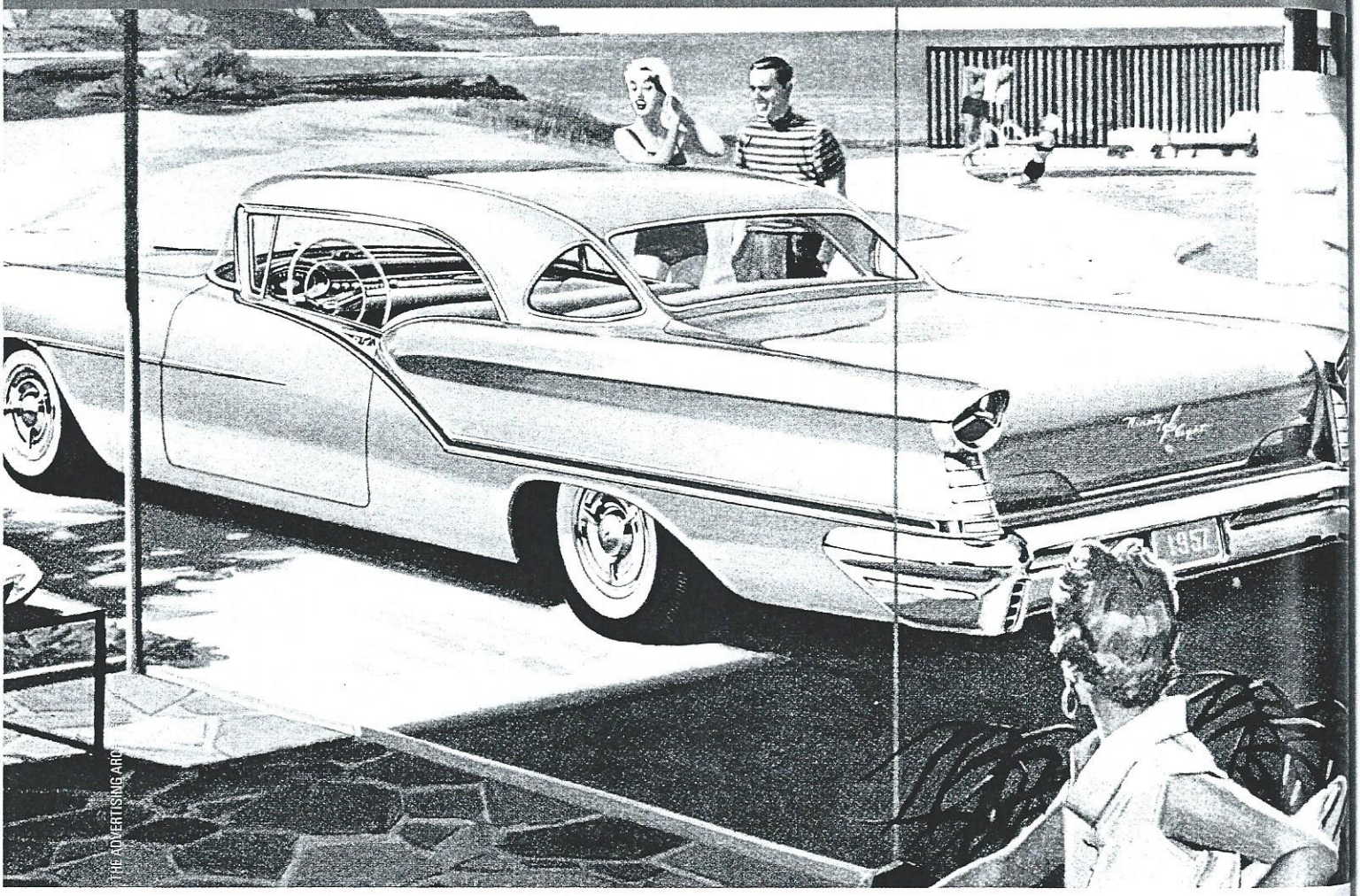
24 | Cold War America



THE ADVERTISING ARC

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After reading this chapter, you should be able to do the following:

- 24-1 Explain the causes of the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union, and discuss some of the more serious incidents between the two superpowers.
- 24-2 Describe American life as it developed during the 1950s, including social, economic, and political issues, and evaluate the significance of the Cold War in these changes.
- 24-3 Explain the rise and effects of McCarthyism.
- 24-4 Describe breakthroughs forged by African Americans in the 1950s and the retaliatory movement that came to be called "massive resistance."

AFTER FINISHING THIS CHAPTER GO TO **PAGE 481** FOR STUDY TOOLS

Two impulses ran through the America that emerged from the Second World War. The first was the distrust, suspicion, and hostility engendered by the Cold War. The Cold War began when the United States, without question the most powerful country in the world following World War II, tried to use its power to proclaim a new global order based on democracy and capitalism. Meanwhile, the Soviet Union, which undeniably bore the brunt of the fighting during the war, with an astounding 23 million dead, rejected the American world order, favoring instead communism and a world revolution in the name of the worker. It also more simply wanted to create a buffer of countries friendly to its communist system. After all, Germany had invaded the Soviet Union twice in thirty years, and used Poland and other countries of eastern Europe to do so. But where the Soviets saw a protective barrier of friendly states, the United States saw communism on a revolutionary march to dethrone capitalism. The result was an ideological, economic, and military contest known as the **Cold War** that shaped American politics, economic life, and even its cultural and social developments throughout the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s.

The second impulse running through postwar America was a far-reaching optimism that the world could be made a better, safer place and that the quality of life for most people in the world could fulfill Roosevelt's Four Freedoms, which had promised material and spiritual freedom after a decade and a half of struggle. In this optimistic spirit, the United States and its Allied Powers created the **United Nations (UN)** in 1945, an international organization that would foster discussions among the world's nations and monitor the well-being of almost all individuals in the world. The first meeting of the UN took place in San Francisco on April 25, 1945. In 1948, the UN adopted its Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which still today outlines the UN's view of inalienable rights reserved for all people, including life, liberty, security of person, and equal protection of the law. It also outlaws slavery, servitude, and torture. The UN was Franklin D. Roosevelt's vision for extending the Four Freedoms throughout the world, and, after he died in office in 1945, his wife Eleanor helped shepherd through the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

On the home front, such optimism appeared less ideological and more material. Stoked by the rapid conversion to a peacetime economy and American consumers' eagerness to devour more and more goods after fifteen years of depression and war, the American economy grew stronger in the 1950s. Affluence and consumerism promoted a new style of life in America, as people moved to the suburbs, drove automobiles in massive numbers, and stayed home to watch television. The seeming conformity of this culture fueled a host of critics, including intellectuals, the youth, women, and numerous minorities. This chapter describes, first, the contours of the international Cold War, then how the Cold War influenced American life from 1945 to 1960.

24-1 THE COLD WAR

24-1a Decade of Build-Up

The Cold War was decades in the making. American politicians had long been suspicious of a communist ideology that called for the destruction of international capitalism via worldwide revolution. They rued and feared the work of the primary theorist of communism, the German intellectual Karl Marx (1818–1883), who not only diagnosed many of the inherent problems of capitalism but also predicted that workers would not put up with economic inequalities forever; they would revolt, taking power from the wealthy and the powerful and putting themselves in charge. And once the revolution started, so Marx's prediction went, it would spread to other nations, taking down one capitalist country after the next. The workers of the world would unite.

Most Americans feared this development, and the American commitment to capitalism makes some sense. The United States had, after all, emerged in the early twentieth century as the wealthiest nation in the world because of its commitment to industrialized

Cold War The postwar ideological, economic, and military contest between the United States and the Soviet Union

United Nations (UN) International organization that fosters discussions among the world's nations and monitors the well-being of almost all individuals in the world

◀◀◀ The decade-and-a-half after the Second World War witnessed a dramatic expansion of America's car culture, highlighted by the creation of the Interstate Highway System, which is still in existence today. This advertisement also demonstrates the hope of a brighter future, another hallmark of Cold War America.

capitalism. So throughout the twentieth century the United States pushed back against the growth of communism not only within its own borders but abroad as well. In 1918, for instance, in the notable Polar Bear Expedition, the United States landed 5,000 troops in Russia in an unsuccessful bid to aid anticommunist forces during the Russian Revolution that first led the communists to power. Throughout the twentieth century, then, many Americans were perpetually leery that Karl Marx's prediction might come true.

After World War II, two issues mushroomed this long-standing distrust into a hostile Cold War: (1) atomic power and (2) the Soviet Union's attempt to create buffer states between it and western Europe (see "The Reasons Why . . ." box).

containment U.S. strategy for dealing with the Soviet Union as outlined by George F. Kennan, with the intent of containing communism and not letting it advance any further than it already had

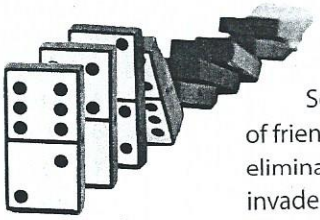
24-1b The Policy of Containment

Was communism advancing or was the Soviet premier Joseph Stalin just trying to protect his nation from European invasion? Despite Stalin's declarations, the United States saw communism on the march. In a "long telegram" drafted in 1946 by George F. Kennan, the senior American diplomat stationed in Moscow, the Americans developed a response to communist expansion that came to be called **containment**, which declared that the United States would not allow communism to advance any further than it already had. As the policy of containment went into effect, it was clear the United States was not only in an ideological war with communism and the Soviet Union, but was also willing to back it up with military might and economic support.

The Reasons Why...

In addition to historic fears about the threat of communism, there were at least two issues that pushed a basic mistrust into a volatile Cold War:

Atomic fears. Less than three months after Hiroshima, President Truman called for international arrangements to stop "the use and development of the atomic bomb." To do this, the United States called for international controls over the technology, saying it would give up its atomic weapons after the controls were in place. The Soviets, however, did not believe Truman's promise that the United States would disarm. They insisted the Americans disarm first or the Soviets would be forced to create a bomb of their own. The Americans, in turn, feared that the Soviets needed to be forced to accept the nuclear controls by the threat of U.S. attack. A stalemate was in the works, and, in he months immediately following the Second World War, negotiations ground to a halt. It seemed clear that the international wartime alliance between Russia and the United States would not segue gracefully into a peaceful postwar order.



