

Summary: Life in the 1950s

Post-War Prosperity

In 1952, General Dwight D. Eisenhower was elected President. He was a war hero who had led the Allied troops in Europe during World War II. Americans trusted him to bring peace and prosperity to the country. The United States economy grew quickly under Eisenhower. Many veterans returned home after the war. They wanted to have families and buy houses. So many new families were started that the United States had a baby boom.

Because of the baby boom, there were not enough houses for everyone. Builders started building huge housing developments. The government gave veterans loans to buy new houses. New families also bought cars and household items, such as washing machines and clothes driers.

Businesses grew and produced more products. So workers had more income. Families had more things to buy. They made budgets to plan for saving and spending.

Cultural Changes

In the 1950s, cars became very important. People living in the suburbs needed a car to drive everywhere. They drove to work, to shop, and to have fun. People drove to national parks. They drove to drive-in theaters to watch movies. They ate at drive-in burger restaurants and ice cream shops. Shopping centers outside of cities became very popular.

Cars made it easy for people to go to new places. Now television made it easy for people to see places without leaving their homes. On television, people could see faraway events as they happened. They watched soap operas and comedy shows.

In the 1950s, television and radio helped rock 'n' roll become popular. Teenagers loved rock 'n' roll and huge crowds cheered for singers like Chuck Berry and Elvis Presley. Some people said rock 'n' roll would not last. But rock 'n' roll continued to grow and changed into new kinds of music that people listen to today.

Before You Read

Find and underline each vocabulary word.

veteran *noun*, a person who has served in the military

baby boom *noun*, increase of babies born after World War II

budget *noun*, a plan for saving and spending income

After You Read

REVIEW What did families use budgets for? Highlight the sentence that tells what people planned.

REVIEW In what new ways did people use their cars during the 1950s? Draw a box around the paragraph that tells you places people drove to.