

Foreign Policy Leading up to World War II

In the decade that followed World War I, American foreign policy objectives were aimed primarily at promoting and maintaining peace and have been described as “independent internationalism” rather than “isolationism.” The **Washington Conference** (1921–1922) gathered eight of the world’s great powers; the resulting treaty set limits on stockpiling armaments and reaffirmed the Open Door Policy toward China. In 1928, 62 nations signed the **Kellogg-Briand Pact**, which condemned war as a means of foreign policy. Although it contained no enforcement clauses, the Kellogg-Briand Pact was widely considered a good first step toward a postwar age.

In Latin America, the United States tried to back away from its previous interventionist policy and replace it with the **Good Neighbor Policy** in 1934. The name, however, is misleading; the United States continued to actively promote its interests in Latin America, often to the detriment of those who lived there. However, the **Platt Amendment** was repealed at this time. The United States achieved its foreign policy objectives mainly through economic coercion and support of pro-American leaders (some of whom were corrupt and brutal). The United States also figured out how to maintain a strong but less threatening military presence in the area, both by paying for the privilege of maintaining military bases in the countries and by arranging to train the nations’ National Guard units.

In Asia, the United States had less influence. Consequently, when Japan invaded Manchuria in 1931 (and in so doing violated the Kellogg-Briand Pact, which Japan had signed), the League of Nations was powerless, and the American government could do little. When Japan went to war against China in 1937, the United States sold arms to the Chinese and called for an embargo on arms sales to Japan. However, fearful of provoking a war with Japan, the government did not order an embargo on commercial shipments to Japan from the United States.

Throughout the Republican administrations of the 1920s, the U.S. government kept tariffs high; this policy is called **protectionism**. Early in Franklin Roosevelt’s presidency, the government devised a method of using economic leverage as a foreign policy tool. The **Reciprocal Trade Agreements Act** allowed the president to reduce tariffs if he felt doing so would achieve foreign policy goals. Countries granted **most favored nation (MFN) trade status** were eligible for the lowest tariff rate set by the United States, if they played their cards right. MFN trade status remains a foreign policy tool today.

Disenchantment with the results of World War I fed isolationist sentiment, a stance amplified by the findings of the **Nye Commission**. Led by Senator Gerald Nye, the commission’s report in 1936 revealed unwholesome activities by American arms manufacturers; many had lobbied intensely for entry into World War I, others had bribed foreign officials, and still others were currently supplying fascist governments with weapons. Congress responded by passing a series of **neutrality acts**. The first neutrality act (1935) prohibited the sale of arms to either belligerent in a war. (Roosevelt sidestepped this act in the 1937 sale of arms to China by simply refusing to acknowledge that China and Japan were at war.) The second neutrality act banned loans to belligerents.

All the while, Roosevelt poured money into the military—just in case. As it became more apparent that Europe was headed for war, Roosevelt lobbied for a repeal of the arms embargo stated in the first neutrality act so that America could help arm the Allies (primarily England, France, and, later, the Soviet Union). When war broke out, Congress relented with a third neutrality act, which allowed arms sales and was termed “cash and carry.” It required the Allies to (1) pay cash for their weapons, and (2) come to the United States to pick up their purchases and carry them away on their own ships. From the outset of the war until America’s entry in 1941, Roosevelt angled the country toward participation, particularly when Poland fell to German troops and other countries followed in rapid succession. In 1940 Hitler invaded France, and a German takeover of both France and England appeared a real possibility. The chance that America might soon enter the war convinced Roosevelt to run for an unprecedented third term. Again, he won convincingly.

Within the limits allowed by the neutrality acts, Roosevelt worked to assist the Allies. He found creative ways to supply them with extra weapons and ships; he appointed pro-Ally Republicans to head the Department of War and the Navy; and he instituted the nation’s first peacetime military draft. It becomes increasingly difficult to describe U.S. foreign policy as isolationist by the 1940s. In 1941 Roosevelt forced the **Lend-Lease Act** through Congress, which permitted the United States to “lend” armaments to England, which no longer had money to buy the tools of war. Roosevelt sent American ships into the war zone to protect Lend-Lease shipments, an act which could easily have provoked a German attack. Later in the year, Roosevelt and British Prime Minister Winston Churchill met at the **Atlantic Charter Conference**. The Atlantic Charter declared the Allies’ war aims, which included disarmament, self-determination, freedom of the seas, and guarantees of each nation’s security.

Given all this activity in the European theater, it seems odd that America’s entry to the war came not in Europe but in Asia. Japan entered into an alliance (called the **Tripartite Pact**) with Italy and Germany in 1940. By 1941 France had fallen to Germany, and the British were too busy fighting Hitler to block Japanese expansion, which had continued south into French Indochina (modern-day Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos). The United States responded to Japanese aggression by cutting off trade to Japan, which was dependent on foreign imports. The embargo included oil, which Japan needed to fuel its war machine. Despite peace talks in November of 1941 between the United States and Japan to avoid war, the United States had broken Japan’s secret communication codes and knew that Japan was planning an attack but did not know the location. Secretary of War **Henry Stimson** encouraged Roosevelt to wait for the Japanese attack in order to guarantee popular support for the war at home. He did not have to wait long. The Japanese attacked **Pearl Harbor**, Hawaii, on December 7, and U.S. participation in the war began.

World War II

Complicated military strategy and the outcome of key battles played a big part in World War II. Fortunately, you do not have to know much about them for the AP Exam; nor do you need to know about the many truly unspeakable horrors the Nazis perpetrated on Europe's Jews, gypsies, homosexuals, and dissidents. You should know about the various wartime conferences, however, when the Allies met to discuss military strategy and the eventual postwar situation. It was no secret that the Grand Alliance between the Soviet Union and the West was tenuous at best, held together by the thread of a common enemy but threatened by Stalin's impatience at the Allies' delay in opening a "second front" while the Soviets bore the brunt of the Nazi onslaught.

The Manhattan Project of 1942 was a concentrated research and development effort to the development of the first atomic bombs. Based in Los Alamos, New Mexico, a team of more than 100,000 scientists and technicians created and tested nuclear bombs on the Pacific island of Bikini. Despite tight security measures, Soviet spies infiltrated the program, the most famous being Ethel and Julius Rosenberg.

The first meeting of the "big three" (Roosevelt, Churchill, and Stalin) took place in the Iranian capital of Tehran in November of 1943. It was here that they planned the Normandy invasion, D-Day, and agreed to divide a defeated Germany into occupation zones after the war. Stalin also agreed to enter the war against Japan once Hitler had been defeated. The Allies fought the Germans primarily in the Soviet Union and in the Mediterranean until early 1944, when Allied forces invaded occupied France (on D-Day). The Soviet Union paid a huge price in human and material loss for this strategy and after the war sought to recoup its losses by occupying Eastern Europe. In the Pacific, both sides incurred huge numbers of casualties. The Allies eventually won a war of attrition against the Germans, and the Americans accelerated victory in the East by dropping two atomic bombs on Japan.

As it had during the Civil War, World War I, and the New Deal, the government acquired more power than it previously had. The War Production Board allowed the government to oversee the mobilization of industry toward the war effort; in return, businesses were guaranteed generous profits. Rationing of almost all consumer goods was imposed. The government sponsored scientific research directed at improving weaponry, developing radar, sonar, and the atomic bomb during this period. The government also exerted greater control over labor. The Labor Disputes Act of 1943 (passed in reaction to a disconcerting number of strikes in essential industries) allowed government takeover of businesses deemed necessary to national security, which gave the government authority to settle labor disputes. Hollywood was enlisted to create numerous propaganda films, both to encourage support on the home front and to boost morale of the troops overseas. Not surprisingly, the size of the government more than tripled during the war.

FDR signed the Selective Training and Service Act of 1940, which created the first peacetime draft in U.S. history and gave birth to the current incarnation of the Selective Service System, which ultimately provided about 10 million soldiers toward the war effort. (Although the draft was discontinued in 1973, after the United States' involvement in Vietnam, the Selective Service System remained in place and currently requires that all male citizens register for the draft within 30 days after turning 18.)

World War II affected almost every aspect of daily life at home and abroad. It created both new opportunities and new tensions within American society. More than a million African Americans served in the U.S. military during World War II, but they lived and worked in segregated units. The U.S. army was not desegregated until after the war, during the Truman administration in 1948. A popular image, familiar to most Americans, is that of Rosie the Riveter. Originally featured on a poster of the era, Rosie came to symbolize the millions of women who worked in war-related industrial jobs during World War II. Unfortunately for the cause of feminism, most women were expected to take off the coveralls and put the apron back on when the soldiers returned home.

Again, as during World War I, the government restricted civil liberties. Probably the most tragic instance was the **internment of Japanese Americans** from 1942 to the end of the war. Fearful that the Japanese might serve as enemy agents within U.S. borders, the government imprisoned more than 110,000 Asian Americans, over two-thirds of whom had been born in the United States and thus were U.S. citizens. Some were not even of Japanese descent. None of those interned was ever charged with a crime; imprisonment was based entirely on ethnic background. The government placed these Japanese Americans in desolate prison camps far from the West Coast, where they feared a Japanese invasion would take place. Most lost their homes and possessions as a result of the internment.

The Supreme Court upheld the constitutionality of both the evacuation and internment of Japanese Americans. As in the *Schenck* case of 1919, the Court ruled that a citizen's civil liberties can be curtailed and even violated in time of war. "Citizenship has its responsibilities as well as its privileges, and in time of war the burden is always heavier. Compulsory exclusion of large groups of citizens from their homes, except under circumstances of direst emergency and peril, is inconsistent with our basic governmental institutions. But when under conditions of modern warfare our shores are threatened by hostile forces, the power to protect must be commensurate with the threatened danger..." wrote Justice Hugo Black in *Korematsu v. United States* (1944). It wasn't until 1988 that a government apology was made and reparations of about \$1.6 million were disbursed to surviving internees and their heirs.

The End of the War

As the war neared its end in Europe, the apparent victors—the Allies—met to discuss the fate of postwar Europe. In February of 1945, the Allied leaders met at Yalta and in effect redrew the world map. By this time the Soviet army occupied parts of Eastern Europe, a result of the campaign to drive the German army out of the USSR.

Stalin wanted to create a "buffer zone" between the Soviet Union and Western Europe; he wanted to surround himself with nations that were "friendly" toward the government in Moscow. Because of the presence of the Red Army, Stalin was given a free hand in Eastern Europe, a decision the other Allies would later regret, with the promise to hold "free and unfettered elections" after the war. Despite this promise, Soviet tanks rolled into Romania three weeks after Yalta, thus beginning the establishment of Soviet **satellites** and the descent of the **Iron Curtain**. (The

Iron Curtain was a metaphor coined by Winston Churchill in 1946 to describe the symbolic division of Eastern and Western Europe, thus the origins of the Cold War following World War II.)

The Allies agreed on a number of issues concerning borders and postwar settlements. They also agreed that once the war in Europe ended, the USSR would declare war on Japan. Toward the end of the war, the Allies agreed to help create the United Nations to mediate future international disputes. The Allies met again at Potsdam to decide how to implement the agreements of Yalta. This time, Harry S. Truman represented the United States, as Roosevelt had died in April. Things did not go as well at Potsdam; with the war's end closer and the Nazis no longer a threat, the differences between the United States and the Soviet Union were growing more pronounced.

Some argue that American-Soviet animosity prompted Truman's decision to use the atomic bomb against the Japanese. (By this argument, America feared Soviet entry into the Asian war where the Soviets might then attempt to expand their influence, as they were doing in Eastern Europe. Along the same line of reasoning, one could assert that the United States wanted to put on a massive display of power to intimidate the Soviets.) However, the manner in which the war in the Pacific had been fought to that point also supported Truman's decision. The Japanese had fought tenaciously and remained powerful despite the long war; casualty estimates of an American invasion of Japan ran upward of 500,000. Some military leaders estimated that such an invasion would not subdue Japan for years. In August the United States dropped two atomic bombs, first on Hiroshima and then three days later on Nagasaki. The Japanese surrendered soon after.

TRUMAN AND THE BEGINNING OF THE COLD WAR (1945–1953)

The end of World War II raised two major issues. The first concerned the survival of the combatants; with the exception of the United States, the nations involved in World War II had all seen fighting within their borders, and the destruction had been immense. The second issue involved the shape of the new world and what new political alliances would be formed. This question would become the major source of contention between the world's two leading political-economic systems, capitalism and communism.

