

# The Postwar Years at Home (1945-1960)

## Lecture #3

### The Mood of the 1950's: Gender Roles, Rock & Roll, and 1950's Culture

#### Main Idea:

*After World War II, many Americans were blessed with wealth, success, and leisure. Conformity seemed the order of the day, although some groups made it their business to avoid the popularly accepted lifestyles of the 1950's.*

- Most Americans valued security over adventure (COMFORT!)
  - After 15 years of depression and war...they just wanted safety and conformity
  - People living in the United States wanted to enjoy the prosperity of the 1950s
    - They wanted their children to grow up without the hardships they experienced



- Before 1950, Americans valued individuality
- During the 1950s, people preferred to be like everyone else - "be normal" (CONFORMITY!)
  - *Tootle the Engine*...children's book created in the 1950s
  - Lesson presented in the book:

*"Always stay on the track no matter what"*

## Youth Culture

- The “*Silent Generation*”
  - Teens during the 1950s had very little interest in the problems and crises of the larger world
- Strong U.S. economy allowed more young people to stay in school rather than drop out to find a job
- Teens had a lot of leisure time to pursue entertainment and fun – allowance \$, too!
  - Clubs, sororities, fraternities, etc...
- A lot of businesses marketed products directly to teenagers
- Movies, television, and advertisements helped build an image of what it meant to be a teen
  - Girls in bobby socks and skirts, boys in letter sweaters



## Religion

- 1950s saw a resurgence in religion in the United States
  - Response to the Cold War struggle against “godless communism”
  - Find hope in the face of the threat of nuclear war
- 1954...Congress voted to add “under God” to the Pledge of Allegiance
- 1955...Congress voted to require the phrase “In God We Trust” to appear on all currency
- By 1960, 95% of all Americans claimed some formal religious group
  - Billy Graham and Evangelists
    - Used radio and television to carry religious messages to more people



## Gender Roles

- Men were supposed to go to school and then find jobs to support wives and children
  - They were the ones to be seen and interact in public...they earned the money (*breadwinners*)
  - Men were to make all the important political, social, and economic decisions
  - Judged themselves and others on what they could buy with the money they earned



- Women were expected to play a supporting role for their husband's lives in the public sphere...emphasis on serving their kids and pleasing their husbands
  - Women kept the house, cooked meals, cleaned the home, and took care of the children
- Young couples after WWII had children
  - Motherhood was embraced – children were the focus of 1950s households
  - Dr. Benjamin Spock's book influenced young parents: children center of household
- Mothers were expected to stay at home with their children and to stay in shape to “*help preserve her size 12 figure*”
  - Social networks consisted of other mothers...usually associated with children
    - Parent Teacher Assoc. (PTA), church groups, Campfire Girls clubs, charity groups, etc...



## Challenges to Conformity

1963...author Betty Friedan published a book entitled *The Feminine Mystique*

- This was an explosive critique of the 1950s ideal of womanhood

Was a former homemaker and mother...had given up her college career for motherhood

- Friedan claimed that millions of women were frustrated with their roles in the 1950s



## Challenges to Conformity

Some young people rejected the values of their parents

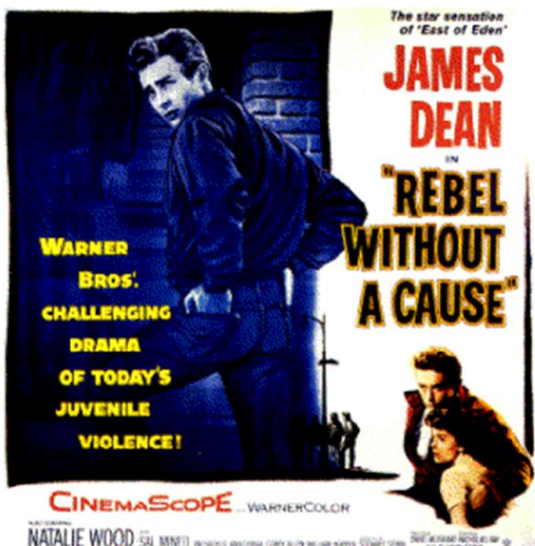
- Often felt misunderstood and alone

Movies and films captured these feelings of alienation

- 1955...*Rebel Without a Cause* starred James Dean
- *Rebel Without a Cause* trailer

