

Part three: Post-war America

Paper 1: Understanding the Modern World

Section A: Period Studies

[AD America, 1920-1973: Opportunity and inequality](#)



Learning Objectives

At the end of the lesson, students should be able to:

- describe the idea of Consumerism and how it manipulated post-war America;
- discuss the role of Dr King and Malcolm X in the flight of the Civil Rights Movement in the US; and
- assess the changes brought by the 'Great Society'.



Important Keywords

Consumerism

Feminism

Civil Rights Movement

Racial Segregation

Great Society

This module discusses post-war American society under the following topics:

- ❑ Post-war American society and economy, including the idea of consumerism and the American Dream;
- ❑ Racial tension and developments in the Civil Rights Movement; and
- ❑ Johnson's the *Great Society* and the rise of feminism.



Image of inspirational minister and Civil Rights leader Martin Luther King, Jr



Post-war American society and economy: consumerism and the causes of prosperity

After the war, consumer values dominated American society, especially the economy. By the 1950s, Americans were eager to spend on scarce goods after being hamstrung by the Great Depression and the Second World War.

Consumerism

It refers to a social and economic belief that personal well-being depends on the extent of personal consumption or purchase of material goods. A consumerist society views that life is better with more consumption of goods.



Those who supported the consumption of local goods were regarded as patriotic



Desire for new items including the television, radio, vacuum cleaner, car, and washing machine



Growth in the suburban population



Introduction of mass production and assembly line

As the suburban population grew, businesses also became mobile. Shopping centres were built in new areas away from those in the cities. For better access to shops and the suburbs, new highways were built under the Highway Act of 1956. Moreover, television and widespread advertising played a key role in fuelling consumerism in the United States.

"... economic recovery after a decade and a half of depression and war depended on a dynamic mass consumption economy."

- Historian Lizabeth Cohen



Post-war American society and economy: consumerism and the causes of prosperity

The United States experienced economic growth and prosperity after the Second World War. War production accelerated the American economy and put an end to the Great Depression, yet many feared a repeat of the economic stagnation which happened after WWI.

CAUSES OF PROSPERITY



Under President Truman, the **Employment Act** (1946) was proposed, which increased government spending on programmes that supported farmers and workers, as well as an increase in minimum wage. Following programmes came to be known as the **'Fair Deal'**.

The **Interstate Highway System** (1956) under Pres. Eisenhower enabled the building of highways in accordance with the national plan, which fuelled the construction and automobile industries, motels, and gas stations.

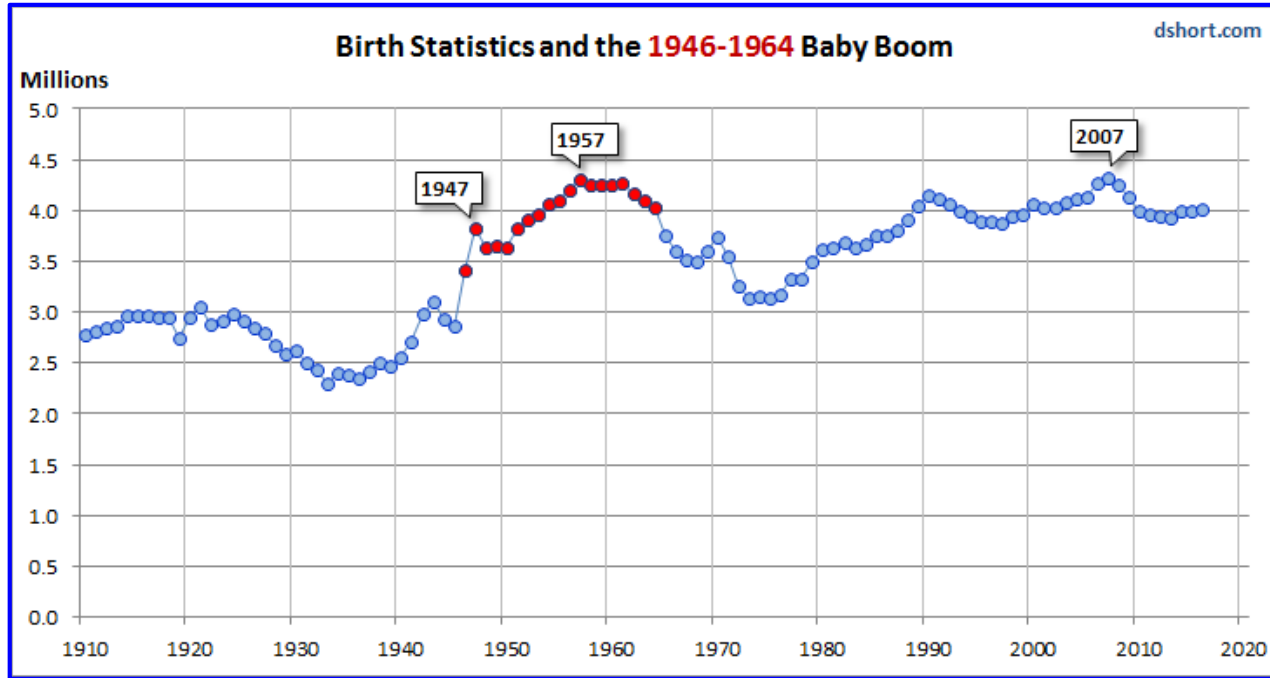
RESULT. Prosperity also initiated rapid population growth, also known as the "Baby Boom". Between 1948 to 1955, America experienced a 50% increase in the number of children born, the highest in history. Many women who had joined the workforce during the war returned to their household duties, and those who retained their jobs received lower wages.