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Communism "on the march." As talks over atomic disarmament collapsed in a cloud of mistrust and suspicion, a more vital debate about what to do with dilapidated central Europe led to even more stringent disagreements. The enormous Soviet losses in World War II (more than 23 million Russians had died) convinced Stalin that the security of the Soviet Union depended on developing a buffer of friendly neighboring states. Most of all, he wanted to eliminate the possibility that Germany would once again invade Russia unimpeded, as it had done twice in the previous thirty years. In early 1945, the Soviets imposed communist-dominated regimes in several central European states. But where the Soviets saw a protective buffer, the United States saw aggressive invasions of sovereign countries and communism "on the march" per the prediction of Karl Marx. Another showdown loomed. Neither side responded to the overtures of the other to discuss the growing suspicions. In March 1946, Winston Churchill publicly declared, "From Stettin in the Baltic to Trieste in the Adriatic, an iron curtain has descended across the continent." East of the "curtain" lay a Soviet-controlled sphere; west of it lay an American- and British-controlled one.

THE POLICY

In his "long telegram," Kennan suggested that communism was on a collision course with capitalism and that the Soviets would do four things in order to win: (1) perpetually seek to expand their territory unless checked by economic, political, and military pressure; (2) undermine Western colonial development in Africa and the Middle East; (3) develop their own economic bloc closed off to the rest of the world; and (4) attempt to penetrate Western civil society to promote Soviet interests.

Kennan proposed that Western governments fight back. They should educate their publics about the Soviet threat, promote democracy abroad, and work to solve their own social problems in order to prevent exploitation by communists. What the West needed to do was contain communism and not let it advance any farther than it already had. Many Americans understood the policy of containment in terms of the **Domino Theory**, which held that the United States was obligated to prevent the communist "dominoes" from falling for fear that they would tip off the next domino and begin a process of communist world domination. The idea of containing communism to prevent the dominoes from falling propelled American foreign policy for the next five decades.

> If the Soviets were creating a union of like-minded states, Truman felt the need to organize one, too.

INSTITUTIONS OF CONTAINMENT

After Kennan had formulated the intellectual rationale for the Cold War, Congress passed the National Security Act of 1947, which created a unified Department of Defense, the U.S. Air Force, the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), and the National Security Council (NSC). The passage of this act showed that, in the two years since the war, American leaders had given up on guaranteeing peace through the United Nations and were preparing for a long confrontation with the Soviet Union.

THE TRUMAN DOCTRINE AND THE MARSHALL PLAN

In addition to the stick of military containment as expounded in the National Security Act of 1947, Americans offered a carrot to the contested states of Europe who might choose one side over the other. In 1947, Truman appealed to Congress to aid nations that might be susceptible to communist infiltration. He first developed this idea with the **Truman Doctrine**, an offer to support Greece and Turkey with money and arms if they would forego Russian assistance. The plan was most broadly promoted by General George Marshall, and the specifics of his plan came to be called the **Marshall Plan**. The Marshall Plan sent $13 billion to governments that promised to become or remain democracies, primarily Britain, France, and the Western occupied zones of Germany. There were some contingencies on how this money was spent, but the primary one was allegiance to the United States.

24-1c Hardened Lines

Shortly after the Marshall Plan was unveiled, Moscow declared that Soviet-occupied countries would not be permitted to take American funds. Stalin was afraid that capitalism and democracy might stimulate anti-Soviet governments to form along its border, threatening Soviet security. In 1948, Stalin consolidated his control of Eastern Europe by ousting the last Eastern European government not dominated by communists in Czechoslovakia. In 1955, the members of this union formalized their organization with the Warsaw Pact. The sides were beginning to harden (see Map 24.1). Disagreement and suspicion were turning into an armed standoff.

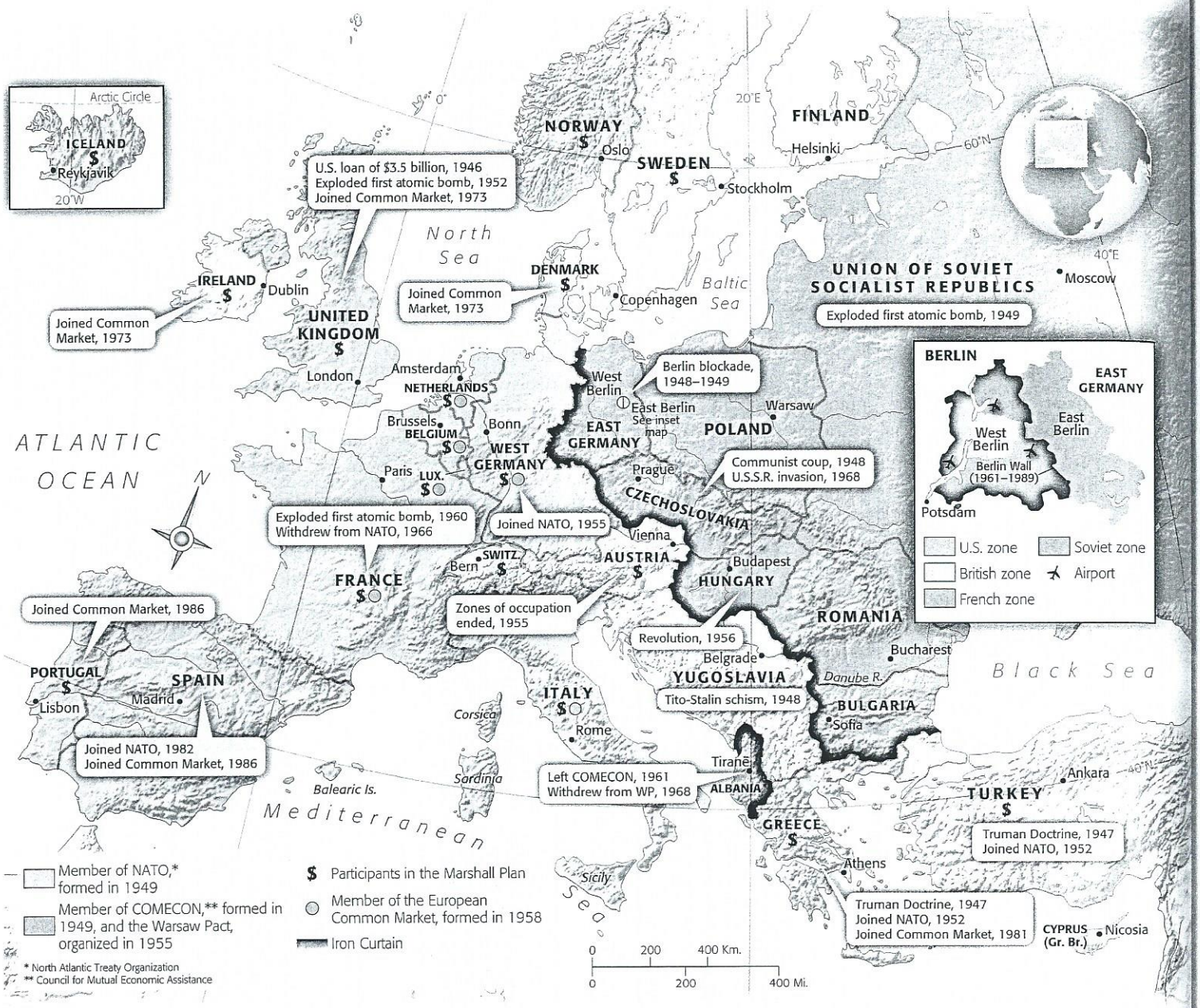
24-1d The Berlin Crisis

The first significant confrontation of the Cold War developed in Germany. The Allies from World War II had agreed to divide postwar Germany into four occupation zones (one for the United States, one for the Soviet Union, one for Great Britain, and one for France). The capital city of Berlin (which sat directly in the center of the Soviet zone) was similarly divided into four zones, one for each member. In February 1948, the Americans, British, and French met in London to plan the economic reconstruction of

Domino Theory Metaphor referring to unstable nations as dominoes, with the United States obligated to prevent the dominoes from "falling," which would begin a process of communist world domination

Truman Doctrine U.S. strategy of offering aid to nations that might be susceptible to communist infiltration

Marshall Plan Truman Doctrine as it was administered in Europe by General George Marshall, in order to diminish the allure of communism; under the auspices of the plan, the U.S. sent $13 billion to governments that promised to become or remain democracies



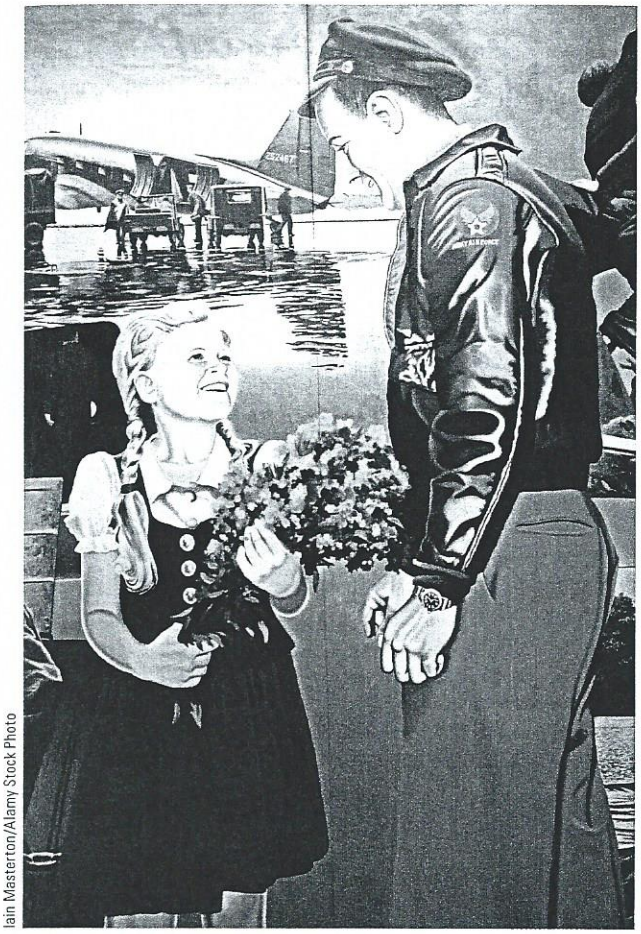
Map 24.1 Europe in the Cold War

>> This map of Europe during the Cold War shows the famous metaphorical "Iron Curtain" between eastern Europe and western, as well as a detailed map of Berlin and the various sparks that occurred between East and West.

their zones, and, on June 23, 1948, they announced the extension of the West German currency, the *Deutschmark*, into West Berlin in an effort to sew together the nation in the name of Western democracy and capitalism. Fearing too much Western influence, Stalin was not prepared to allow this currency into the heart of the Soviet zone, so on June 24, the Soviets blockaded West Berlin, preventing food and supplies from entering the non-Soviet sections of the city. This was the first "battle" of the Cold War.