The stakes in this power struggle, called the Cold War (because there was no actual combat as there is in a "hot war"), were high. Though the major powers (the United States and Soviet Union) didn't enter into combat in the Cold War, the United States did fight hot "proxy" wars in Korea and Vietnam during this time. The American economy was growing more dependent on exports; American industry also needed to import metals, a process requiring (1) open trade and (2) friendly relations with those nations that provided those metals. In addition, with many postwar economies in shambles, competition for the few reasonably healthy economies grew fiercer. Finally, those countries that were strongest before the war—Germany, Japan, and Great Britain—had either been defeated or seen their influence abroad greatly reduced. The United States and the Soviet Union emerged as the two new superpowers. Although they were allies during World War II, the war's end exposed the countries' many ideological differences, and they soon became enemies.

Truman and Foreign Policy

The differences between Soviet and American goals were apparent even before the war was over, but became even clearer when the Soviets refused to recognize Poland's conservative government-in-exile. (The Polish government had moved to England to escape the Nazis; this government was backed by the United States.) A communist government took over Poland. Within two years pro-Soviet communist coups had also taken place in Hungary and Czechoslovakia. The propaganda in the United States and USSR during this period reached a fever pitch. In each country the other was portrayed as trying to take over the world for its own sinister purposes.

Then, in 1947, communist insurgents threatened to take over both Greece and Turkey, but England could no longer prop up these nations. In a speech before Congress in which he asked for \$400 million in aid to the two countries, Truman asserted, "I believe it must be the policy of the United States to support free peoples who are resisting attempted subjugation by armed minorities or outside pressures." This statement, called the **Truman Doctrine**, became the cornerstone of a larger policy, articulated by George Kennan, called "containment." The idea of containment came from what is known as the **Long Telegram**, which Kennan sent to Washington from his duty station in Germany, in 1946. This policy said that the United States would not instigate a war with the Soviet Union, but it would come to the defense of countries in danger of Soviet takeover. The policy

aimed to prevent the spread of communism and encourage the Soviets to abandon their aggressive strategies.

Meanwhile, the United States used a tried-and-true method to shore up its alliances—it gave away money. The **Marshall Plan**, named for Secretary of State George Marshall, sent more than \$12 billion to Europe to help rebuild its cities and economy. In return for that money, of course, countries were expected to become American allies. Although the Marshall Plan was offered to Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, no countries in the Soviet sphere participated in the program, as Stalin viewed the initiative as further evidence of U.S. imperialism. The United States also formed a mutual defense alliance with Canada and a number of countries in Western Europe called the **North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)** in 1949. Truman did not have an easy time convincing Congress that NATO was necessary; remember, from the time of Washington's Farewell Address, American sentiment has strongly favored avoiding all foreign entanglements.

The crisis in **Berlin** the previous year, however, helped convince Congress to support NATO. The crisis represented a culmination of events after World War II. In 1945 Germany had been divided into four sectors, with England, France, the United States, and the USSR each controlling one. Berlin, though deep in Soviet territory, had been similarly divided. Upon learning that the three Western Allies planned to merge their sectors into one country and to bring that country into the Western economy, the Soviets responded by imposing a **blockade** on Berlin. Truman refused to surrender the city, however, and ordered airlifts to keep that portion under Western control supplied with food and fuel. The blockade continued for close to a year, by which point the blockade became such a political liability that the Soviets gave it up. Don't confuse the **Berlin Blockade** with the **Berlin Wall**. The Berlin Blockade occurred when the Soviets closed off access to the city during the Truman administration in 1948, while the Soviets erected the Berlin Wall in 1961 during the Kennedy administration to divide the city between the East and the West. Constructed of concrete and barbed wire, the wall separated the Soviet sector of Berlin from West Berlin and became a symbol of the Cold War. The wall was finally dismantled in 1989.

Not long after the United States joined NATO, the Soviets detonated their first atomic bomb. Fear of Soviet invasion or subterfuge also led to the creation of the **National Security Council** (a group of foreign affairs advisers who work for the president) and the **Central Intelligence Agency** (the United States' spy network).

As if Truman didn't have enough headaches in Europe, he also had to deal with Asia. Two issues dominated U.S. policy in the region: the **reconstruction of Japan** and the **Chinese Revolution**. After the war the United States occupied Japan, and its colonial possessions were divided up. The United States took control of the Pacific Islands and the southern half of Korea, while the USSR took control of the northern half of Korea. Under the command of General Douglas MacArthur, Japan wrote a democratic constitution, demilitarized, and started a remarkable economic revival. The United States was not as successful in China, where it chose to side with Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalist government against **Mao Zedong's** Communist insurgents, during China's 20-year civil war. Despite massive American military aid, the Communists overthrew the Nationalists, whose government was exiled to Taiwan. For

decades the United States refused to recognize the legitimacy of Mao's regime, creating another international "hot spot" for Americans. Truman also chose to aid the French during the Vietnamese war for independence in Indochina, although most Americans were not aware of this at the time.

McCarthyism

All this conflict with communists resurrected anti-communist paranoia at home, just as anti-communism had swept America during the Red Scare after World War I. In 1947 Truman ordered investigations of 3 million federal employees in a search for "security risks." Those found to have a potential Achilles' heel—either previous association with "known communists" or a "moral" weakness such as alcoholism or homosexuality (which, the government reasoned, made them easy targets for blackmail)—were dismissed without a hearing. In 1949 former State Department official **Alger Hiss** was found guilty of consorting with a communist spy (Richard Nixon was the congressman mostly responsible for Hiss's downfall). Americans began to passionately fear the "enemy within." Even the Screen Actors Guild, then headed by Ronald Reagan, attempted to discover and purge its own communists.

It was this atmosphere that allowed a demagogic senator named **Joseph McCarthy** to rise from near anonymity to national fame. In 1950 McCarthy claimed to have a list of more than 200 known communists working for the State Department. He subsequently changed that number several times, which should have clued people in to the fact that he was not entirely truthful. Unchallenged, McCarthy went on to lead a campaign of innuendo that ruined the lives of thousands of innocent people. Without ever uncovering a single communist, McCarthy held years of hearings with regard to subversion, not just in the government, but in education and the entertainment industry as well. Those subpoenaed were often forced to confess to previous associations with communists and name others with similar associations. Industries created lists of those tainted by these charges, called **blacklists**, which prevented the accused from working, just as blacklists had been used against union organizers at the turn of the last century. McCarthy's downfall came in 1954, during the Eisenhower administration, when he accused the Army of harboring communists. He had finally chosen too powerful a target. The Army fought back hard, and with help from **Edward R. Murrow's** television show, in the **Army-McCarthy hearings**, McCarthy was made to look foolish. The public turned its back on him, and the era of McCarthyism ended, but public distrust and fear of communism remained.

Truman's Domestic Policy and the Election of 1948

The end of the war meant the end of wartime production. With fewer Jeeps, airplanes, guns, bombs, and uniforms to manufacture, American businesses started laying off employees. Returning war veterans further crowded the job market, and unemployment levels rose dramatically. At the same time, many people who had built up their savings during the war (since rationing had limited the availability of consumer goods) started to spend more liberally, causing prices to rise. In 1946 the inflation rate was

"You've done enough. Have you no sense of decency, sir? At long last, have you left no sense of decency?"

—Army counsel Joseph Welch, speaking back to Joseph McCarthy at the hearings that would effectively end McCarthy's career.

nearly 20 percent. The poor and unemployed felt the effects the most. Truman offered some New Deal-style solutions to America's economic woes, but a new conservatism had taken over American politics. Most of his proposals were rejected, and the few that were implemented had little effect.

The new conservatism brought with it a new round of anti-unionism in the country. Americans were particularly upset when workers in essential industries went on strike, as when the coal miners' strike (by the United Mine Workers, or UMW) cut off the energy supply to other industries, shutting down steel foundries, auto plants, and more. Layoffs in the affected industries exacerbated tensions. Americans cared little that the miners were fighting for basic rights. Truman followed the national mood, ordering a government seizure of the mines when a settlement could not be reached. During a later railroad strike, Truman threatened to draft into the military those strikers who held out for more than he thought they deserved. Consequently, Truman alienated labor, one of the core constituencies of the new Democratic coalition. Labor and consumers, angry at skyrocketing prices, formed an alliance that helped the Republicans take control of the Eightieth Congress in the 1946 midterm elections.

Truman also alienated many voters (particularly in the South) by pursuing a civil rights agenda that, for its time, was progressive. He convened the President's Committee on Civil Rights, which in 1948 issued a report calling for an end to segregation and poll taxes, and for more aggressive enforcement of anti-lynching laws. Truman also issued an executive order forbidding racial discrimination in the hiring of federal employees and another executive order desegregating the Armed Forces. Blacks began to make other inroads. The NAACP won some initial, important lawsuits against segregated schools and buses; Jackie Robinson broke the color barrier in baseball; and black groups started to form coalitions with liberal white organizations, thereby gaining more political clout. These advances provoked an outbreak of flagrant racism in the South, and in 1948 segregationist Democrats, or "Dixiecrats," abandoned the party to support Strom Thurmond for president.

With so many core Democratic constituencies—labor, consumers, Southerners—angry with the president, his defeat in 1948 seemed certain. Truman's popularity, however, received an unintentional boost from the Republican-dominated Congress. The staunchly conservative legislature passed several anti-labor acts too strong even for Truman. The Taft-Hartley Act, passed over Truman's veto, prohibited "union only" work environments (called "closed shops"), restricted labor's

Let's Make A Deal

Both Theodore and Franklin Roosevelt, as well as FDR's successor Harry Truman, offered "deals" to the American public:

	President	What's the deal with this?
Square Deal	Theodore Roosevelt	Government promised to regulate business and restore competition
First New Deal	Franklin Roosevelt	Focused on immediate public relief and the recovery of banks
Second New Deal	Franklin Roosevelt	Addressed the shortcomings of the First New Deal and responded to a changing political climate
Fair Deal	Harry Truman	Extension of New Deal vision and provisions for reintegrating WWII veterans into society (e.g., the G.I. Bill)

right to strike, prohibited the use of union funds for political purposes, and gave the government broad power to intervene in strikes. The same Congress then rebuked Truman's efforts to pass health care reform; increase aid to schools, farmers, the elderly, and the disabled; and promote civil rights for blacks. The cumulative effect of all this acrimony made Truman look a lot better to those he had previously offended. Still, as election time neared, Truman trailed his chief opponent, Thomas Dewey. He then made one of the most brilliant political moves in American history: He recalled the Congress, whose majority members had just drafted an extremely conservative Republican platform at the party convention, and challenged them to enact that platform. Congress met for two weeks and did not pass one significant piece of legislation. Truman then went out on a grueling public appearance campaign, everywhere deriding the "do-nothing" Eightieth Congress. To almost everyone's surprise, Truman won re-election, and his coattails carried a Democratic majority into Congress.

The Korean War

The Korean War began when communist North Korea invaded U.S.-backed South Korea. Believing the Soviet Union to have engineered the invasion, the United States took swift countermeasures. Originally intending only to repel the invasion, Truman decided to attempt a reunification of Korea after some early military successes. Under the umbrella of the United Nations, American troops attacked North Korea, provoking China, Korea's northern neighbor. (The Chinese were not too keen on the idea of hostile American troops on their border.) China ultimately entered the war, pushing American and South Korean troops back near the original border dividing North and South Korea. U.S. commander **Douglas MacArthur** recommended an all-out confrontation with China, with the objective of overthrowing the Communists and reinstating Chiang Kai-shek. Truman thought a war with the world's most populous country might be imprudent and so decided against MacArthur. When MacArthur started publicly criticizing the president, who was also the commander-in-chief, Truman fired him for insubordination. MacArthur was very popular at home, however, and firing him hurt Truman politically.

Although peace talks began soon after, the war dragged on another two years, into the Eisenhower administration. When the 1952 presidential election arrived, the Republicans took a page from the Whig playbook and chose **Dwight D. Eisenhower**, a war hero. By this point the presidency had been held by the Democratic party for 20 years. Truman was unpopular; his bluntness is now seen as a sign of his integrity, but during his terms, it offended a lot of potential constituents. In short, America was ready for a change. Eisenhower beat Democratic challenger **Adlai Stevenson** easily.

