During the 1950s, about 20 percent of the American population—particularly people of color and those living in the inner cities and Appalachia—did not share in the general prosperity. Experts also worried about the rise in juvenile delinquency.

Poverty Amidst Prosperity

**MAIN Idea** Despite the growing affluence of much of the nation, many groups still lived in poverty.

**HISTORY AND YOU** Are the pockets of poverty in America today the same as they were in the 1950s? Read on to learn about the people and regions most affected by poverty in the 1950s.

The 1950s saw a tremendous expansion of the middle class. At least one in five Americans, or about 30 million people, however, lived below the poverty line. This imaginary marker is a figure the government sets to reflect the minimum income required to support a family. Such poverty remained invisible to most Americans, who assumed that the country’s general prosperity had provided everyone with a comfortable existence.

The writer Michael Harrington, however, made no such assumptions. During the 1950s, Harrington set out to chronicle poverty in the United States. In his book *The Other America*, published in 1962, he alerted those in the mainstream to what he saw in the run-down and hidden communities of the country:

“To be sure, the other America is not impoverished in the same sense as those poor nations where millions cling to hunger as a defense against starvation. . . . That does not change the fact that tens of millions of Americans are, at this very moment, maimed in body and spirit, existing at levels beneath those necessary for human decency. If these people are not starving, they are hungry, and sometimes fat with hunger, for that is what cheap foods do. They are without adequate housing and education and medical care.”

—from *The Other America*

The poor included single mothers and the elderly; minorities such as Puerto Ricans and Mexican immigrants; rural Americans—both African American and white—and inner city residents, who remained stuck in crowded slums as wealthier citizens fled to the suburbs. Many Native Americans endured grinding poverty whether they stayed on reservations or migrated to cities.
The Decline of the Inner City

Amid the prosperity of the 1950s, many lived in terrible poverty. While suburbs boomed, the poor, many of whom were minorities, were relegated to inner-city slums. Native Americans suffered extreme poverty and the breakdown of their culture on reservations, while Mexican migrant workers in the Southwest barely made enough to feed, clothe, and shelter themselves and their children.

The poverty of the 1950s was most apparent in the nation’s urban centers. As middle-class families moved to the suburbs, they left behind the poor and less-educated. Many city centers deteriorated because the taxes that the middle class paid moved out with them. Cities no longer had the tax dollars to provide adequate public transportation, housing, and other services.

When government tried to help inner-city residents, it often made matters worse. During the 1950s, for example, urban renewal programs tried to eliminate poverty by tearing down slums and erecting new high-rise buildings for poor residents. These crowded, high-rise projects, however, often created an atmosphere of violence. The government also unwittingly encouraged the residents of public housing to remain poor by evicting them as soon as they began earning a higher income.

In the end, urban renewal programs actually destroyed more housing space than they created. Too often, the wrecking balls destroyed poor people’s homes to make way for roadways, parks, universities, tree-lined boulevards, or shopping centers.

Analyzing VISUALS

1. **Examining** Based on the photos, what aspect of life does it seem the hardest for the poor in America to obtain?
2. **Hypothesizing** What do you think might account for minorities having a lower average income than whites in the United States in the 1940s and 1950s?
**African Americans**

Many of the citizens left behind in the cities were African American. By 1960, more than 3 million African Americans had migrated from the South to Northern cities in search of greater economic opportunity and to escape violence and racial intimidation. For many of these migrants, however, the economic boom of the war years did not continue in the 1950s.

Long-standing patterns of racial discrimination in schools, housing, hiring, and salaries in the North kept many inner-city African Americans poor. The last hired and the first fired for good jobs, they often remained stuck in the worst-paying occupations. In 1958 African Americans’ salaries, on average, were only 51 percent of what whites earned. Poverty and racial discrimination also deprived many African Americans of other benefits, such as decent medical care.

In 1959 the play *A Raisin in the Sun* opened on Broadway. Written by African American author Lorraine Hansberry, the play told the story of a working-class African American family struggling against poverty and racism. The title referred to a Langston Hughes poem that wonders what happens to an unrealized dream: “Does it dry up like a raisin in the sun?” The play won the New York Drama Critics Circle Award for the best play of the year. Responding to a correspondent who had seen the play, Lorraine Hansberry wrote: “The ghettos are killing us; not only our dreams . . . but our very bodies. It is not an abstraction to us that the average [African American] has a life expectancy of five to ten years less than the average white.”