Became a cultural icon representing the “troubled youth” and the fascination with the “bad boy”

Books like 1951’s *The Catcher in the Rye* by J.D. Salinger encouraged troubled youths to seek out their own individuality and not conform



## Challenges to Conformity

*Rock & Roll*...a new type of music that had grown out of the rhythm-and-blues musical tradition

- First introduced by radio disc jockey Alan Freed in Cleveland, Ohio
- Teenagers across the nation became instant fans of the new Rock & Roll genre and the lifestyle it entailed

Musically characterized by a driving beat and simple melody

Chuck Berry, Bill Haley and the Comets, Little Richard, and Elvis Presley were rock stars in the 1950s



## Challenges to Conformity

Elvis Presley

- His performances showcased his flamboyant style and good looks
- Attracted hordes of screaming fans – mostly teenage girls – everywhere he went
- Released many records during the 1950s that became huge hits
- Elvis Presley - controversy

Adults disliked Elvis and the new rock & roll music he represented

- They feared that it would cause a rise in immorality
- Some opposed rock & roll because of race: it was considered “black” music

Opposed to integration – “mixing” of races

- There were even efforts to ban rock concerts and keep records out of the stores

This made it even more popular!

## Challenges to Conformity

### Beatniks

- Artists, writers, and other non-conformists gathered together to form the “Beat Generation”
- Beatniks stressed spontaneity and spirituality instead of conformity and apathy – “release yourself from conformity and consumerism”
- The “Beats” held very liberal political views
- Their lifestyles challenged respectability...were free with their sexuality and use of illegal drugs

The pre-cursor to the “hippie” and counter culture movements of the 1960s

- Beatniks used to gather at local coffee shops, dress in black, and recite spoken-word poems



# Lecture #4

## President Truman and President Eisenhower

### The 1950s

- The 4 C's dominated the 1950s:
  1. **Consumerism** - buying material goods
  2. **Conformity** - be like everyone else – don't stand out
  3. **Conservative** - family values, less intrusive government
  4. **Comfort** - safety and security are priorities

People voted for political leaders that corresponded to these values.

- 1950s were “Conservative” – politically and culturally
  - Politically, there was massive economic pressure to maintain prosperity
  - Consumerism was equated with success and status
  - Anti-communist beliefs dominated politics
    - McCarthyism, Red Scare



## Harry S. Truman 1945-1952

### Objectives:

- Explain Pres. Truman's path to the presidency.

- **Identify and describe the main components of Pres. Truman's domestic policy.**
- **Identify and describe the main components of Pres. Truman's foreign policy.**

## Truman's Background

- Harry S. Truman (May 8, 1884 – December 26, 1972)
  - 33<sup>rd</sup> President of the United States
- Harry Truman was born in Missouri
  - Spent most of his youth on his family's farm.
- Served in combat in France during World War I as an artillery officer.
  - Briefly owned a haberdashery (sold men's hats, clothing items, socks, gloves, etc...) after the war.
  - Joined the Democratic Party in Kansas City, Missouri – worked to get Democrats elected.
- First elected to public office as a county official and became a U.S. Senator in 1935.
- Truman was the final running mate of President Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1944.
  - Succeeded to the presidency on April 12, 1945, when Roosevelt died after months of declining health.
- Truman wanted to follow in FDR's footsteps.
  - Often appeared ill-prepared for the presidency.
  - Scattershot approach to governing – lack of focus – even some Democrats didn't support him.
- Today, Truman is considered one of the better presidents
  - "The Buck Stops Here."

## The Peacetime Economy

- CONSUMERISM!
- Truman's economic priority was *reconversion* – the social and economic transition from wartime to peacetime. \*(example: make clothing and cars instead of weapons)
  - American citizens wanted access to consumer goods right away – needed to ease regulations, inflation increased as a result.
    - Prices rose 25% immediately after the war
  - Workers demanded wage increases – to keep up with inflation.
    - Strikes in the Steel, Coal, Automobile, Electrical, and Railroad industries.
- 1947 Taft-Hartley Act
  - Allowed the President to declare an 80-day cooling off period – strikers had to return to work – in industries that affected the national interest.
    - Red Scare – Anti-communist feelings
    - Labor unions are thought to be closely tied to communism.
    - Truman vetoed this bill – Congress voted to override the veto.