THE EISENHOWER YEARS (1953–1961)

The 1950s are often depicted as a time of conformity. Across much of America, a consensus of values reigned. Americans believed that their country was the best in the world, that communism was evil and had to be stopped, and that a decent job, a home in the suburbs, and access to all the modern conveniences (aka consumerism) did indeed constitute “the good life.” Congress had enacted the Serviceman’s Readjustment Act, commonly known as the G.I. Bill of Rights, in June of 1944. It provided an allowance for educational and living expenses for returning soldiers and veterans who wished to earn their high school diploma or attend college. The G.I. Bill not only helped many Americans achieve the American dream but also helped stimulate postwar economic growth by providing low-cost loans to purchase homes or farms or to start small businesses. The 1950s also proved to be an era in which the civil rights movement built on the advances of the 1940s and met some violent resistance; an era plagued by frequent economic recessions; and an era of spiritual unrest that manifested itself in such emerging art forms as Beat poetry and novels (“Howl,” *On the Road*), teen movies (*Blackboard Jungle*, *The Wild One*, *Rebel Without a Cause*), and rock ‘n’ roll (Elvis Presley, Little Richard, Jerry Lee Lewis, Chuck Berry).

The Kitchen Debate

Vice President Richard Nixon visited Moscow in 1959 for a cultural fair. While standing in a model American kitchen, Nixon ended up getting into an argument with Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev that emblemized not only U.S.-Soviet relations but also common American attitudes toward gender in the 1950s. An excerpt:

Nixon: I want to show you this kitchen. It is like those of our houses in California.

Khrushchev: We have such things.

Nixon: This is our newest model. This is the kind which is built in thousands of units for direct installations in the houses. In America, we like to make life easier for women.

Khrushchev: Your capitalistic attitude toward women does not occur under communism.

Nixon: I think that this attitude toward women is universal.

Domestic Politics in the 1950s

Eisenhower arrived at the White House prepared to impose conservative values on the federal government, which had mushroomed in size under Roosevelt and Truman. He sought to balance the budget, cut federal spending, and ease government regulation of business. In these goals he was, at best, only partly successful. The military buildup required by the continuing Cold War prevented Eisenhower from making the cuts to the military budget that he would have liked. He reduced military spending by reducing troops and buying powerful weapons systems (thus shaping the New Look Army), but not enough to eliminate deficit spending. The popularity of remaining New Deal programs made it difficult to eliminate them; furthermore, circumstances required Eisenhower to increase the number of Social Security recipients and the size of their benefits. Under Eisenhower the government also began developing the Interstate Highway System, partly to make it easier to move soldiers and nuclear missiles around the country. The new roads not only sped up travel, but they also promoted tourism and the development of the suburbs. The initial cost, however, was extremely high. As a result, Eisenhower managed to balance the federal budget only three times in eight years.

Some of the most important domestic issues during the Eisenhower years involved minorities. In 1953 Eisenhower sought to change federal policy toward Native

Americans. His new policy, called **termination**, would liquidate reservations, end federal support to Native Americans, and subject them to state law. However, in devising this policy, Eisenhower did not take Native American priorities into account. He aimed simply to reduce federal responsibilities and bolster the power of the states. Native Americans protested, convinced that termination was simply a means of stealing what little land the tribes had left. The plan failed and was ultimately stopped in the 1960s but not before causing the depletion and impoverishment of a number of tribes.

The civil rights movement experienced a number of its landmark events during Eisenhower's two terms. In 1954 the Supreme Court heard the case of *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*, a lawsuit brought on behalf of Linda Brown (a black school-age child) by the NAACP. Future Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall argued the case for Brown. In its ruling the Court overturned the "separate but equal" standard as it applied to education; "separate but equal" had been the law of the land since the Court had approved it in *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896). In a 9 to 0 decision, the Court ruled that "separate educational facilities are inherently unequal" and that schools should desegregate with "all deliberate speed." Although a great victory for civil rights, *Brown v. Board of Education* did not immediately solve the school segregation problem. Some Southern states started to pay the tuition for white children to attend private schools in order to maintain segregation. Some states actually closed their public schools rather than integrate them. Although Eisenhower personally disapproved of segregation, he also opposed rapid change, and so did little. This inactivity encouraged further Southern resistance, and in 1957 the governor of Arkansas called in the state National Guard to prevent a group of black students, the **Little Rock Nine**, from enrolling in a Little Rock high school. Eisenhower did nothing until one month later, when the courts ordered him to enforce the law. Arkansas, in response, closed all public high schools in Little Rock for two years. Eisenhower supported the Civil Rights Acts of 1957 and 1960, which strengthened the voting rights of Southern blacks and the punishments for crimes against blacks, respectively.

Another key civil rights event, the **Montgomery bus boycott**, began in 1955 when **Rosa Parks** was arrested for refusing to give up her seat on a bus to a white man as was required by **Jim Crow** laws. Outrage over the arrest, coupled with long-term resentment over unfair treatment, spurred blacks to stay off Montgomery buses for more than a year. The boycott brought **Martin Luther King Jr.** to national prominence. Barely 27 years old at the time, King was pastor at Rosa Parks's church. Although King was clearly groomed for greatness—his grandfather had led the protests resulting in the creation of Atlanta's first black high school, his father was a minister and community leader, and King had already amassed impressive academic credentials (Morehouse College, Crozer Theological Seminary, University of Pennsylvania, and finally a Ph.D. from Boston University)—the year-long bus boycott gave him his first national podium. In the end, a ruling by the Supreme Court resulted in the integration of city buses in Montgomery and elsewhere.

King encouraged others to organize peaceful protests, a plan inspired by his studies of Henry David Thoreau and Mohandas Gandhi. In 1960 black college students in **Greensboro, North Carolina**, tried just that approach, organizing a sit-in at a local Woolworth's lunch counter designated "whites only." News reports

of the sit-in, and the resultant harassment the students endured, inspired a sit-in movement that spread across the nation to combat segregation.

America Versus the Communists

There are a number of terms associated with the Cold War policy of Eisenhower and Secretary of State **John Foster Dulles** that you need to know. The administration continued to follow the policy of containment but called it **liberation** to make it sound more intimidating. It carried the threat that the United States would eventually free Eastern Europe from Soviet control. Dulles coined the phrase "**massive retaliation**" to describe the nuclear attack that the United States would launch if the Soviets tried anything too daring. **Deterrence** described how Soviet fear of massive retaliation would prevent their challenging the United States and led to an arms race. Deterrence suggested that the mere knowledge of **mutually assured destruction (MAD)** prevented both nations from deploying nuclear weapons. Dulles allowed confrontations with the Soviet Union to escalate toward war, an approach called **brinkmanship**. Finally, the Eisenhower administration argued that the spread of communism had to be checked in Southeast Asia. If South Vietnam fell to communism, the nations surrounding it would fall quickly like dominoes; hence, the **domino theory**.

Cold War tensions remained high throughout the decade. Eisenhower had hoped that the death of **Joseph Stalin** in 1953 might improve American-Soviet relations. Initially, the new Soviet leader **Nikita Khrushchev** offered hope. Khrushchev denounced Stalin's totalitarianism and called for "peaceful coexistence" among nations with different economic philosophies. Some Soviet client states took Khrushchev's pronouncements as a sign of weakness; rebellions occurred in Poland and Hungary. When the Soviets crushed the uprisings, U.S.-Soviet relations returned to where they were during the Stalin era. Soviet advances in nuclear arms development (the USSR exploded its first hydrogen bomb a year after the United States blew up its first H-bomb) and space flight (the USSR launched the first satellite, *Sputnik*, into space, motivating the United States to quickly create and fund the **National Aeronautics and Space Administration**, or **NASA**) further heightened anxieties.

Meanwhile, the United States narrowly averted war with the other communists, the Chinese. American-allied Taiwan occupied two islands close to mainland China, **Quemoy** and **Matsu**. The Taiwanese used the islands as bases for commando raids on the communists, which eventually irritated the Chinese enough that they bombed the two islands. In a classic example of brinkmanship, Eisenhower declared that the United States would defend the islands and strongly hinted that he was considering a nuclear attack on China. Tensions remained high for years, and Eisenhower's stance forced him to station American troops on the islands. During the 1960

The Arms Race

Size of bombs

- Atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima, 1945: equal to 12,500 tons of TNT
- First hydrogen bomb test, 1952: equal to 10,400,000 tons of TNT
- Soviet Tsar Bomba test, 1961: equal to 57,000,000 tons of TNT

Number of warheads

- 1945: USA 6; USSR 0
- 1950: USA 369; USSR 5
- 1955: USA 3057; USSR 200
- 1960: USA 20,434; USSR 1605
- 1970: USA 26,119; USSR 11,643
- 1980: USA 23,764; USSR 30,062

presidential election, Kennedy used the incident as a campaign issue, arguing that the two small islands were not worth the cost of defending them.

Third World Politics

World War II resulted in the breakup of Europe's huge overseas empires. In the decades that followed the war's end, numerous countries in Africa, Asia, and South America broke free of European domination. These countries allied themselves with neither of the two major powers; for this reason they were deemed the **Third World**. Both America and the Soviets sought to bring Third World countries into their spheres of influence, as these nations represented potential markets as well as sources of raw materials. The two superpowers particularly prized strategically located Third World countries that were willing to host military bases.

Neither superpower, it turned out, was able to make major inroads in the Third World at first. **Nationalism** swept through most Third World nations, recently liberated from major world powers. Enjoying their newfound freedom, these countries were reluctant to foster a long-term alliance with a large, powerful nation. Furthermore, most Third World countries regarded both powers with suspicion. America's wealth fostered both distrust and resentment, prompting questions about U.S. motives. America's racist legacy also hurt it in the Third World, where most residents were nonwhite. However, most Third World nations also saw how the Soviets dominated Eastern Europe and so had little interest in close relations with them. These new nations were not anxious to fall under the control of either superpower.

However, the United States tried to expand its influence in the Third World in other ways. For example, in 1956 in Egypt, the United States tried offering foreign aid, hoping to gain an ally by building the much-needed **Aswan Dam**. Egypt's nationalist leader Gamal Nasser suspected the Western powers of subterfuge; furthermore, he detested Israel, a Western ally. Eventually, he turned to the Soviet Union for that aid. Later that year, Israel invaded Egypt, followed by Britain and France, in an effort to gain control of the **Suez Canal**. President Eisenhower played the "good cop" and pressured Britain and France to withdraw. The American government also used **CIA covert operations** to provide a more forceful method of increasing its influence abroad. In various countries, the CIA coerced newspapers to report disinformation and slant the news in a way favorable to the United States, bribed local politicians, and tried by other means to influence local business and politics. The CIA even helped overthrow the governments of Iran and Guatemala in order to replace anti-American governments with pro-American governments. It also tried, unsuccessfully, to assassinate the communist leader of Cuba, **Fidel Castro**.

The 1960 Presidential Election

In 1960 Eisenhower's vice president, **Richard Nixon**, received the Republican nomination. The Democrats nominated Massachusetts senator **John F. Kennedy**. Similar in many ways, particularly in foreign policy, both candidates campaigned against the "communist menace" as well as against each other. Aided by his youthful good looks, Kennedy trounced an awkward Nixon in their first televised

debate. Kennedy's choice of Texan **Lyndon Johnson** as a running mate helped shore up the Southern vote for the Northern candidate. Nixon, meanwhile, was hurt by his vice presidency, where he had often served the role of Eisenhower's "attack dog." The fact that Eisenhower did not wholeheartedly endorse Nixon also marred his campaign. Still, it turned out to be one of the closest elections in history, and some believe that voter fraud turned a few states Kennedy's way, without which Nixon would have won.

In his final days in office, Eisenhower warned the nation to beware of a new coalition that had grown up around the Cold War, which he called the military-industrial complex. The combination of military might and the highly profitable arms industries, he cautioned, created a powerful alliance whose interests did not correspond to those of the general public. In retrospect, many would later argue that in his final statement, Eisenhower had identified those who would later be responsible for the escalation of the Vietnam War.

