

PART
SIX

MAKING MODERN AMERICA

1945 to the Present

World War II broke the back of the Great Depression in the United States and also ended the century-and-a-half-old American tradition of isolationism in foreign affairs. Alone among the warring powers, the United States managed to emerge from the great conflict physically unscarred, economically healthy, and diplomatically strengthened. Yet if Americans faced a world full of promise at the war's end, it was also a world full of dangers, none more disconcerting than Soviet communism. These two themes of promise and menace mingled uneasily throughout the nearly five decades of the Cold War era, from the end of World War II in 1945 to the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991.

At home unprecedented prosperity in the postwar quarter-century nourished a robust sense of national self-confidence and fed a revolution of rising expectations. Invigorated by the prospect of endlessly spread-



ing affluence, Americans in the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s had record numbers of babies, aspired to ever-higher standards of living, generously expanded the welfare state (especially for the elderly), widened opportunities for women, welcomed immigrants, and even found the will to grapple at long last with the nation's grossest legacy of injustice, its treatment of African Americans. With the exception of Dwight Eisenhower's presidency in the 1950s, Americans elected liberal Democratic presidents (Harry Truman in 1948, John F. Kennedy in 1960, and Lyndon Johnson in 1964). The Democratic party, the party of the liberal New Deal at home and of an

activist foreign policy abroad, comfortably remained the nation's majority party. Americans trusted their government and had faith in the American dream that their children would lead a richer life than their parents had done. Anything and everything seemed possible.

The Suburban Society

In the phenomenally affluent post-World War II years, newly prosperous Americans flocked to the freshly built suburbs.

The rising curve of ascending expectations, propelled by exploding economic growth, bounded upward throughout the 1950s. It peaked in the 1960s, an exceptionally stormy decade during which faith in government, in the wisdom of American foreign policy, and in the American dream itself, began to sour. Lyndon Johnson's "Great Society" reforms, billed as the completion of the unfinished work of the New Deal, foundered on the rocks of fiscal limitations and stubborn racial resentments. Johnson, the most ambitious reformer in the White House since Franklin Roosevelt, eventually saw his presidency destroyed by the furies unleashed over the Vietnam War.

When economic growth flattened in the 1970s, the horizon of hopes for the future seemed to sink as well. The nation entered a frustrating period of stalled expectations, increasingly rancorous racial tensions, disillusion with government, and political stalemate, although in one important arena idealism survived. As "second-wave feminism" gathered steam, women burst through barriers that had long excluded them from male domains operating everywhere from the factory floor to the U.S. Army to the Ivy League. Not content with private victories, they also called on the government for help—to ensure women equal opportunity as workers, fair treatment as consumers, and the right to choose an abortion.

With the exceptions of Jimmy Carter in the 1970s and Bill Clinton in the 1990s, Americans after 1968 elected conservative Republicans to the White House (Richard Nixon in 1968 and 1972, Ronald Reagan in 1980 and 1984, George H. W. Bush in 1988), but continued to elect Democratic congresses. As the twenty-first century dawned, a newly invigorated conservative Republican party was bidding to achieve long-term majority status, while the Democratic party teetered on a tightrope between its



liberal policies and the conservative demands of the day for tax cuts and welfare reform.

Abroad the fierce competition with the Soviet Union, and after 1949 with Communist China as well, colored almost every aspect of America's foreign relations and shaped domestic life, too. Unreasonable fear of communists at home unleashed the destructive force of McCarthyism in the 1950s—a modern-day witch hunt in which careers were capsized and lives ruined by reckless accusations of communist sympathizing. The FBI encroached on sacred American liberties in its zeal to uncover communist "subversives."

The Cold War remained cold, in the sense that no shooting conflict broke out between the great

power rivals. But the United States did fight two shooting wars, in Korea in the 1950s and Vietnam in the 1960s. Vietnam, the only foreign war in which the United States has ever been defeated, cruelly convulsed American society, ending not only Lyndon Johnson's presidency but the thirty-five-year era of the Democratic party's political dominance as well. Vietnam also touched off the most vicious inflationary cycle in American history, and embittered and disillusioned an entire generation.

Uncle Sam in the Cold War era built a fearsome arsenal of nuclear weapons, great air and missile fleets to deliver them, a two-ocean navy, and, for a time, a large army raised by conscription. Whether the huge expenditures necessary to maintain that gigantic defense establishment stimulated or distorted the economy was long a controversial question. When the Cold War ended, Americans turned their attention in the 1990s to developing a new "global economy." But as the twenty-first century dawned, a terrorist assault on American soil once again raised urgent questions about national defense and international security.

The End of an Era?

As surely as victory in World War II restored confidence and prosperity to a people demoralized by the Great Depression, the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, struck electric fear into the American people—and menaced their historical commitment to an open society and individual liberties.

The Cold War Begins

1945–1952

THE UNITED STATES STAND AT THIS MOMENT
AT THE SUMMIT OF THE WORLD.

WINSTON CHURCHILL, 1945

The American people, 140 million strong, cheered their nation's victories in Europe and Asia at the conclusion of World War II. But when the shouting faded away, many Americans began to worry about their future. Four fiery years of global war had not entirely driven from their minds the painful memories of twelve desperate years of the Great Depression. Still more ominously, victory celebrations had barely ended before America's crumbling relations with its wartime ally, the Soviet Union, threatened a new and even more terrible international conflict.

Postwar Economic Anxieties

The decade of the 1930s had left deep scars. Joblessness and insecurity had pushed up the suicide rate and dampened the marriage rate. Babies went unborn as pinched budgets and sagging self-esteem wrought a sexual depression in American bedrooms. The war had

banished the blight of depression, but would the respite last? Grim-faced observers were warning that the war had only temporarily lifted the pall of economic stagnation and that peace would bring the return of hard times. Homeward-bound GIs, so the gloomy predictions ran, would step out of the army's chow lines and back into the breadlines of the unemployed.

The faltering economy in the initial postwar years threatened to confirm the worst predictions of the doomsayers who foresaw another Great Depression. Real gross national product (GNP) slumped sickeningly in 1946 and 1947 from its wartime peak. With the removal of wartime price controls, prices giddily levitated by 33 percent in 1946–1947. An epidemic of strikes swept the country. During 1946 alone some 4.6 million laborers laid down their tools, fearful that soon they could barely afford the autos and other goods they were manufacturing.