## Civil Rights

- *Civil Rights* – Truman supported civil rights, yet help some racial prejudices.



- 1946 – Appointed a biracial Committee on Civil Rights to look into race relations
  - This committee produced a report demanding action on their findings:
    1. support a federal anti-lynching law
    2. abolish the poll tax as a voting requirement
    3. prevent discriminatory practices in hiring
- 1948 – Ordered the end of segregation and discrimination in the armed forces

*“I am not asking for social equality, because no such things exist, but I am asking for equality of opportunity for all human beings, and as long as I stay here I am going to continue that fight.”*

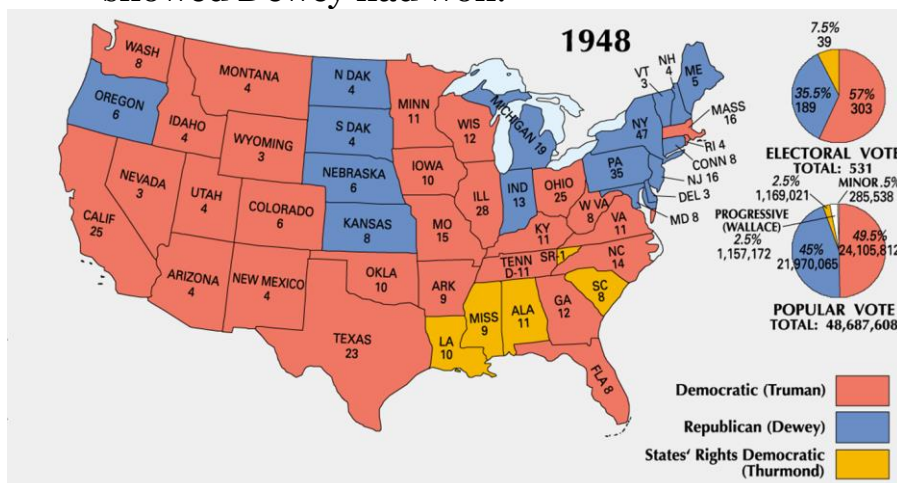
- Pres. Truman

## Truman’s Fair Deal

- *The Fair Deal* — Truman’s 21-point program for postwar economic improvement and equality.
  - Included legislation to promote:
    - Full employment
    - A higher minimum wage
    - Greater unemployment compensation for workers without jobs
    - Housing assistance
    - National health insurance program
    - Atomic energy control
  - There was **TREMENDOUS** political opposition to the Fair Deal.
    - Both Democrats and Conservatives were concerned that adding government programs would increase taxes, increase spending, and increase the size of government.
      - *“To err is Truman”*
      - *“You just sort of forget about Harry until he makes another mistake.”*

## 1948 Presidential Election

- Truman decided to run for re-election in 1948
  - He had little support – even from within the Democrat Party.
- Truman ran against Thomas Dewey, the Republican Governor of New York State.
  - Newspapers, political experts, and polls all predicted that Truman would be defeated.
- Truman won a **SHOCKING** victory – newspapers even printed headlines that showed Dewey had won.

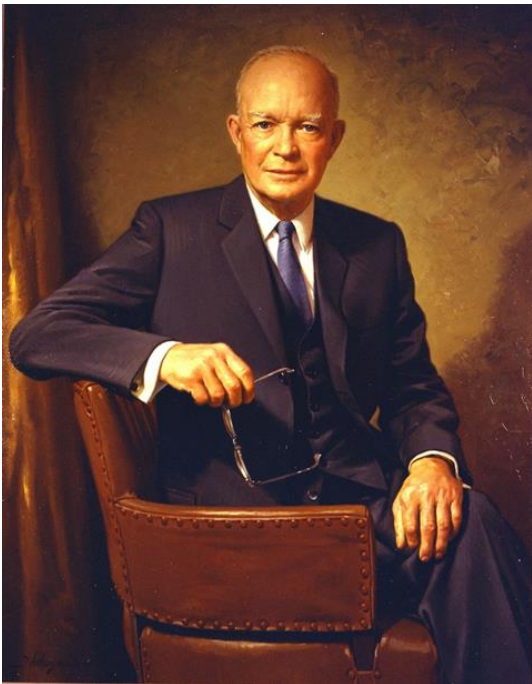


## <sup>nd</sup> 22 Amendment

- Many Republicans were very frustrated with the Democrats holding the Presidency since 1932.
  - As a result, the 22nd Amendment was adopted and ratified in 1951.

