Uneven Prosperity

Postwar growth and the Americans it left behind

9-12.US2.27 "Describe the causes and effects on American society and culture of widespread growing affluence in the post-war period, as well as groups and geographic areas that were largely left out of it."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline two causes of postwar affluence, circle two effects on American life, and number two examples of people or places left out of the boom. Use your marks to trace who benefited and why.

A Boom with Boundaries

1 In 1948, a worker leaving an automobile plant might pass a showroom full of new cars. During World War II, families had saved money while factories produced military goods rather than many household products. After the war, pent-up demand met expanding factories, rising productivity, and relatively well-paid union jobs in industries such as automobiles and steel. Federal spending on veterans' education through the GI Bill helped some workers gain training for better-paying work. More families could afford refrigerators, cars, and new homes, often by buying on credit. Yet an expanding economy did not give every worker the same wages or choices.

2 A family moving to a suburb might buy a house far from the city and drive to work each day. The federal government backed many mortgages through programs such as Federal Housing Administration insurance and GI Bill home loans. New highways also made driving from suburbs to city jobs easier. Federal housing policies and private lenders favored white buyers, while discriminatory lending and deed restrictions blocked many Black families from suburban homes. This pattern increased racial separation between suburbs and cities. Television shows and advertisements presented a home, a car, and new appliances as signs of success, often casting women chiefly as homemakers.

3 In the Southwest, many Mexican American farmworkers earned low wages and could not easily buy the goods celebrated in television ads. In Appalachia, coal mine mechanization reduced jobs, leaving many families outside the suburban boom. Black veterans could qualify for GI Bill benefits on paper, yet local banks and segregated colleges often limited their access in practice. Those who could not purchase homes missed a common way to build family wealth as property values rose. Postwar prosperity thus reshaped where people lived and what they bought, but its benefits followed unequal paths across race, occupation, and region.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How did wartime saving and changes in factory production help cause the postwar buying boom?

2. How did federal policies help suburbs grow, and why could many Black families not share in that growth?

3. What did television shows and advertisements suggest a successful life looked like? Describe one effect this message could have on American culture.

4. Compare why many families in the Southwest and Appalachia were left out of postwar affluence.

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write a five-sentence museum caption comparing two possible postwar households, one that benefits from the boom and one that faces a barrier. Use details from at least two paragraphs to explain a cause of their different experiences and two effects on American society or culture.

ANSWER KEY

Uneven Prosperity

HIGH SCHOOL · 9-12.US2.27

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline two causes of postwar affluence, circle two effects on American life, and number two examples of people or places left out of the boom. Use your marks to trace who benefited and why. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How did wartime saving and changes in factory production help cause the postwar buying boom?	**Families had saved money while factories made military goods. After the war, factories could make household products to meet families' pent-up demand.**
2	How did federal policies help suburbs grow, and why could many Black families not share in that growth?	**Federally backed mortgages helped buyers purchase homes, and highways made suburban commutes easier. Discriminatory lending, federal housing policies, and deed restrictions blocked many Black families from suburban homes.**
3	What did television shows and advertisements suggest a successful life looked like? Describe one effect this message could have on American culture.	**They presented a home, car, and new appliances as signs of success and often portrayed women as homemakers. This could strengthen consumer expectations or expectations about women's roles.**
4	Compare why many families in the Southwest and Appalachia were left out of postwar affluence.	**Many Mexican American farmworkers in the Southwest earned low wages. In Appalachia, coal mine mechanization reduced jobs.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

A white auto worker's family might use union wages and a federally backed mortgage to buy a suburban home. A Black veteran's family might face a lender's discriminatory rules despite eligibility for GI Bill benefits. Their different access to housing could increase racial separation between suburbs and cities. For the first family, a car could make commuting possible, while television ads could make that car seem like a sign of success. The second family might miss a chance to build wealth as home values rise.

Accept other passage-supported causes and effects, including credit, job training, consumer expectations, and portrayals of women as homemakers. Student captions should distinguish access to a benefit from eligibility on paper.