BREAKING THE BLOCKADE

The two sides were now directly opposed. But Truman had no desire to initiate actual fighting. He opted instead for a massive, peaceful air operation, authorizing an airlift



Iain Masterton/Alamy Stock Photo

>> This mural on the wall of Tempelhof Airport in Berlin depicts a German girl handing flowers of gratitude to an American soldier, in commemoration of the Berlin airlift, the first "battle" of the Cold War.

of food and supplies for eleven months. In the end, the United States and its allies flew more than 200,000 flights over Berlin, dropping 4,700 tons of daily necessities. It was a major endeavor. It was also filled with tension. Truman knew that the Soviet Union would have a massive military advantage in any European conflict (the United States had largely demobilized its army after the Second World War). On the other hand, at the time of the blockade, the United States was still the only nation with the atomic bomb. Meanwhile, an embargo placed on Eastern European goods by Western nations convinced the Soviets to back down. The Soviet Union ended the blockade of West Berlin in May 1949. Truman's Berlin airlift had worked.

NATO

The events of the Berlin Crisis pushed American allies to formalize their commitment to one another in order to counter the growing power of the Soviets. They did so through a pact called the **North Atlantic Treaty Organization** (NATO) in 1949. Its key provision, Article V, declared that an attack against one or more treaty partners "shall be considered an attack against them all." NATO cemented an alliance of Western nations, a project that grew more urgent after Truman announced that the Soviet Union had successfully tested an atomic bomb of its own in 1949. Churchill's "iron curtain" had fallen into place, and both sides were armed with nuclear weapons.

Historians still debate which side bears the most responsibility for the advent of the Cold War. Some see Stalin's aggressive stances in central Europe and Berlin as indications that Kennan's predictions might have been correct and that the Soviet Union was on a long-standing aggressive march to defeat capitalism. Others see Stalin's attempts to control central Europe as understandable considering the events of the first half of the twentieth century. They instead see American actions as misguided and overly reactionary. A subtler approach than armed containment, they say, might have led to more amicable relations, without both nations having to see the other as enemies.

24-1e Conflicts in Asia

Despite the continued debate, by 1949, the two sides had consolidated their positions on either side of the iron curtain. But after the Berlin Crisis, the Cold War stalled in Europe; the iron curtain was largely in place, and neither side was ready for a nuclear confrontation. Instead, the focus of the Cold War shifted elsewhere.

Asia was the first stop. Britain and France had huge colonial possessions in Asia and Africa, but after World War II they no longer had the money to maintain those empires. Countries like Vietnam and Laos were in open revolt against their former colonial overlords. Moreover, the Atlantic Charter had plotted the Allied Powers at least rhetorically against colonialism. This fact allowed an opening for Soviet-backed revolutionary movements. Would these colonial holdings in Asia become communist? Would the United States allow them to?

"LOSING" CHINA

As nationalist battles in Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia threatened Western colonial power (and would later lead to the Vietnam War), more immediate issues loomed in China. Although China had been on the winning side in

North Atlantic Treaty Organization Pact that cemented an alliance of Western nations; prompted by the Berlin Crisis

World War II, the war had damaged its stability, and immediately after the war the country fell into civil war between Chinese Communists (under Mao Zedong) and Chinese Nationalists (under Chiang Kai-shek). The United States funneled billions of dollars to the Nationalists even though America's diplomats warned that a communist takeover was inevitable. In October 1949, Mao completed his conquest; China was now controlled by a communist ruler. Mao soon signed a treaty with Stalin, while the Chinese Nationalists were forced to withdraw to the island of Taiwan.

The situation in China sent shock waves through the United States. Truman was accused of having "lost" China to communism, and some people even hinted that there were communist agents within the State Department. Mao's victory raised the stakes of containment. Not only was communism potentially on the march, but also it had taken over the largest Asian nation in the world. It looked like the United States was losing the Cold War.

24-1f American Rearmament

American leaders were determined to prevent other states from "falling." In a classified paper known as **NSC-68**, American diplomats portrayed an uncontrollably aggressive Soviet Union whose program for "world domination" required the "ultimate elimination" of any opposition. NSC-68's sweeping recommendations to stop the threat included a massive military buildup, the creation of hydrogen bombs, and the rooting out of all communists on American soil.

To critics, NSC-68 seemed out of proportion to the threat. But on June 25, 1950, communist powers in North Korea invaded South Korea, thus beginning the Korean War. Afraid of what this meant for the march of communism, the National Security Council adopted NSC-68 as official policy. To prepare to impede communist progress, it embarked on a vast rearmament plan, increasing the 1951 defense budget from $13.5 billion to $48.2 billion. The Korean invasion had made the incredible—a worldwide communist takeover—suddenly seem plausible.

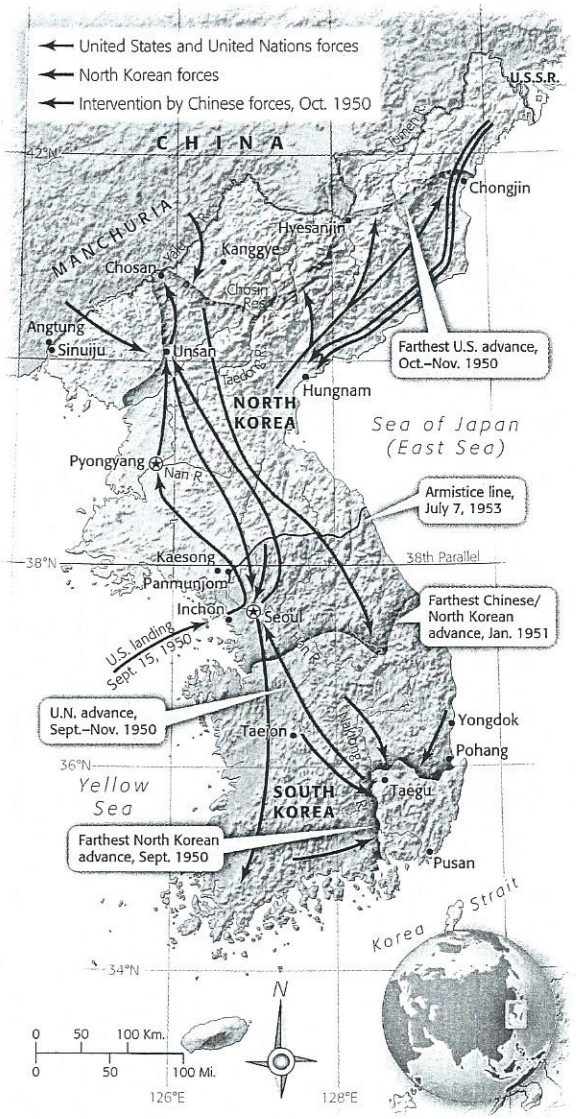
24-1g The Korean War

Korea seemed an unlikely place for World War III to break out. It was remote, and it did not possess vital natural resources. But "losing" China had taken its psychological toll on American leaders. Plus, just as with Berlin, Korea, which had been controlled by Japan during the war, was divided between the Allies after the war, with the Soviets controlling the northern half and the United States controlling the southern half. The country was supposed to be reunified in 1948, but the deadline passed without the nation coming together. Tensions between the north and the south simmered, and when North Korean forces (aided by Soviet planners) attacked and easily took the South Korean capital of Seoul, Americans felt the need to respond (see Map 24.2).

NSC-68 Classified paper written by American diplomats that portrayed an uncontrollably aggressive Soviet Union and recommended stopping the threat through a massive military buildup, the creation of hydrogen bombs, and the rooting out of all communists on American soil

Map 24.2 The Korean War

>> This map of the Korean peninsula shows the divide between North Korea and South Korea, and the various ebbs and flows of the battle between 1950 and 1953.



THE AMERICAN RESPONSE

Truman immediately ordered troops into Asia. He also ordered the development of the hydrogen bomb and secretly dispersed atomic bombs and short-range missiles to American air and naval bases all over the world. At home, leaders drew up plans of what to do in case of nuclear war. With the Soviet Union now armed with a bomb of its own, the threat seemed imminently plausible.

Despite these preparations, by late September 1950, things looked bad for the South Korean and American forces (who were led by the United Nations). Then a surprise attack led by the American general and UN commander-in-chief for Korea, Douglas MacArthur, at Inchon, a port near Seoul, helped turn the tide. Taking the North Koreans by surprise, UN troops cut their supply lines. The North Korean war machine collapsed, and UN forces recaptured Seoul. UN troops pursued the North Korean remnants all the way up the Korean peninsula, and by November they were positioned close to theChinese border, along the Yalu River. Would they now invade China, almost certainly sparking World War III?

CHINA INTERVENES

As the UN troops approached the Chinese frontier, Mao grew concerned. Truman had decided against invading China, but Mao did not know this. On November 27, 1950, a huge number of Chinese forces, totaling at least 200,000 troops and officially called "volunteers" for the North Korean cause, crossed the Korean border and attacked UN forces. Caught by surprise, UN forces reeled southward, and on January 4, 1951, communist troops recaptured Seoul, keeping several thousand American prisoners of war. As the situation worsened, Truman wondered aloud about using the atomic bomb. But as winter gave way to spring, the UN troops again took the offensive, retaking Seoul in March 1951.

STALEMATE

Once UN forces reached the original dividing line between North and South (the 38th parallel), Truman halted the offensive. He was intent on avoiding an open conflict with China and the Soviet Union. General MacArthur, however, determined to carry the fight to China for a final showdown, publicly raged against the president, writing to congressional Republicans, "There is no substitute for victory." In April 1951, Truman relieved MacArthur of command for his insubordination. Addressing the American people, Truman said, "We are trying to prevent a third world war." A long stalemate settled along the 38th parallel, and many frustrated Americans treated MacArthur as a hero.

ARMISTICE

In late July 1953, North Korea, exhausted by the high casualties associated with the stalemate, agreed to an armistice. The armistice brought the Korean War to an end almost exactly where it had begun—but only after 35,000 American deaths, 114,000 Chinese deaths, and roughly 300,000 Korean fatalities (including both North Korean and South Korean casualties).

24-1h A Cold War, Not a Hot One

In the wake of the Korean War, many Americans concluded that the United States could not afford another land war against the Soviet Union and its allies. While still committed to containment, starting in the mid-1950s the United States relied less on open warfare and instead emphasized (1) covert operations, (2) formal alliances, and (3) nuclear weapons.

COVERT OPERATIONS

In this environment, one approach that maximized the effectiveness of American foreign policy was overthrowing

>> The Korean War Memorial, in Washington, D.C. includes a depiction of a platoon on dawn patrol in Korea. The platoon consists of 19 figures, representing each branch of the US military. The general sense of fighting proxy wars against the Soviet Union—in far-flung places many Americans had never heard of, like Korea—ensured the battle with the Soviet Union would be a cold war, not a hot one.

uncooperative foreign governments through agencies like the CIA. The pattern was set in 1953, in Iran, and in 1954, in Guatemala. In both countries, the CIA and its functionaries acted on the U.S. federal government's belief that left-wing governments might be susceptible to communist influence, even if these governments had been democratically elected. The governments of Iran and Guatemala were both overturned covertly, and the United States repeatedly resisted getting involved in situations that would have to be made public. The American government was hoping it could fight the Cold War quietly, keeping unfriendly governments from ever gaining power by covertly influencing elections and economic development.