**Hispanics**

African Americans were not the only minority group that struggled with poverty. Much of the nation’s Hispanic population faced the same problems. During the 1950s and early 1960s, the Bracero Program brought nearly 5 million Mexicans to the United States to work on farms and ranches in the Southwest. Braceros were temporary contract workers. Many later returned home, but some 350,000 settled permanently in the United States.

These laborers, who worked on large farms throughout the country, lived with extreme poverty and hardship. They toiled long hours, for little pay, in conditions that were often...
unbearable. In The Other America, Michael Harrington noted:

**PRIMARY SOURCE**

"[Migrant laborers] work ten-eleven-twelve hour days in temperatures over one hundred degrees. Sometimes there is no drinking water. . . . Women and children work on ladders and with hazardous machinery. . . . Babies are brought to the field and are placed in ‘cradles’ of wood boxes."

—from The Other America

Away from the fields, many Mexican families lived in small, crudely built shacks, while some did not even have a roof over their heads. “They sleep where they can, some in the open,” Harrington noted about one group of migrant workers. “They eat when they can (and sometimes what they can).” The nation paid little attention to the plight of Mexican farm laborers until the 1960s, when the workers began to organize for greater rights.

**Native Americans**

Native Americans also faced challenges throughout the postwar era. By the middle of the 1900s, Native Americans—who made up less than one percent of the population—were the poorest ethnic group in the nation. Average annual family income for Native American families, for example, was $1,000 less than that of African American families.

After World War II, during which many Native American soldiers had served with distinction, the United States government launched a program to bring Native Americans into mainstream society—whether they wanted to assimilate or not.

Under the plan, which became known as the **termination policy**, the federal government withdrew all official recognition of the Native American groups as legal entities and made them subject to the same laws as white citizens. Native American groups were then placed under the responsibility of state governments. At the same time, the government encouraged Native Americans to blend in with the larger society by helping them move off reservations to cities.

Although the idea of integrating Native Americans into mainstream society began with good intentions, some of its supporters had more selfish goals. Speculators and developers sometimes gained rich farmland at the expense of destitute Native American groups.

**MAKING CONNECTIONS**

1. **Comparing** How did conditions change, if at all, from 1940 to 1990?
2. **Identifying Central Issues** Which groups suffered most from issues of urban decline? Why?
For most Native Americans, termination was a disastrous policy that only deepened their poverty. In the mid-1950s, for example, the Welfare Council of Minneapolis described Native American living conditions in that city as miserable: “One Indian family of five or six, living in two rooms, will take in relatives and friends who come from the reservations seeking jobs until perhaps fifteen people will be crowded into the space.”

During the 1950s, Native Americans in Minneapolis could expect to live only 37 years, compared to 46 years for all Minnesota Native Americans and 68 years for other Minneapolis residents. Similar patterns existed elsewhere. Benjamin Reifel, a Sioux, described the despair that the termination policy produced:

**Primary Source**

“The Indians believed that when the dark clouds of war passed from the skies overhead, their rising tide of expectations, though temporarily stalled, would again reappear. Instead they were threatened by termination. . . . Soaring expectations began to plunge.”

—quoted in The Earth Shall Weep

**Appalachia**

Residents of rural Appalachia also failed to share in the prosperity of the 1950s. The scenic beauty of the mountainous region, which stretches from New York to Georgia, often hid desperate poverty. Coal mining had long been the backbone of the Appalachian economy. With mechanization of mining in the 1950s, unemployment soared. With no work to be had, some 1.5 million people abandoned Appalachia to seek a better life in the cities. “Whole counties,” wrote one reporter, “are precariously held together by a flour-and-dried-milk paste of surplus foods. . . . The men who are no longer needed in the mines and the farmers who cannot compete . . . have themselves become surplus commodities in the mountains.”

Appalachia had fewer doctors per thousand people than the rest of the country. Studies revealed high rates of nutritional deficiency and infant mortality. In addition, schooling in the region was considered even worse than in inner-city slums.

**Identifying** Which groups were left out of the economic boom of the 1950s?
Juvenile Delinquency

**MAIN Idea** Juvenile crime rates rose during the 1950s; a crisis in education occurred when the baby boomers began school.

**HISTORY AND YOU** Has your school placed a greater emphasis on science and math classes recently? Read to learn about a push in science and math education during the 1950s.

During the 1950s, many middle-class, white Americans found it easy to ignore the poverty and racism that afflicted many of the nation’s minorities, since they themselves were removed from it. Some social problems, however, became impossible to ignore.