THE TURBULENT SIXTIES

At the outset, the 1960s seemed the start of a new, hope-filled era. Many felt that Kennedy, his family, and his administration were ushering in an age of "Camelot" (the theatrical play was very popular then). As Arthur had had his famous knights, Kennedy, too, surrounded himself with an entourage of young, ambitious intellectuals who served as his advisers. The press dubbed these men and one woman "the best and the brightest" America had to offer. Kennedy's youth, good looks, and wit earned him the adoration of millions. Even the name of his domestic program, the **New Frontier**, connoted hope. It promised that the fight to conquer poverty, racism, and other contemporary domestic woes would be as rewarding as the efforts of the pioneers who settled the West.

The decade did not end as it had begun. By 1969 America was bitterly divided. Many progressives regarded the government with suspicion and contempt, while many conservatives saw all dissidents as godless anarchists and subversives. Although other issues were important, much of the conflict centered on these two issues: the Vietnam War and blacks' struggle to gain civil rights. As you read through this summary of the decade, pay particular attention to the impact of both issues on domestic harmony.

Kennedy and Foreign Policy

Like Truman and Eisenhower, Kennedy perceived the Soviet Union and communism as the major threats to the security of the United States and its way of life. Every major foreign policy issue and event of his administration related primarily to these Cold War concerns.

Two major events during Kennedy's first year in office heightened American-Soviet tensions. The first involved Cuba, where a U.S.-friendly dictatorship had been overthrown by communist insurgents led by **Fidel Castro**. When Castro

took control of the country in 1959, American businesses owned more than 3 million acres of prime Cuban farmland and also controlled the country's electricity and telephone service. Because so many Cubans lived in poverty, Cuban resentment of American wealth was strong, so little popular resistance occurred when Castro seized and nationalized some American property. The United States, however, was not pleased. When Castro signed a trade treaty with the Soviet Union later that year, Eisenhower imposed a partial trade embargo on Cuba. In the final days of his presidency, Eisenhower broke diplomatic relations with Cuba, and Cuba turned to the Soviet Union for financial and military aid.

Taking office in 1961, President Kennedy inherited the Cuban issue. Looking to solve the dilemma, the CIA presented the ill-fated plan for the **Bay of Pigs invasion** to the new president. The plan involved sending Cuban exiles, whom the CIA had been training since Castro's takeover, to invade Cuba. According to the strategy, the army of exiles would win a few battles, and then the Cuban people would rise up in support, overthrow Castro, and replace his government with one more acceptable to the United States. Kennedy approved the plan but did not provide adequate American military support, and the United States launched the invasion in April 1961. The invasion failed, the Cuban people did not rise up in support, and within two days Kennedy had a full-fledged disaster on his hands. Not only had he failed to achieve his goal, but he had also antagonized the Soviets and their allies in the process. His failure also diminished America's stature with its allies.

Later in the year, Kennedy dealt with a second foreign policy issue when the Soviets took aggressive anti-West action by erecting a wall to divide East and West Berlin. The **Berlin Wall**, built to prevent East Germans from leaving the country, had even greater symbolic significance to the democratic West. It came to represent the repressive nature of communism and was also a physical reminder of the impenetrable divide between the two sides of the Cold War.

In 1962 the United States and the Soviet Union came the closest they had yet to a military (and perhaps nuclear) confrontation. The focus of the conflict was once again Cuba. In October, American spy planes detected missile sites in Cuba. Kennedy immediately decided that those missiles had to be removed at any cost; he further decided on a policy of brinkmanship to confront the **Cuban missile crisis**. He imposed a naval quarantine on Cuba to prevent any further weapons shipments from reaching the island, and then went on national television and demanded that the Soviets withdraw their missiles.

By refusing to negotiate secretly, Kennedy backed the Soviets into a corner; if they removed the missiles, their international stature would be diminished, especially since the quarantine was effectively a blockade, which diplomats defined as an act of war on the part of the United States. Therefore, in return, the Soviets demanded that the United States promise never again to invade Cuba and that the United States remove its missiles from Turkey (which is as close to the USSR as Cuba is to the United States). When Kennedy rejected the second condition, he gambled that the Soviets would not attack in response. Fortunately, behind-the-scenes negotiations defused the crisis, and the Soviets agreed to accept America's promise not to invade Cuba as a pretext for withdrawing the missiles. In return, the United States

Kennedy Wasn't a Donut

A popular urban legend holds that when President Kennedy went to the Berlin Wall in 1963 and declared, "*Ich bin ein Berliner*," he made a grammatical error and inadvertently called himself a jelly donut.

Sadly for high school history teachers trying to get a laugh out of their classes, this isn't actually true. While the word "*ein*" is omitted when literally declaring one's residence, it is required for figurative statements such as Kennedy's. Kennedy made no error, and the donut legend didn't start circulating until a novelist joked about it twenty years later.

secretly agreed to remove its missiles from Turkey a few months later, thus making it look like the United States had won. Recent scholarship suggests that it was the Soviet leader Khrushchev who prevented World War III and a nuclear holocaust.

The policy of containment even motivated such ostensibly philanthropic programs abroad as the **Peace Corps**. The Peace Corps' mission was to provide teachers and specialists in agriculture, health care, transportation, and communications to the Third World, in the hopes of starting these fledgling communities down the road to American-style progress. The government called this process "nation building." The Peace Corps had many successes, although the conflict between its humanitarian goals and the government's foreign policy goals often brought about failures as well. Furthermore, many countries did not want American-style progress and resented having it forced upon them.

The greatest theater for American Cold War policy during this era, however, was **Vietnam**, which will be discussed in greater detail shortly.

Kennedy and Domestic Policy

Kennedy began his presidency with the promise that America was about to conquer a **New Frontier**. He pushed through legislation that increased unemployment benefits, expanded Social Security, bumped up the minimum wage, and aided distressed farmers, among other measures.

Kennedy's civil rights agenda produced varied results. Kennedy supported **women's rights**, establishing a presidential commission that in 1963 recommended removing all obstacles to women's participation in all facets of society. Congress enacted the **Equal Pay Act** in 1963, which required that men and women receive equal pay for equal work. Unfortunately, employers continue to get around this federal law by simply changing job titles. However, it was only late in his presidency that Kennedy openly embraced the black civil rights movement. After almost two years of near inaction, in September 1962, Kennedy enforced desegregation at the University of Mississippi. In the summer of 1963, he asked Congress for legislation that would outlaw segregation in all public facilities. After Kennedy's assassination in November, Lyndon Johnson was able to push that legislation—the **Civil Rights Act of 1964**—through Congress on the strength of the late president's popularity and his own skills as a legislator.

Still, Kennedy's presidency proved an active period for the civil rights movement as a number of nongovernmental organizations mobilized to build on the gains of the previous decade. Martin Luther King Jr. led the **Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC)**, which staged sit-ins, boycotts, and other peaceful demonstrations. The Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) organized the **Freedom Riders** movement; the Freedom Riders staged sit-ins on buses, sitting in sections prohibited to them by segregationist laws. They were initially an integrated group, as was the **Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC)**, which did grassroots work in the areas of voter registration and anti-segregationist activism. Such groups met considerable resistance. In 1963 Mississippi's NAACP director, Medgar Evers, was shot to death by an anti-integrationist. Not long after, demonstrators in

Montgomery, Alabama, were assaulted by the police and fire department who used attack dogs and fire hoses against the crowd. News reports of both events horrified millions of Americans and thus helped bolster the movement. So, too, for reasons mentioned above, did Kennedy's assassination.

Lyndon Johnson's Social Agenda

Like Kennedy, Lyndon Johnson made an early commitment to the civil rights movement, but unlike Kennedy, Johnson took immediate action to demonstrate that commitment. From the time he took office, Johnson started to lobby hard for the **Civil Rights Act of 1964**, which outlawed discrimination based on a person's race, color, religion, or gender. If you can remember only one federal law in U.S. history, this is it! The Civil Rights Act of 1964 is the most comprehensive piece of civil rights legislation enacted in U.S. history and the basis of all discrimination suits to this day. The law prohibited discrimination in employment as well as in public facilities (thus increasing the scope of Kennedy's proposed civil rights act).

Not long after, Johnson oversaw the establishment of the **Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC)** to enforce the employment clause of the Civil Rights Act. Johnson signed the **Voting Rights Act of 1965** after he was elected in his own right in 1964. This law cracked down on those states that denied blacks the right to vote despite the Fifteenth Amendment. He also signed another civil rights act banning discrimination in housing, and yet another that extended voting rights to Native Americans living under tribal governments.

Johnson had grown up poor and believed that social injustice stemmed from social inequality, and therefore, he advocated civil rights in employment. Toward the same end, he lobbied for and won the **Economic Opportunity Act**, which appropriated nearly \$1 billion for poverty relief. After his landslide victory in the 1964 presidential election, Johnson greatly expanded his anti-poverty program. A number of programs combined to form Johnson's **War on Poverty**. **Project Head Start** prepared underprivileged children for early schooling; **Upward Bound** did the same for high school students. **Job Corps** trained the unskilled so they could get better jobs, while **Volunteers in Service to America (VISTA)** acted as a domestic Peace Corps. In addition, **Legal Services for the Poor** guaranteed legal counsel to those who could not afford their own lawyers. To further assist the poor, Johnson founded the **Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD)**, increased federal aid to low-income apartment renters, and built more federal housing projects.

The legislation passed during 1965 and 1966 represented the most sweeping change to U.S. government since the New Deal. Johnson's social agenda was termed the "**Great Society**." Best of all, taxpayers did not feel much pain: Increased tax revenues from a quickly expanding economy funded the whole package. Not everyone liked Johnson's agenda, however; many objected to any increase in government activity, and the extension of civil rights met with bigoted opposition, especially in the South. Thus, ironically, the huge coalition that had given Johnson his victory and his mandate for change started to fall apart because of his successes (and were hastened by a bitter national debate over American involvement in Vietnam).

The Civil Rights Movement

In the early 1960s, the civil rights movement made a number of substantial gains. Legislative successes such as those passed under Johnson's Great Society program provided government support. The movement also won a number of victories in the courts, particularly in the Supreme Court. Under Chief Justice Earl Warren, the Court, for a brief moment in history, was extremely liberal. The Warren Court worked to enforce voting rights for blacks and forced states to redraw congressional districts so that minorities would receive greater representation. The Warren Court expanded civil rights in other areas as well. Among its landmark rulings are those that prohibited school prayer and protected the right to privacy. The Warren Court also made several decisions concerning the rights of the accused. In *Gideon v. Wainwright*, the Court ruled that a defendant in a felony trial must be provided a lawyer for free if he or she cannot afford one. In the *Miranda v. Arizona*, the Court ruled that, upon arrest, a suspect must be advised of his or her right to remain silent and to consult with a lawyer.

Civil rights victories did not come easily. Resistance to change was strong, as evidenced by the opposition of state governments, police, and white citizens. In Selma, police prevented blacks from registering to vote; in Birmingham, police and firemen attacked civil rights protesters. All over the South, the Ku Klux Klan and other racists bombed black churches and the homes of civil rights activists with seeming impunity. In Mississippi three civil rights workers were murdered by a group that included members of the local police department.

With news reports of each event, outrage in the black community grew. Some activists abandoned Martin Luther King's strategy of nonviolent protest. Among the leaders who advocated a more aggressive approach was Malcolm X, a minister of the Nation of Islam. Malcolm X urged blacks to claim their rights "by any means necessary." (His autobiography is an essential document of the history of racism in America.) Later, two groups that previously had preached integration—the SNCC and CORE—expelled their white members and advocated the more separatist, radical program of Black Power. By 1968, when King was assassinated, the civil rights movement had fragmented, with some continuing to advocate integration and peaceful change, while others argued for empowerment through self-imposed segregation and aggression.

The New Left, Feminism, and the Counterculture

Black Americans were not the only ones challenging the status quo in the 1960s. Young whites, particularly those in college, also rebelled. For these young adults, the struggle was one against the hypocrisy, complacency, and conformity of middle-class life.