*“No person shall be elected to the office of the President more than twice, and no person who has held the office of President, or acted as President, for more than two years of a term to which some other person was elected President shall be elected to the office of the president more than once.”*

- Presidents are only allowed to serve two terms.
- Provision was written into the amendment itself to allow Truman to run again.
  - Truman decided not to run for re-election in 1952.



## **Dwight D. Eisenhower** **1952-1960**

### **Objectives:**

- Explain Pres. Eisenhower's path to the presidency.
- Identify and describe the main components of Pres. Eisenhower's domestic policy.
- Identify and describe the main components of Pres. Eisenhower's foreign policy.

### **Before the Presidency**

- Dwight D. Eisenhower ( October 14, 1890 – March 28, 1969)

- 34<sup>th</sup> President of the U.S.
- Eisenhower was born in Texas – grew up in Kansas.
  - Attended West Point Military Academy – played football
  - Nickname was “Ike”
  - He was a five-star general in the U.S. Army during World War II
    - Supreme Commander of the Allied Forces in Europe.
      - Oversaw the D-Day landings in France
- After World War II:
  - Ike served as Army Chief of Staff (under Truman), President of Columbia University, and was the head of NATO.
- Ran for President in 1952 – had both Republicans and Democrats ask him to represent their parties.
  - Eisenhower chose the Republicans.

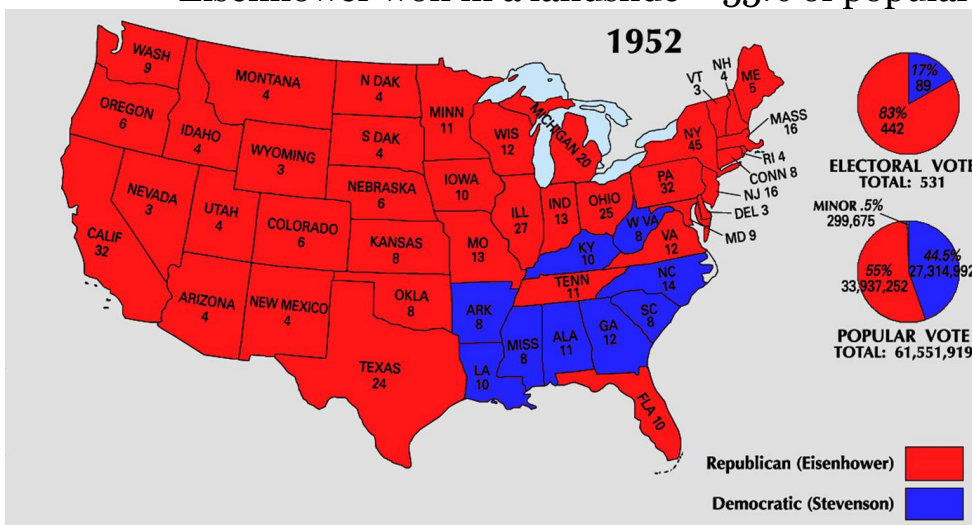
## 1952 Presidential Election

- Eisenhower was famous for his leadership during WWII
  - Had an easygoing charm that gave Americans a sense of security.
- Eisenhower ran against Adlai Stevenson, Democrat Governor of Illinois
- “I Like Ike” campaign slogan
  - 1952 "I Like Ike" - Eisenhower Presidential Campaign Ad
- “K1C2” campaign strategy
  - Focused on ending the Korean War and fighting communism and corruption.
- Eisenhower’s running mate was Richard Nixon
  - Nixon forced to give a speech defending himself and Eisenhower of accepting illegal gifts:

*“It was a little cocker spaniel dog...Black and white spotted. And our little girl – Tricia, the 6-year old – named it Checkers. And you know the little kids love that dog and I just want to say this right now, that regardless of what they say about it, we’re going to keep it.”*

- Nixon’s “Checkers Speech”

- Eisenhower won in a landslide – 55% of popular vote.



