

## SSUSH21

The student will explain the *impact of technological development and economic growth on the United States, 1945-1975.*

This standard will measure your understanding of America's technological development and economic growth from the end of World War II through 1975, and their impact on our nation. This period led directly into present-day events, so your knowledge of it is critical to your understanding of how recent American history influences us now.

a. Describe the baby boom and its impact as shown by Levittown and the Interstate Highway Act.

### Economic Growth

After World War II, soldiers returned home to America and settled back into the lives they had left behind. One effect of this was a huge growth in population called the Baby Boom. From the mid-1940s to the mid-1960s the birthrate quickly increased, reaching its high point in 1957, a year when over four million babies were born. The generation referred to as Baby Boomers is the largest generation in American history. Another effect of the soldiers' return was a housing shortage. The veterans' new and growing families needed homes to live in. In response, housing developers such as William Levitt created methods of building houses faster, cheaper, and more efficiently.

These methods led to the creation of the first suburbs—communities outside of a city and mostly made up of single-family houses for people whose family members worked in the city. The first example of a suburb was on New York's Long Island, where William Levitt's Levittown was the first master-planned community in America. Because the new suburbs were outside the limits of large cities, there was little public transportation available for the suburban residents. They needed cars and increased car ownership meant more roads were needed, so Congress passed the Interstate Highway Act, authorizing the construction of a national network of highways to connect every major city in America. In all, 41,000 miles of new expressways, or freeways, were built. It was a record-size public works project.

b. Describe the impact television has had on American culture; include the presidential debates (Kennedy/Nixon, 1960) and news coverage of the Civil Rights Movement.

### Television Changes

The first regular television broadcasts began in 1949, providing just two hours a week of news and entertainment to a very small area on the East Coast. By 1956, over 500 stations were broadcasting all over America, bringing news and entertainment into the living rooms of most Americans. In the 1960 national election campaign, the **Kennedy/Nixon presidential debates** were the first ones ever shown on TV. Seventy million people tuned in. Although Nixon was more knowledgeable about foreign policy and other topics, Kennedy looked and spoke more forcefully because he had been coached by television producers. Kennedy's performance in the debate helped him win the presidency. The Kennedy/Nixon debates changed the shape of American politics. TV newscasts also changed the shape of American culture. Americans who might never have attended a civil rights demonstration saw and heard them on their TVs in the 1960s. In 1963, TV reports showed helmeted police officers from Birmingham, Alabama, using high-pressure fire hoses to spray African American children who had been walking in a protest march. The reports also showed the officers setting police dogs to attack them, and then clubbing them. **TV news coverage of the civil rights movement** helped many Americans turn their sympathies toward ending racial segregation and persuaded Kennedy that new laws were the only ways to end the racial violence and to give African Americans the civil rights they were demanding.

c. Analyze the impact of technology on American life; include the development of the personal computer, the cellular telephone and *the expanded use of air conditioning*.

#### **Technological Wonders**

In addition to the television, other postwar advances in technology surged. The expanded use of **air-conditioning** permitted more tolerable working conditions in skyscrapers and other buildings used for conducting business, thereby encouraging urban development and stimulating economic growth in hot and humid climates. Telephone lines covered the country, allowing people to stay in contact regardless of distance. By the 1970s, early versions of today's **personal computers**, the Internet, and cellular phones gave a few Americans a glimpse of the technologies that someday would connect everyone to each other regardless of where they were, and these technologies would become as common as typewriters and public phone booths were in the 1970s.

d. Describe the impact of competition with the USSR as evidenced by the launch of Sputnik I and President Eisenhower's actions.

#### **Sputnik I and the Cold War**

In 1957, the Soviet Union launched the first artificial satellite—Sputnik I—a feat that caused many Americans to believe the United States had “fallen behind” the Soviet Union in terms of understanding science and the uses of technology. The success of the Soviet satellite launch led to increased U.S. government spending on education, especially in mathematics and science, and on national military defense programs. Additionally, Sputnik I increased Cold War tensions by heightening U.S. fears that the Soviet Union might use rockets to launch nuclear weapons against the United States and its allied nations.