

Postwar America



Labor Unrest and Legislative Response



- The post-World War II era saw a surge in labor strikes across various industries due to rising inflation and demands for better wages. Notable strikes occurred in the automobile, electrical, steel, and mining sectors.
- President Truman faced significant challenges in handling labor unrest. In 1946, Truman was forced to intervene in a coal miner's strike to prevent a national energy crisis. He threatened to seize control of the mines and draft striking workers into the military if they did not return to work.
- The Taft-Hartley Act, passed by Congress in 1947 over Truman's veto, marked a significant shift in labor relations. It restricted the power of unions by outlawing closed shops and allowing states to pass right-to-work laws. The Act was seen as a response to growing concerns about the power of organized labor.

Truman's Domestic Program

- Truman's domestic agenda aimed to continue the work of the New Deal and address pressing social and economic issues. His proposals included expanding Social Security benefits, raising the minimum wage, and implementing programs for full employment and public housing.
- Despite Truman's efforts, many of his legislative proposals faced opposition in Congress, particularly from Republicans and conservative Southern Democrats. Truman's push for civil rights legislation, including protections for African Americans' voting rights and an end to segregation in the armed forces, faced significant resistance.
- Truman's advocacy for civil rights was ahead of its time but was limited by the prevailing racial attitudes and political realities of the era. His executive order desegregating the military was a significant step towards racial equality, but broader civil rights legislation would have to wait for future administrations.

Election of 1948

- Truman's victory in the 1948 presidential election was one of the most surprising upsets in American political history. Despite facing internal divisions within the Democratic Party and widespread skepticism about his chances, Truman mounted a spirited campaign.
- The Democratic Party faced challenges from both the left and the right. Southern Democrats, angered by Truman's support for civil rights, formed the Dixiecrat Party, while liberal Democrats were critical of Truman's domestic policies.
- Truman's aggressive campaigning, which included attacks on the Republican-controlled Congress as a "do-nothing" body, resonated with voters, particularly laborers, African Americans, and farmers. His victory defied expectations and rejuvenated the Democratic Party.



Truman's Fair Deal

- Truman's Fair Deal sought to build on the successes of the New Deal and address the post-war challenges facing the nation. Despite facing opposition in Congress, Truman achieved some key legislative victories.
- The Fair Deal expanded Social Security benefits and implemented measures to address housing shortages and promote economic growth. However, many of Truman's proposals, such as national health insurance and civil rights legislation, were blocked by Congress.
- Truman's Fair Deal legacy laid the groundwork for future efforts to expand the social safety net and promote economic opportunity in America.

Eisenhower's Election and Campaign

- Dwight D. Eisenhower's candidacy in the 1952 presidential election offered a stark contrast to Truman's leadership style. A popular World War II hero, Eisenhower promised to bring an end to the war in Korea and restore stability and prosperity to the nation.
- Eisenhower's running mate, Richard Nixon, faced controversy during the campaign over allegations of improper financial dealings. However, Nixon's famous "Checkers speech" helped salvage his reputation and secure his place on the Republican ticket.
- Eisenhower's landslide victory in the election marked a significant shift in American politics, with Republicans gaining control of both the White House and Congress.



Eisenhower's Policies

- Eisenhower's presidency was characterized by a pragmatic approach to governance, often described as "middle-of-the-road" or "dynamic conservatism." He sought to balance economic conservatism with targeted government interventions.
- Eisenhower's economic policies included ending government price and rent controls and slashing government aid to public housing. He also advocated for tax cuts and reductions in federal spending.
- Eisenhower's administration prioritized infrastructure development, passing the Federal Highway Act in 1956 to fund the construction of the interstate highway system. He also championed projects like the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence Seaway, which facilitated international trade and transportation.

Extending New Deal Policies

- Despite his conservative leanings, Eisenhower continued and even expanded certain New Deal policies during his presidency. He extended Social Security coverage to additional beneficiaries and increased the minimum wage.
- Eisenhower's administration also provided government aid to farmers and extended unemployment compensation to millions of Americans. These measures helped support economic stability and promote social welfare.
- Eisenhower's willingness to extend New Deal policies reflected the enduring legacy of Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal and demonstrated the importance of maintaining social safety nets during periods of economic change and uncertainty.



The End