One problem at this time was a rise in, or at least a rise in the reporting of, **juvenile delinquency**—antisocial or criminal behavior of young people. Between 1948 and 1953, the United States saw a 45 percent rise in juvenile crime rates. A popular 1954 book titled *1,000,000 Delinquents* correctly predicted that in the following year, about 1 million young people would be involved in some kind of criminal activity.

Americans disagreed on what had triggered the rise in delinquency. Experts blamed television, movies, comic books, racism, busy parents, a rising divorce rate, lack of religion, and anxiety over the military draft. Some cultural critics claimed that young people were rebelling against the conformity of their parents. Others blamed a lack of discipline. Doting parents, complained Bishop Fulton J. Sheen, had raised bored children who sought new thrills, such as “alcohol, marijuana, even murder.” Still others pointed at social causes, blaming teen violence on poverty. The problem, however, cut across class and racial lines—the majority of car thieves, for example, had grown up in middle-class homes.

Most teens, of course, steered clear of gangs, drugs, and crime. Nonetheless, the public tended to stereotype young people as juvenile delinquents, especially those teens who favored unconventional clothing and long hair, or used street slang.

Concerned about their children, many parents focused on the nation’s schools as a possible solution. When baby boomers began entering the school system in the 1950s, enrollments increased by 13 million. School districts struggled to pay for new buildings and hire more teachers.

Americans’ education worries only intensified in 1957 after the Soviet Union launched the world’s first space satellites, *Sputnik I* and *Sputnik II*. Many Americans felt that the nation had fallen behind its Cold War enemy and blamed what they felt was a lack of technical education in the nation’s schools. *Life* magazine proclaimed a “Crisis in Education” and offered a grim warning: “What has long been an ignored national problem, *Sputnik* has made a recognized crisis.” In the wake of the *Sputnik* launches, efforts began to improve math and science education. Profound fears about the country’s young people, it seemed, dominated the end of a decade that had brought prosperity and progress for many Americans.

**Evaluating** What were some suggested explanations of the increase in juvenile crime?
Chapter 16
Visual Summary

The Prosperity of the 1950s

Economy and Society
- The GI Bill provided funds and loans to millions of war veterans.
- Consumer spending increased rapidly.
- More Americans owned homes than ever before.

Population Patterns
- The U.S. population experienced a “baby boom.”
- Millions of Americans moved out of cities to the suburbs.

Science, Technology, and Medicine
- Improvements in communication, transportation, and electronics allowed Americans to work more efficiently.
- Medical breakthroughs included the polio vaccine, antibiotics, and treatments for tuberculosis, cancer, and heart disease.

Popular Culture
- New forms of music, radio, cinema, and literature emerged.
- Television replaced movies and radio as the nation’s new and most popular form of mass media.

The Problems of the 1950s

Economy and Society
- Workers went on strike for higher wages.
- Congress would not pass Truman’s civil rights legislation.
- Eisenhower cut back on New Deal programs.

Population Patterns
- Financially able people moved from crowded cities to new suburbs.
- Poverty increased in the inner city and the poor faced ongoing social problems.
- Crime increased among young people.

Science, Technology, and Medicine
- Poor people in inner cities and rural areas had limited access to modern health care.

Popular Culture
- Not everyone could afford to buy the new consumer goods available, such as televisions.
- African Americans and other minorities were, for the most part, not depicted on television.
- Many television programs promoted stereotypical gender roles.

▲ While many prospered in the 1950s, many were excluded from achieving the American Dream.
Reviewing Vocabulary

Directions: Choose the word or words that best complete the sentence.

1. The Taft-Hartley Act outlawed the ________, opening some industries to nonunion workers.
   A closed shop
   B labor unions
   C right-to-work laws
   D open shop

2. During the 1950s, the number of ________ grew, as more Americans worked in offices.
   A computers
   B blue-collar jobs
   C franchises
   D white-collar jobs

3. After World War II, Native Americans suffered from the government policy of ________, which forced them into mainstream society.
   A urban renewal
   B termination
   C migrant work
   D reservation planning

4. The poem “Howl,” by Allen Ginsberg, is a work that came out of the ________ movement.
   A rock ‘n’ roll
   B generation gap
   C beat
   D jazz

Reviewing Main Ideas

Directions: Choose the best answer for each of the following questions.