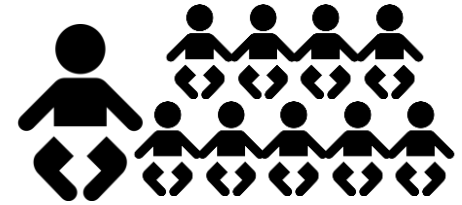
The economic boom after World War II saw a rise in mass consumption. This advert invites consumers to enjoy the glamour of a modern refrigerator.



Chart Analysis of Birth Statistics and the Baby Boom

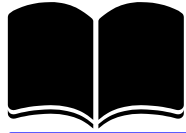


American Birth Statistics and the 1946-1964 Baby Boom



Baby Boom

Refers to the drastic increase in the number of babies born in a specific place and time. In the United States, a baby boom occurred after WWII. Their generation has come to be known as the Baby Boomers.



Post-war American society and economy: the American Dream; McCarthyism

“After total war
can come total living”



During World War II, companies ran adverts promising American consumers a better life after the war.

It was during the Great Depression that the term the “American Dream” was coined by historian James Truslow Adams in his book *The Epic of America* published in 1931.

The first effective attempt employed to revive the American economy was by Franklin D. Roosevelt’s New Deal programmes. Among the series of programmes was the National Housing Act in 1934, which boosted the building of homes and increased ownership. Moreover, FDR’s G.I. Bill of Rights signed on 22 June 1944 further assured veterans’ welfare.

Moreover, the bill offered free tuition, a living stipend, and books.

Decades prior to WWII, the phrase “American Dream” was already appearing in newspapers in the mid- to late-1800s when pioneers began to travel westward in search of new opportunities and fortune. Moreover, European immigrants also used the same term when they immigrated to the U.S. in search of better jobs, homes, and lives.

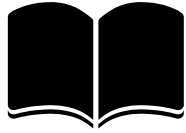


Image of Senator Joseph McCarthy

I have in my hand 57 cases of individuals who would appear to be either card-carrying members or certainly loyal to the Communist Party, but who nevertheless are still helping to shape our foreign policy...

- From the speech of Senator McCarthy

Who was Senator McCarthy?

Joseph McCarthy was a Republican senator from Wisconsin who drew national attention when he delivered a Lincoln Day address in Wheeling, West Virginia, on 9 February 1950. He criticised the government for its failed foreign policies regarding Communist infiltration. In addition, McCarthy claimed that he possessed a list of Communists who were working in the State Department. As a result, he created national paranoia in which many believed in the existence of Communist spies at all levels of society. After further investigation, a committee proclaimed that McCarthy's accusations were fraud.

McCarthyism

In 1938, Sen. McCarthy began the House Un-American Activities Committee. His accusations of Communist infiltration in the United States became known as McCarthyism, which formed part of the global Communist fear referred to as the **'Red Scare'**. Due to his fabricated list and unproven accusations, many Americans who were suspected as Communists lost their jobs.



