

There's More Online!

- ✓ BIOGRAPHY Ralph Ellison
- ✓ CHART/GRAPH Native Americans
- ✓ CHART/GRAPH Suburban Dwellers
- ✓ MAP Appalachia
- ✓ VIDEO Other Side of American Life
- ✓ INTERACTIVE SELF-CHECK QUIZ



## LESSON 3

## The Other Side of American Life

ESSENTIAL QUESTION • How does prosperity change the way people live?

Reading HELPDESK



## Academic Vocabulary

- income
- entity

## Content Vocabulary

- poverty line
- urban renewal
- termination policy
- juvenile delinquency

## TAKING NOTES:

## Key Ideas and Details

**Organizing** As you read, use the major headings of this section to create an outline similar to the one below.

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| <p>The Other Side of American Life</p> <p>I. Poverty Amid Prosperity</p> <p style="margin-left: 20px;">A.</p> <p style="margin-left: 20px;">B.</p> <p style="margin-left: 20px;">C.</p> <p style="margin-left: 20px;">D.</p> <p style="margin-left: 20px;">E.</p> <p>II.</p> |
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## IT MATTERS BECAUSE

During the 1950s, about 20 percent of the American population—particularly people of color and those living in the inner cities and Appalachia—did not share in the general prosperity. Experts also worried about the rise in juvenile delinquency.

## Poverty Amid Prosperity

**GUIDING QUESTION** Are the people and regions most affected by poverty today the same as in the 1950s?

The 1950s saw a large expansion of the middle class. At least one in five Americans, or about 30 million people, however, lived below the **poverty line**. This imaginary marker is a figure the government sets to reflect the minimum **income** required to support a family. Many Americans mistakenly thought that the country's prosperity had provided for everyone.

The poor included single mothers and the elderly; minorities such as Puerto Ricans and Mexican immigrants; rural Americans—both African American and white; and inner-city residents, who remained stuck in crowded slums. Many Native Americans endured poverty whether they stayed on reservations or migrated to cities.

## The Decline of the Inner City

Poverty was most apparent in the nation's urban centers. As middle-class families moved to the suburbs, they left behind the poor and less educated. Many city centers deteriorated because they no longer received taxes from their former middle-class residents. Cities could no longer provide adequate public transportation, housing, and other services.

When government tried to help inner-city residents, it often made matters worse. **Urban renewal** programs tried to eliminate poverty by tearing down slums and building new high-rises for poor residents. Yet these crowded projects often created an

atmosphere of violence. The government also unwittingly created a condition supporting poverty with a rule that evicted residents of public housing as soon as they began earning a higher income.

### African Americans

Although more than 3 million African Americans had migrated from the South to Northern cities, long-standing patterns of racial discrimination kept many of them poor. In 1958 African Americans' salaries, on average, were only 51 percent of what whites earned.

In 1959 the play *A Raisin in the Sun*, written by African American author Lorraine Hansberry, opened on Broadway. The play told the story of a working-class African American family struggling against poverty and racism. Hansberry wrote: "The ghettos are killing us; not only our dreams . . . but our very bodies."

### Hispanics

Much of the nation's Hispanic population also struggled with poverty. Nearly 5 million Mexicans had come to the United States through the Bracero Program to work on farms and ranches in the Southwest. Braceros were temporary contract workers. Many later returned home, but some 350,000 settled permanently in the United States. They worked long hours, for little pay, in conditions that were often unbearable. The migrant workers' list of grievances included "poor food . . . substandard housing, prejudice and discrimination, physical mistreatment and exposure to pesticides . . . and unsatisfactory earnings," according to one Bracero Program history.

### Native Americans

By the middle of the 1900s, Native Americans—who made up less than one percent of the population—were the poorest ethnic group in the nation. After World War II, the United States government launched a program to bring Native Americans into mainstream society. Under the plan, which became known as the **termination policy**, the federal government withdrew all official recognition of the Native American groups as legal **entities** and made them subject to the same laws as white citizens. Another program encouraged Native Americans to relocate from their reservations to cities.

For many Native Americans, relocation was a disaster. For example, in the mid-1950s, the Welfare Council of Minneapolis said of Native American living conditions: "One Indian family of five or six, living in two rooms, will take in relatives and friends who come from the reservations seeking jobs until perhaps fifteen people will be crowded into the space." During the 1950s, Native Americans in Minneapolis could expect to live only 37 years, compared to 68 years for other Minneapolis residents. Benjamin Reifel, a Sioux, described the despair the termination policy produced: "The Indians believed that when the dark clouds of war passed from the skies overhead, their rising tide of expectations, though temporarily stalled, would again reappear. Instead they were threatened by termination. . . . Soaring expectations began to plunge."

### Appalachia

The mountainous region of Appalachia, stretching from New York to Georgia, often kept poverty hidden. Coal mining, long the backbone of the Appalachian economy, mechanized in the 1950s, causing soaring unemployment.