The growing muscle of organized labor deeply annoyed many conservatives. They had their revenge against labor's New Deal gains in 1947, when a Republican-



The GI Bill Financed by the federal government, thousands of World War II veterans crowded into college classrooms in the 1940s. Here a fresh crop of ex-soldier students lays in supplies for the new term.

controlled Congress (the first in fourteen years) passed the Taft-Hartley Act over President Truman's vigorous veto. Labor leaders condemned the Taft-Hartley Act as a "slave-labor law." It outlawed the "closed" (all-union) shop, made unions liable for damages that resulted from jurisdictional disputes among themselves, and required union leaders to take a noncommunist oath.

Taft-Hartley was only one of several obstacles that slowed the growth of organized labor in the years after World War II. In the heady days of the New Deal, unions had spread swiftly in the industrialized Northeast, especially in huge manufacturing industries like steel and automobiles. But labor's postwar efforts to organize in the historically antiunion regions of the South and West proved frustrating. The CIO's "Operation Dixie," aimed at unionizing southern textile workers and steelworkers, failed miserably in 1948 to overcome lingering fears of racial mixing. And workers in the rapidly growing service sector of the economy—many of them middle-aged women, often working only part-time in small shops, widely separated from one another—proved much more difficult to organize than the thousands of assembly-line workers who in the 1930s had poured into the auto and steel unions. Union membership would peak in the 1950s and then begin a long, unremitting decline.

The Democratic administration meanwhile took some steps of its own to forestall an economic downturn. It sold war factories and other government instal-

lations to private businesses at fire-sale prices. It secured passage in 1946 of the Employment Act, making it government policy "to promote maximum employment, production, and purchasing power." The act created a three-member Council of Economic Advisers to provide the president with the data and the recommendations to make that policy a reality.

Most dramatic was the passage of the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944—better known as the GI Bill of Rights, or the GI Bill. Enacted partly out of fear that the employment markets would never be able to absorb 15 million returning veterans at war's end, the GI Bill made generous provisions for sending the former soldiers to school. In the postwar decade, some 8 million veterans advanced their education at Uncle Sam's expense. The majority attended technical and vocational schools, but colleges and universities were crowded to the blackboards as more than 2 million ex-GIs stormed the halls of higher learning. The total eventually spent for education was some \$14.5 billion in taxpayer dollars. The act also enabled the Veterans Administration (VA) to guarantee about \$16 billion in loans for veterans to buy homes, farms, and small businesses. By raising educational levels and stimulating the construction industry, the GI Bill powerfully nurtured the robust and long-lived economic expansion that eventually took hold in the late 1940s and that profoundly shaped the entire history of the postwar era.

The Long Economic Boom, 1950–1970

Gross national product began to climb haltingly in 1948. Then, beginning about 1950, the American economy surged onto a dazzling plateau of sustained growth that was to last virtually uninterrupted for two decades. America's economic performance became the envy of the world. National income nearly doubled in the 1950s and almost doubled again in the 1960s, shooting through the trillion-dollar mark in 1973. Americans, some 6 percent of the world's people, were enjoying about 40 percent of the planet's wealth.

Nothing loomed larger in the history of the post-World War II era than this fantastic eruption of affluence. It did not enrich all Americans, and it did not

Coca-Colonizing the World

American consumerism—and American products—flooded over the globe after World War II, as this 1950 cover from *Time* magazine illustrates.



touch all people evenly, but it transformed the lives of a majority of citizens and molded the agenda of politics and society for at least two generations. Prosperity underwrote social mobility; it paved the way for the eventual success of the civil rights movement; it funded vast new welfare programs, like Medicare; and it gave Americans the confidence to exercise unprecedented international leadership in the Cold War era.

As the gusher of postwar prosperity poured forth its riches, Americans drank deeply from the gilded goblet. Millions of depression-pinched souls sought to make up for the sufferings of the 1930s. They determined to “get theirs” while the getting was good. A people who had once considered a chicken in every pot the standard of comfort and security now hungered for two cars in every garage, swimming pools in their backyards, vacation homes, and gas-guzzling recreational vehicles. The size of the “middle class,” defined as households earning between \$3,000 and \$10,000 a year, doubled from pre-Great Depression days and included 60 percent of the American people by the mid-1950s. By the end of that decade, the vast majority of American families owned their own cars and washing machines, and nearly 90 percent owned a television set—a gadget invented in the 1920s but virtually unknown until the late 1940s. In another revolution of sweeping consequences, almost 60 percent of American families owned their own homes by 1960, compared with less than 40 percent in the 1920s.

Of all the beneficiaries of postwar prosperity, none reaped greater rewards than women. More than ever, urban offices and shops provided a bonanza of employment for female workers. The great majority of new jobs created in the postwar era went to women, as the service sector of the economy dramatically outgrew the old industrial and manufacturing sectors. Women accounted for a quarter of the American work force at the end of World War II and for nearly half the labor pool five decades later. Yet even as women continued their march into the workplace in the 1940s and 1950s, popular culture glorified the traditional feminine roles of homemaker and mother. The clash between the demands of suburban housewifery and the realities of employment eventually sparked a feminist revolt in the 1960s.

See
DBQ 11

The Roots of Postwar Prosperity

What propelled this unprecedented economic explosion? The Second World War itself provided a powerful stimulus. While other countries had been ravaged by



EXAMINING THE EVIDENCE

Advertising Prosperity, 1956 This Ford advertisement in a popular magazine encouraged readers to buy a second car. By the mid-1950s, once manufacturers had met the demand for cars, homes, appliances, and other consumer goods that a decade and a half of depression and world war had pent up, they worried about how to keep expanding their markets. "Planned obsolescence"—changing design frequently enough to necessitate replacement purchasing—was one strategy. Altering expectations about what consumers

needed was another. This advertisement suggests that the up-to-date family, living in its modern-style suburban home, had no choice but to own two cars, one for the male breadwinner's business, the other for the wife's "ferrying the family." What kinds of gender role prescriptions are reinforced in this advertisement? What assumptions has Ford made about prospective buyers of its cars? How much can mass advertising tell us about the actual values of Americans living at a particular time?



The only problem in posing this picture was getting the two Fords to stand still.

Seven good reasons for two FORDS

To free their family from one-car captivity the Bremers got two Fords—a Country Sedan and a Thunderbird—the car that inspired the styling and performance of all '56 Fords.

"We saw the need for a second car even before our first youngster arrived. If you're married you know why. The five children just made two Fords more necessary. I need a car for business. My wife needs one for ferrying the family.

"Why are they Fords? In the first place, you can't beat Ford's looks at twice the price. You get extra zip in a Ford V-8, too. That's why it's the world's best seller! It's a good investment, too. Nothing at the price keeps its value like a Ford. And, of course, you don't need children to appreciate the extra safety of Ford Lifeguard Design," says Mr. Bremer.