Post-war American society and economy: the American Dream; McCarthyism

McCarthyism

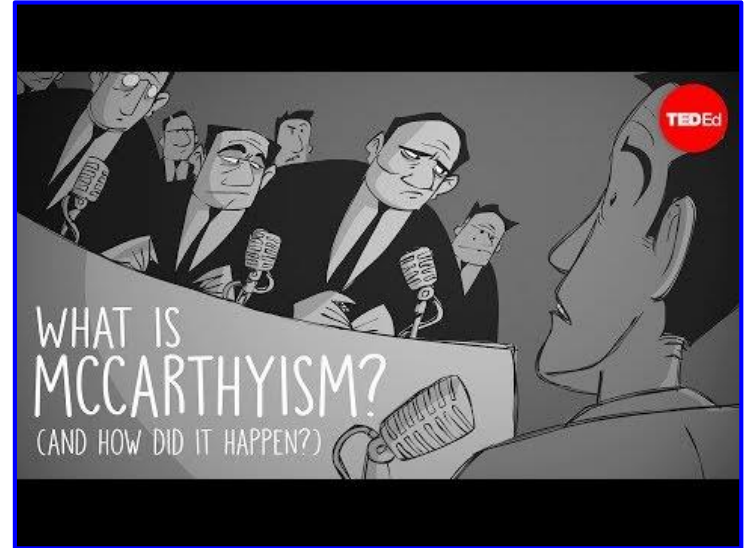
Because of the rapid growth of Communism in China and eastern Europe, McCarthy gained drastic support. As a result, many Americans in various industries lost their jobs due to false accusations fuelled by xenophobia. Despite the lack of evidence, they were blacklisted. Moreover, about 2,000 government employees were fired.

The first two paragraphs of the 13 March 1954 New York Times story on McCarthy, Cohn, and David Schine

M'CARTHY AND THE ARMY

The fantastic story of the efforts of Senator McCarthy and his right-hand man, Roy M. Cohn, to bludgeon the Army into giving special privileges to their colleague Pvt. G. David Schine has at last come to light. The restraint of Army officials from Secretary Stevens down in withholding this remarkable tale from public view is a tribute to their powers of self-control. But it is altogether in the national interest that the tactics of the Senate's chief inquisitors be exposed in terms that everyone can understand.

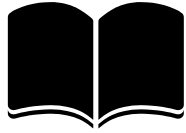
If Mr. Cohn ever had any usefulness, which is a premise that we do not grant, it has certainly been ended with the publication of this extraordinary document. His efforts to secure a special status for his friend Private Schine reveal an utter lack of judgment and an indescribable arrogance that could hardly be believed if they were not all spelled out in the Army's carefully compiled report:



For a visual explainer of the background and nature of McCarthyism, watch the documentary provided.

Access using this link:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N35IugBYH04>



Post-war American society and economy: popular culture, including Rock 'n' Roll and television

After World War II, Americans experienced social changes, which were reflected in music, entertainment, media and literature.

1950s



Image of Elvis Presley

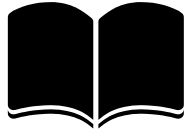
Other than the King of Rock, Chuck Berry, Jerry Lee Lewis, Chubby Checker, Bobby Darin and Buddy Holly were also popular rock 'n' roll musicians.

It was during this decade that **rock 'n' roll** and rockabilly emerged in the U.S. Musical icon Elvis Presley became the most popular artist of this genre, adored by women due to his good looks, dance moves and music.

Due to affordability and availability, TV sets appeared in every American home. By the **1960s**, around 9 in 10 American families owned a TV. This caused cinema to fall into decline. Commercial radio remained popular due to the youth supporting upbeat music and music charts.

1970s

A number of film companies released movies and advertised them on television. In 1972, *The Godfather* became a cult hit. In the following years, films such as *Jaws* (1975) and *Star Wars* (1977) became top-grossing films.



Racial tension and developments in the Civil Rights Movement in the 1950s and 1960s: segregation laws

Centuries after the arrival of African slaves to America, their descendants fought for autonomy, equality and freedom in the white-ruled land. African-Americans gradually emerged on the civil rights stage and began fighting harder for inclusion after the Second World War.



Image showing the origin of the theatrical character Jim Crow

Jim Crow Laws

Refers to the collection of state and local statutes which made racial segregation legal. Following the ratification of the 13th Amendment in 1865, which freed slaves, the Black Codes emerged. These codes detailed how freed slaves could work, where they lived and travelled. Black Codes were prevalent in the Southern States where African-Americans experienced indentured servitude along with their children.

The Jim Crow Laws mandated the 'separate but equal' status of African-Americans.

At the beginning of the 1880s, as African-American populations spread to the big cities, white city dwellers demanded more laws prohibiting African-American contact in public places.



Racial tension and developments in the Civil Rights Movement in the 1950s and 1960s: segregation laws

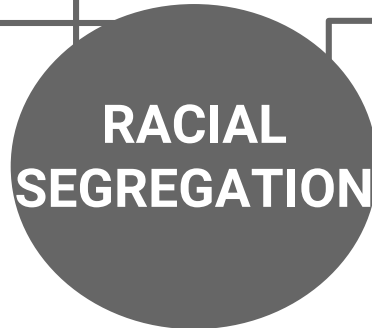


A sign in Montgomery, Alabama, showing separate drinking fountains for blacks and whites

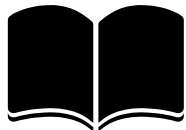
In the South, African-Americans were forbidden from entering public parks. Moreover, establishments such as theatres, restaurants, and professional offices were segregated.



