churches and black students infused the movement with an ethos of nonviolent direct action that forced America to see the injustice of Jim Crow, the southern legal structure that relegated African Americans to second-class citizenship.

A different type of discord permeated American home-life throughout the 1950s. In many respects families were the focus of American society from 1945 to 1960. Lured to fast-growing suburbs by low cost loans and affordable housing prices, an exploding middle class filled their homes with an array of possessions previously out of reach for most Americans. The baby boom generation, those 76.4 million Americans born between 1946 and 1964, now coming into adolescence, embraced new standards in dress, music, and movies that distinguished the “teen”

generation from their parents. Some teenagers rebelled against authority in more overtly political ways. High school and college students, for instance, were the ground troops in many civil rights demonstrations. Others joined the counterculture beat movement to express their rebellion against social norms through poetry, novels, and art.

From 1945 to 1960, Americans debated the divergent political paths that the country could take domestically during the Cold War era. They pondered the effects of continuing New Deal programs, unions, suburbs, civil rights, and consumption on American society. Altogether the changing American way of life created a sense of both contentment and crisis for the nation.

Learning Objectives

After a careful examination of Chapter 25, students should be able to do the following:

1. Identify the candidates and outcome of the presidential election of 1952.
2. Explain the ability of Eisenhower Republicans to stake a claim to centrism in American politics.
3. Discuss the growth of the American economy during the 1950s and explain its impact on America's national image and the way in which the nation identified and characterized itself.
4. Comment on the impact of economic growth on African Americans and Native Americans.
5. Define the term *urban renewal* and describe how it transformed American cities.
6. Outline the provisions of the Federal Highway Act of 1956 and explain the impact of massive road construction on American society and culture.
7. Define the term *teenager* and explain the importance of the emerging youth culture in America.
8. Discuss the connection between government and God during the 1950s and how this impacted the popularity of religion.
9. Identify the major writers who challenged American affluence by revealing the limitations and dangers of national economic abundance.
10. Explain Eisenhower's "doctrine of massive retaliation" in terms of its impact on American foreign relations during the 1950s and on increasing American fear of nuclear war.
11. Identify the significance of the Soviet launch of the *Sputnik* and indicate the American response to that event.

12. Explain the historical significance of the Supreme Court decision in *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*.
13. Explain the intent of the Southern Manifesto.
14. List the crises occurring between 1954 and 1963 that indicated the difficulty of carrying out the Brown decision “with all deliberate speed.”
15. Explain the historical significance of the Montgomery bus boycott.
16. Discuss the role of Martin Luther King, Jr., in the American civil rights movement.

Key Terms & Definitions:

Taft-Hartley Act (1947) Law that abolished the closed shop, banned so-called sympathy boycotts, and required that all union officers sign affidavits certifying that they were not members of the Communist Party. (753)

Fair Deal Truman’s proposals for national health care, public housing, education, and public works projects. (754)

military-industrial complex Eisenhower’s term for the close ties between the defense industry and the Pentagon that might influence government policy. (755)

Levittowns Planned suburban communities where developers standardized every part of the construction process. (758)

baby boom generation The 76.4 million Americans born between 1946 and 1964. (758)

Kennedy and Nixon debate First televised presidential election debate in 1960 watched by nearly 77 million Americans, or 60 percent of the adult population. (761)

Beats Members of the bohemian communities of poets, novelists, and artists that flourished in New York’s Greenwich Village and San Francisco’s North Beach and who rejected middle-class suburban values. (763)

Brown v. Board of Education (1954) Supreme Court decision that segregated schools violated the equal protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment. (766)

Montgomery Bus Boycott (1955–1956) A year-long bus boycott that brought a new leader, Martin Luther King Jr., and a new strategy of nonviolent protest to the forefront of the Civil Rights Movement. (768)

Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) Civil rights organization founded by Martin Luther King Jr. that used black churches to devise a new nonviolent strategy of direct action. (770)

Little Rock Nine Nine black teenagers who integrated Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas, in 1957 and became the focus of a national crisis that required the intervention of federal troops to resolve. (771)

sit-ins Nonviolent demonstrations where civil rights protesters employed the tactic of civil disobedience to occupy seats at whites-only lunch counters. (772)

civil disobedience A strategy of nonviolence used by demonstrators to protest a law or a policy considered unjust. (772)

Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) Student-run civil rights organization founded in 1960. (775)

Study Questions:

What symbolism made this photograph an icon of the Civil Rights Movement? (750)

What overall arguments do these signs make in favor of labor's demands? (752)

What differing responses did postwar labor conflicts provoke? (753)

How did foreign affairs influence domestic politics in the postwar era? (754)

What significance did Eisenhower's "victory of the moderates" have? (755)

What factors caused standards of living to improve for many Americans in the 1950s? (756)

Compare this family's possessions and home life to those of previous generations. (757)

Why did suburbs boom in the 1950s? (758)

What competing visions emerged over suburban living and corporate jobs? (759)

What insights do 1950s television shows offer into American culture? (760)

How did politicians use television and photographs to shape their public image? (761)

How did larger economic and technological changes make a mass teen culture possible? (762)

What competing visions of youth rebellion did rock-and-roll and the Beat movement embody? (763)

How does Rothko's painting compare to social realist paintings in the 1930s (see Chapter 22)? (764)

In what ways did racial discrimination shape southern children's lives? (765)

Why did the Supreme Court rule that segregated schools were unconstitutional? (766)

How do these photos compare to postcards of lynchings (see Chapter 21)? (767)

Which individual choices mattered in the Till case? (768)

What is the enduring legacy of Rosa Parks's decision? (769)

Why was the Montgomery Bus Boycott a turning point in the Civil Rights Movement? (770)

What messages did this planned scene send to whites and blacks? (771)

Why did Eisenhower send troops to integrate Central High School in Little Rock? (772)

What principals lay at the heart of nonviolent direct action? (773)

Why were sit-ins successful in the upper South? (774)

What different strengths did students and churches bring to the Civil Rights Movement? (775)