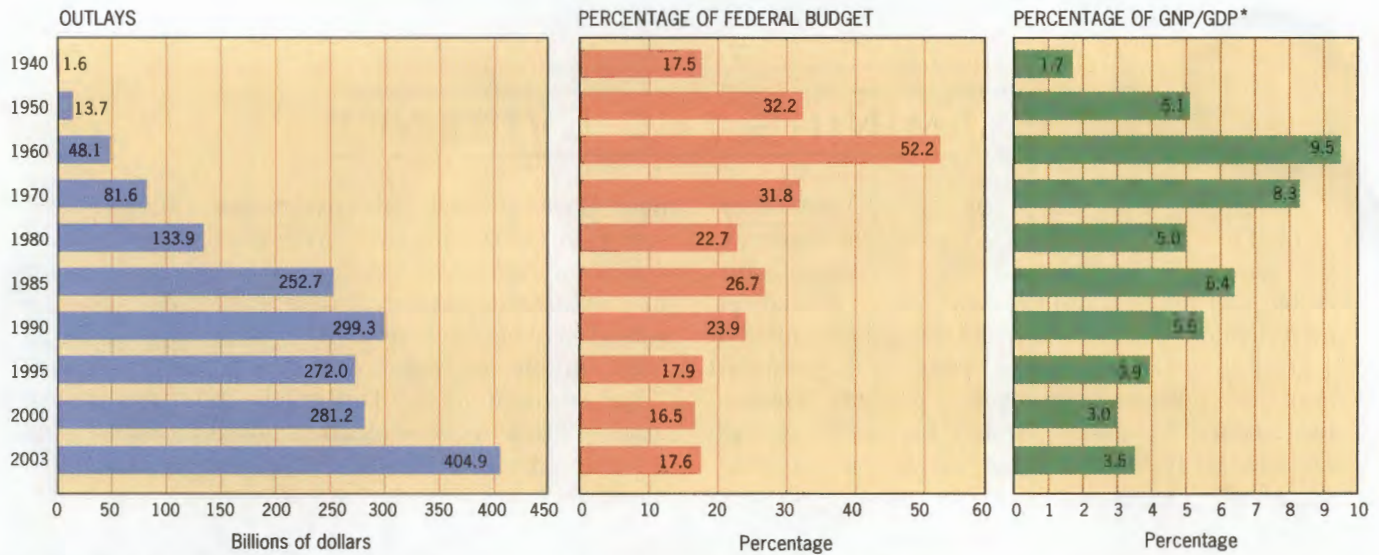
SEE YOUR LOCAL FORD DEALER



The Country Sedan, one of six Ford do-it-all's, has 4-doors, lots of room. And its 296-h.p. V-8 is the most powerful standard "8" in its field.

The Ford Thunderbird inspired the styling for all Fords. And you can have its own 312-h.p. Special V-8 in most of them.

Join the 300,000 TWO FORD families!



National Defense Budget, 1940–2003 (Sources: *Congressional Budget Office, Historical Tables*, and *Statistical Abstract of the United States*, relevant years.)

*Gross *national* product (GNP) was used before 1960. It includes income from overseas investment and excludes profits generated in the United States but accruing to foreign accounts. Gross *domestic* product (GDP), used thereafter, excludes overseas profits owed to American accounts but includes the value of all items originating in the United States, regardless of the destination of the profits. Until recent years those factors made for negligible differences in the calculation of *national* and *domestic* product, but most economists now prefer the latter approach.

years of fighting, the United States had used the war crisis to fire up its smokeless factories and rebuild its depression-plagued economy. Invigorated by battle, America had almost effortlessly come to dominate the ruined global landscape of the postwar period.

Ominously, much of the glittering prosperity of the 1950s and 1960s rested on the underpinnings of colossal military budgets, leading some critics to speak of a “permanent war economy.” The economic upturn of 1950 was fueled by massive appropriations for the Korean War, and defense spending accounted for some 10 percent of the GNP throughout the ensuing decade. Pentagon dollars primed the pumps of high-technology industries such as aerospace, plastics, and electronics—areas in which the United States reigned supreme over all foreign competitors. The military budget also financed much scientific research and development (“R and D”—hence the name of one of the most famous “think tanks,” the Rand Corporation). More than ever before, unlocking the secrets of nature was the key to unleashing economic growth.

Cheap energy also fed the economic boom. American and European companies controlled the flow of abundant petroleum from the sandy expanses of the

Middle East, and they kept prices low. Americans doubled their consumption of inexpensive and seemingly inexhaustible oil in the quarter-century after the war. Anticipating a limitless future of low-cost fuels, they flung out endless ribbons of highways, installed air-conditioning in their homes, and engineered a sixfold increase in the country’s electricity-generating capacity between 1945 and 1970. Spidery grids of electrical cables carried the pent-up power of oil, gas, coal, and falling water to activate the tools of workers on the factory floor.

With the forces of nature increasingly harnessed in their hands, workers chalked up spectacular gains in productivity—the amount of output per hour of work. In the two decades after the outbreak of the Korean War in 1950, productivity increased at an average rate of more than 3 percent per year. Gains in productivity were also enhanced by the rising educational level of the work force. By 1970 nearly 90 percent of the school-age population was enrolled in educational institutions—a dramatic contrast with the opening years of the century, when only half of this age group had attended school. Better educated and better equipped, American workers in 1970 could produce nearly twice as much in an hour’s



Agribusiness

Expensive machinery of the sort shown here made most of American agriculture a capital-intensive, phenomenally productive big business by the 1990s—and sounded the death knell for many small-scale family farms.

labor as they had in 1950. Productivity was the key to prosperity. Rising productivity in the 1950s and 1960s virtually doubled the average American's standard of living in the postwar quarter-century.

Also contributing to the vigor of the postwar economy were some momentous changes in the nation's basic economic structure. Conspicuous was the accelerating shift of the work force out of agriculture, which achieved productivity gains virtually unmatched by any other economic sector. The family farm nearly became an antique artifact as consolidation produced giant agribusinesses able to employ costly machinery. Thanks largely to mechanization and to rich new fertilizers—as well as to government subsidies and price supports—one farmworker by the century's end could produce food for over fifty people, compared with about fifteen people in the 1940s. Farmers whose forebears had busted sod with oxen or horses now plowed their fields in air-conditioned tractor cabs, listening on their stereophonic radios to weather forecasts or the latest Chicago commodities market quotations. Once the mighty backbone of the agricultural Republic, and still some 15 percent of the labor force at the end of World War II, farmers made up a slim 2 percent of the American population by the 1990s—yet they fed much of the world.