Also segregated were water fountains, waiting areas, elevators, cemeteries, restrooms, and cashier windows.



Examples of signs showing racial segregation in the South



Racial tension and developments in the Civil Rights Movement in the 1950s and 1960s: Martin Luther King Jr and peaceful protests

1955

King became the protest leader and official spokesman of the NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People). He coordinated civil rights activists for a bus boycott that lasted for 381 days.

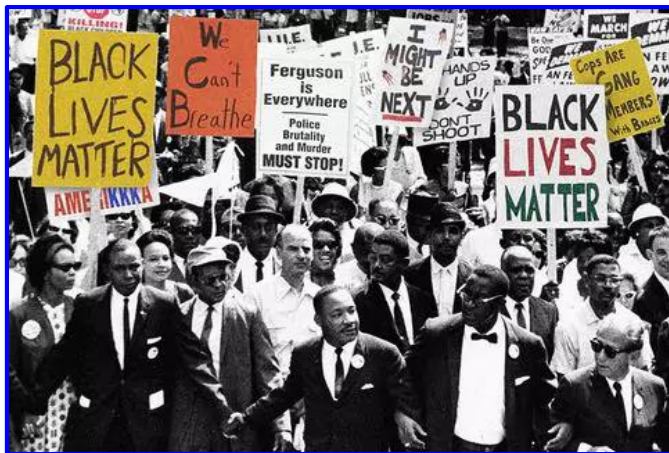
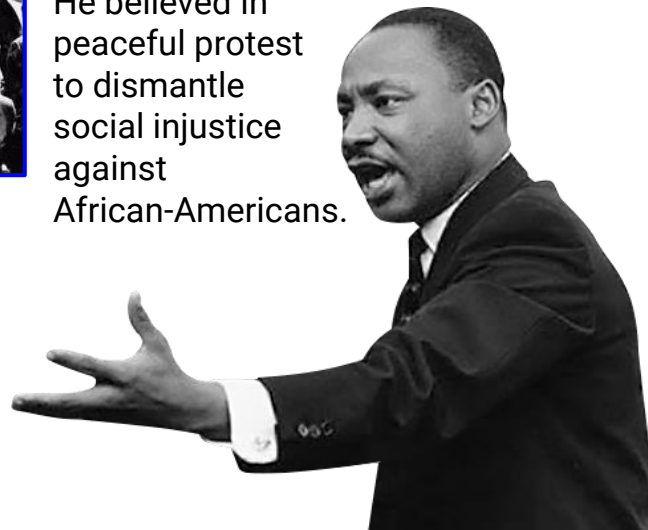


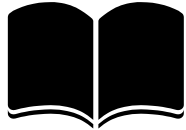
Image of a march led by Martin Luther King Jr. during the Civil Rights Movement

Martin Luther King, Jr. was a Baptist minister and social activist who led many momentous events in the American Civil Rights Movement in the mid-1950s. He believed in peaceful protest to dismantle social injustice against African-Americans.



1957

Together with fellow ministers and civil rights activists, King founded the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), which aimed to achieve equality through peaceful and nonviolent protest.



Racial tension and developments in the Civil Rights Movement in the 1950s and 1960s: Martin Luther King Jr and peaceful protests

1963

With religious groups and civil rights activists, King organised the March on Washington, a political rally highlighting equal jobs and freedom for African-Americans.

1965

He led the Selma to Montgomery March, which later contributed to the passage of the Voting Rights Act of the 15th Amendment in August.

1964

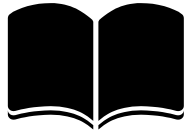
Due to his efforts in fighting for equality and human rights for African-Americans, King received a Nobel Peace Prize.

1968

King was assassinated on the balcony of a motel in Memphis.



Watch Dr Martin Luther King, Jr's / *Have A Dream* speech. Access using this link:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vP4iY1TtS3s>



Racial tension and developments in the Civil Rights Movement in the 1950s and 1960s: Malcolm X and the Black Power Movement

Who was Malcolm X?

Born on 19 May 1925, Malcolm was a minister and black nationalist leader who propagated the philosophy of the Nation of Islam in the 1950s and 1960s. He promoted freedom for African-Americans from racism by all means including violence. Malcolm X was known for having militant views including the establishment of an independent black nation through violent revolution.