There was a negative side to these covert operations, however. For instance, the political instability that the CIA forced on these countries led to a forty-year civil war in Guatemala and a twenty-five-year dictatorship in Iran that was so authoritarian during the period of American sponsorship that it generated the conditions of its own downfall. In 1979 these conditions in Iran would lead to a civil war that empowered the Islamic revolutionary Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini.

ALLIANCES

Another approach the American government employed was the use of treaties and generous economic arrangements. In Indochina, where the decline of European colonialism had led to tremendous political instability, the United States at first gave millions of dollars to the French colonial government in Vietnam. In effect, U.S. dollars were being used to fight against a revolutionary insurrection to keep the French in power. Once the French decided the effort wasn't worth it, the U.S. then gave substantial military aid to the new anticommunist state of South Vietnam, a state it had in fact done a great deal to help create. In Vietnam at least, the United States was willing to do whatever it could to keep communism at bay, first by supporting the French, then by propping up a puppet government that opposed the communist revolutionaries. The U.S. also helped create the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO). In this way, the U.S. government hoped to prevent a chain of "falling dominoes," or neighboring countries inexorably succumbing to communism one at a time.

NUCLEAR WEAPONRY

The third approach was more frightening: hydrogen bombs. In January 1954 the United States articulated a strategy of "massive retaliation," by which it meant a substantial buildup of hydrogen bombs, each a thousand times more powerful than an atomic bomb. This strategy had its strengths. For instance, when the Chinese Communists in mainland China threatened the Chinese Nationalists on Taiwan in 1954 and 1958, American threats of massive retaliation helped hold the Communists at bay. But this experience also prompted the Chinese to seek Soviet aid in developing their own nuclear arsenal, something it would successfully begin in 1964.

THE ARMS RACE BEGINS

Because of the fear of being outgunned and because of the occasional usefulness of the idea of "massive retaliation," an arms race began between the United States and the Soviet Union. America's first hydrogen bomb

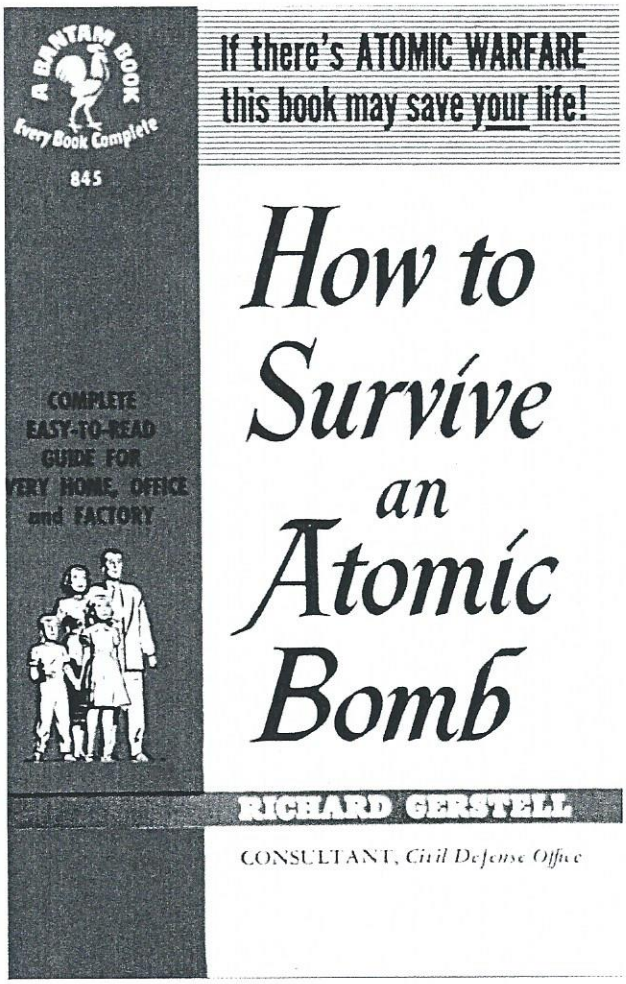


Image Courtesy of The Advertising Archives

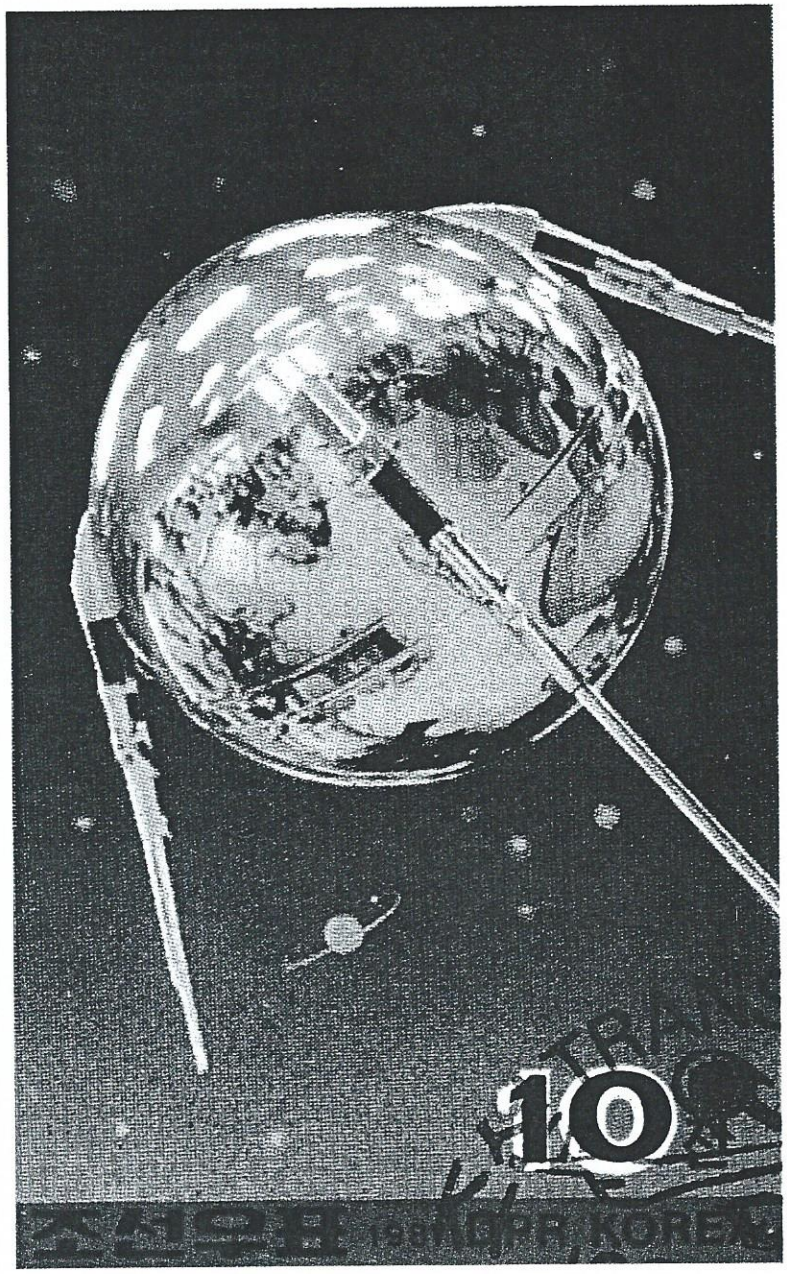
>> During the unsettling arms race, the American public turned to booklets like this one, offering such unlikely cure-alls as covering one's head or ducking under furniture in the event of an atomic bomb blast.

was tested on November 1, 1952. Within a year, the Soviet Union matched this achievement with a test of its own. American decision makers concluded that, if the United States was to continue to derive some advantage from the hydrogen bomb, it must stay ahead of the Soviets in numbers of bombs, destructive power, and the ability to deliver them swiftly. The Soviets responded in kind, with each side forcing the other to go higher and higher, accelerating the potential for an ever more devastating conflict. Eventually this policy came to be called "mutually assured destruction," or MAD, because the policy behind the arms race suggested that an attack by one side would almost necessarily mean a destruction of both sides in the conflict. Some Americans, notably the scientists who worked on the first nuclear bombs, protested the arms race. But the escalation continued.

FROM ARMS RACE TO SPACE RACE

With time, hydrogen bombs were getting smaller and less complicated, meaning that smaller nations without bomber technology, such as Britain, France, and Israel, could develop atomic weapons systems. In August 1957, the Soviets tested the first intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM), which could travel from one continent to another. Two months later, they launched the world's first artificial satellite, *Sputnik I*, into orbit.

These events inspired a wave of dread across America. The idea that the enemy had actually placed a device in space that was passing over the United States frightened the American public and eroded confidence in American technological superiority. American war planners were alarmed as well, because the launch implied the Soviets could now deliver nuclear warheads to U.S. territory in about half an hour. The United States matched the feat of *Sputnik* three months later, in January 1958, by placing *Explorer I* into orbit. Over the course of the following year, the United States made major investments in science initiatives and established the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) as a central body for space research. The Soviet challenge inspired American government leaders to attain a new level of technological mastery, one that would ultimately lead to a moon landing in 1969. But in the short term, it merely heightened the mistrust that characterized the Cold War.



>> When the USSR launched the world's first two artificial satellites in 1957, many Americans were petrified that the Soviet Union was now literally hovering over the United States and that the state of American science was inferior to that of its Cold War adversary. Pictured here is a stamp printed in North Korea for the 30th anniversary of the first flight satellite, Sputnik-1, shown on the stamp.

24-2 THE COLD WAR HOME FRONT

The Cold War shaped American domestic life in many ways. For one thing, it helped keep the economy hot despite the demobilization after World War II. Fear of nuclear war also inspired both a second Red Scare (usually called McCarthyism, as explained later in this chapter) and a religious revival. The Cold War contributed to a tide of conservatism, too, as many politicians warned that communists had gained a foothold in American political and cultural life and any left-leaning initiative might be the secret work of covert communists. This conservatism diminished some of the momentum of postwar liberals, who believed the rhetoric of World War II had given them leverage to pass their pro-union, antidiscrimination agenda.

Amid these uncertainties, many Americans adjusted somewhat comfortably to life in a Cold War, taking advantage of good wages and the new luxury items that appeared by the truckload. These values were unaffected by the anxieties provoked by the Cold War, and in fact many Americans exerted their democratic freedoms through consumerism. Historians have for good reason called the period from 1945 to 1960 the Age of Affluence, even if that affluence was tempered by knowledge that, at any given moment, the Cold War might flash hot, and nuclear war might begin.

