

SIGNIFICANT SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT 1933-1964

The permanent westward shift in the geographical center of the nation's population was accelerated by World War II. After the war, population growth in the US was greater than in any other nation of the western world. Notable population trends in evidence were from the farm to city (especially among blacks who left the farms of the South to work in urban factories during the war), from city centers to suburbs (especially among whites), from lower to middle class (especially among whites benefiting from the Montgomery GI Bill), and from Protestant to Catholic.

POPULATION GROWTH AND COMPOSITION - In 1940, the population of the United States had reached approximately 131 million. The American birth rate had been in declining trend since the twenties when smaller families had become fashionable. From this background, forecasters projected a steadily declining birth rate, one that would in a few decades leave the nation with a stable population. The oncoming of WWII greatly changed the forecasts. Increased war time and postwar marriages at earlier ages and the popularity of larger families caused a sudden rapid increase in the birth rate (the baby boomers). By 1960, the American population had vaulted to 180 million. Although the 1958 birth rate began an annual decline from the numbers registered since about 1940, large annual increases in absolute numbers remained almost as high as ever. In the early 1960s, population experts repeatedly called attention to the American "population explosion" as well as the world trend to larger population and the possibility of food shortages in the future (one of the reasons for the hippy movement of the 1960s).

The main reason for the increase in the population, even though the birth rate had again stabilized, was the constantly diminishing death rate, due especially to improvements in medical care and advances of medical science, increased life expectancy and consequently the proportion of "senior citizens."

MOVEMENT TO THE SUBURBS - After WWII, sociologists made much of the large movements of the urban middle classes (which was mainly white due to the GI Bill and the lack of good college education available to blacks) from the larger cities to their suburbs, a movement made possible by the increasing use of automobiles and the extensive highway building undertaken by the federal government. The growing middle classes could afford to move to suburbia to escape the problems of the cities, which was aged buildings and poverty (black workers were fired after WWII and were largely unemployed).

In the suburbs the monotonous, brick, dated architecture of the twenties gave way to the white unadorned, boxlike economical housing of the thirties. With the increase in money, people moved to the suburbs into single-story, wide eaved ranch house of the thirties. Better incomes and status seeking required that these new homes have two-car garages (usually gaping at the street) and the large picture window displaying the large decorative lamp of the living room.

IMPROVED LIVING STANDARDS - The dreaded return of the economic depression, so fully expected following the war, never materialized (at least for white Americans). Instead, most Americans enjoyed ever increasing prosperity. The impetus given the economy was a consequence of the war which created a great increase in money in circulation and postponed the rising demand for consumer goods. As goods became available, people spent wartime savings bonds, their increasing incomes, and used installment financing to buy more. The postwar boom in residential construction absorbed much of the spending. Where one car had been a necessity before, now a great many families seemed to require two cars (even though many women did not work). Many families bought television sets, which became the basis of household entertainment (also brought about a disillusionment about family life, which will also be a cause of the hippy movement of the 1960s).

After the immediate postwar demand for goods was partially satisfied, people began to spend more for services of all kinds, including education, entertainment and medical care. Travel and all kinds of sports boomed with the increase in leisure time and in disposable incomes. Leisure time increased with the shorter

work week and increased vacation times. More people came to own their own homes. In traveling, people in the suburbs shifted from trains and busses to private automobiles and airplanes.

All of these trends narrowed the gap between the upper classes and the population. No longer was it just the domain of the upper classes to own homes, cars and fashionable clothes. Sociologists had to develop new ways to measure the classes (they turned to gross family income). However, all of these improved living standards in the suburbs were largely restricted to white America. Blacks in the “inner cities” remained impoverished. However, they did see what was occurring and asked why this great American prosperity was not happening to them. Swiss philosopher Gunnar Myrdal in the *American Dilemma* (1945) predicted this widening among the racial classes would cause America severe problems within the next two decades.

THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT BEGINS

By the end of the 1940s blacks were increasingly gaining more visible exposure in white America. Musicians and actors were gaining some roles and Major League Baseball began signing blacks to contracts to play baseball with white athletes. However, these gains had little or no effect on the everyday life of most black Americans until the Supreme Court of the United States stepped in.

INTEGRATION OF THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS - As we studied before, the 14th Amendment provides that no state may deprive citizens of their privileges nor deny them “equal protection of the laws.” In the case *Plessy v. Ferguson* in 1896 the Supreme Court held that “separate but equal” public facilities for blacks did not violate the Constitution; of course, as we have studied, this decision permitted segregation of blacks, which were not equal in funding.

In 1954, the Supreme Court by unanimous vote under Chief Justice Earl Warren recognized the inequality, perpetuated by segregation, in the case of *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas*, which was argued by NAACP lawyer Thurgood Marshall. The Court held that “separate educational facilities are inherently unequal.” Thus 17 states were found in violation of the Constitution. In 1955 another Court decision ordered the states to terminate segregation with “all deliberate speed” and designated Federal District Courts as agents for deciding if local authorities were complying with the decision. In other cases, the ban on segregation was applied to public recreation facilities and transportation facilities.