In 1962 the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) formed. Its leftist political agenda, laid out in a platform called the Port Huron Statement, set the tone for other progressive groups on college campuses; these groups collectively became known as the New Left. New Left ideals included the elimination of poverty and racism and an end to Cold War politics. One particularly active branch of the New Left formed at the University of California at Berkeley. In 1964 students there

Beatniks

We usually associate cultural rebellion with the 1960s and early 1970s, but the Beat Movement got its start in the 1950s. Beat writers, such as Allen Ginsburg, William Burroughs, and Jack Kerouac, challenged the straight-laced conservatism of the Eisenhower era by publishing works championing bohemian lifestyles, drug use, and non-traditional styles of art. The Beatniks would later inspire the Hippies of the 1960s.

"There's a time when the operation of the machine becomes so odious, makes you so sick at heart, that you can't take part! You can't even passively take part! And you've got to put your bodies upon the gears and upon the wheels, upon the levers, upon all the apparatus, and you've got to make it stop! And you've got to indicate to the people who run it, to the people who own it, that unless you're free, the machine will be prevented from working at all!"

—Mario Savio, speaking from the steps of Sproul Hall at the University of California, Berkeley, on December 3, 1964

protested when the university banned civil rights and anti-war demonstrations on campus. These protests grew into the **Free Speech movement**, which in turn fostered a number of leftist and radical political groups on the Berkeley campus.

Most New Left groups, however, were male-dominated and insensitive to the cause of women's rights. Women became frustrated with being treated as second-class citizens and started their own political groups. In 1963 Betty Friedan's book *The Feminine Mystique* openly challenged many people's assumptions about women's place in society. Friedan identified "The problem that has no name" and is credited with restarting the women's movement, a movement that had faded once women's suffrage was achieved with the Nineteenth Amendment in 1920. She was also one of the founders of NOW, the **National Organization for Women**, formed in 1966 to fight for legislative changes, including the ill-fated **Equal Rights Amendment (ERA)** to the Constitution. The modern movement for gay rights also began to solidify in the 1960s, with the first Gay Pride parades occurring on the anniversary of the Stonewall riots, an event at which gays fought back against the police in New York City.

Feminists fought against discrimination in hiring, pay, college admissions, and financial aid. They also fought for control of reproductive rights, a battle that reached the Supreme Court in the 1973 case *Roe v. Wade*, which enabled women to obtain abortions in all 50 states within the first trimester. Many states argued that they had an obligation to protect "life," as stipulated in the Fourteenth Amendment, and quickly passed state laws prohibiting a woman from having an abortion after the first three months of her pregnancy. Although there is no specific mention of a constitutional right to privacy, the Supreme Court had established this important precedent in 1965 in the case *Griswold v. Connecticut*. *Roe v. Wade* remains a controversial decision and continues to play a central role in American politics and society.

Rebellion against "the establishment" also took the form of nonconformity, a repudiation of the Eisenhower years. Hippies grew their hair long, wore tie-dyed shirts and ripped jeans, and advocated drug use, communal living, and "free love." Their way of life came to be known as the **counterculture** because of its unconventionality and its total contrast to the staid mainstream culture, which was typified by big band music and banal television variety shows. By the end of the 1960s, the counterculture became more widely accepted, and artists such as Andy Warhol, Bob Dylan, Jimi Hendrix, the Beatles, and the Rolling Stones were among the biggest moneymakers in the arts.

Concurrent with the rise in activism for civil rights and women's rights was the upsurge of interest in environmental issues. Rachel Carson, an American marine biologist wrote the seminal work of non-fiction, *Silent Spring*, a worldwide best-seller to this day. *Silent Spring* blew the whistle on the widespread use of the chemical pesticide DDT, leading to its eventual ban. Meanwhile, legislators responding to industrial pollution passed the **Clean Air Act** of 1955, the first law to control the use of airborne contaminants.

The New Left, feminists, the counterculture, and others in the growing left wing of American politics almost uniformly opposed American participation in the Vietnam War. These groups' vocal protests against the war and the fierce opposition they provoked from the government and pro-war Americans created a huge divide in American society by 1968. Before we discuss that fateful year, it is important to understand how and why America became involved in Vietnam.

American Involvement in Vietnam, World War II–1963

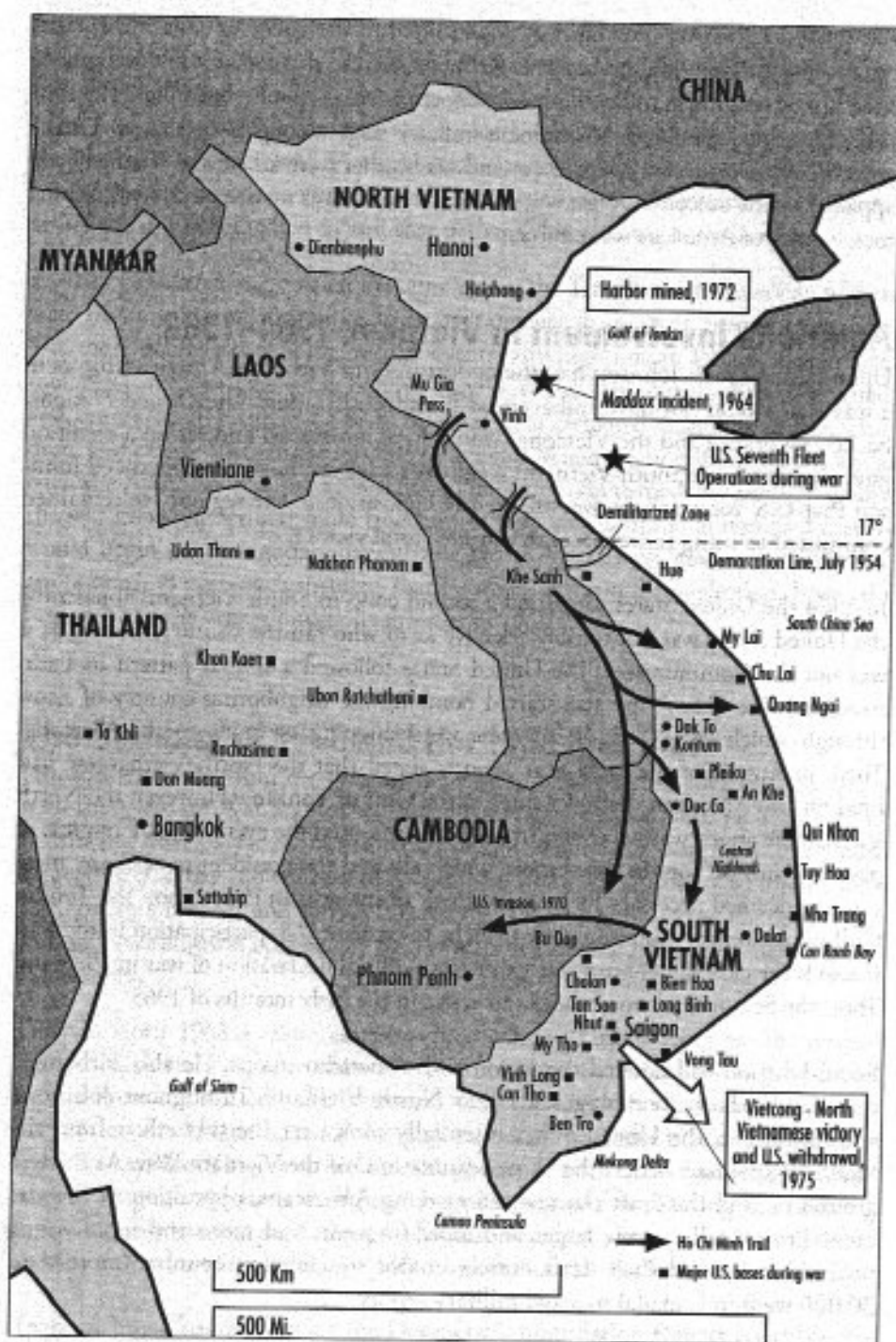
From the Truman administration until the fall of Soviet Communism in 1991, U.S. foreign policy leaders asserted an American right to intervene anywhere in the world to stop the spread of communism and to protect American interests. Nowhere did that policy fail more miserably than in Vietnam, where the United States maintained an economic and military presence for almost 25 years. The Vietnam War divided America as no war before had.

The origins of America's involvement in Vietnam stretch back to World War II. From the late nineteenth century until World War II, Vietnam was a French colony. France exported the country's resources—rice, rubber, and metals—for French consumption. This foreign exploitation of Vietnam helped foster a nationalist Vietnamese resistance called the *Việt Minh*, led by **Ho Chi Minh**. Ho had been schooled in France and had joined the French Communist Party before returning home. In fact, Ho Chi Minh was in Paris during the Versailles Peace Conference in 1919 and approached Woodrow Wilson at the time. Ho asked Wilson to honor his commitment to the right of nations to **self-determination**, as expressed in Wilson's **Fourteen Points**, and to help the Vietnamese expel the French from their country. Wilson ignored Ho Chi Minh's appeal.

Japan invaded Vietnam during World War II and ended French control of the country. Faced with a common enemy, the Vietnamese helped the Allies defeat Japan and probably expected to be granted their independence at the conclusion of the war, as India was in 1947. Shortly after the Japanese surrender in 1945, Ho drafted the Vietnamese Declaration of Independence modeled on the United States Declaration of Independence and the French Declaration of Rights of Man and Citizens.

The United States did not recognize Vietnamese independence nor the legitimacy of Ho's government, in part because of America's alliance with France (which wanted its colony back), and in part because Ho was a communist. Instead, the United States recognized the government of Bao Dai, the Vietnamese emperor whom the French had installed in the South, which France still controlled. Subsequently, Vietnam fought a war for independence against the French from 1946 until 1954, when the French were defeated at the Battle of Dien Bien Phu. Although Ho appealed to President Truman for assistance on several occasions, Truman never responded. Ho hoped the United States would honor its commitment to the principle of self-determination and empathize with the Vietnamese rather than support the colonial power. Truman continued to aid the French. The United States financed more than 80 percent of France's war effort in Indochina, a fact few Americans knew then or know now.

In 1954 all of the involved parties met in Geneva, Switzerland, and drew up the **Geneva Accords**, which divided Vietnam at the 17th parallel, with Communist forces controlling North Vietnam and (so-called) democratic forces controlling the South. It was agreed that this division was to be temporary and that elections would be held in two years to reunite the country and determine who would rule a unified Vietnam. The elections never took place, however. The United States, certain that Ho Chi Minh would win an election, sabotaged the peace agreement. First, the United States made an alliance with another South Vietnamese leader named Ngo Dinh Diem and helped him oust Bao Dai (whom the United States felt was too weak to control the country). Then, the CIA organized commando raids across the border in North Vietnam to provoke a Communist response (which the South Vietnamese could then denounce). Diem pronounced South Vietnam an autonomous country and refused to participate in the agreed-upon national election. The United States rallied Britain, France, Thailand, Pakistan, the Philippines, New Zealand, and Australia to form the NATO-like **Southeast Asian Treaty Organization (SEATO)** to provide for South Vietnam's defense against Communist takeover.



Southeast Asia During the Vietnam War

Unfortunately, the situation continued its downward spiral. Diem, it turned out, was a vicious leader. He took despotic control of South Vietnam, imprisoning political enemies, persecuting Buddhist monks, and closing newspapers that criticized his government. As a result, many South Vietnamese citizens joined the North Vietnamese side. These communist South Vietnamese insurgents were called the Vietcong. Rather than cut its losses, the United States continued to support Diem and

the South Vietnamese economically. Committed to the policy of containment and intent on nation building, President Kennedy increased America's involvement in Vietnam by sending in military advisors known as the Green Berets. Finally, in 1963 the CIA helped the South Vietnamese military stage a coup to overthrow Diem's government. During the coup, Diem and his brother were killed and Kennedy was appalled by the outcome. A few weeks later, Kennedy was assassinated, and Johnson took control of America's war efforts.

American Involvement in Vietnam, 1964–1968

Upon taking office, Johnson had the opportunity to withdraw American forces in a way that would not have embarrassed his administration. The United Nations, backed by France and the Vietcong, would have intervened and set up a coalition government to rule South Vietnam. Kennedy's advisers, however, convinced Johnson that U.S. forces could overwhelm any opposition in the region. He remained committed to using those forces to achieve "total victory."