24-2a Truman and the Postwar Economy

THE FAIR DEAL

At the end of World War II, President Truman saw all the returning soldiers and feared that job shortages were imminent. With this in mind, in late 1945 he submitted a twenty-one-point plan, later called the **Fair Deal**, that sought to expand the welfare state initiated during the New Deal. The Fair Deal included increases to the minimum wage, federal assistance in building homes, federal support for education and health care, and an attempt to reach full employment through public works. Showing Truman's commitment to civil rights, the Fair Deal also renewed the Fair Employment Practices Commission (FEPC), which Roosevelt had established to end racial job discrimination in federal jobs.

Despite the Fair Deal's breadth, Truman faced many obstacles. For one, he was not terribly popular as president. His reserved demeanor made him seem small compared to the charismatic Roosevelt. Moreover, Truman faced a hostile Congress: although controlled by Democrats, Congress was led by an informal coalition of conservatives from both parties. Southern Democrats and northern Republicans often found common cause in checking the growth of the federal government, if for different reasons (southern Democrats didn't want the federal government to intervene with their segregated society, while northern Republicans wanted to ensure low taxes and fewer government restraints on business growth). As a result, Truman had few domestic successes.

THE CONVERSION ECONOMY AND LABOR UNREST

Truman's problems were compounded by the truly tempestuous postwar economy. In the months after the war, the return of GIs pushed wages down, while inflation rose 25 percent during the first year. Labor organizers demanded increased wages to compensate, but because there were more workers available than ever before, employers felt little pressure to capitulate. The result of this impasse was a remarkable series of strikes. By the end of 1946, about 5 million workers had walked off the job in more than 5,000 strikes across the country. Workers were shifting jobs rapidly, and security seemed a faraway promise.

Truman, generally a friend of labor but worried about the economy, soon grew intolerant of the strikes. When two railroad unions went on strike in May 1946, Truman requested that Congress draft the strikers into the military, which would then force them to work.Although the strike was soon settled and the authority to draft strikers was never made law, union workers were angry at Truman for his threats. Meanwhile, conservatives complained that Truman had not taken stronger anti-union steps. That fall, a Republican slogan asked Americans if they had "Had Enough?" In November 1946, the public answered by sending a Republican majority to both houses of Congress for the first time since 1928.

TAFT-HARTLEY

With their new power, pro-business Republicans attempted to scale back the role of the federal government, particularly with regard to labor disputes. Led by Senator Robert Taft, Congress passed the Labor Management Relations Act (better known as the

air Deal Truman's twenty-one-point postwar plan that provided creases in the minimum wage, federal assistance in building homes, deral support for education and health care, and jobs in public works; presented a renewal of the Fair Employment Practices Commission

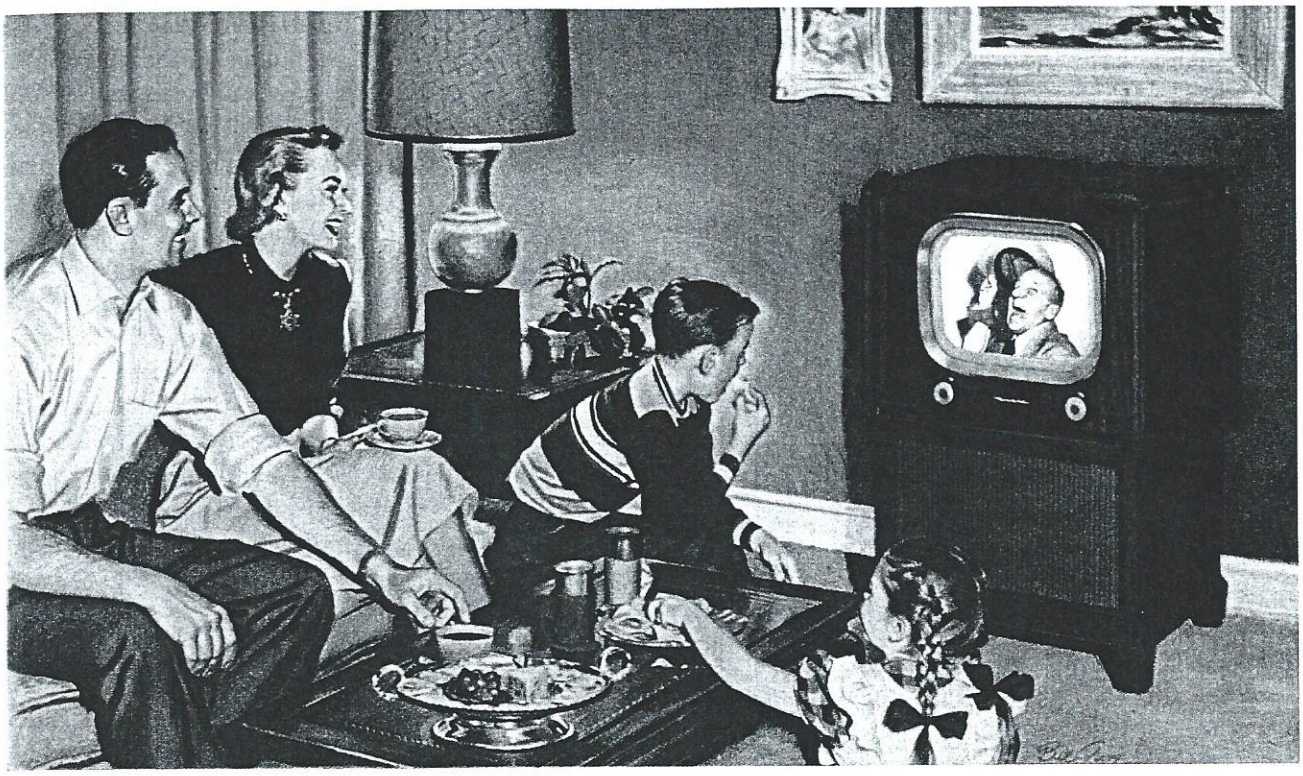


Image Courtesy of The Advertising Archives

>> Rather than attend social forms of entertainment like movies or sporting events, with TV, people could be entertained while staying home. This constituted a transformation in the way Americans lived, as they became increasingly private and joined fewer clubs and organizations. Here, a family relaxes and snacks in front of the TV, something that never happened before the 1950s.

Taft-Hartley Act) in June 1947. Taft-Hartley banned the closed shop, meaning that jobs could not be exclusively limited to union members only. It also outlawed collective bargaining within industries and authorized the president to delay strikes by declaring a "cooling-off" period. Predictably, Truman vetoed Taft-Hartley, but Congress overrode his veto. Truman's presidency seemed destined for oblivion. More importantly, the rights of labor, which unions had fought for so ardently since the 1930s, were dramatically curbed—and would remain so for the rest of the century.

24-2b Economic Growth

After these initial flurries of uncertainty, however (and indeed the lasting restrictions of the Taft-Hartley Act), the postwar economy picked up. Indeed, it grew red hot. From 1947 to 1960, the gross national product doubled. Wages went up, inflation stayed low, and leisure activities became accessible to more and more Americans. So did comforts like electricity, air conditioning, and indoor plumbing. Well more than half of all Americans were now considered "middle class." Fears about a distressed economic picture melted away as the American nation successfully converted to a peacetime economy.

CONSUMERISM

How did this happen so quickly? The change occurred because Americans were spending more due to higher wages, veterans' benefits, and demand that had been restrained during wartime. American industries were meeting people's desires by producing new products. Things like dishwashers, washing machines, and televisions rapidly moved from luxuries to necessities. *Automation* became a key word in the vocabulary of the American consumer. Fewer concerns about carrying debt helped as well, as credit cards became more popular in the 1950s. And the commitment to the Cold War meant that government dollars were continuously pouring into a variety of defense-related industries.

Taft-Hartley Act Labor Management Relations Act of 1947 that banned the closed shop, outlawed collective bargaining within industries, and authorized the president to delay strikes by declaring a "cooling-off" period

Out of the emerging strong economy, business leaders greatly curbed the postwar wave of strikes by offering benefits like health insurance and pensions to workers. Labor leaders like Walter Reuther were only marginally pleased with these offers. Certainly they liked the fatter paychecks, but Reuther and others felt that the burdens of health care and retirement should not be borne by an individual company because that made retirement plans dependent on the health of that particular company. Nevertheless, because they could not make much headway in crafting national health or retirement plans, Reuther and other labor leaders accepted the system whereby a single company provides a worker with health care and retirement—the system on which most Americans depend today.

TELEVISION AND THE AUTOMOBILE

Out of this expanded economy, two products transformed American life more than any others: (1) television and (2) the automobile. In the 1950s, the technology behind the television was perfected, and it immediately became immensely popular. Nine out of ten American families owned at least one set by the end of the decade. Television changed the way Americans relaxed and recreated. Rather than attend social forms of entertainment like movies or sporting events, people could be entertained while staying home. Initially, neighborhood social and political clubs emerged to replace more casual social gatherings, but by the end of the 1950s, memberships in social clubs were beginning to decline as well. Furthermore, television produced strong, indelible images that were disseminated widely, cutting through regional differences and creating a genuine national experience.

The automobile also transformed American life, and the 1950s were the years when cars were made accessible to many in the middle and lower classes. Not only were more Americans wealthier in the 1950s, but also in 1956, the federal government passed the **National Interstate and Defense Highways Act**, which authorized $25 billion to build 41,000 miles of interstate highways over the following ten years. The largest public works project in American history to that time, the act greatly eased suburbanization and car transportation. By the end of the decade, eight in ten Americans owned at least one car. Motels, drive-ins, and fast-food restaurants sprang up throughout the country, reflecting the dominance of this form of transportation. The suburbs expanded as well, in no small part because now nearly everyone could afford to drive to a job in the city. But Americans' love of cars came at a cost: plans for extensive public transportation systems were put on hold. Rather than build train tracks or subway systems, the federal and state governments expanded the roads.

ational Interstate and Defense Highways Act The rgest public works project in American history when it was passed; ıthorized $25 billion to build 41,000 miles of roads, greatly assisting ıe burgeoning car culture of the 1950s

24-2c Suburban Nation

The new interest in cars combined with a quirk in the GI Bill led to another change in American life: the dramatic growth of the suburbs. The GI Bill made loans available for new homes, but it did not finance the renovation of old homes. For this and other reasons, more and more Americans moved out of the cities to the green ring around them.