The Smiling Sunbelt

The convulsive economic changes of the post-1945 period shook and shifted the American people, amplifying

the population redistribution set in motion by World War II. As immigrants and westward-trekking pioneers, Americans had always been a people on the move, but they were astonishingly footloose in the postwar years. For some three decades after 1945, an average of 30 million people changed residences every year. Families especially felt the strain, as distance divided parents from children, and brothers and sisters from one another. One sign of this sort of stress was the phenomenal popularity of advice books on child-rearing, especially Dr. Benjamin Spock's *The Common Sense Book of Baby and Child Care*. First published in 1945, it instructed millions of parents during the ensuing decades in the kind of homely wisdom that was once transmitted naturally from grandparent to parent, and from parent to child. In fluid postwar neighborhoods, friendships were also hard to sustain. Mobility could exact a high human cost in loneliness and isolation.

Especially striking was the growth of the "Sunbelt"—a fifteen-state area stretching in a smiling crescent from Virginia through Florida and Texas to Arizona and California. This region increased its population at a rate nearly double that of the old industrial zones of the Northeast (the "Frostbelt"). In the 1950s California alone accounted for one-fifth of the entire nation's population growth and by 1963 had outdistanced New York as the most populous state—a position it still held in the early years of the twenty-first century, with more than 35 million people, or one out of every eight Americans.

The South and Southwest were a new frontier for Americans after World War II. These modern pioneers came in search of jobs, a better climate, and lower taxes.

political support with the sarcastic slogan “The North shall rise again.”

These dramatic shifts of population and wealth further broke the historic grip of the North on the nation’s political life. Every elected occupant of the White House since 1964 has hailed from the Sunbelt, and the region’s congressional representation rose as its population grew. With their frontier ethic of unbridled individualism and their devotion to unregulated economic growth, the Sunbelters were redrawing the Republic’s political map.



The Rush to the Suburbs

In all regions America’s modern migrants—if they were white—fled from the cities to the burgeoning new suburbs (see “Makers of America: The Suburbanites,” pp. 860–861). Government policies encouraged this momentous movement. Federal Housing Administration (FHA) and Veterans Administration (VA) home-loan guarantees made it more economically attractive to own a home in the suburbs than to rent an apartment in the city. Tax deductions for interest payments on home mortgages provided additional financial incentive. And government-built highways that sped commuters from suburban homes to city jobs further facilitated this mass migration. By 1960 one in every four Americans dwelt in suburbia, and the same leafy neighborhoods held more than half the nation’s population as the twentieth century neared its end.

The construction industry boomed in the 1950s and 1960s to satisfy this demand. Pioneered by innovators like the Levitt brothers, whose first “Levittown” sprouted on New York’s Long Island in the 1940s, builders revolutionized the techniques of home construction. Erecting hundreds or even thousands of dwellings in a single project, specialized crews working from standardized plans laid foundations, while others raised factory-assembled framing modules, put on roofs, strung wires, installed plumbing, and finished the walls in record time and with cost-cutting efficiency. Snooty critics wailed about the aesthetic monotony of the suburban “tract” developments, but eager home buyers nevertheless moved into them by the millions.

“White flight” to the leafy green suburbs left the inner cities—especially those in the Northeast and Midwest—black, brown, and broke. Migrating blacks from the South filled up the urban neighborhoods that

were abandoned by the departing white middle class (see “Makers of America: The Great African American Migration,” pp. 892–893). In effect, the incoming blacks imported the grinding poverty of the rural South into the inner cores of northern cities. Taxpaying businesses fled with their affluent customers from downtown shops to suburban shopping malls (another post-World War II invention).

Government policies sometimes aggravated this spreading pattern of residential segregation. FHA administrators, citing the “risk” of making loans to blacks and other “unharmonious racial or nationality groups,” often refused them mortgages for private home purchases, thus limiting black mobility out of the inner cities and driving many minorities into public housing projects. Even public housing programs frequently followed a so-called neighborhood composition rule, which effectively built housing for blacks in neighborhoods that were already identified as predominantly black—thus solidifying racial separation.



The Postwar Baby Boom

Of all the upheavals in postwar America, none was more dramatic than the “baby boom”—the huge leap in the birthrate in the decade and a half after 1945. Confident young men and women tied the nuptial knot in record numbers at war’s end, and they began immediately to fill the nation’s empty cradles. They thus touched off a demographic explosion that added more than 50 million bawling babies to the nation’s population by the end of the 1950s. The soaring birthrate finally crested in 1957 and was followed by a deepening birth dearth. By 1973 fertility rates had dropped below the point necessary to maintain existing population figures. If the downward trend persisted, only further immigration would lift the U.S. population above its 1996 level of some 264 million.

This boom-or-bust cycle of births begot a bulging wave along the American population curve. As the oversize postwar generation grew to maturity, it was destined—like the fabled pig passing through the python—to strain and distort many aspects of American life. Elementary-school enrollments, for example, swelled to nearly 34 million pupils in 1970. Then began a steady decline, as the onward-marching age group left in its wake closed schools and unemployed teachers.

MAKERS OF AMERICA



The Suburbanites

Few images evoke more vividly the prosperity of the postwar era than aerial photographs of sprawling suburbs. Neat rows of look-alike tract houses, each with a driveway and lawn and here and there a backyard swimming pool, came to symbolize the capacity of the economy to deliver the “American dream” to millions of families.

Suburbanization was hardly new. Well-off city dwellers had beaten paths to leafy outlying neighbor-

hoods since the nineteenth century. But after 1945 the steady flow became a stampede. The baby boom, new highways, government guarantees for mortgage lending, and favorable tax policies all made suburbia blossom.

Who were the Americans racing to the new postwar suburbs? War veterans led the way in the late 1940s, aided by Veterans Administration mortgages that featured tiny down payments and low interest rates. The general public soon followed. The Federal Housing Administration (FHA) offered insured mortgages with low down payments and 2 to 3 percent interest rates on thirty-year loans. With deals like this, it was hardly surprising that American families flocked into “Levittowns,” built by William and Alfred Levitt, and other similar suburban developments.

People of all kinds found their way to suburbia, heading for neighborhoods that varied from the posh to the plain. Yet for all this diversity, the overwhelming majority of suburbanites were white and middle-class. In 1967 sociologist Herbert Gans published *The Levittowners*, based on his own move to a Levitt-built community outside Philadelphia. He described suburban families in tract developments as predominantly third- or fourth-generation Americans with some college education and at least two children.

Men tended to work in either white-collar jobs or upper-level blue-collar positions such as foremen. Women usually worked in the home, so much so that suburbia came to symbolize the domestic confinement that feminists in the 1960s and 1970s decried in their campaign for women’s rights.