In 1964 the United States supported a second coup in South Vietnam; apparently, the United States was not terribly selective as to who ran the country, so long as it was not the Communists. (The United States followed a similar pattern in Latin America.) The U.S. Army also started bombing the neighboring country of Laos, through which the North Vietnamese were shipping weapons to the Vietcong. Then, in August of the same year, reports stated that the North Vietnamese had fired on two American destroyer ships in the Gulf of Tonkin. (However, the North Vietnamese attack was never confirmed.) Johnson used the event to get Congress to pass the **Gulf of Tonkin Resolution**, which allowed the president to take any measures he deemed necessary to protect American interests in the region. The Tonkin Gulf resolution gave Johnson *carte blanche* to escalate U.S. participation in the war. It also is the closest Congress ever came to an official declaration of war in Vietnam. Thus, the first ground troops began to arrive in the early months of 1965.

Soon, Johnson had flooded the region with American troops. He also authorized massive Air Force bombing raids into North Vietnam. Throughout Johnson's administration, the United States essentially took over the war effort from the South Vietnamese; hence, the "Americanization" of the Vietnam War. As the war ground on and the draft claimed more young Americans, opposition to the war grew. Protest rallies grew larger and more frequent, and more and more young men either ignored their draft notices or fled to a foreign country (more than 30,000 went to Canada) to avoid military service.

Johnson's advisers continued to assure him that the war was "winnable" until January 1968, when the North Vietnamese launched the **Tet Offensive** (named after the Vietnamese holiday celebrating the New Year). In conjunction with the Vietcong, the North Vietnamese inflicted tremendous damage on American forces and nearly captured the American embassy in the South Vietnamese capital of Saigon. Though the North Vietnamese and Vietcong forces were, in the end, decisively driven back, the severity of the strikes was an ugly shock for the American people, who had been assured by the Johnson administration that the United States was winning the war. This would be a major turning point in the war, as most Americans

had been confident their superior technology could easily defeat the underdeveloped Third World nation. The Tet Offensive was a highly calculated series of attacks carried out around the country, demonstrating that American military experts had vastly underestimated the sophistication of Vietnamese strategy. That the North Vietnamese and Vietcong could launch such a large-scale offensive and nearly succeed in taking the American embassy made the American public come to believe it was being lied to and that perhaps this war was not winnable.

The My Lai Massacre occurred the same year as the Tet Offensive. American soldiers were becoming more and more frustrated and began to act in unspeakable ways. The most publicized of these horrific events, although not an isolated occurrence, took place in a small village in South Vietnam, where U.S. soldiers abused, tortured, and murdered an estimated 347 to 504 innocent civilians, including women, children, and elderly Vietnamese too infirm to fight. When the story finally broke a year later, the American public was outraged. Public opinion turned and protests against the war grew angrier and more frequent. In response, Johnson announced that he would begin peace negotiations with the North Vietnamese government. He also announced, to everyone's surprise, that he would not run for re-election. It was the beginning of the very tumultuous summer of 1968.

The Summer of 1968 and the 1968 Election

Johnson withdrew from the presidential race in large part because his association with the Vietnam War had turned many Americans against him, including many within his own party. Johnson's renomination would not have been easy; both Eugene McCarthy (no relation to Joseph McCarthy!) and Robert Kennedy, John F. Kennedy's brother and former attorney general, were poised to challenge him. Johnson's withdrawal opened the field to a third candidate, Vice President Hubert Humphrey.

Early in April 1968 a white assassin killed Martin Luther King Jr. The murder ignited black riots in more than 150 towns and cities. Arson, looting, and even murder were committed by the outraged mobs. In Chicago, where the Democratic convention would later be held, the mayor ordered the police to shoot arsonists on sight. To say that King's assassination heightened the already considerable tension surrounding race relations would be a huge understatement. During this time, the Kerner Commission report on race relations came out, stating that "our nation is moving toward two societies, one white and one black—separate and unequal."

Then, in June, frontrunner for the Democratic nomination Robert Kennedy was assassinated. Kennedy had come to represent the last bastion of hope for many Americans. Young, handsome, and vital (like his adored older brother), Kennedy was also an aggressive advocate for the poor and a harsh critic of the war in Vietnam. Together, the two assassinations convinced many that peaceful change from within the political system was impossible.

Many disenchanted young Americans came to Chicago in August to demonstrate at the Democratic Convention against government policy. The police were ordered to break up the crowds of protesters, which they did with tear gas, billy clubs,

and rifles. Images of American policemen in gas masks clubbing American citizens reached millions of living rooms across the country through television and the newspapers, presenting a picture eerily reminiscent of the police states *against* which America supposedly fought. When the convention chose pro-war Vice President Humphrey over the anti-war McCarthy *and* refused to condemn the war effort, the Democrats alienated many of their core constituency on the left.

Meanwhile, the Republicans handed their nomination to former vice president Richard Nixon at a rather peaceful convention. Then, a third candidate entered the national election, Alabama governor George Wallace, who ran a segregationist third-party campaign, much like Strom Thurmond had done in 1948 against Harry Truman. Wallace was popular in the South, which had traditionally voted Democratic. Thus, Humphrey was twice cursed: He had alienated his progressive urban base in the North and Wallace was siphoning his potential support in the South. Humphrey denounced the Vietnam War late in the campaign, but it was too little, too late. In one of the closest elections in history, Richard Nixon was elected president.

The Counter Counter-Culture

It would be easy to stereotype the 1960s and 1970s as a rollicking party filled with free love, new social ideas, and worthy political causes for which young people could devote their time. Not everyone in America embraced the changes of the 1960s, though. Dismayed with what they perceived to be the excesses of the civil rights movement, the counterculture movement, and feminism, some Americans were eager to bring the country back to traditional values based on religious principles. Other Americans were alarmed by the rising cost of social welfare programs created by the New Deal and Johnson's Great Society. The conservative resurgence began in the 1970s at the grassroots level with a variety of groups that focused on single issues such as ending abortion, criticizing affirmative action, or emphasizing traditional gender roles and the nuclear family. Many older people were suspicious of the largely young contingent who had come to question the values of their parents and grandparents. Religious people distrusted the rejection of traditional morals and spiritual beliefs. Southern segregationists resisted the Civil Rights movement. And some Americans who did not have strong political leanings simply tired of marches and protests and wanted to return to a more peaceful way of life.

One notable leader in the Conservative reaction to the changes of the 1960s was Phyllis Schlafly. She is most well known for lobbying against the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) to the Constitution. The ERA passed Congress, but was never fully ratified by the states, in part due to efforts to quell it by Schlafly and her supporters. Opponents to the ERA claimed that it could lead to the conscription of women into war (the Vietnam draft was already highly controversial), negatively affect women in divorce cases, and even allow men entry to women's-only colleges and clubs. Whatever the effects of the ERA would have been, these warnings influenced the opinions of many Americans and thus the ERA was never fully ratified.

When Richard Nixon ran for office, he sought to appeal to what he called the "Silent Majority" of Americans who did not fully embrace the cultural and political changes of the 1960's and 1970. Conservatives voted for Nixon in large numbers, hoping that he would reverse the trend of encroaching federal power, as did some Southern Democrats who distrusted the newer liberal social policies of their party.

Nixon, "Vietnamization," and Détente

Nixon entered office promising to end American involvement in Vietnam by turning the war over to the South Vietnamese, a process he called "Vietnamization." He soon began withdrawing troops; however, he also increased the number and intensity of air strikes. Like his predecessors, Nixon was a veteran cold warrior who believed that the United States could, and must, win in Vietnam. He ordered bombing raids and ground troops into Cambodia, in hopes of rooting out Vietcong strongholds and weapons supplies. American involvement in Vietnam dragged on until 1973, when Secretary of State **Henry Kissinger** completed negotiations for a peace treaty with the North Vietnamese.

There are a couple of postscripts to the Vietnam story. First, the negotiated peace crumbled almost as soon as American troops started to vacate the country. In 1975 Saigon fell to the North Vietnamese Army, and Vietnam was united under communist rule. Second, Congress passed the **War Powers Resolution** in 1973 in order to prevent any future president from involving the military in another undeclared war. The War Powers Resolution requires the president to obtain congressional approval for any troop commitment lasting longer than 60 days.

Nixon did have success, however, in his other foreign policy initiatives, especially those concerning the world's two other superpowers, the USSR and China. During Nixon's first term, the United States increased trade with the Soviets, and the administration negotiated the first of a number of arms treaties between the two countries. Results were even more dramatic with China. After a series of secret negotiations, Nixon traveled to communist China, whose government the United States had previously refused to acknowledge. Nixon's trip eased tensions, partly because at the time of the trip, Americans trusted the anti-communist Nixon to improve relations with China, and his trip opened trade relations between the two countries. It also allowed Nixon to use his friendship with the Chinese as leverage against the USSR, and vice versa. (The Chinese and the Soviets, despite both being communist, hated each other.)

The Nixon years added two new terms to the vocabulary of foreign policy. Together, Nixon and Kissinger formulated an approach called *détente*, a policy of "openness" that called for countries to respect each other's differences and cooperate more closely. *Détente* ushered in a brief period of relaxed tensions between the two superpowers but ended when the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan in 1979. The **Nixon Doctrine** announced that the United States would withdraw from many of its overseas troop commitments, relying instead on alliances with local governments to check the spread of communism.

Nixon's Domestic Policy

Nixon could not match his successes overseas at home. During Nixon's presidency, the economy worsened, going through a period of combined recession-inflation that economists called stagflation. Nixon attempted to combat the nation's economic woes with a number of interventionist measures, including a price-and-wage freeze and increased federal spending. None of his efforts produced their intended results.

Politically, American society remained divided among the haves and have-nots, the conservatives and the progressives. Much of the political rhetoric on both sides painted the opposition as enemies of the "American way." Several confrontations on college campuses heightened political tensions, most notably when national guardsmen shot and killed four protesters at Kent State University in Ohio who were protesting the United States' decision to invade Vietcong camps in neutral Cambodia. This incident became synonymous with the division between the youth and middle America. A similar incident occurred at the historically black Jackson State University in Mississippi, but the media failed to report the incident—further evidence of continued racial conflict in American society. Meanwhile, urban crime levels rose, causing many to flee to the relative tranquility of the suburbs.

Still, in 1972, Nixon won re-election in one of the greatest landslide victories in American political history, defeating liberal Senator George McGovern. Although Nixon won the election easily, both houses of Congress remained under Democratic control, an indication of the mixed feelings many Americans felt toward their political leaders.

Watergate and Nixon's Resignation

In the summer of 1971, two major newspapers published the **Pentagon Papers**, a top-secret government study of the history of U.S. involvement in Vietnam. The study covered the period from World War II to 1968, and it was not complimentary. It documented numerous military miscalculations and flat-out lies the government had told the public. Even though the documents contained nothing about the Nixon administration, Nixon fought aggressively to prevent their publication. The United States was involved in secret diplomatic negotiations with North Vietnam, the USSR, and China at the time, and Nixon and Kissinger both believed that the revelation of secret government dealings in the past might destroy their credibility in the present.

Nixon lost his fight to suppress the Pentagon Papers, a loss that increased Nixon's already considerable paranoia. In an effort to prevent any further leaks of classified documents, Nixon put together a team of investigators called the "plumbers." The plumbers undertook such disgraceful projects as burglarizing a psychiatrist's office in order to gather incriminating information on Daniel Ellsberg, the government official who had turned the Pentagon Papers over to the press. During the 1972 elections, the plumbers sabotaged the campaigns of several Democratic hopefuls and then botched a burglary of Democratic headquarters in the Watergate Hotel.

When the plumbers were arrested at the Watergate Hotel, the White House began an all-out effort to cover up the scandal. A Senate hearing into the matter began in early 1973 and dragged on, keeping the story alive in the news for the next year and a half. Information was slowly revealed that incriminated the president's closest advisers. They would resign, and then most would be tried and convicted of felonies. (Perjury and destruction of evidence were two popular and successful charges against them.) At last, it was discovered that Nixon had secretly taped all conversations in the White House, including many concerning Watergate. For the next year, a legal battle over the tapes raged; the Senate demanded them, and Nixon refused to turn them over, claiming executive privilege. All the while, more damning evidence came to light—much of it in the pages of *The Washington Post*, courtesy of investigative journalists **Bob Woodward** and **Carl Bernstein**—and more former Nixon associates were jailed. When the president lost the battle over the tapes—the Supreme Court ordered Nixon to turn them over to the Senate—he knew his days were numbered, as the tapes revealed a number of unsavory aspects of Nixon's character. Rather than face impeachment proceedings, Nixon resigned in August 1974. His vice president, **Gerald Ford**, took office and almost immediately granted Nixon a presidential **pardon**, thereby preventing a trial.