Section 1 (pp. 566–571)

5. Which of the following were two characteristics of the U.S. economy after World War II?
   A high unemployment and scarce goods
   B abundant goods and low unemployment
   C low unemployment and scarce goods
   D abundant goods and high unemployment

6. Which of the following was achieved under Truman’s Fair Deal?
   A a large increase in Social Security benefits
   B a broad program of civil rights reforms
   C a decrease in funding for the TVA
   D a federal highway bill

Section 2 (pp. 572–579)

7. One major cause of the growth of the suburbs was the
   A rise in blue-collar jobs.
   B Korean War.
   C affordability of homes.
   D television.

8. Jonas Salk developed the first vaccine for which illness?
   A tuberculosis
   B cancer
   C heart disease
   D polio
9. How did the post–World War II baby boom affect American society between 1945 and 1960?
   A. It decreased the demand for housing.
   B. It bankrupted the Social Security system.
   C. It increased the need for educational resources.
   D. It encouraged people to migrate to the Sun Belt.

10. How did television affect the radio industry?
   A. One-fifth of the nation’s movie theaters closed.
   B. Radio stations started to broadcast soap operas.
   C. The number of radio stations increased as the car created a larger audience.
   D. Radio stations declined in number as the audience turned to television.

**Critical Thinking**

*Directions: Choose the best answers to the following questions.*

13. The GI Bill boosted the postwar economy by
   A. instituting a military draft.
   B. providing veterans with generous loans.
   C. requiring all veterans to go to college.
   D. providing veterans with white-collar jobs.

Base your answers to questions 14 and 15 on the graph below and on your knowledge of Chapter 16.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total Population (percent)</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1910</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1920</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1930</td>
<td>15</td>
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<td>1940</td>
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<td>1950</td>
<td>25</td>
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<td>1960</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

14. What trend in the percentage of suburban dwellers does this graph show?
   A. Fewer people were moving from the cities to the suburbs each year.
   B. More people lived in the suburbs in 1910 than 1950.
   C. More people lived in the cities in 1960 than 1950.

15. In what year was there approximately twice the percentage of suburban residents as there had been in 1910?
   A. 1930
   B. 1940
   C. 1950
   D. 1960

**Section 3 (pp. 582–587)**

11. The imaginary government marker setting the minimum income required to support a family is called the
   A. urban renewal.
   B. poverty line.
   C. income tax.
   D. delinquency.

12. The purpose of the Bracero Program was to
   A. bring workers into the United States from Mexico.
   B. send workers from the United States to Mexico.
   C. find housing for new immigrants.
   D. deport illegal immigrants.

**Need Extra Help?**

If You Missed Questions . . . | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 | 14 | 15
Go to Page . . .               | 573| 577| 582| 584–585| 566–567| R16 | R16

**Go On**
16. Many Americans responded to the Soviet launching of Sputnik by demanding that schools
   A focus more on math and science.
   B offer more physical fitness training.
   C require students to learn a foreign language.
   D require the recitation of the Pledge of Allegiance.

For additional test practice, use Self-Check Quizzes—Chapter 16 at glencoe.com.

Need Extra Help?
If You Missed Questions . . . 16 17 18 19 20
Go to Page . . . 587 R18 591 591 566–571

17. The main idea of this cartoon is that 1950s white-collar workers were
   A lazy and useless.
   B unstable and untrustworthy.
   C extremely good at what they did.
   D overly dedicated to their jobs.

Document-Based Questions
Directions: Analyze the document and answer the short-answer questions that follow the document.

George Gallup, one of the nation's first pollsters, spoke at the University of Iowa in 1953 about the importance of mass media in the United States. Below is an excerpt from his remarks:

“One of the real threats to America's future place in the world is a citizenry which duly elects to be entertained and not informed. From the time the typical citizen arises and looks at his morning newspaper until he turns off his radio or television set before going to bed, he has unwittingly cast his vote a hundred times for entertainment or for education. Without his knowing it, he has helped to determine the very character of our three most important media of communication—the press, radio, and television.”

—quoted in Legacy of Freedom, Vol. 2: United States History from Reconstruction to the Present

18. According to Gallup, what is a threat to the future of the United States in the world?

19. How do American citizens “cast their votes” to determine what is read, seen, and heard in the mass media?

Extended Response
20. Harry Truman was a Democrat, and Dwight Eisenhower was a Republican. However, the two men did not always act along party lines and, in some cases, took similar approaches to governing. In an expository essay, compare and contrast the domestic agendas of these two presidents of the postwar era. Include an introduction and at least three paragraphs with supporting details that explain how Truman’s and Eisenhower’s ideas and approaches to domestic issues were different and similar.