The house itself became more important than ever as postwar suburbanites built their leisure lives around television, home improvement projects, and barbecues on the patio. The center of family life shifted to the fenced-in backyard, as neighborly city habits of visiting on the front stoop, gabbing on the sidewalk, and strolling to local stores disappeared. Institutions that had thrived as social centers in the city—churches,

Aerial View of the On-ramps to a Typical New Interstate Highway, 1950s





Drive-in Café in Los Angeles, the Mother and Model of All Suburbias

women's clubs, fraternal organizations, taverns—had a tougher time attracting patrons in the privatized world of postwar suburbia.

Life in the suburbs was a boon to the automobile, as parents jumped behind the wheel to shuttle children, groceries, and golf clubs to and fro. The second car, once an unheard-of luxury, became a practical “necessity” for suburban families constantly “on the go.” A car culture sprang up with new destinations, like drive-thru restaurants and drive-in movies. Roadside shopping centers edged out downtowns as places to shop. Meanwhile, the new interstate highway system enabled breadwinners to live farther and farther from their jobs and still commute to work daily.

Many suburbanites continued to depend on cities for jobs, though by the 1980s the suburbs themselves became important sites of employment. Wherever they worked, suburbanites turned their backs on the city and its problems. They fought to maintain their communities as secluded retreats, independent municipalities with their own taxes, schools, and zoning restrictions designed to keep out public housing and the poor. Even the naming of towns and streets reflected a pastoral ideal. Poplar Terrace and Mountainview Drive were popular street names; East Paterson, New Jersey, was

renamed Elmwood Park in 1973. With a majority of Americans living in suburbs by the 1980s, cities lost their political clout. Bereft of state and federal aid, cities festered with worsening social problems: poverty, drug addiction, and crime.

Middle-class African Americans began to move to the suburbs in substantial numbers by the 1980s, but even that migration failed to alter dramatically the racial divide of metropolitan America. Black suburbanites settled in towns like Rolling Oaks outside Miami or Brook Glen near Atlanta—black middle-class towns in white-majority counties. By the end of the twentieth century, suburbia as a whole was more racially diverse than at midcentury. But old patterns of urban “white flight” and residential segregation endured.

Moving to the Suburbs After World War II, Americans by the millions moved to suburban housing developments like this one. Although criticized for their architectural monotony and cultural barrenness, the suburbs provided inexpensive and spacious housing for growing families seeking to escape the crowded confines of the cities.



The maturing babies of the postwar boom sent economic shock waves undulating through the decades. As tykes and toddlers in the 1940s and 1950s, they made up a lucrative market for manufacturers of canned food and other baby products. As teenagers in the 1960s, the same youngsters spent an estimated \$20 billion a year for clothes and recorded rock music—and their sheer numbers laid the basis of the much-ballyhooed “youth culture” of that tumultuous decade. In the 1970s the consumer tastes of the aging baby boomers changed again, and the most popular jeans maker began marketing pants with a fuller cut for those former “kids” who could no longer squeeze into their size-thirty Levi’s. In the 1980s the horde of baby boomers bumped and jostled one another in the job market, struggling to get a foothold on the crowded ladder of social mobility. In the 1990s the boom generation began to enter middle age, raising its own “secondary boom” of children—a faint demographic echo of the postwar population explosion. The impact of the huge postwar generation will continue to ripple through American society well into the twenty-first century, when its members pass eventually into retirement, placing enormous strains on the Social Security system.

Truman: The “Gutty” Man from Missouri

Presiding over the opening of the postwar period was an “accidental president”—Harry S Truman. “The moon, the stars, and all the planets” had fallen on him, he remarked when he was called upon to shoulder the dead Roosevelt’s awesome burdens of leadership. Trim and owlishly bespectacled, with his graying hair and friendly, toothy grin, Truman was called “the average man’s average man.” Even his height—five feet eight inches—was average. The first president in many years without a college education, he had farmed, served as an artillery officer in France during World War I, and failed as a haberdasher. He then tried his hand at precinct-level Missouri politics, through which he rose from a judgeship to the U.S. Senate. Though a protégé of a notorious political machine in Kansas City, he had managed to keep his own hands clean.

The problems of the postwar period were staggering, and the suddenly burdened new president at first approached his tasks with humility. But gradually he



The Big Three From left to right, Churchill, Roosevelt, and Stalin take time out from their fateful meeting at Yalta in February 1945. Roosevelt was only weeks away from death.

evolved from a shrinking pipsqueak into a scrappy little cuss, gaining confidence to the point of cockiness. When the Soviet foreign minister complained, "I have never been talked to like that in my life," Truman shot back, "Carry out your agreements and you won't get talked to like that." Truman later boasted, "I gave him the one-two, right to the jaw."

A smallish man thrust suddenly into a giant job, Truman permitted designing old associates of the "Missouri gang" to gather around him and, like Grant, was stubbornly loyal to them when they were caught with cream on their whiskers. On occasion he would send critics hot-tempered and profane "s.o.b." letters. Most troubling, in trying to demonstrate to a skeptical public his decisiveness and power of command, he was inclined to go off half-cocked or stick mulishly to a wrongheaded notion. "To err is Truman," cynics gibed.

But if he was sometimes small in the small things, he was often big in the big things. He had down-home authenticity, few pretensions, rock-solid probity, and a lot of that old-fashioned character trait called moxie. Not one to dodge responsibility, he placed a sign on his White House desk that read, "The buck stops here." Among his favorite sayings was, "If you can't stand the heat, get out of the kitchen."



Yalta: Bargain or Betrayal?

Vast and silent, the Soviet Union continued to be the great enigma. The conference at Teheran in 1943, where Roosevelt had first met Stalin man to man, had done something to clear the air, but much had remained unresolved—especially questions about the postwar fates of Germany, Eastern Europe, and Asia.

A final fateful conference of the Big Three had taken place in February 1945 at Yalta. At this former tsarist resort on the relatively warm shores of the Black Sea, Stalin, Churchill, and the fast-failing Roosevelt reached momentous agreements, after pledging their faith with vodka. Final plans were laid for smashing the buckling German lines and assigning occupation zones in Germany to the victorious powers. Stalin agreed that Poland, with revised boundaries, should have a representative government based on free elections—a pledge he soon broke. Bulgaria and Romania were likewise to have free elections—a promise also flouted. The Big Three further announced plans for fashioning a new international peacekeeping organization—the United Nations.

Of all the grave decisions at Yalta, the most controversial concerned the Far East. The atomic bomb had not yet been tested, and Washington strategists expected frightful American casualties in the projected assault on Japan. From Roosevelt's standpoint it seemed highly desirable that Stalin should enter the Asian war, pin down Japanese troops in Manchuria and Korea, and lighten American losses. But Soviet casualties had already been enormous, and Moscow presumably needed inducements to bring it into the Far Eastern conflagration.

