

Postwar Changes

As you read, look for:

- the postwar economy,
- the cultural changes in the postwar period,
- the Cold War, and
- vocabulary terms **right-to-work law** and **Cold War**.

The period following World War II was a time of rapid and remarkable change, both in the United States and in Louisiana.

The Economy

During the 1940s and 1950s, Louisiana's economy shifted from agriculture to industry. Farm jobs disappeared when machines replaced laborers on the farms. Farm workers moved to towns and cities to work or left the state to find jobs. African American farm workers migrated to northern cities like Detroit where they could find factory jobs, less discrimination, and a different lifestyle. By the 1950s, the majority of Louisiana's population was urban.

The postwar period saw even more growth in Louisiana's oil industry. An exciting new opportunity developed with the first offshore oil rig in the Gulf of Mexico in 1947. In addition, chemical plants began locating along the Mississippi River between Baton Rouge and New Orleans to take advantage of the available oil. New jobs with higher wages changed the lifestyle of many who lived in the area.

Money began pouring into the state from oil leases on state land. This money led to a dispute between Louisiana and the federal government over the oil extracted from the floor of the Gulf of Mexico. The conflict between the state and the United States about how much of the royalties belonged to Louisiana was not settled until the 1980s.

Lagniappe

Kerr-McGee was a small independent oil company in 1947 when it hit oil nine miles off Louisiana's outer islands.



Above: Geologists working for Kerr-McGee are seen here exploring for oil in the Gulf of Mexico in 1947.



Top: Jerry Lee Lewis from Ferriday has always been a showman. This photo was taken at a 1958 performance.

Above: New Orleans-born Antoine "Fats" Domino was a popular rock-and-roll musician.

The economic growth after World War II also led to the growth of labor unions. Governor Kennon and others believed that labor unions had become too powerful in Louisiana. They argued that the state's economy suffered since new businesses did not want to come to Louisiana because of the strong labor movement here.

In 1954 the legislature passed a **right-to-work law**, a law that allows workers to get and keep jobs without having to join a union. Union members and Governor Earl Long worked to have the legislature repeal the law in 1956. After 1956, labor unions could get a business to agree to a contract that said workers should join the union or at least pay the union dues. Unions said this protected the workers. Business owners said they were forced to pay higher wages.

Cultural Changes

After World War II, television changed the culture of America. The state's first television stations included New Orleans station WDSU and station WAFB in Baton Rouge. On December 18, 1948, people in New Orleans excitedly filled Municipal Auditorium to watch their first television broadcast. By the 1950s, this new invention had reached many homes in Louisiana. Families soon gathered around the television set in the evening to watch comedies like "I Love Lucy," game shows like "What's My Line," and the popular western "Gunsmoke."

Another cultural change shocked the older generation in the 1950s. Rock and roll music became the soundtrack of teenage life. Louisiana jazz and blues music led to this new music, rock and roll. Some of the early performers, such as Fats Domino, recorded their new music in New Orleans.

Elvis Presley, the most famous of the new musicians, thrilled young Louisiana audiences before he became nationally famous. He appeared on the "Louisiana Hayride," a country music radio show, in Shreveport in 1954. Soon, teenagers from all over North Louisiana flocked to hear Elvis at the "Hayride." The girls screamed and squealed, shocking the regular fans of country music at the show. On August 28, 1956, New Orleans teenagers flocked to Municipal Auditorium to hear Elvis sing. The music critic of the *Times-Picayune* reported, "He sang 'Blue Suede Shoes' and 'Heartbreak Hotel' with what passes for a voice." Elvis returned to New Orleans in 1958 to film the movie *King Creole*.

The Cold War

While some people in Louisiana focused on the new social changes after World War II, others turned their attention to world tensions. The relationship between the United States and the Soviet Union grew strained after World War II. The hostility was called the **Cold War** because it was mainly fought with words and diplomacy.

The fear of the spread of communism through Soviet aggression provoked American reaction. The United States formed a number of military alliances hoping to “contain” communism. Tensions from the Cold War led to actual fighting in Korea in 1950. Some World War II veterans returned to fight in that war, and they were joined by younger soldiers. Louisiana families again waited anxiously for word from the war zone. The Korean War ended in 1953, but the conflict between communism and capitalism continued. An arms race developed between the Soviet Union

and the United States, and fear of the atomic bomb threatened world peace.

Military bases and oil refineries in Louisiana were considered prime targets. State and local governments prepared for possible attack. Evacuation plans were developed for Louisiana’s major cities. Practice evacuation drills were even held in some Louisiana schools. Buildings were designated as “fallout shelters,” where people could go in case of an atomic attack.

The Civil Defense Office encouraged Louisiana citizens to build their own fallout shelters. Architects provided do-it-yourself plans and explained how individuals could build a shelter for \$300 in about two weeks. People in North Louisiana were warned that Barksdale Air Force Base might be bombed. They were advised to build bomb shelters with one-foot-thick concrete walls and three feet of earth covering the roof.

Newspapers carried mock headlines such as “Shreveport ‘Destroyed’ in Civil Defense Tests” (Shreveport *Times*) and “Who’s Afraid? Not We!” (Baton Rouge *Morning Advocate*). The *Morning Advocate* printed an enhanced photograph of the State Capitol being blown up. In spite of this publicity, most people did not build fallout or bomb shelters. Preparing for an atomic attack seemed futile.



Above: Thousands of American troops participated in the Korean War in the early 1950s.

Lagniappe

In 1950, the Louisiana Legislature established local Civil Defense Agencies. These groups are now called the Offices of Emergency Preparedness.

Check for Understanding ✓

1. Why did workers leave the farm?
2. What happened to the oil industry?
3. What two cultural changes affected life?
4. What are two ways people prepared for a possible nuclear attack?