Gerald Ford

Gerald Ford became president when Nixon resigned. Ford replaced Nixon's first vice president, **Spiro Agnew**, who had resigned in the face of impending criminal charges (relating to corruption during his tenure as governor of Maryland). When Ford selected **Nelson Rockefeller** as his vice president, it was the first time that neither the president nor the vice president had been elected by the public.

Ford's controversial **pardon** of Nixon brought the Watergate era to a close, but it also cost Ford politically, as it raised suspicions that Nixon and Ford had struck a deal. Ford's political fortunes were further undermined by the weak economy. People were encouraged to wear "WIN" buttons: Whip Inflation Now. An oil embargo organized by Arab nations (under the leadership of OPEC) against the United States increased fuel prices, which in turn caused the price of almost everything else to rise. Inflation, coupled with an increasing unemployment rate, and the damage done to his credibility by the media, especially parodies by the actor **Chevy Chase** on *Saturday Night Live*, sealed Ford's fate. In 1976 he was defeated by Democrat **Jimmy Carter**.

Jimmy Carter

Carter inherited a weakening economy. During his presidency, inflation exceeded 10 percent, and interest rates on loans approached 20 percent. Slow economic growth was coupled with inflation to worsen the stagflation that began in Nixon's term. Carter tried to balance the federal budget but failed (as had every president since Eisenhower).

Many of the nation's economic problems resulted from the increased cost of OPEC petroleum. In response, President Carter increased funding for research into alternative sources of power. Carter created a new, cabinet-level government agency,

the **Department of Energy**, to oversee these efforts. Many Americans saw nuclear power as a solution to the nation's energy woes. Opponents argued that nuclear power plant failures were potentially catastrophic; their fears were reinforced when a Pennsylvania plant at **Three Mile Island** failed, releasing radioactive materials into the atmosphere.

The high point of the Carter administration came when President Carter personally brokered a **peace agreement between Israel and Egypt**. Israeli-Egyptian conflict dated to the moment of Israel's founding in 1948, when Israel was besieged by hostile Arab neighbors. Tensions between Israel and Egypt were heightened by the **1967 Six Day War**, during which Israel took control of the Sinai Peninsula, a desert region belonging to Egypt. In 1978, however, the leaders of the two countries agreed to meet with each other, in each other's countries. It was a major breakthrough in Israeli-Arab relations; most Arab nations refused even to acknowledge Israel's existence. President Carter hoped to capitalize on this breakthrough. He invited the two leaders to **Camp David** and personally brokered an agreement between the two nations. Ever since, the United States has actively participated in peace negotiations in the region.

Carter enjoyed some foreign policy successes. Along with negotiating the peace treaty between Israel and Egypt, he also concluded an arms agreement with the Soviets. However, Carter also suffered some major setbacks. When the USSR invaded Afghanistan, Carter's efforts proved powerless in forcing a withdrawal. Carter also flip-flopped in Nicaragua, where first he befriended the revolutionary **Sandinista** government and then turned against them as they allied themselves more closely with the USSR and Cuba. Carter's worst crisis involved Iran, when American hostages were taken in retaliation for America's decades-long support of the repressive, deposed Shah. Held for more than a year, the hostages were released only after Ronald Reagan took office.

REAGAN, H.W., CLINTON, AND W. (1980–2001)

The Reagan Candidacy

By the late 1970s, many Americans had grown tired of the conflicts of the previous decade. Many were uncomfortable with the growing cynicism toward political leaders. Jimmy Carter hit a raw nerve—and disturbed many Americans—when he complained in a speech that the people were letting themselves be overtaken by a “crisis of confidence.” This came to be known as “the malaise speech,” though Carter never used the word “malaise” in it.

Ronald Reagan saw that the nation was ready for a major change. In the 1980 presidential campaign, Reagan, a former actor and governor of California, presented himself as Carter’s opposite and a Washington “outsider,” not tainted by events of the previous two decades, much as Carter had portrayed himself as an outsider in 1976. While Carter blamed American self-indulgence and consumerism for the country’s problems, Reagan stressed the positive aspects of America. Furthermore, many Americans who disagreed with Reagan’s conservative politics nonetheless voted for him because they liked him and his “can-do” attitude. Further damaging Carter’s chances was the third-party candidacy of liberal Republican John Anderson, who attracted a sizable “protest vote” from those who might otherwise have supported Carter. In the end, Reagan won the 1980 election by a landslide.

Supply-Side Economics

Ronald Reagan tried to revive the economy by applying the theory of **supply-side economics**. Reagan believed that if corporate taxes were reduced, those corporations would earn greater profits. They would then use those profits, he believed, to buy new equipment and hire more employees. As a result, wealth would “trickle down” by creating more jobs and reinvigorating the economy. (George H. W. Bush would refer to this policy as “voodoo economics.”) Reagan coupled this with large-scale deregulation, particularly in the areas of banking, industry, and the environment. He also successfully lobbied Congress for an across-the-board tax cut for all Americans. This policy increased his popularity with most Americans, although many complained that tax cuts hurt the poor, who pay little in income tax but depend on federal enfranchisement programs (such as welfare, food stamps, and Medicaid) to survive.

At first, Reagan’s economic policies had little effect. The country continued in a recession for almost two years before the economy revived. Even then, results were mixed. Although inflation subsided, the unemployment rate continued to rise, lending credence to the criticism that, under Reagan, the rich were getting richer while the poor were getting poorer. Rather than reinvesting in the economy, as supply-side economics suggested, the rich used the money saved on taxes to buy luxury items.

Military Spending and Budget Deficits

Ronald Reagan frequently claimed that he sought to decrease the size of the federal government. He called his plan the **New Federalism**, but it was quite the opposite of federalism—its goal was to shift power from the national government to the states. Reagan suggested that the states take complete responsibility for welfare, food stamps, and other social welfare programs currently funded at the national level; in return, the national government would assume the entire cost of Medicaid. Reagan's goal was never accomplished, however. The states feared that the shift would greatly increase the cost of state government, which would require unpopular tax increases at the state level.

At the same time, Reagan convinced Congress to greatly increase military spending. He funded research into a space-based missile shield system called the **Strategic Defense Initiative**, or **SDI** (the program was dubbed "**Star Wars**" by both supporters and detractors). Arguing that America needed to more quickly develop superior arms, Reagan also escalated the arms race with the USSR. Some historians have argued that the arms race bankrupted the Soviet Union and helped bring about an end to the Cold War, while others mainly credit Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev for the Cold War's end.

Tax cuts, increased military spending, and the failure of Reagan's New Federalism plan combined to escalate the **federal budget deficit**. Government spending increased while government revenues shrank, forcing the government to borrow money. Congress blamed the deficit on Reagan's tax cuts and called for a tax increase. Reagan, on the other hand, argued that the fault was with Congress, which refused to decrease funding for social welfare programs at the rate the president requested. Neither side budged, and as a result, the federal deficit reached record heights during the Reagan administration.

Foreign Policy Under Reagan

In foreign policy, Reagan sought to end the Cold War by winning it on every front he could in any way he could. He supported repressive regimes and right-wing insurgents in El Salvador, Panama, the Philippines, and Mozambique, all because they opposed communism. During the Reagan administration, the U.S. military led an international invasion of **Grenada** to topple a new Communist government there.

One of Reagan's top foreign policy priorities was support for a group of Nicaraguan insurgents called the "**Contras**." Reports that the Contras were torturing and murdering civilians led Congress to cut off aid to the group, but the Reagan administration was so fully committed to them and opposed to the Sandinistas, who were communists, that it devised a plan to fund them through other channels. The government secretly sold weapons to Iran and then used the income to buy guns for the Contras. The entire process was eventually discovered; it came to be known as the **Iran-Contra affair**. Critics argued that Iran-Contra represented a constitutional crisis, pointing out that the plan had denied Congress the "power of the purse" central to the system of checks and balances. Supporters claimed that the president had broken no laws and that his goals were good ones.

Another foreign policy setback came when the Reagan administration sent marines to **Lebanon** as part of a United Nations peacekeeping force. A suicide bomb killed 240 servicemen and led to an eventual pullout of troops.

Reagan's greatest successes in foreign policy came in U.S.-Soviet relations. At first, Reagan's hard-line anti-communism led to deterioration in relations. The rhetorical war between the two enemies was fierce, Reagan calling the Soviet Union "the evil empire," and hitting an all-time low when he jokingly declared that he had outlawed the USSR, and added "we begin bombing in five minutes." Although not meant to be heard by the public, the joke was picked up by a microphone and later broadcast repeatedly. The escalated arms race further destabilized relations by constantly altering the military balance of power. Ultimately, however, the arms race helped bring the adversaries to the bargaining table, as neither side could afford the high cost.

American-Soviet relations were further helped when reformer Mikhail Gorbachev rose to power in the Soviet Union. Gorbachev is best known for his economic policy of *perestroika*, or restructuring, and his social reforms collectively referred to as *glasnost*, or openness. Gorbachev loosened Soviet control of Eastern Europe, increased personal liberties in the Soviet Union, and eventually allowed some forms of free-market commerce in the Communist country. Reagan and Gorbachev met frequently and ultimately negotiated a withdrawal of nuclear warheads from Europe.

George H. W. Bush

The election of 1988 convinced many Americans that progressive liberalism was finally destroyed, as George Bush easily defeated the Democratic candidate, Michael Dukakis, who was then governor of Massachusetts. In accepting his party's nomination, George Bush called for "a kinder, gentler nation," and he is most remembered for declaring, "Read my lips: No new taxes." "Liberalism" had become the "L word," and feminism had become the new "F word." The conventional wisdom held that Americans had settled back into traditional American lifestyles that celebrated values such as family and abstinence from sex and drugs (Nancy Reagan had urged kids your age to "Just say NO!"). It appeared as if the moral majority had spoken.

The most significant events of the Bush presidency were the ending of the Cold War (symbolized by the dismantling of the Berlin Wall and breakup of the Soviet Union) and the Persian Gulf War. If containment had been the guiding policy during the Cold War, but the Soviet Union no longer posed a threat to the world order, it would be left to George Bush to set the course for U.S. foreign policy into the twenty-first century. The test came in August 1990, when Saddam Hussein, the leader of Iraq, invaded Iraq's tiny but oil-rich neighbor Kuwait. When Saddam seized Kuwait's oil fields and threatened the world's access to Middle East oil, Washington reacted immediately. Having learned from Vietnam, Bush built a consensus in Congress and assembled an international coalition against Iraq in the UN.

Operation Desert Storm consisted mostly of massive air strikes against strategic Iraqi targets, and most Americans watched the war from the safety of their homes on television as if it were a video game. The war ended quickly with few American casualties. Although Iraq was required to submit to UN inspectors to insure that there were no **weapons of mass destruction** or chemical warfare production facilities, Saddam Hussein remained in power, a decision many foreign policy experts later came to criticize. It appeared that U.S. foreign policy in the post-Cold War era would focus on political stability in the Middle East and defending human rights.

Post-1980 Society

Though the 1980s were before you were born and may even seem like ancient history to you, historians assert that it can take as many as 50 years or more before enough time has elapsed for people to evaluate the past objectively. Keeping that in mind, let's take a look at some of the major trends and developments that historians have begun to identify in the past 20 or 30 years.

Changing Demographics

As was the case a century ago, when predominantly Eastern European immigrants arrived by the millions onto America's shores, immigration in recent decades has significantly affected the shape and tenor of American society. In 1890, 86 percent of immigrants to the United States were from Europe. From the 1970s through today, however, the fastest growing ethnic minorities in the United States have been **Hispanics** and **Asians**, and according to the 2000 census, Hispanics now outnumber African Americans as the largest minority in the United States. Much of this growth among Asians and Hispanics has been fueled by immigration.

