

Postwar Adjustments

The 15 million American soldiers, sailors and marines returning to civilian life in 1945 and 1946 faced the problem of finding jobs and housing. **By the 1950s, Americans enjoyed the highest standard of living achieved by any society in history. The Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944, popularly known as the GI Bill of Rights, proved a powerful support during the transition of 15 million veterans to a peacetime economy.** More than half the returning GIs (as the men and women in uniform were called) seized the opportunity afforded by the GI Bill to continue their education at government expense. **Over 2 million GIs attended college, which started a postwar boom in higher education. The veterans also received over \$16 billion in low interest, government backed loans to buy homes and farms and to start businesses.** By focusing on a better educated workforce and also promoting new construction, the federal government stimulated the postwar economic expansion. Truman capitalized on this success by promoting his **Fair Deal** which promised an extension of affordable housing, an expansion of the minimum wage and Social Security while also eliminating discriminatory practices. While Truman delivered on the first two facets of his plan, the furthest he could get with eliminating discriminatory practices was desegregating the federal government.

After the war, there was a mass migration to warmer states of the Union near the U.S./Mexico border called **the sunbelt (specifically the states of California and Florida).** Once these new families settled, there was an explosion of marriages and births. **Younger marriages and larger families resulted in 50 million babies entering the U.S. population between 1945 and 1960.** As the ***baby boom*** generation gradually passed from childhood to adult it profoundly affected the nation's social institutions and economic life in the last half of the 20th Century. **Initially, the baby boom tended to focus on women's attention on raising children and homemaking. Nevertheless, the trend of more women in the workplace continued. By 1960, one-third of all married women worked outside the home.**

The high demand for housing after the war resulted in a construction boom. **William J. Levitt led in the development of postwar suburbia with his building and promotion of Levittown, a project of 17,000 mass-produced, low-priced family homes on Long Island, New York.** Low interest rates on mortgages were both government issued and tax deductible made the move from the city to the suburbs more affordable even for families of modest means. **In a single generation, the majority of middle-class Americans became suburbanites. For many older inner cities, the effect of mass movement to suburbia was disastrous. By the 1960s, cities from Boston to Los Angeles became increasingly poor and racially divided. This phenomenon is commonly known as "white flight."**

Questions for Presentation on Back

QUESTIONS TO ANSWER FOR PRESENTATION.

1. How did the federal government take care of citizens in the Postwar Era? (Define Truman's Fair Deal and emphasize whether the Fair Deal was successful)
2. How did family life generally change during the Postwar Era? (Define moving to the sunbelt and baby boom in your answer, emphasize how the latter affects gender norms)
3. Did people want to stay in the cities during the Postwar Era? (Define suburbia and white flight in your answer).