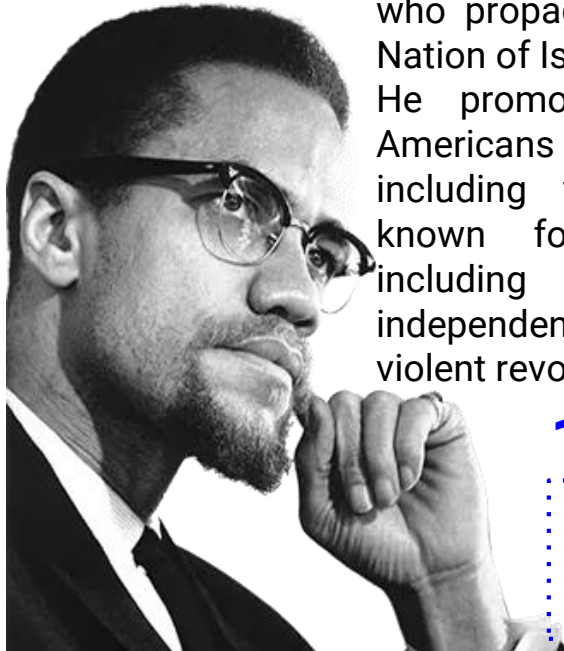
THE BLACK POWER MOVEMENT. A political and social movement emerged in the 1960s which advocated autonomy and self-determination of African-Americans in the United States. Aside from its political cornerstone, and based on the influence of Malcolm X, the movement specifically introduced changes to African-American culture from hairstyles, clothing, music, art and even language use.

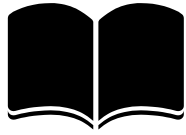
He was assassinated by members of the Nation of Islam.

1964

He left the Nation of Islam after feeling betrayed by his hero, Elijah Muhammad. His ideology became the foundation of radical movements including Black Power and the Black Panthers.

1965



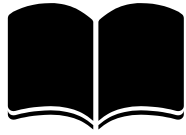


Racial tension and developments in the Civil Rights Movement in the 1950s and 1960s: Malcolm X and the Black Power Movement



Stokely Carmichael, national head of the SNCC, speaks about the meaning of "Black Power" on the campus of Florida A&M University, April 16, 1967, in Tallahassee, Florida.

BLACK POWER. The term "Black Power" was first coined by Stokely Carmichael, a Civil Rights activist and leader of the SNCC. The movement emerged as many African-Americans were dissatisfied with Martin Luther King, Jr's slow nonviolent protests. In 1968, during the Olympics in Mexico, African-American athletes Tommie Smith and John Carlos made the Black Power salute during the medal ceremony. Conversely, Dr King heavily denounced the movement as it encouraged and incited violence among young African-Americans. The movement ended in the late 1960s, as America's focus turned to the Vietnam War.



Racial tension and developments in the Civil Rights Movement in the 1950s and 1960s: Civil Rights Acts of 1964 and 1968

CIVIL RIGHTS ACT

1964

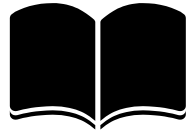


As proposed by John F. Kennedy, the Civil Rights Act was signed into law by U.S. President Lyndon B. Johnson, which ended racial segregation in public places as well as banned employment discrimination based on religion, sex, colour, and race.

Following the Civil War, constitutional amendments were passed which abolished slavery, gave freed slaves citizenship, and the right to vote for all men regardless of race. Despite these amendments, African-Americans continued to experience discrimination and segregation in all forms.

Under the 1964 Civil Rights Act, African-Americans as a minority should not be segregated and discriminated against in any public places including parks, theatres, restaurants, courthouses, and others. They should not be denied of any services based on colour or race. Moreover, the act also appropriated sufficient funds for anti-discriminatory programmes especially in assisting school desegregation.

Martin Luther King, Jr. said that the Civil Rights Act was nothing less than a second emancipation. As a result, two more legislations were passed protecting African-Americans: the Voting Rights Act of 1965 and the Fair Housing Act of 1968



Racial tension and developments in the Civil Rights Movement in the 1950s and 1960s: Civil Rights Acts of 1964 and 1968

1968



Also known as the Fair Housing Act, it prohibited discrimination regarding the sale, rental, and financing of housing based on sex, race, colour, and religion. The act enabled people to rent or own houses in previously segregated areas.

The Fair Housing Act was passed by Congress days after the assassination of civil rights leader, Martin Luther King, Jr.

Prior to this act, race-based housing patterns were prominent in many areas, especially in the South. Amongst the impact of this act was the staggering increase of the African-American population in urban centres. The number rose from about 6.1 million in the 1950s to 15.3 million in 1980.