The **Immigration Act of 1965** contributed significantly to the increase in immigration by members of these population groups. This legislation phased out all national quotas by 1968 and set annual limits on immigration from the Western Hemisphere and the rest of the world, essentially relaxing restrictions on non-European immigration. It gave priority to reuniting families and to certain skilled workers (particularly scientists) and **political refugees**. Though the vast majority of immigrants who entered under this legislation did so in order to join family members, searching for employment and escaping from persecution still ranked high among the most common reasons people came to the United States. Several groups admitted under these regulations included Cuban and Southeast Asian refugees created by **Fidel Castro's** revolution and the Vietnam War, respectively.

At the end of the twentieth century, from 1970 to 2000, the number of foreign-born people living in the United States went from 10 million to 31 million, or 11 percent of the total population. Fifty-one percent of those foreign-born were from Latin America, while 27 percent were from Asia, the second-largest group. Not since the turn of the twentieth century has the United States experienced a comparable surge in immigration. In 1915 immigrants made up 15 percent of the total population, the largest percentage in our history so far.

What will all these changes mean for American society? The increasing racial and ethnic diversity of our population has not only sparked heated debate on immigration policy but also on issues such as bilingual education and affirmative action. Discussions of immigration policy have generally centered on illegal immigration, the role and impact that immigrants have on the economy, and the extent to which an influx of new cultures, attitudes, and ideas will reshape society. Tensions created by this new wave of immigration have resulted in various measures to curb illegal immigration, abolish bilingual education in some states, and allow both low-skilled and high-skilled workers into the United States on a temporary basis to provide needed labor and services. In 1986, for instance, Congress passed the **Simpson-Mazzoli Act**, which outlawed the deliberate employment of illegal immigrants and granted legal status to some illegal aliens who entered the United States before 1982. However, problems persist.

Whether you believe that immigrants place a burden on social services or support and enrich the development of our economy and society, it is clear that the United States is in the midst of major demographic changes that are visible today. With each new wave of immigration, ethnic enclaves sprout in big cities and neighborhoods, contributing to America's unique mixture of peoples. A century ago, there were communities such as Little Italy in New York City or Chinatown in San Francisco. Today, reflecting more recent population trends, there are places like Little Havana in Miami and Little Saigon in Orange County, California. Americans have also seen an increase in multilingual services and the media catering to Hispanics and Asians in particular. Even political parties openly attempt to attract Hispanics in recognition of their potential political influence. The impact of these changing demographics will be felt for generations to come.

The Clinton Presidency (1993–2001)

William Jefferson Clinton was the first Democrat to be elected president since Jimmy Carter. After more than a decade of Republican control of the White House, Clinton and **Al Gore** took control in January 1993. Although it is doubtful that you would be required to write an essay that went through the 1990s, you could see a few multiple-choice questions about the major events that occurred during Clinton's two terms as president. The following is a brief review of those issues and events.

The first significant event of the Clinton presidency was the establishment of the **North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA)**. Although the treaty had been negotiated by the previous Republican administration, Clinton signed it into law in 1993. The agreement did exactly what it sounds like it did—eliminated trade barriers among the United States, Mexico, and Canada. While the treaty was severely criticized by American labor unions, who feared American companies would move their factories elsewhere in order to reduce costs with lower wages and operation costs, corporate interests supported it enthusiastically. Despite often speaking favorably about the concept of free trade, and gradually reducing tariff barriers over time, the United States has historically interfered with trade, usually in the form of high, protective tariffs, when it was beneficial to certain political and economic groups, but always under the guise of protecting the "national interest."

Also notable during Clinton's presidency was the 1994 Congressional Election. Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich's Contract with America outlined a specific series of laws the Republican Party wished to pass, designed to reduce taxes, consolidate government programs, and reform welfare entitlement programs. The Republicans won back control of the Congress, but their power was limited by Clinton's moderating Democrat executive power. No doubt, the most infamous event of Clinton's presidency was the Clinton-Lewinsky scandal that led to Clinton's impeachment during his second term in office. Some Clinton supporters believe that special prosecutor Kenneth Starr had it in for the Clintons, beginning with his accusations of their dubious real estate dealings in what came to be known as **Whitewater**. Regardless, the U.S. House of Representatives impeached Clinton for perjury, obstruction of justice, and abuse of power. Remember that impeachment is the formal accusation of wrongdoing; it does not mean that the accused is thrown out of office. According to the Constitution, the House of Representatives has the "sole power of impeachment," and any federal official can be impeached for committing treason, bribery, or other "high crimes and misdemeanors." The United States Senate then has the "sole power to try all impeachments." Although Clinton was impeached, he was acquitted by the Senate and remained in office to finish his second term. Several federal judges have been impeached throughout American history, but Clinton was only the second president ever impeached. Lincoln's vice president, Andrew Johnson, was impeached, but he too was acquitted and was not thrown out of office. Students sometimes think that Nixon was impeached for his involvement in Watergate. Not quite. He resigned before the House of Representatives completed the process.

Clinton was really the first president to take office after the end of the Cold War, and he made it clear that one of his major foreign policy goals was the protection of human rights around the world, although some criticized his turning a blind eye to human rights violations in China, defending capitalism over democracy. In 1999 Clinton supported a bombing campaign in the former Yugoslavia under the auspices of NATO. Slobodan Milosevic, president of Serbia, was conducting a brutal policy of "ethnic cleansing" against Balkan Muslims. Milosevic was eventually tried and convicted for committing "crimes against humanity."

Other notable events that took place during the Clinton years include his "Don't ask, don't tell" policy pertaining to gays in the U.S. military and his appointments of Ruth Bader Ginsburg and Stephen Breyer to the Supreme Court. Two significant initiatives that failed were his proposal for a national health care program and campaign finance reform.

THE 2000 ELECTION

While it is incredibly unlikely that you will be asked to know anything specific about the George W. Bush administration, other than the obvious major events like 9/11 and the situation in Iraq (although certainly not in any detail), you may see a question about the 2000 election. According to the Constitution, a candidate must win a majority of electoral votes to win the presidential election. However, because of the "winner-take-all" system regarding the allotment of electoral votes in most states, it is possible for a candidate to win the majority of the popular vote nationwide but lose the presidency. Recall that this happened in 1824, when Jackson won a plurality of the popular vote, but John Quincy Adams became president, and again in 1876, when Samuel J. Tilden lost to Rutherford B. Hayes. On election night in November 2000, it appeared that Al Gore had defeated George W. Bush. However, through a convoluted series of mishaps with the voting procedure in Florida, the results of the Electoral College were questioned. Eventually, the Supreme Court prevented a formal recount of the vote in Florida and George W. Bush, son of former president George H. W. Bush, was elected.

The George W. Bush presidency also marked the rise in **neoconservatism**, which literally means "new conservatism," a movement in sharp opposition to "paleo-conservatism" or the conservatism of prior Republican administrations. Neo-conservatives, such as Vice-President Dick Cheney, Secretary of State Donald Rumsfeld, and advisor Paul Wolfowitz, promoted the idea of spreading democracy worldwide and putting American corporate interests first through the use of military actions abroad. Global trade and open immigration is a net positive for America in neoconservative thought.

Some former Democrats latched onto neoconservatism, while both staunch Liberals and paleo-conservatives criticized the Bush Administration. For liberals, the Bush policies were symptomatic of excessive corporate power and global imperialism, while traditional conservatives such as Patrick J. Buchanan lamented the cost of military adventures overseas, the loss of domestic jobs incurred by global free-trade agreements, and the ravages of unrestricted immigration. Americans on both sides of the aisle, it seemed, had lost faith in the ability of the federal government to solve social and economic problems.

AFRICAN AMERICANS IN POLITICS

Following the accomplishments of Freedom Summer in 1964, the **Voting Rights Act of 1965**, and the **Twenty-fourth Amendment** to the Constitution, which prohibited the use of poll taxes, measures such as literacy tests and poll taxes that had been used by many Southern states to deny African Americans the right to vote were summarily banned. The results in the South were dramatic: In 1960 only 20 percent of eligible African Americans had been registered to vote, but by 1971, that number had jumped to 62 percent. Cities such as Los Angeles, Chicago, Washington, D.C., Atlanta, and New Orleans elected their first African American mayors in the 1980s. The nation's first African American governor was elected in 1990 in Virginia.

In 1968 Shirley Chisholm was the first African American woman elected to Congress; in 1972 she also became the first African American to run for president. Reverend Jesse Jackson also ran for the Democratic presidential nomination in 1984 and 1988, winning many of the primary elections. According to the U.S. Census Bureau in 2000, there were 1,540 African American legislators, representing 10 percent of the total number of legislators nationwide. Colin Powell and Condoleezza Rice, both secretaries of state under President George W. Bush, occupied the most powerful political office that African Americans had held since Thurgood Marshall was appointed to the Supreme Court by Lyndon Johnson in the 1960s. Of course, those records were surpassed with the historic 2008 election of Barack Obama as president of the United States.

Urban Problems

As in the past, people in the 1950s and 1960s flocked to the cities for employment and cheaper housing. African Americans continued to move to Northern and Western cities as they had done during World Wars I and II, while other minorities, including immigrants from Latin America, were drawn to cities for similar reasons. By the 1970s and 1980s, however, mounting urban problems—overcrowding, increasing unemployment and crime rates, and decaying and inadequate housing and commercial areas—initiated a trend of mostly white, middle-class Americans leaving the cities for the suburbs (a phenomenon nicknamed “white flight”); the open spaces, shopping malls, and better-funded schools of the suburbs also enticed people to move. When middle-class families moved to the suburbs, businesses and industries that once provided vital jobs and tax revenue for cities followed. The result was that poor people and racial minorities remained in cities where there were insufficient funds for housing, sanitation, infrastructure, and schools.

Meanwhile, televised urban riots in the 1960s, such as those in Los Angeles, Chicago, and New York after the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr., only served to widen the gap between cities and suburbs and to heighten racial tensions. One of the worst urban riots occurred much later in 1992 in South Central Los Angeles, where many African Americans expressed outrage at the acquittal of four white police officers who were videotaped beating a black man, Rodney King.

Tensions between urban and suburban areas surfaced in ways that highlighted both racial and class animosity. In 1974–1975 the forced busing of students resulted in violence in South Boston when black students from a poorer section were bused into a predominantly white, working-class neighborhood school by court order. Buses were vandalized and attacked while riot police tried to quell the mob. White families moved from South Boston or sent their children to private schools, while even some black families opposed the forced busing, arguing instead that the schools in their black neighborhoods should receive better funding. Busing continued in many major cities through the late 1990s, and although many schools did achieve greater racial integration, the strategy was not without its critics. Indeed, the Supreme Court decision in *Milliken v. Bradley* (1974) held that an interdistrict remedy for unconstitutional segregation found in one district exceeded the scope of the violation.

But while the image of the scary inner city still has a hold on some imaginations, it is no longer supported by statistics. Both violent crime and property crime have plunged since the early 1990s, and crime in 2010 reached its lowest level in forty years. In large urban areas the drop in crime has been even more pronounced. Affluent young professionals have flocked back to city centers. There is an active debate over what has caused this encouraging trend—one theory credits falling levels of lead in the environment due to legislation in the early 1970s, as lead poisoning is linked to criminal activity. Whatever the reasons, the dramatic drop in crime has led to a revitalization of American cities over the course of the past twenty years.

THE CONSERVATIVE RESURGENCE

Instrumental in energizing conservatives throughout the 1970s and 1980s were right-wing evangelical Christians, members of a branch of Protestantism that emphasized a “born-again” religious experience and adherence to strict standards of moral behavior taken from the Bible. **Evangelicalism**, particularly fundamentalist sects, became increasingly prominent in political life from the 1970s through the 1990s. Fundamentalists denounced the moral relativism of liberals and believed in a literal interpretation of the Bible. Evangelical groups also became increasingly political. Conservative evangelicals and fundamentalists such as **Billy Graham**, **Jeerry Falwell**, and **Pat Robertson** helped to mobilize other like-minded citizens to support the Republican Party and bring together various conservative groups to form a movement known as the **New Right**. The growing strength of the New Right was evident in the key role it played in helping to elect **Ronald Reagan** in 1980, and in 1994 when the Republican Party under **Newt Gingrich** recaptured control of both houses of Congress under Democratic President **Bill Clinton**. Evangelical Christians continued to support Republicans with the election and re-election of **George W. Bush**. However, the election of **Barack Obama** in 2008 and his re-election in 2012 have led many political observers to conclude that the conservative resurgence has ebbed and that American history has entered a new phase.