EXTENT OF DESEGREGATION - The first steps toward ending segregation were taken in the six border states where there was little public opposition to obeying the Court’s decision. Six other states of the South gave token acceptance but there was much public opposition. In the states of the Deep South, with larger percentages of blacks, various measures were taken to obstruct the enforcement of the decision. Laws were passed empowering local schools to assign pupils upon various bases by which segregation could continue. State funds were denied to schools that integrated and laws passed to abolish public schools in favor of private schools. Court decisions often required reopening of such schools on the basis of integration. When the governor of Arkansas, Orval Faubus, used the Arkansas National Guard to prevent integration at the Little Rock (Central) High School, Eisenhower, who privately called the Brown decision a mistake, nationalized the Guard and ordered them to protect black pupils in 1957-1958.

CIVIL RIGHTS ACT OF 1957 - While the discrimination of blacks occurred throughout the US, it was a particular problem in the South. As we have seen, these states were slow to adopt the idea of desegregation. The problems in Montgomery, Alabama in the summer of 1955 over Rosa Parks and the bus boycott, placed the issue on the TV screens of millions of Americans. Most were shocked to human beings treated in such a manner (firehoses, etc). In 1957, Congress stepped in and tried to pass a broad civil rights bill. After its provisions were considerably weakened by Southern Democrats in the Senate, it was passed – to become the first civil rights bill to pass Congress since 1875. The law 1) created a Commission on Civil Rights with the duty of investigating denial of voting rights based on unfair discrimination and 2) gave the Department of Justice certain powers of enforcement.

When Southern officials obstructed the enforcement of the act, the Commission investigated denial of the vote to blacks. The Commission made further recommendations, and Congress responded with the Civil Rights Act of 1960. This law provided federal penalties for anyone resorting to violence to obstruct the Civil Rights Act and placed restrictions on election officials to help secure the enforcement of voting rights.

KENNEDY-JOHNSON AND THE CIVIL RIGHTS ISSUE

Election of 1960. As was expected, Eisenhower gave his VP Richard Nixon his endorsement for the Republican nomination for president. The Democrats turned to the young Senator from Massachusetts, John Kennedy. As the Cold War again heightened and Americans were turned off by the violence from white Republicans, Kennedy gained steadily, despite his youth and Catholic background. The tide turned for Kennedy during the first televised national debate. Looking young and energetic, Kennedy came off more impressive than the tired Nixon (suffering from a cold and refusing TV makeup). However, to those who listened on the radio, Nixon was the winner of the debate. However, the TV audience was larger and it helped push Kennedy to the Presidency in the closest national election in US history. Kennedy won the popular vote by 113,957 of nearly 69 million voters. In Kennedy, the US found someone with the willingness to lead the fight in the Cold War and domestic issues.

CIVIL RIGHTS AND SCHOOL DESEGREGATION - The Kennedy administration was not effective in passing many of its campaign promises (too short), the blacks of the country found their biggest supporter in the White House. The President and Attorney-General Robert Kennedy took vigorous steps to realize the goal of civil rights for blacks. Also, blacks and white sympathizers (of which there were many at the time) pursuing Martin Luther King's tactics of nonviolence rose "freedom buses" into the South to break the customary segregation of blacks in public transportation. Signs indicated that many communities in the South would follow their more responsible leaders and move more rapidly toward terminating the various segregation practices. The crusaders for equality also undertook "sit-ins" at public lunch counters in drug and department stores, to force management to serve all persons regardless of color. This tactic won desegregation in many towns, but in some instances led to minor violence. Late in 1962 the administration, by Kennedy's executive order, banned racial discrimination in renting or buying FHA-assisted housing.

The forced enrollment of James Meredith, a black man, at the University of Mississippi in September 1962 led to a showdown between state and federal authorities similar to that at Little Rock in 1957. Kennedy sent in 10,000 troops to protect Meredith while attending classes. Two persons were killed in the rioting to stop Meredith's enrollment. Most Americans watched disgustedly as events unfolded on their TV screens.

In spite of resistance offered to desegregation in parts of the deep South, blacks were steadily and quietly winning innumerable victories. These gains made available to them, for the first time, the right to vote, to hold white collar jobs (middle class jobs), to attend integrated schools (get a good education), to use desegregated transportation and live desegregated housing.

CIVIL RIGHTS, 1963 - The black civil rights movement gained further momentum in 1963. In the South, Tulane University and Clemson College quietly admitted black students, and show of federal force gained the admission of three blacks to the University of Alabama. The civil rights movement in the South aimed to desegregate all public facilities and businesses and to register voters. In the North, and elsewhere, the goals were job equality, de facto school integration, and housing desegregation. Opposition to black demands were often from extreme faction of society (KKK) and took forms of lawlessness and violence. As violence increased, many government official began to try to limit protests out of fear for the public safety (i.e. no protests, no KKK lynching).

To continue to win their rights, blacks and white sympathizers continued to conduct meetings, hold peaceful demonstrations, marches, sit-ins, and exercised their legal rights. They began to slowly receive more political support as political leaders began to recognize the black's voting strength. Better incomes for blacks provided funds as did contributions by religious and reform groups. Independence from European nations of the African nations gave moral support. President Kennedy and his brother were most active in using executive power of the federal government; for example, the Interstate Commerce Commission

ordered an end to segregation in bus terminals. The federal courts handed down orders to desegregate schools and permit the registration of voters. President Kennedy twice called for civil rights legislation. Only after his assassination, however, was it passed. The 1963 demonstrations reached a climax in August in a civil rights march on Washington staged by 200,000 persons to the Lincoln Memorial. Addressing the crowd, Dr. Martin Luther King spoke of his hopes and dreams in his now famous speech, "I have a dream..."