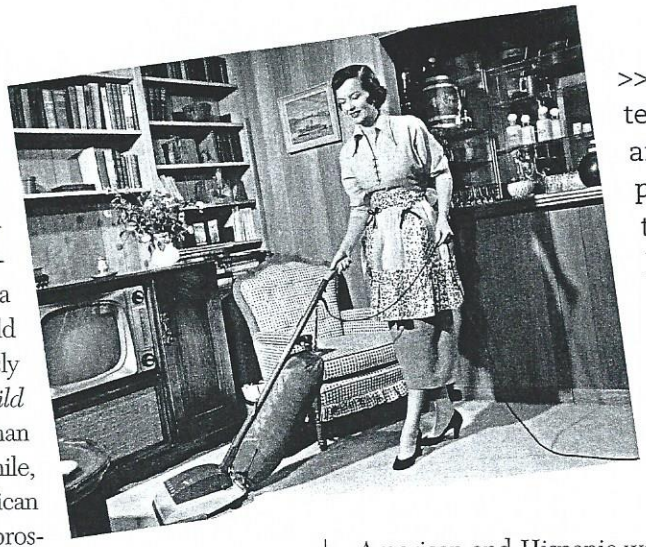
Suburbs had been growing since the 1890s and especially since the 1920s, but they expanded even farther in the 1950s. By 1960, suburbs claimed a larger portion of the nation's population than did the city, small town, or countryside. Most of this expansion was due to the work of developers like William Levitt, who transformed orange groves and empty fields on the outskirts of cities into large towns made of prefabricated homes. The rapid growth of the suburbs and the conformity that seemed to set in there had at least five important results: (1) the sudden end to the transformed gender roles created by World War II; (2) an increase in racial segregation; (3) a postwar religious revival; (4) a chorus of critics of conformity; and (5) a lasting environmental footprint outside America's major metropolises.

GENDERED SPHERES

While millions of women entered industrial and white-collar jobs during the war, the return of soldiers sparked the massive firing of most women workers. One result of this transition was the creation of an ethos whereby women became guardians of domestic life once again, who should stay home to ensure the raising of good, democracy-loving children. Besides enforcing age-old stereotypes, there was a social reason too: following the war, the twenty-somethings who had fought for the Four Freedoms wanted to begin families. A baby boom resulted. After World War II, 76 million children were born in less than twenty years. In 1940, women were having, on average, 2.1 children; in 1960, they were having 3.5 children.

In the 1950s, the domestic ideal of the nuclear family became a dominant cultural image. Childcare experts, television, magazines, and politicians all propagated the notion that women should leave the work world and return

home. For instance, according to many psychiatrists, caring for children was not simply a task, but was meant to be the central focus of women's lives. The concept of the child-centered family was popularized by Dr. Benjamin Spock, a pediatrician and expert on child development whose enormously popular manual, *Baby and Child Care* (1946), sold more than 50 million copies. Meanwhile, *Ebony*, a magazine for African Americans, celebrated the prosperity that allowed some black women to become primarily wives and mothers and no longer domestic servants. Black or white, domesticity was the presumed feminine ideal.



>> Childcare experts, television, magazines, and politicians all propagated the notion that women should leave the work force and return home. Here a happy, aproned housewife vacuums a den.

George Marks/Getty Images

American politicians promoted women's roles as mothers and homemakers as well. In 1959, Vice President Richard Nixon proudly told Soviet premier Nikita Khrushchev that American women prided themselves on stocking their kitchens with the latest appliances. Debating the relative merits of capitalism versus communism, Nixon reasoned that American women were fueling the economy by spending, rather than by marching off to industrial jobs as Soviet women did. The exchange between the two leaders became known as the **Kitchen Debate**.

Though suburban domesticity was promoted throughout American life as a desirable ideal, the reality was somewhat harsher. Because many mothers had two or three children, their days were demanding. New suburban homes required a great deal of upkeep as well. Even with new household inventions, many of which were advertised as "time-saving," the amount of time women spent on housework actually increased during the 1950s. If women did have free time, they were encouraged to channel it into caring for their families.

For the women who did remain in the employment sector, there was an increase in occupational segregation between the sexes. With men returning from military service, working women were forced into an employment niche in the service sector. For the most part, they worked as secretaries, teachers, nurses, and waitresses. Most women's jobs offered few possibilities for career advancement.

During the 1950s, African American women made some gains, moving out of primarily domestic service and agricultural work and into clerical work, nursing, and teaching. In 1960, 58 percent of all African American women worked outside the home. Many Japanese American and Hispanic women also worked outside the home to support their families.

RACIAL SEGREGATION

The physical distance of suburbia hardened racial segregation. As millions of white Americans left the cities for the suburbs, millions of black Americans were moving from the South to the cities of the North or West. In New York City, about half a million Puerto Ricans moved into what had been the Italian American neighborhoods of East Harlem. As a symbol of what was happening elsewhere, during the 1950s, a majority of Italian Americans moved out of East Harlem, favoring New York's suburbs instead. These types of migrations created many racially defined urban ghettos. White realtors and politicians frequently made matters worse by excluding black people from certain neighborhoods or making home loans impossible for African Americans to obtain. Even when they could afford it, black people were routinely barred by covenant or custom from many neighborhoods. The federal government refused to insert protections against such practices in federal housing bills. As a result, the new suburbs were overwhelmingly white, and the cities housed higher populations of racial minorities.

RELIGIOUS REVIVAL

If segregation was the rule concerning racial minorities, religious minorities—Catholics and Jews—developed a new kind of pluralism in these years. Previously deniedaccess to many social arenas in American life, these minority groups

Kitchen Debate Discussion between Soviet premier Nikita Khrushchev and Vice President Richard Nixon in 1959 debating the relative merits of capitalism and communism

took advantage of a 1950s consumerism to move more fully into the mainstream. More importantly, fears awakened during the Cold War, the baby boom, and the move to the suburbs all led toa dramatic religious revival in the 1950s. This waswhen "Under God" was added to the U.S. Pledge of Allegiance and "In God We Trust" was added to U.S. currency. What distinguished this religious revival from all previous ones was that Catholics and Jews were included; it was not solely a Protestant revival. As Catholics and Jews earned allowances for their public displays of religion, they expanded the scope of American religious life, moving it beyond simply Protestantism. This transition to acceptable pluralism led to many debates about the place of religion in American life, especially when Catholics sought federal funds for parochial schools and Jews sought to ensure protection by emphasizing the separation of church and state.

CRITICS OF CONFORMITY

Life in the suburbs, with its stereotype of two cars, husband at work, wife at home, and children in the yard, seemed to many to be both refreshing after the uncertain depression years and boring because of its homogeneity. Focusing on this conformity, critics derided what they saw as *The Lonely Crowd* (1950), to use sociologist David Reisman's title, which described a society in which people determined their self-worth by the opinions of others, as the inner-directed life of previous eras faded away. Films such as *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1956) and *Rebel Without a Cause* (1955), novels like J. D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye* (1951), the poetry of a youthful group of poets called the Beats, and sociological tracts like *The Lonely Crowd* and William H. Whyte's *The Organization Man* (1956) all focused on the supposed blandness of American suburban life at mid-century. Historians have noted how these critics understated the continued diversity of American life and the very real psychological problems of living in a world shrinking because of mass communications and unimpeded transportation. Furthermore, these critics overlooked other, perhaps more serious problems such as poverty, environmental destruction, and persistent racism. But they tapped into a psychological sentiment that was shared by many Americans who, supposedly living the American Dream, found themselves bored by it or excluded from it.

THE LARGE ENVIRONMENTAL FOOTPRINT

Postwar suburban living, with its large detached houses, unwieldy yards, dependence on the automobile, and incursion into wild lands and wetlands, greatly enlarged the size of the average American's environmental footprint. As Americans left dense cities behind, they encroached on lands that had lain undisturbed for years. In doing so, they were also relying on goods and services that were not easily reclaimable by the earth, like petroleum for automobiles. There was, therefore, a large environmental cost to the growth of suburbia, too.

24-2d Postwar Domestic Politics

As American social life changed in the 1950s, so did national politics, drifting toward conservatism and propelled by persistent fears of Soviet influence in the United States.

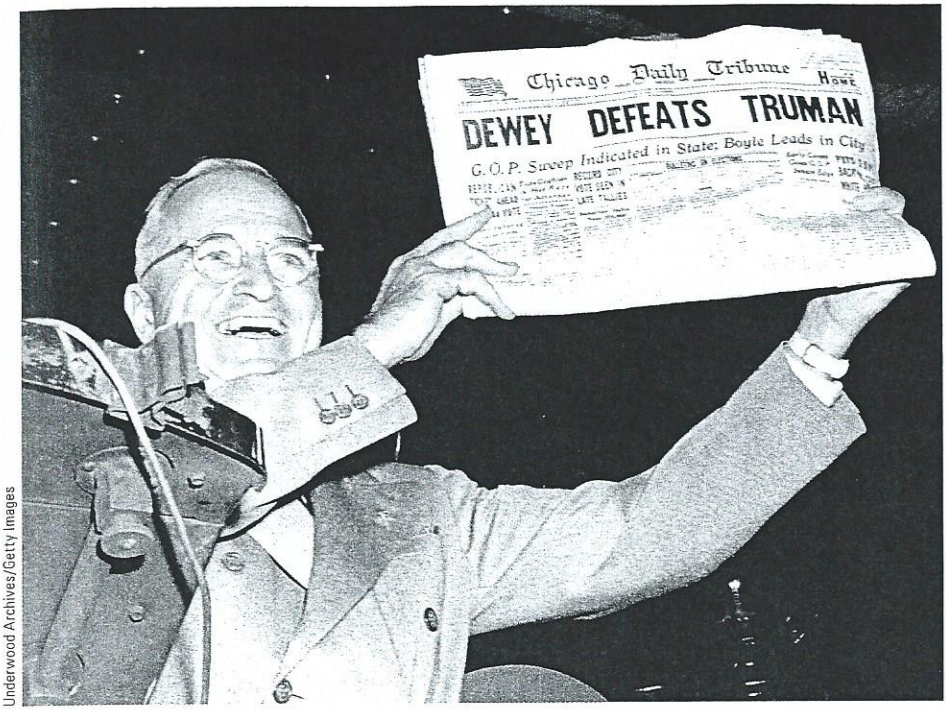
TRUMAN'S DECLINE

Viewing Truman as a spent force after his labor troubles in 1947, the Republicans eagerly anticipated the presidential election of 1948. Their chances seemed improved by internal dissension among Democrats. First, Truman's support for civil rights (for example, his 1948 order to end segregation in the armed forces) antagonized southerners, who had been vital members of Roosevelt's New Deal coalition and loyal Democrats for nearly eighty years. Truman also put a civil rights plank in the 1948 party platform. In protest, southern delegates literally walked out of the Democratic National Convention and formed their own party, the States' Rights Democratic Party, and then selected their own candidate for president. These so-called Dixiecrats threatened to disrupt the Democratic hold on the South that dated back to Reconstruction, all over the cause of civil rights.