**poverty line** a level of personal or family income below which one is classified as poor by the federal government

**income** a gain or recurrent benefit usually measured in money derived from capital or labor

**urban renewal** government programs that attempt to eliminate poverty and revitalize urban areas

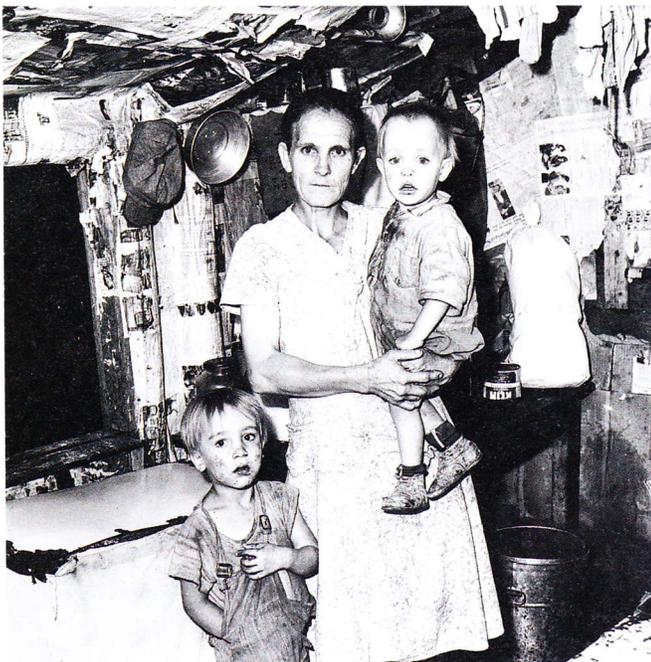
**termination policy** a government policy to bring Native Americans into mainstream society by withdrawing recognition of Native American groups as legal entities

**entity** something having independent, separate, or self-contained existence

Eight family members lived in this three-room house lined with newspaper in Appalachia in the 1950s.

#### ► CRITICAL THINKING

**Drawing Conclusions** Besides inadequate housing, what other effects did poverty have on people?



Some 1.5 million people left Appalachia to seek a better life in the cities. Appalachia had fewer doctors than the rest of the country, and rates of nutritional deficiency and infant mortality were high. Schooling was considered even worse than in inner-city slums.

**READING PROGRESS CHECK**

**Identifying** What are two regions where poverty was most prevalent in the 1950s, and why was their level of prosperity so low?

## Juvenile Delinquency

**GUIDING QUESTION** *What factors were blamed for the rise in juvenile delinquency?*

During the 1950s, many middle-class white Americans found it easy to ignore poverty and racism. Some social problems, however, became impossible to ignore. **Juvenile delinquency**—antisocial or criminal behavior of young people—became one of those problems when the United States saw a 45 percent rise in juvenile crime rates between 1948 and 1953.

Americans disagreed on what had triggered the rise. Experts blamed television, movies, comic books, racism, busy parents, a rising divorce rate, lack of religion, and anxiety over the military draft. Some cultural critics claimed that young people were rebelling against the conformity of their parents. Others blamed a lack of discipline. Bishop Fulton J. Sheen complained that parents had raised bored children who sought new thrills, such as “alcohol, marijuana, even murder.” Still others pointed at social causes, blaming teen violence on poverty. Most teens stayed clear of gangs, drugs, and crime. Still, the public stereotyped young people as juvenile delinquents, especially those who had long hair or used street slang.

Concerned about their children, many parents focused on the schools as a possible solution. When baby boomers began entering the school system in the 1950s, enrollments increased by 13 million, and school districts struggled to pay for new buildings and hire more teachers. In 1957 the Soviet Union’s launch of *Sputnik I* and *Sputnik II*, the world’s first space satellites, caused more panic about education. Many felt that the nation had fallen behind its Cold War enemy. They blamed what they saw as a lack of technical education. Efforts to improve math and science education began. Yet fears about the nation’s young people lingered at the end of the decade.

**READING PROGRESS CHECK**

**Evaluating** Why do you think schools were a possible solution for juvenile delinquency?

**juvenile delinquency**  
antisocial or criminal behavior of young people

## Connections to TODAY

### Juvenile Delinquency

Teens are more involved in crime, drugs, and gangs today than they were in the 1950s. There are four times as many juvenile court cases as there were in 1960. In the late 1990s, about 2 million juveniles (ages 10–17) were arrested, mostly for drug-related crimes. Many of these crimes were committed by juveniles in gangs. The number of juvenile cases has dropped in the past decade, but gang crimes are on the rise.

## LESSON 3 REVIEW



### Reviewing Vocabulary

- 1. Defining** If someone is living below the poverty line, what does that mean?
- 2. Explaining** Why did some people stereotype certain young people as juvenile delinquents?

### Using Your Notes

- 3. Making Connections** Use your notes from the lesson to determine what caused some young people to become juvenile delinquents and how society responded with solutions.

### Answering the Guiding Questions

- 4. Evaluating** Are the people and regions most affected by poverty today the same as in the 1950s?
- 5. Identifying** What factors were blamed for the rise in juvenile delinquency?

### Writing Activity

- 6. NARRATIVE** You are a writer for your school newspaper. This month’s paper is featuring a throwback to the 1950s. Write an article that highlights a social problem affecting your generation that parallels problems in the 1950s.