Horse trader Stalin was in a position at Yalta to exact a high price. He agreed to attack Japan within three months after the collapse of Germany, and he later redeemed this pledge in full. In return, the Soviets were promised the southern half of Sakhalin Island, lost by Russia to Japan in 1905, and Japan's Kurile Islands as well. The Soviet Union was also granted joint control over the railroads of China's Manchuria and special privileges in the two key seaports of that area, Dairen and Port Arthur. These concessions evidently would give Stalin control over vital industrial centers of America's weakening Chinese ally.

As it turned out, Moscow's muscle was not necessary to knock out Japan. Critics charged that Roosevelt had sold Jiang Jieshi (Chiang Kai-shek) down the river when he conceded control of China's Manchuria to Stalin. The consequent undermining of Chinese morale, so the accusation ran, contributed powerfully to Jiang's overthrow by the communists four years later. The critics also assailed the "sellout" of Poland and other Eastern European countries.

Roosevelt's defenders countered that Stalin, with his mighty red army, could have secured much more of China if he wished and that the Yalta conference really set limits to his ambitions. Apologists for Roosevelt also contended that if Stalin had kept his promise to support free elections in Poland and the liberated Balkans, the sorry sequel would have been different. Actually, Soviet troops had then occupied much of Eastern Europe, and a war to throw them out was unthinkable.

The fact is that the Big Three at Yalta were not drafting a comprehensive peace settlement; at most they were sketching general intentions and testing one another's reactions. Later critics who howled about broken promises overlooked that fundamental point. In the case of Poland, Roosevelt admitted that the Yalta agreement was "so elastic that the Russians can stretch it all the way from Yalta to Washington without ever technically breaking it." More specific understandings among the wartime allies—especially the two emerging superpowers, the United States and the Soviet Union—awaited the arrival of peace.



RUSSIA UNDER THE CZARS had been a major force in European politics for centuries. In March, 1917, the people rebelled against their corrupt and tyrannical government, and after months of conflict among several factions, the Bolsheviks declared themselves the rulers on Nov. 7. They named the country the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. Because of its weakened condition, it had to drop out of World War I and

accept the terms, first of Germany, and later, of the Allies. Its postwar boundaries, as shown on this map, were not definitely settled until 1923. World War II was Russia's opportunity to regain its place as a major power. It seized much of its lost territory, including some that had been ceded to Japan by Czarist Russia. The dots give the year that the U.S.S.R. gained final possession of the areas referred to; some of them

had been taken earlier in the war and then lost to the Axis. Manchuria, at present a battleground for Chinese Communist and Government troops, is coveted by Russia, which has partial control of the railroads by agreement with China. The first Bolshevik leaders were zealous in telling the world that their object was to have Communism cover the globe; Stalin talks less but acts more.

NATIONAL CAPITAL ●
CAPITALS OF U.S.S.R. *
SCALE OF MILES
0 100 200 300 400 500

The Communist Menace First appearing in the *New York Daily News* on January 6, 1946, this map reflected the rising anxiety in post-World War II America that the Soviet Union was an aggressively expansionist power, relentlessly gobbling up territory and imposing its will across both Europe and Asia.

The United States and the Soviet Union

History provided little hope that the United States and the Soviet Union would reach cordial understandings about the shape of the postwar world. Mutual suspicions were ancient, abundant, and abiding. Communism and capitalism were historically hostile social philosophies. The United States had refused officially to recognize the Bolshevik revolutionary government in Moscow until it was sixteen years old, in 1933. Soviet skepticism toward the West was nourished by the British and American delays in opening up a second front against Germany, while the Soviet army paid a grisly price to roll the Nazi invaders back across Russia and Eastern Europe. Britain and America had also frozen

their Soviet "ally" out of the project to develop atomic weapons, further feeding Stalin's mistrust. The Washington government rubbed salt in Soviet wounds when it abruptly terminated vital lend-lease aid to a battered USSR in 1945 and spurned Moscow's plea for a \$6 billion reconstruction loan—while approving a similar loan of \$3.75 billion to Britain in 1946.

Different visions of the postwar world also separated the two superpowers. Stalin aimed above all to guarantee the security of the Soviet Union. The USSR had twice in the twentieth century been stabbed in its heartland by attacks across the windswept plains of Eastern Europe. Stalin made it clear from the outset of the war that he was determined to have friendly governments along the Soviet western border, especially in Poland. By maintaining an extensive Soviet sphere of influence in Eastern and central Europe, the USSR could

protect itself and consolidate its revolutionary base as the world's leading communist country.

To many Americans, that "sphere of influence" looked like an ill-gained "empire." Doubting that Soviet goals were purely defensive, they remembered the earlier Bolshevik call for world revolution. Stalin's emphasis on "spheres" also clashed with Franklin Roosevelt's Wilsonian dream of an "open world," decolonized, demilitarized, and democratized, with a strong international organization to oversee global peace.

Even the ways in which the United States and the Soviet Union resembled each other were troublesome. Both countries had been largely isolated from world affairs before World War II—the United States through choice, the Soviet Union through rejection by the other powers. Both nations also had a history of conducting a kind of "missionary" diplomacy—of trying to export to all the world the political doctrines precipitated out of their respective revolutionary origins.

Unaccustomed to their great-power roles, unfamiliar with or even antagonistic to each other, and each believing in the universal applicability of its own particular ideology, America and the USSR suddenly found themselves staring eyeball-to-eyeball over the prostrate body of battered Europe—a Europe that had been the traditional center of international affairs. In these circumstances some sort of confrontation was virtually unavoidable. The wartime "Grand Alliance" of the United States, the Soviet Union, and Britain had been a misbegotten child of necessity, kept alive only until the mutual enemy was crushed. When the hated Hitler fell, suspicion and rivalry between communistic, despotic Russia and capitalistic, democratic America were all but inevitable. In a fateful progression of events, marked often by misperceptions as well as by genuine conflicts of interest, the two powers provoked each other into a tense standoff known as the Cold War. Enduring four and a half decades, the Cold War not only shaped Soviet-American relations; it overshadowed the entire postwar international order in every corner of the globe. The Cold War also molded societies and economies and the lives of individual people all over the planet.



Shaping the Postwar World

Despite these obstacles, the United States did manage at war's end to erect some of the structures that would support Roosevelt's vision of an open world. Meeting at Bretton Woods, New Hampshire, in 1944, the Western Allies established the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to

encourage world trade by regulating currency exchange rates. They also founded the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (World Bank) to promote economic growth in war-ravaged and underdeveloped areas. In contrast to its behavior after World War I, the United States took the lead in creating these important international bodies and supplied most of their funding. The stubborn Soviets declined to participate.