## Modern Republicanism

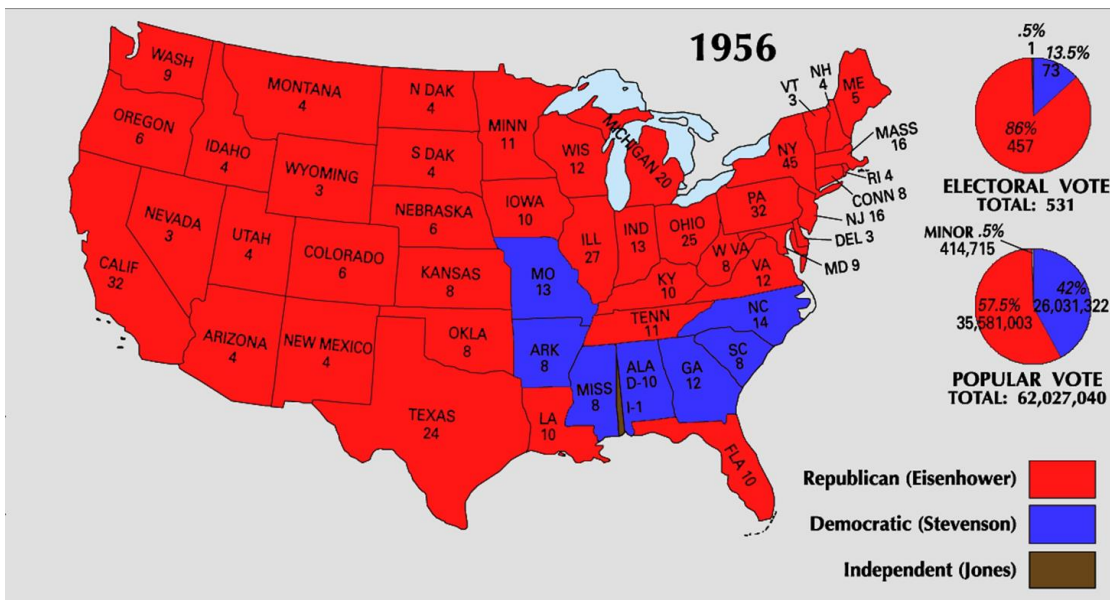
- Eisenhower adopted *Modern Republicanism*:
  1. Wanted to slow the growth of the federal government.
  2. Wanted to decrease the power of the president and increase the authority of Congress and the states.
  3. Supported conservative economic policies:
    1. Cut government spending
    2. Reduce taxes
    3. Balance the federal budget
    4. Encourage the growth of business
  4. Supported liberal social policies:
    1. Eisenhower was “*conservative when it comes to money, liberal when it comes to human beings.*”
  5. Fought communism and the USSR
- Civil Rights victories:
  1. Brown vs. Board of Education (1954)
  2. Desegregated public schools in Little Rock, AR
  3. Signed civil rights legislation in 1957 and 1960 to protect the right to vote for African-Americans.

## Personality & Leadership

- Pres. Eisenhower had a “low key” approach to the presidency
  - Eisenhower was “*very decent, wholesome in his instincts, terribly free of the little meanness that often plague great men’s lives.*”  
– Gabriel Hauge, Eisenhower’s Economic Advisor
    - Eisenhower was described as *laissez faire* (“hands off”), kind, and reassuring as a leader.
  - Worked behind the scenes: “*I’m not one of those desk-pounding types that likes to stick out his jaw and look like he’s bossing the show.*”
    - Democrats said he lacked leadership skills:  
*What do you do with an Eisenhower doll? You wind it up and it does nothing.*
- The American people overwhelmingly approved of Eisenhower’s leadership
  - He easily won reelection in 1956

## 1956 Presidential Election

- In 1956, Eisenhower faced Adlai Stevenson again.
  - Won an even BIGGER landslide
    - 457 of 531 electoral votes
    - 57.6% of the popular vote



## The Technology Challenge

- Soviets launch Sputnik satellite into space in 1957.
- October 4, 1957 - Sputnik I is launched into space
  - President Eisenhower is blamed for this “defeat” in the Cold War –
    - Was America losing its competitive edge?
  - 1958 - U.S. fears this new technology and creates the *National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA)* – an independent agency dedicated to space exploration.
- National Defense Education Act (1958)
  - Schools start to push Science and Math
    - Want to produce more engineers and scientists to compete with the Soviets.
    - Encourage the best and brightest to become teachers, scientists, mathematicians, and engineers.

NASA Yearly Budgets

