

# BBC Bitesize

**Narrator:** The expansion of American military manufacturing during World War Two has led to a booming economy.

When the war ends in 1945, factories return to making consumer items, mass producing goods such as cars, TVs and washing machines.

America is also supplying these items to much of the world, further strengthening the economy.

The booming economy means more people are able to live the so called American Dream – buy a home, purchase a car and travel.

In 1946, over three million babies are born - a 20% increase over the previous year. This number continues to rise until 1965, in what is known as a baby boom.

With no war and a strong economy, 'baby boomers', those born during the boom, grow up to be teenagers with more leisure time and money than ever before!

By 1959, over 85% of households in America have a television, boosting the power of advertising.

Influenced by blues and jazz, a new style of music - rock and roll – emerges, and becomes hugely popular in the 1950s.

But not everyone is able to enjoy the benefits of American prosperity. One quarter of all Americans, and half of all African Americans, still live in poverty.

Many Native Americans are also poor and live on reservations with no access to the natural resources they rely on for their way of life. Health care and education on the reservations are underfunded – and they struggle to improve their lives.

The government widens this divide by investing in suburbs over city centres. Mainly white, middle-class suburban housing is funded, while mainly black urban residents are either ignored - or displaced in order to build highways.

Meanwhile, Soviet influence is spreading across Eastern Europe, leading some to fear that communism will take hold in America. In 1950, Senator Joseph McCarthy starts a ruthless political campaign – known as a witch hunt... accusing anybody with liberal views of being a communist. Eventually he goes too far and loses public support.

John F Kennedy is elected president in 1960 after campaigning to reduce poverty and improve access to healthcare, but he is assassinated in 1963. His Vice President, Lyndon B. Johnson, becomes president and introduces a series of reforms called the Great Society which aim to help end poverty and racial discrimination.

The Great Society has a huge impact. By 1967 spending on education, health, jobs and welfare has nearly doubled since 1964, the number of African Americans living in poverty has also fallen.

But America remains unequal, and marginalised groups, including African Americans and women, continue to fight for equality.