As flags wept at half-mast, the United Nations Conference opened on schedule, April 25, 1945, despite Roosevelt's dismaying death thirteen days earlier. Unlike Woodrow Wilson, Roosevelt had shrewdly moved to establish the new international body before the war's conclusion, so as to capitalize on the wartime spirit of cooperation and insulate planning for the United Nations from the potentially divisive issue of the peace settlement. Meeting at the San Francisco War Memorial Opera House, representatives from fifty nations fashioned the United Nations charter.

The U.N. was a successor to the old League of Nations, but it differed from its predecessor in significant ways. Born in a moment of idealism and designed to prevent another great-power war, the League had adopted rules denying the veto power to any party to a dispute. The U.N., by contrast, more realistically provided that no member of the Security Council, dominated by the Big Five powers (the United States, Britain, the USSR, France, and China), could have action taken against it without its consent. The League, in short, presumed great-power conflict; the U.N. presumed great-power cooperation. Both approaches had their liabilities. The U.N. also featured an Assembly, which could be controlled by smaller countries. In contrast to the chilly American reception of the League in 1919, the Senate overwhelmingly approved the U.N. Charter on

In June 1946 Bernard Baruch (1870–1965), in presenting his plan for the control of atomic energy to the United Nations, said,

"We are here to make a choice between the quick and the dead. That is our business. Behind the black portent of the new atomic age lies a hope which, seized upon with faith, can work our salvation. If we fail, then we have damned every man to be the slave of fear. Let us not deceive ourselves; we must elect world peace or world destruction."

July 28, 1945, by a vote of 89 to 2—not least because it provided safeguards for American sovereignty and freedom of action.

The United Nations, setting up its permanent glass home in New York City, had some gratifying initial successes. It helped preserve peace in Iran, Kashmir, and other trouble spots. It played a large role in creating the new Jewish state of Israel. The U.N. Trusteeship Council guided former colonies to independence. Through such arms as UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization), FAO (Food and Agricultural Organization), and WHO (World Health Organization), the U.N. brought benefits to peoples the world over.

The fearsome new technology of the atom put to an early test the spirit of cooperation on which the U.N. had been founded. The new organization failed badly. U.S. delegate Bernard Baruch called in 1946 for a U.N. agency, free from the great-power veto, with worldwide

authority over atomic energy, weapons, and research. The Soviet delegate countered that the possession of nuclear weapons simply be outlawed by every nation. President Truman said that it would be folly to “throw away our gun until we are sure the rest of the world can’t arm against us.” The suspicious Soviets felt the same way and used their veto power to scuttle the proposals. A priceless opportunity to tame the nuclear monster in its infancy was lost. The atomic clock ticked ominously on for the next forty-five years, shadowing all relations between the Soviet Union and the United States and threatening the very future of the human race.

The Problem of Germany

Hitler’s ruined Reich posed especially thorny problems for all the wartime Allies. They agreed only that the can-

The Nuremberg War Crimes Trial, 1946 Of the Nazi defendants pictured here, from left to right in the first row, Hermann Goering committed suicide during the trial; Rudolf Hess was sentenced to life imprisonment and died an apparent suicide in his cell in 1987; Joachim von Ribbentrop, Wilhelm Keitel, and Ernest Kaltenbrunner were executed; in the second row, Karl Doenitz was sentenced to ten years in prison; Erich Raeder to life imprisonment, but released in 1955; Baldur von Schirach to 20 years in prison; and Fritz Sauckel was executed.



Former prime minister Winston Churchill (1874–1965), in a highly controversial speech at Fulton, Missouri (March 1946), warned of Soviet expansionism:

"From Stettin in the Baltic to Trieste in the Adriatic an iron curtain has descended across the Continent."

cer of Nazism had to be cut out of the German body politic, which involved punishing Nazi leaders for war crimes. The Allies joined in trying twenty-two top culprits at Nuremberg, Germany, during 1945–1946. Accusations included committing crimes against the laws of war and humanity and plotting aggressions contrary to solemn treaty pledges.

Justice, Nuremberg-style, was harsh. Twelve of the accused Nazis swung from the gallows, and seven were sentenced to long jail terms. "Foxy Hermann" Goering, whose blubbery chest had once blazed with ribbons, cheated the hangman a few hours before his scheduled execution by swallowing a hidden cyanide capsule. The trials of several small-fry Nazis continued for years. Legal critics in America and elsewhere condemned these proceedings as judicial lynchings, because the victims were tried for offenses that had not been clear-cut crimes when the war began.

Beyond punishing the top Nazis, the Allies could agree on little about postwar Germany. Some American Hitler-haters, noting that an industrialized Germany had been a brutal aggressor, at first wanted to dismantle German factories and reduce the country to a potato patch. The Soviets, denied American economic assistance, were determined to rebuild their shattered land by extracting enormous reparations from the Germans. Both these desires clashed headlong with the reality that an industrial, healthy German economy was indispensable to the recovery of Europe. The Americans soon came to appreciate that fact. But the Soviets, deeply fearful of another blitzkrieg, resisted all efforts to revitalize Germany.

Along with Austria, Germany had been divided at war's end into four military occupation zones, each assigned to one of the Big Four powers (France, Britain, America, and the USSR). The Western Allies refused to allow Moscow to bleed their zones of the reparations that Stalin insisted he had been promised at Yalta. They also began to promote the idea of a reunited Germany. The communists responded by tightening their grip on their Eastern zone. Before long, it was apparent that Germany would remain indefinitely divided. West Germany eventually became an independent country, wedded to the West. East Germany, along with other Soviet-dominated Eastern European countries, such as Poland and Hungary, became nominally independent "satellite" states, bound to the Soviet Union. Eastern Europe virtually disappeared from Western sight behind the "iron curtain" of secrecy and isolation that Stalin



Postwar Partition of Germany

Germany lost much of its territory in the east to Poland and the Soviet Union. The military occupation zones were the bases for the formation of two separate countries in 1949, when the British, French, and American zones became West Germany, and the Soviet zone became East Germany. (The two Germanies were reunited in 1990.) Berlin remained under joint four-power occupation from 1945 to 1990 and became a focus and symbol of Cold War tensions.



Berliners Watch Incoming U.S. Relief Airplane, 1948

clanged down across Europe from the Baltic to the Adriatic. The division of Europe would endure for more than four decades.

With Germany now split in two, there remained the problem of the rubble heap known as Berlin. Lying deep within the Soviet zone (see the map on p. 867), this beleaguered isle in a red sea had been broken, like Germany as a whole, into sectors occupied by troops of each of the four victorious powers. In 1948, following controversies over German currency reform and four-power control, the Soviets abruptly choked off all rail and highway access to Berlin. They evidently reasoned that the Allies would be starved out.