As a result of the booming African-American population in urban areas, white Americans began to move from the cities to the suburbs. Ghettos began to emerge as inner city communities were dominated by poor African-Americans.



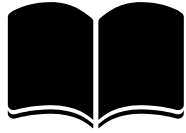
For better visual understanding, watch the explainer covering post-war America.

Access using this link:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S64zRnnn4Po>

Make notes outlining events that highlighted American society using these categories:

- Social
- Economic
- Political



America and the 'Great Society': the social policies of Presidents Kennedy and Johnson relating to poverty, education and health

Who was John F. Kennedy?



JFK was the 35th president of the United States. At the age of 43, he became the youngest and first Roman Catholic elected president of America.

- ❑ The conservative Democrat entered the 80th Congress at the age of 29.
- ❑ In 1960, he announced his candidacy for president along with Lyndon B. Johnson.

JFK employed Keynesian economics, as theorised by John Maynard Keynes, by focusing on federal tax and spending policies. According to Keynes, economic growth and lowering unemployment could be achieved through federal deficit spending.

Fair Labor Standards, 1961

Amendments to the 1938 act saw a minimum wage of \$1.25 established and minors further protected from labour exploitation.

Social Security Act, 1961

It permitted male workers an early retirement at the age of 62 and extended benefit payments to aged widows, widowers, and dependent parents.



America and the 'Great Society': the social policies of Presidents Kennedy and Johnson relating to poverty, education and health

Housing Act, 1961

Provided low-cost housing and low-interest loans to those who needed it, especially to the elderly and low-income families.

Equal Pay Act, 1963

This assured women equal pay to men doing the same job.



Maternal and Child Health and Mental Retardation Planning Amendment to the Social Security Act, 1963

Aside from JFK's inspiring inaugural address, he pumped funds into the construction of state highways. Moreover, he created the Food Stamp programme. JFK also accelerated tax refunds, farm price supports, and G.I. life insurance dividends.

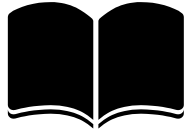
Image of President John F. Kennedy signing the Equal Pay Act in 1963

Aimed at supporting mental illness and intellectual disabilities, it provided appropriations for the construction of facilities for the prevention, care, and treatment of people with mental health conditions.

On 22 November 1963, Vice-President Lyndon B. Johnson was sworn in as President of the United States after the assassination of John F. Kennedy in Dallas, Texas.



Lyndon B. Johnson



America and the 'Great Society': the social policies of Presidents Kennedy and Johnson relating to poverty, education and health

While many Americans were grieving the death of JFK, Johnson took advantage by pushing through some of Kennedy's agenda, including tax cuts and the Civil Rights Act. Among his initial moves as president was the introduction of the Office of Economic Opportunity and the Economic Opportunity Act, which aimed to break the poverty cycle by providing further education and skill-based programmes.

War on Poverty

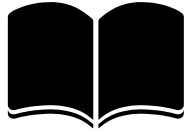
In March 1964, Johnson initiated his 'war on poverty' by introducing the following:

- ❑ a Community Action programme that would enable local communities to deal with poverty,
- ❑ the recruitment and training of American volunteers to serve in poverty-stricken communities

- ❑ employers were given loans and guarantees if they offered jobs to the unemployed
- ❑ farmers were given funds to buy land and establish agricultural co-ops; and
- ❑ unemployed parents were supported as they entered the workforce.

"...this program will show the way to new opportunities for millions of our fellow citizens. It will provide a lever with which we can begin to open the door to our prosperity for those who have been kept outside."

- US President Lyndon B. Johnson



America and the 'Great Society': the social policies of Presidents Kennedy and Johnson relating to poverty, education and health

Medicare and Medicaid

In 1964, health safety nets for America's most vulnerable, the poor and the elderly, were provided. Medicare covered physician and hospital costs of qualified elderly, while Medicaid provided government cash assistance to qualified poor.

By 1965, federal funding for education was appropriated through the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. It specifically provided funds for school districts covering preschool programmes, school libraries, textbooks, and special education services.

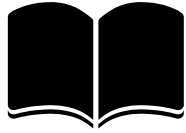
From 1964 to 1965, Pres. Johnson launched a set of domestic policies which aimed to eliminate poverty and racial injustice in the United States. He coined it the 'Great Society'.

GREAT SOCIETY

Education Reform

To ensure success among young Americans, Project Head Start was launched by Pres. Johnson to be led by politician and activist Sargent Shriver. Along with a team of child development experts, the project launched an eight-week summer for 500,000 children ages three to five.

In addition, President LBJ also signed the National Endowment for the Arts and Humanities, which funded and supported artists, libraries, public archives, and galleries.