Second, Truman had alienated many liberals when he fired Henry Wallace from his cabinet. Former vice president Wallace had openly criticized Truman's Cold War policies and advocated greater cooperation with the Soviets. Wallace's followers formed the Progressive Party and nominated Wallace as their candidate. Truman was therefore under assault from the right and the left, and this was just within his own party.

TRUMAN'S RESURGENCE

For their part, Republicans nominated Thomas E. Dewey, indicating that they had made peace with some elements of the New Deal legacy. Dewey advocated several liberal policies, hoping to appeal to the middle of the political spectrum. In July 1948, however, Truman cleverly called Congress back into session and demanded that the Republicans pass an agenda based on their own party platform. When congressional



Underwood Archives/Getty Images

>> Dewey defeats Truman in one of the most notorious journalistic mistakes in American history, a fact attested to by Truman's giant grin while waving the newspaper with the headline, "Dewey Defeats Truman."

Republicans refused to act, Truman attacked the "do-nothing Republican Congress." This made it appear as if they were making election-year promises that they did not intend to keep. Many union workers also returned to the Democratic fold, encouraged by Truman's veto of Taft-Hartley and by his calls for the nation to strengthen the New Deal (although he still lost union-heavy Michigan, New York, and Pennsylvania). Farmers came out particularly strong for Truman as well, giving him all but six states west of the Mississippi. In November 1948, Truman pulled off a stunning upset, defeating Dewey and helping recapture both houses of Congress for the Democratic Party.

DEMOCRATIC ECLIPSE

Truman triumphantly viewed his election as a mandate for the Fair Deal. But he was wrong. Upon starting his second term, Truman resubmitted the proposals in his platform, but, once again, a watertight coalition of conservative southern Democrats and northern Republicans meant that few of Truman's proposals became law. Southern Democrats continued to reject civil rights laws, and, in 1950, interest in Truman's domestic agenda was overshadowed by the Korean War. Frustrated and becoming increasingly unpopular, Truman decided not to seek reelection in 1952. The country, he felt, was moving to the right.

REPUBLICANS RETURN

And indeed it was. In the fall of 1952, World War II hero Dwight D. Eisenhower became the Republican candidate and easily won the presidential election, outdistancing by a wide margin the Democratic nominee, Illinois governor Adlai Stevenson. Republicans gained majorities in the House and Senate as well. The New Deal, the Fair Deal, and twenty years of Democratic power in Washington seemed to have run its course. But, like Dewey, Eisenhower, while rhetorically favoring smaller government, did not fundamentally oppose the New Deal. And Cold War concerns would, in the long run, provide a new impetus for expanding the government, which in fact grew during Eisenhower's presidency. Eisenhower was a folksy conservative who was friendly to big business, but he was not averse to pouring money into the economy, especially for national defense. He defined national defense broadly, employing it as a pretext to fund the giant interstate project that built most of the nation's highways, as well as several housing projects. He also oversaw the development of the Cold War strategy of crafting covert operations, forming alliances, and building up the nation's nuclear weapon supply. And the economy was good during his presidency, in no small part because of the tremendous amount of federal spending Eisenhower poured into it. Lots of people had good reason to "Like Ike."

By the end of his presidency, Eisenhower began to express reservations about these expenses. In his 1961 farewell address, he himself sounded the alarm against the "military-industrial complex" that tied the military too closely to the economy and jeopardized American democracy. But during his presidency, Eisenhower had not been shy about expanding the federal government, and indeed much of his success had depended on it.

AP Images/Bill Allen

>> The World War II hero Gen. Dwight Eisenhower served as president from 1953 to 1961, overseeing both an economic boom and the growth and expansion of the Cold War. While many Americans "liked Ike," many others thought he represented a bland, conformist culture. Here President Eisenhower swings around in his White House office chair in Washington, January 17, 1961, before starting his farewell television/radio address to the nation.

24-3 THE SECOND RED SCARE

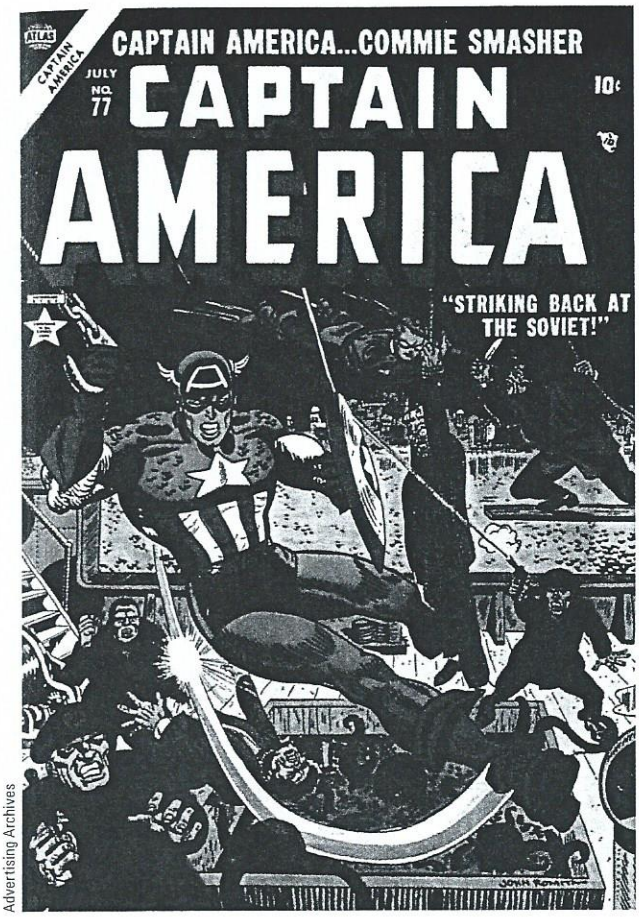
All this politicking took place with dramatic background music: the second Red Scare. For those caught in its sweep, it was more than just background music. The Red Scare was little short of a crusade against communist influence within the United States. Its scope was wide and deep, curtailing civil liberties and quelling political dissent from the top levels of national politics to the lowest neighborhood school board meeting. All the developments of postwar American life must be understood to have occurred within the confines of a restrictive fear that communism was on the march and might one day influence what was coming to be called "the American way of life."

24-3a Loyalty Oaths

The second Red Scare began almost as soon as World War II ended; its prominence paralleled the progress of the Cold War. Fearful of allegations that there were communists working in his government, in 1947 Truman established the Federal Loyalty-Security Program, which investigated the backgrounds of all federal employees and barred hiring anyone who was deemed a security risk. Meanwhile, Truman's attorney general, Tom C. Clark, compiled a list of hundreds of organizations considered potentially subversive. The organizations were then subjected to investigations. Many state and city governments and private companies emulated the loyalty program and required employees to sign loyalty oaths. Between 1947 and 1965, roughly 20 percent of all working people in the United States were required to take an oath.

24-3b Nixon, Hoover, and McCarthy

With fingers pointing everywhere, many powerful Americans grew worried about an insidious conspiracy to overthrow the government. Congressman Richard



Advertising Archives

>> Even Marvel Comics' Captain America, now billed as "Captain America . . . Commie Smasher!" on the cover pictured here, became a crusader against communism.

Nixon, FBI director J. Edgar Hoover, and Senator Joseph McCarthy of Wisconsin were at the center of this storm. For his part, Nixon propelled himself to fame in 1948 by charging former State Department official Alger Hiss with espionage. Although the evidence of his association with communists at first appeared shaky, Hiss was convicted of lying about his Soviet contacts in 1950. Decades later, his guilt is still debated by historians, although most now conclude that Hiss was in fact a spy. Meanwhile, Hoover insisted that communists were everywhere, "even at your front door," and he instructed the FBI to keep tabs on people who might be associated with communism. In general, his investigations extended to any group that challenged conformity, including liberals, labor activists, civil rights workers, and especially homosexuals.

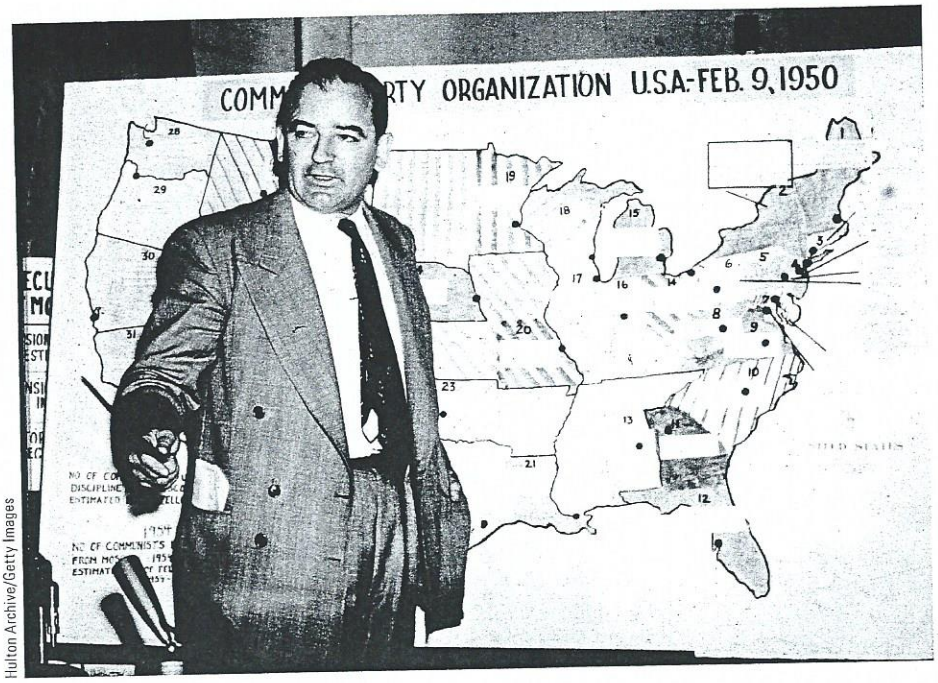
But it was Senator Joseph McCarthy who best leveraged the supposed threat of communism to launch himself into prominence. His speeches were shrill and bombastic as he publicized his communist purges. In an infamous 1950 speech, the senator declared that the State Department was "thoroughly infested with communists." He claimed to have a list of more than two hundred communists, but he did not allow the press to confirm his evidence. In the end, McCarthy's demagoguery, which destroyed lives and led to many a ruined career, was based on false accusations. His influence reached deeply into American culture, though, so much so that the aggressive tactics of the Red Scare became known as "McCarthyism."

