

The 1950's The Post-War years



Happy Days?



- Returning soldiers wanted to put the horrors of the battlefields behind them when they came back home
- **Americans could now spend money** they had saved when most items were rationed during the war or unaffordable during the Depression

Huge Economic Expansion

- Avg. **income almost doubled** in post-war years
(Went from \$1,526 to \$2,788)



Big Corporations

- A few huge firms dominated many industries
- Car companies like **Ford**, **Chrysler** and **General Motors**
- **General Electric** (GE) dominated the electrical business



Fast Food

- Fast food industry sprung up because of **fast, efficient service** and location **along new busy highways**
- Ray Croc, the founder of McDonald's, used assembly-line food production to mass produce cheap burgers



Franchise



- McDonald's and 100's of other restaurant *franchises* began to open (a franchise is the right to open a restaurant using a parent company's brand name and system)
- Entrepreneurs of the decade learned that people enjoyed quick service, affordability and consistency. Fast food delivered this and was perfect for adults, teens and children. It could also be easily replicated and franchising spread the successful local restaurant models across the country.

The Birth of a Fast Food Nation

- Many of our largest and most popular fast food chains got their start during the 1950's.
- Dunkin Donuts, 1950 – Quincy, Massachusetts
- KFC, 1952 – Salt Lake City, Utah (first franchise opened)
- Denny's (as Danny's Donuts), 1953 – Lakewood, California
- Burger King (as Insta-Burger King), 1953 – Jacksonville, Florida
- Sonic Drive-In, 1953 – Shawnee Oklahoma
- Taco Bell (as Bell's Drive-In), 1954 – San Bernardino, California
- Pizza Hut, 1958 – Wichita, Kansas

New Technology Transforms Life

- **New and improved products** like dishwashers and gas-powered lawnmowers that **saved consumers time and money**
- **Television** – Developed in the 1930's, Americans “fell in love” with it after WWII
- 2/3 of families owned one by 1953



TV

- Shows like *Howdy Doody* and *The Mickey Mouse Club*, for kids
- Comedies like *I Love Lucy* and *Father Knows Best*
- *American Bandstand* played popular music for teens
- **Only 3 networks** controlled all the shows



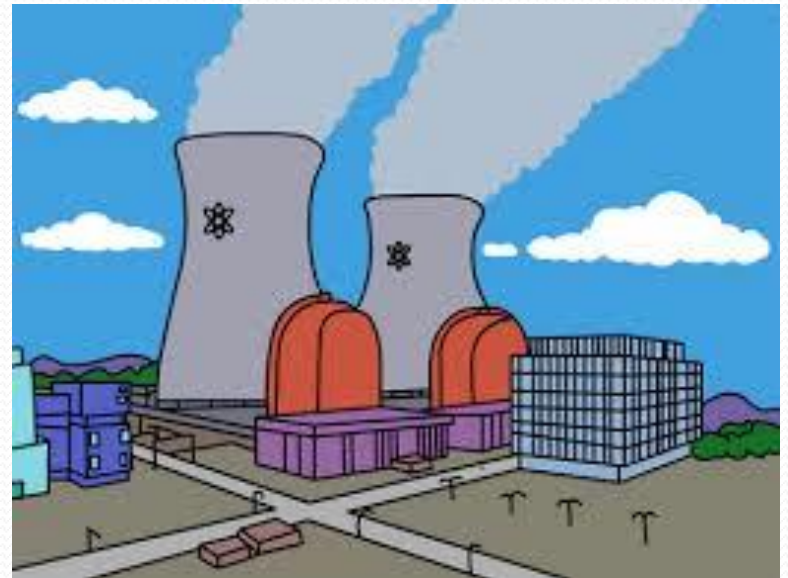
Materialism



- Advertising paid for shows on television
- TV commercials bombarded Americans with advertisements for the latest consumer products.
- Millions of viewers were persuaded to buy the items they saw on television commercials
- No remotes to change the channel or on-demand commercial-free viewing so forced to sit through ads!

Other Advances

- Wartime research led to **1st computers** that could fit on a desk instead of filling a room (invention of *transistor*)
- **Nuclear power** – generated electrical power using same technology as atomic bomb (splitting uranium atoms)



Medicine



- Advances in medicine – **Jonas Salk's polio vaccine** (had killed or disabled 20,000 kids in US every year)
- **Penicillin and antibiotics**
- **Surgical advances like heart surgery**
- **Psychiatric medication** (for mentally ill)

Changes in the Workplace

- **Before the war** most had *blue-collar* jobs in **factories** producing goods
- After the war, however, new machines performed many of the jobs previously done by people
- **By mid 1950's** majority had *white-collar* jobs working **in offices** or selling products



Large Corporations = Conformity

- White-collar work environment had clean, bright offices
- **Downside** to this: large corporations were impersonal, you had less connection to the products the company made, and employees were often **told to dress, think, and act alike**



Suburbs and Highways

- With so many people working and making a better living than ever before, the **Baby boom continued**
- Growing families wanted to live outside cities and could now drive in to work in **new cars on new highways**



New Homes

- **GI Bill** – gave **low-interest loans to soldiers** so they could buy a home – “cookie-cutter” neighborhoods (all looked alike) starting springing up everywhere and quickly – called “Levittowns” after developer, Bill Levitt
- Could mass produce inexpensively using assembly line techniques – but uniformity was a drawback



Highways

- Stores moved from cities to **shopping centers** further away in the suburbs
- People used **more private cars** and **less public transportation**



Interstate Highway System

- More cars led to building **40,000 miles of roads and highways connecting towns & states**
- **Credit cards** introduced so people could buy stuff (gas, etc.) easier while on the road



Create a Billboard

- There were many changes in Postwar America in the 1950's. Choose one of the following and **design a billboard that advertises/promotes this new aspect of American life:**
- Credit Cards (Diner's club, American Express, etc.)
- Television
- Interstate Highway System
- Nuclear Power Plants
- McDonald's/a Fast-food chain
- New appliances (electric lawnmower, dishwasher, etc.)
- *Keep it simple (1 or 2 catchy phrases), but your billboard should include 1.) the product name and 2.) a convincing argument as to why you need it and/or should support it*