America and the 'Great Society: the development and impact of feminist movements in the 1960s and early 1970s, including the fight for equal pay; the National Organisation for Women

During World War II, a significant number of American women started to work to support men who had enlisted in the army. There were about 6 million women working in factories, while around 600,000 joined the Army as support personnel. After the war, many women refused to give up their jobs and started to demand more rights.

In the 1960s, American women were expected to marry in their 20s and to focus on building and maintaining a family. They were tasked with housekeeping and childcare. By law, they had no right to own any property of their husband.

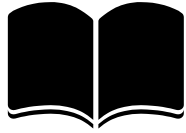
Around 38% of women entered the workforce and they were limited to a few jobs including being a teacher, secretary, and nurse. Moreover, they were paid lower salaries compared to men. Very few women entered professions with only 6% being doctors, 3% lawyers, and less than 1% being engineers.

The Feminine Mystique

In 1963, Betty Friedan published a book about women's rights and the idea of a feminist movement. She insisted that women should have equal rights to men.

National Organisation for Women

Friedan, along with other women leaders, established an organisation that would demand equal rights for women under the U.S. law. By 1964, discrimination based on sex and race became illegal. It was followed by the Civil Rights Act, which gave women equal access to employment and higher education.



America and the 'Great Society: the development and impact of feminist movements in the 1960s and early 1970s, including the fight for equal pay; the National Organisation for Women



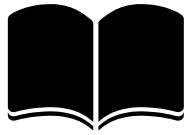
Betty Friedan, shown in 1970, is credited with starting second-wave feminism with her book

In her book, *Feminist Mystique*, Friedan wrote that American women who abandoned their career for marriage at a young age contributed to the baby boom.

The feminist movement emerged in the 1960s and focused on ending workplace inequality through anti-discrimination laws.

IMPACT. In 1972, Education Amendment was passed, which prohibited sex-based discrimination in any federally-funded education programme. It was also during this decade that Women's Studies emerged as an academic discipline. By 1975, International Women's Year was declared, which highlighted the contributions of women to American society.

Moreover, women were not pulled out of school in order to get married. They were given the freedom to establish careers and own property without men. In politics, there was a huge increase in female participation. Through these efforts, today, many forms of injustice, violence, and discrimination based on sex are unacceptable.



America and the 'Great Society: the development and impact of feminist movements in the 1960s and early 1970s, Roe v Wade (1973)

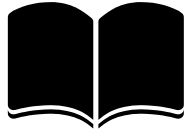
On 22 January 1973, the U.S. Supreme Court decided on the *Roe v. Wade* case, which affirmed the constitutionality of access to safe and legal abortions.



Elianna Schiffrick, centre, was among a small group of counter-protesters outside the Supreme Court during the March for Life

BACKGROUND. As early as the 1820s and 1830s, American women were using dangerous drugs to induce abortions. Despite government regulations, abortion was a common procedure for women who did not want to continue a pregnancy. In the 1850s, the American Medical Association began to call for the criminalisation of abortion.

In 1965, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that banning the distribution of birth control to married couples was unconstitutional. By 1970, Hawaii became the first state to legalise abortion, followed by New York, Alaska, and Washington.



America and the 'Great Society: the development and impact of feminist movements in the 1960s and early 1970s, Roe v Wade (1973)

JANE ROE. Norma McCorvey, famously known as Jane Roe, was a woman from Texas who had given birth twice and had to give her children up for adoption due to being unable to financially support them. In 1969, abortion became legal in Texas under circumstances of saving the mother's life. That same year, McCorvey fell pregnant and attempted to have an abortion due to continued poverty.

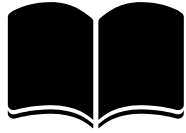


Image of Norma McCorvey, a.k.a Jane Roe

McCorvey became known as Jane Roe after she was referred to local attorneys Linda Coffee and Sarah Weddington, who both wanted to question anti-abortion laws in Texas.

HENRY WADE. By 1970, Roe's attorneys filed a case against Henry Wade, the District Attorney of Dallas County. Wade was the same lawyer who prosecuted Jack Ruby for the murder of Lee Harvey Oswald, JFK's assassin in the previous years.

RESULT. In 1970, the district court in Texas ruled that the abortion ban was illegal as it violated an individual's constitutional right to privacy. In the following years, the case was appealed in the U.S. Supreme Court, which decided in 1973 that the Texas law banning abortion was unconstitutional. Justice Blackmun, particularly, point out that women's right to abortion was protected by the 14th Amendment.