With Truman, Hoover, and McCarthy all asserting the presence of communists in the United States, Americans began pointing fingers at each other. Regardless of the evidence against them, once someone was labeled a subversive, his or her life was often dramatically altered. These individuals found it difficult to find work, became socially isolated, and had a hard time recovering their reputation. This was most dramatically illustrated by accusations against Hollywood actors. The congressional House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) focused on Hollywood beginning in 1947. HUAC members believed that the movie industry was teeming with communists; they also knew that a formal investigation of Hollywood would generate considerable publicity. As part of the anticommunist purge, writers, directors, actors, and film executives were called to testify about their political beliefs and also those of their family, friends, and colleagues. The question HUAC most famously asked was: "Are you now or have you ever been a member of the Communist Party of the United States?"

In 1947, a group of screenwriters and directors known as the **Hollywood Ten** appeared before HUAC and refused to answer any questions, citing their right to freedom of speech. The Supreme Court, however, denied them protection under the First Amendment. The members of the group, many of whom were or had been members of the Communist Party in the 1930s, were each charged with contempt, fined $1,000, and sentenced to a year in jail. More damningly, they were also put on a **blacklist**, which contained names of people deemed "subversive" and whom Hollywood executives agreed not to hire. The blacklist expanded to include hundreds of Hollywood professionals between 1947 and 1965.

Hollywood Ten Group of screenwriters and directors accused of being members of the Communist Party

blacklist Collection of names of hundreds of people deemed "subversive" whom Hollywood executives agreed not to hire



Hulton Archive/Getty Images

>> Sen. Joseph McCarthy, pictured here, used bombast and smear tactics to fight what he saw as homegrown communism.

McCarthy himself confronted the extent of his powers when, in 1954, he accused the U.S. Army of hiding coercive elements in its realm. The U.S. Army counsel, Joseph Welch, demanded that McCarthy produce the names of the purported communists, and, unable to do so, McCarthy instead attacked a junior associate working with Welch. When McCarthy wouldn't drop the lengthy, sidestepping attack on Welch's young associate, Welch yelled, "Have you no sense of decency, sir? At long last, have you no sense of decency?" It was clear McCarthy couldn't back up his claims, and the U.S. Senate shortly thereafter voted to censure McCarthy for his unfounded accusations. His attacks in Congress at least stopped. But the atmosphere of accusation and guilt by innuendo continued long after McCarthy's own personal decline.

24-4 CIVIL RIGHTS BREAKTHROUGHS

Despite the tendency toward McCarthy-inspired conservatism during these years, minorities achieved significant breakthroughs in the 1950s. Indeed, many minorities used the language of freedom inspired by the Cold War to push for their own increased rights. European immigrant groups, which had faced discrimination before the war, were generally assimilated into American culture during the war. They became accepted in social groups and the workplace in ways that would have been unthinkable just two decades prior. And African Americans began to mobilize their forces for what would become the civil rights movement.

24-4a Desegregation in the Military

President Truman displayed an early example of this new consideration for minorities. Truman was the first president to address the NAACP at its national convention. More importantly, in 1946, Truman formed the first Committee on Civil Rights to assess the state of citizenship rights across the country. The committee issued a report, *To Secure These Rights,* that recommended "the elimination of segregation, based on race, color, creed, or national origin, from American life." Based on these recommendations, Truman ordered the desegregation of the U.S. armed forces in 1948. The process was slow and laborious, and not complete until 1954. But it was a monumental accomplishment that brought black and white Americans together in the close confines of the U.S. military.

Desegregating the armed forces also sent a clear signal that the federal government was willing to challenge segregation in its own ranks. The armed forces became a model example that interracial desegregation could work, something not generally accepted before the 1940s (and, for many Americans, not until much later than that). That same year, Truman endorsed a plank in his party's platform at the Democratic National Convention that supported civil rights for all Americans, regardless of race, creed, or color. Though many Democrats expressed outrage, civil rights had entered the national dialogue.

24-4b Desegregation in Sports

Professional baseball featured another popular example of civil rights liberalism. In April 1947, Jackie Robinson,

a World War II veteran, made his major league baseball debut with the Brooklyn Dodgers. Aware that his presence would generate hostility, Robinson vowed not to retaliate against racist taunts. As expected, fans threw debris at him, rival players attacked him, and he was often barred from eating with his teammates on the road. Despite these stressful hardships, Robinson flourished. He won the National League Rookie of the Year award in 1947 and the league's Most Valuable Player award in 1949, and later he became the first African American inducted into the Baseball Hall of Fame. Within a few years, a number of other stars of the Negro Leagues entered the historically white major leagues, successfully integrating "America's pastime," a highly visible aspect of the nation's cultural life.

BROWN V. *BOARD*

Legal challenges to segregation were meeting with some success as well, especially those led by the NAACP's legal team. One landmark case was *Shelley v. Kraemer* (1948), in which the U.S. Supreme Court outlawed neighborhoods from inserting legal clauses (called "restrictive covenants") that forbade the sale of a home in that area to a racial minority. Another landmark case was *Brown* v. *Board of Education* (1954), in which the Supreme Court ruled that separate educational facilities for black and white people were "inherently unequal." This was a major breakthrough, overturning nearly sixty years of legal segregation that began with *Plessy* v. *Ferguson* (1896). But it was slow to trigger changes. For one thing, President Eisenhower believed that states rather than the federal government should deal with civil rights, and he refused to endorse the *Brown* decision. For another, the Court decreed in 1955 that desegregation of southern schools should proceed "with all deliberate speed," which was vague enough to allow southern states leniency in enforcing the new law.

> **"Mob rule cannot be allowed to override the decisions of our courts."**
>
> —President Dwight D. Eisenhower, September 24, 1957

Another near breakthrough came with Eisenhower's assistance. In September 1957, nine black

Bettmann/Getty Images

>> Elizabeth Eckford endures the taunts of classmates as troops ensure African Americans' entry into Little Rock's Central High School. When the federal troops left a month later, the taunts and jeers reappeared, and Gov. Orval Faubus closed Little Rock's public schools the following year in order to prevent integration.

students were selected to integrate Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas. When classes began, the students were met by angry, racist mobs threatening violence, as well as by the Arkansas National Guard, which had been ordered by Arkansas Governor Orval Faubus to prevent integration. Believing he had little choice but to uphold the Supreme Court's order in *Brown*, Eisenhower sent a thousand troops from the U.S. Army's 101st Airborne Division to Little Rock to protect the black students. They stayed for a month before being replaced by the Arkansas National Guard, which looked on as white students taunted and tortured the African American students for the remainder of the school year. The following year, Faubus chose to close all of Little Rock's public schools in order to prevent further integration. When Arkansas public schools reopened, it was only after white residents had funded the creation of numerous private schools, thus maintaining a semblance of segregation that operated outside the law.

24-4c Massive Resistance and the Black Response

Faubus was not alone in fighting against civil rights advances. In the South, black advances were almost always met by **massive resistance** from the dominant white population. Certainly some white southerners supported racial integration, but the loudest and most agitated did not. African American activists and their white sympathizers were beaten, picketed, and generally maltreated, sometimes even killed. The *Brown* decision itself had led to the creation of several **White Citizens' Councils**, which were organized to defend segregation. The Ku Klux Klan also experienced a revival in the middle 1950s, especially in the South. And parts of the South, such as Prince Edward County, Virginia, chose to close their public school system and their public pools rather than be forced to integrate.

massive resistance A campaign and policy begun by politicians in Virginia to craft laws and do whatever possible to resist racial integration; spread throughout the South

White Citizens' Councils Committees organized in the 1950s and 1960s to defend segregation in the South

bus boycott A campaign to boycott an area's buses until change is instituted; used frequently during the civil rights movement

EMMETT TILL

One of the most-discussed acts of racist violence occurred in 1955, when a fourteen-year-old Chicago-born African American boy named Emmett Till was beaten and murdered for supposedly whistling at a white woman who worked at a grocery store in Money, Mississippi. The woman's husband and his half-brother were arrested for kidnapping and murder, and the American public closely followed their trial in newspapers and on television, especially after Till's mother allowed reporters to photograph Till's badly beaten body. Although several African Americans testified that they had seen and heard the beating, the jury found the two men innocent. The world press also followed the story closely, leading one German newspaper to report, "The Life of a Negro Isn't Worth a Whistle." The communist presses also picked up the Till case and other civil rights abuses in order to make a statement about the hypocrisy of the United States' claims to be fighting for freedom in the Cold War. Although lynching was still, evidently, permissible in the Deep South, the case of Emmett Till provoked outrage, leading many northerners who had been cool on civil rights to see the depth of segregation still extant in the South and making white southerners aware that the world was watching their actions; the two men acquitted of Till's murder were later ostracized by their local white society. Many later civil rights activists saw the murder of Till as a turning point in their lives, demonstrating that the legal system in the South was not going to protect them and that they needed activism to create change. Few were surprised when, more than fifty years later, Till's accuser admitted to fabricating the most salacious parts of her story.

MONTGOMERY BUS BOYCOTT AND SCLC

Indeed, white resistance did not prevent African Americans from continuing to push for equal treatment and access to public services. In fact, despite the continued violence, civil rights activism increased in the late 1950s. Following a successful 1953 **bus boycott** in Baton Rouge and the public outcry over Emmett Till's murder, in 1955 Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat in the "whites only" section of a Montgomery, Alabama, bus. After her arrest, the African American community in Montgomery, which had been planning for such an event for more than a year, boycotted the city's bus system. Despite significant loss of revenue, the white owners of

the bus lines initially refused to integrate their seating policy. They held out until 1956, when the Supreme Court declared that segregation in public transportation was unconstitutional.

The Montgomery Bus Boycott, a remarkable success that mobilized the black community and demonstrated the possibilities of a widespread social movement, led directly to the formation of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), founded in January 1957 to challenge Jim Crow laws in a direct way. Several veteran civil rights activists were present at the inception, including Bayard Rustin, Ella Baker, Stanley Levison, Ralph Abernathy, and Martin Luther King, Jr. King was selected as the group's leader. The SCLC initiated and organized massive revolts in the Deep South against racial oppression, and it embraced a philosophy of peaceful integration and **nonviolence**. But it would take increased grassroots protests to push the movement forward, protests that would start in 1960.

>LOOKING AHEAD...

The conflicts over race in 1950s America would turn out to be dress rehearsals for the massive social changes that would come in the 1960s. But more than just civil rights were affected by the changes in postwar America. The political spectrum was colored by the Cold War for the next half-century. Americans were to have access to greater luxuries than in any other society in the history of the world. Jobs were mostly plentiful, and churches were generally full. But these changes came with costs. The fear of unpredictable nuclear holocaust loomed over everything. Women were socially prescribed to remain in the home if the family could afford it. Racial disparities were made worse by restrictions in suburban housing. And the consumerist impulse of American life led many Americans to critique their society as hollow and bland. Whatever else it might be, the coming decade, when these complaints would have ramifications, would not be described as bland, conformist, or dull. It is to that subject, "the sixties," that we now must turn.

nonviolence Strategy for social changes that rejects the use of violence

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