America and the 'Great Society: the development and impact of feminist movements in the 1960s and early 1970s, Roe v Wade (1973)

The court set regulations on abortion by dividing pregnancy into three trimesters. The first trimester could be solely decided by the mother, while the second could be regulated by the government based on health risks. This case further strengthened women's reproductive rights.

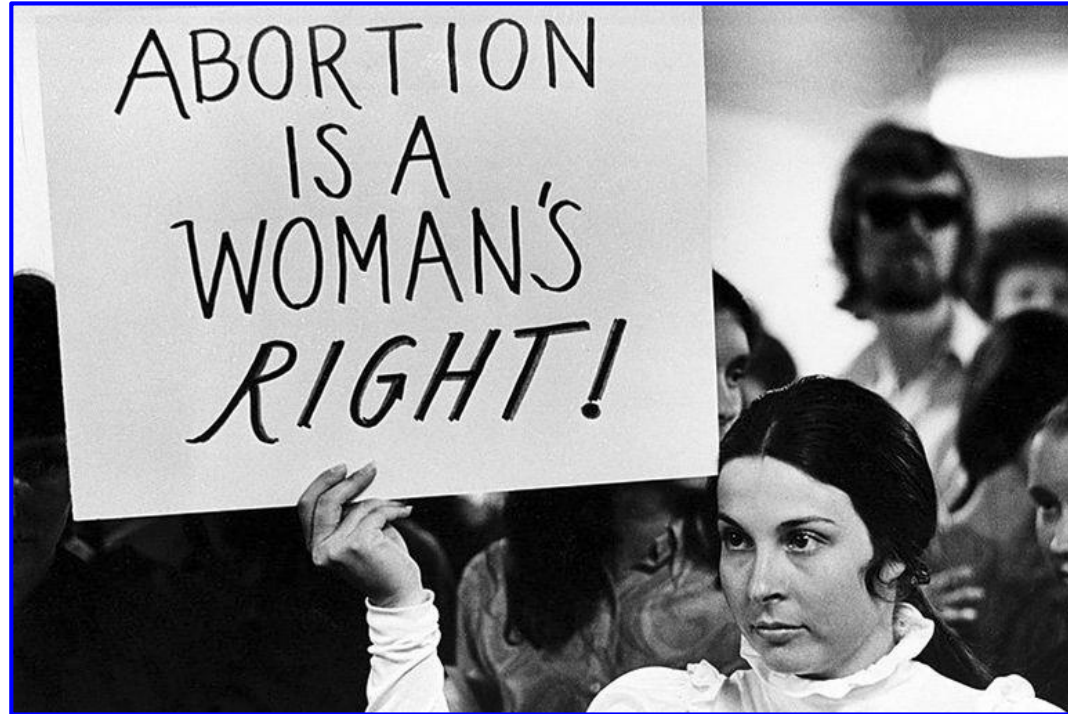


Image of a woman holding a placard insisting that abortion is a woman's right



America and the 'Great Society': the Supreme Court ruling on equal rights (1972 and opposition to Equal Rights Amendment)

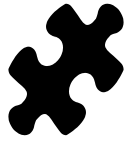
Equal Rights Amendment

BACKGROUND. Originally known as the Lucretia Mott Amendment, the Equal Amendment was first drafted by Alice Paul in 1923. Between 1923 and 1970, a number of versions were presented to Congress by women's rights groups. By 1970, with the instrumental role of Representative Martha Griffiths, the House passed the amendment, followed by the Senate in 1972. Within a year, it was ratified by 30 states even after being partly slowed down by anti-E.R.As.

OPPOSITION.

- ❑ Some conservatives, specifically led by Phyllis Schlafly, argued that the E.R.A would strip women of their privileges, which included exemption from military draft and husband support.
- ❑ Conservative women were also against the movement because of its support of abortion, contraception, as well as gay rights.

The Equal Rights Amendment was passed on 22 March 1972, but due to opposition and lack of sufficient state votes, the E.R.A was never ratified. However, many states added similar amendments to their state constitutions.



CONSUMERISM

A social and economic idea that purchasing goods and services are vital to an individual's well-being.

McCARTHYISM

Refers to the rigid campaign against Communists who were believed to have infiltrated the U.S. government. It was named after Senator McCarthy who began the call.

RACIAL SEGREGATION

The practice of separating people based on ethnicity, race, and colour.

CIVIL RIGHTS ACT

The act which outlawed discrimination based on race, colour, religion, national origin, and sex.

GREAT SOCIETY

A series of domestic policies initiated by U.S. President Lyndon B. Johnson to eradicate poverty and racial injustice in America.

FEMINISM

Advocacy for women's rights which emerged in the 1960s and seeks equality of the sexes in all aspects of life.