Berlin became a hugely symbolic issue for both sides. At stake was not only the fate of the city but a test of wills between Moscow and Washington. The Americans organized a gigantic airlift in the midst of hair-trigger tension. For nearly a year, flying some of the very aircraft that had

recently dropped bombs on Berlin, American pilots ferried thousands of tons of supplies a day to the grateful Berliners, their former enemies. Western Europeans took heart from this vivid demonstration of America's determination to honor its commitments in Europe. The Soviets, their bluff dramatically called, finally lifted their blockade in May 1949. In the same year, the governments of the two Germanies, East and West, were formally established. The Cold War had icily congealed.

The Cold War Congeals

A crafty Stalin also probed the West's resolve at other sensitive points, including oil-rich Iran. Seeking to secure oil concessions similar to those held by the British and Americans, Stalin in 1946 broke an agreement to remove his troops from Iran's northernmost province, which the USSR had occupied, with British and American approval, during World War II. Instead he used the troops to aid a rebel movement. Truman sent off a stinging protest, and the Soviet dictator backed down.

Moscow's hard-line policies in Germany, Eastern Europe, and the Middle East wrought a psychological

In February 1946 Kremlin specialist George F. Kennan (b. 1904) sent his landmark "Long Telegram" to the State Department. In the eight-thousand-word, eighteen-page message, Kennan assessed the Soviet threat and called for a new kind of response, which would eventually become known as the "containment doctrine":

*"In summary, we have here a political force [Stalin's regime] committed fanatically to the belief that with [the] US there can be no permanent *modus vivendi*, that it is desirable and necessary that the internal harmony of our society be disrupted, our traditional way of life be destroyed, the international authority of our state be broken, if Soviet power is to be secure."*

Pearl Harbor. The eyes of Americans were jarred wide open by the Kremlin's apparent unwillingness to continue the wartime partnership. Any remaining goodwill from the period of comradeship-in-arms evaporated in a cloud of dark distrust. "I'm tired of babying the Soviets," Truman remarked privately in 1946, as attitudes on both sides began to harden frostily.

Truman's piecemeal responses to various Soviet challenges took on intellectual coherence in 1947, with the formulation of the "containment doctrine." Crafted by a brilliant young diplomat and Soviet specialist, George F. Kennan, this concept held that Russia, whether tsarist or communist, was relentlessly expansionary. But the Kremlin was also cautious, Kennan argued, and the flow of Soviet power into "every nook and cranny available to it" could be stemmed by "firm and vigilant containment."

Truman embraced Kennan's advice when he formally and publicly adopted a "get-tough-with-Russia" policy in 1947. His first dramatic move was triggered by word that heavily burdened Britain could no longer bear the financial and military load of defending Greece

against communist pressures. If Greece fell, Turkey would presumably collapse and the strategic eastern Mediterranean would pass into the Soviet orbit.

In a surprise appearance, the president went before Congress on March 12, 1947, and requested support for what came to be known as the Truman Doctrine. Specifically, he asked for \$400 million to bolster Greece and Turkey, which Congress quickly granted. More generally, he declared that "it must be the policy of the United States to support free peoples who are resisting attempted subjugation by armed minorities or by outside pressures"—a sweeping and open-ended commitment of vast and worrisome proportions. Critics then and later charged that Truman had overreacted by promising unlimited support to any tinhorn despot who claimed to be resisting "Communist aggression." Critics also complained that the Truman Doctrine needlessly polarized the world into pro-Soviet and pro-American camps and unwisely construed the Soviet threat as primarily military in nature. Apologists for Truman have explained that it was Truman's fear of a revived isolationism that led him to exaggerate the Soviet threat and to pitch his message in the charged language of a holy global war against godless communism—a description of the Cold War that straight-jacketed future policymakers who would seek to tone down Soviet-American competition and animosity.

Truman found support for casting the Cold War as a battle between good and evil from theologians like the influential liberal Protestant clergyman Reinhold Niebuhr (1892–1971). For over five decades after World War I, Niebuhr crusaded against what he perceived as the drift away from Christian foundations. A vocal enemy of fascism, pacifism, and communism in the 1940s and 1950s, Niebuhr divided the world into two polarized camps: the "children of light" and the "children of darkness." For Niebuhr, Christian justice, including force if necessary, required a "realist" response to "children of darkness" like Hitler and Stalin.

A threat of a different sort loomed in Western Europe—especially France, Italy, and Germany. These key nations were still suffering from the hunger and economic chaos spawned by war. They were in grave danger of being taken over from the inside by Communist parties that could exploit these hardships.

President Truman responded with a bold policy. In a commencement address at Harvard University on June 5, 1947, Secretary of State George C. Marshall invited the Europeans to get together and work out a *joint* plan for their economic recovery. If they did so, then the United States would provide substantial financial assistance.

Where To? 1947 A satirical view of the Truman Doctrine.





The Marshall Plan Turns Enemies into Friends The poster in this 1950 photograph in Berlin reads, "Berlin Rebuilt with Help from the Marshall Plan."

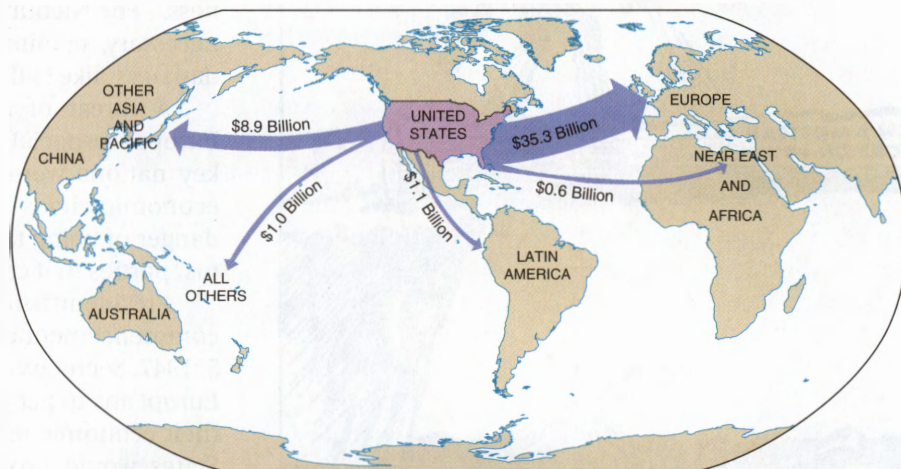
This forced cooperation constituted a powerful nudge on the road to the eventual creation of the European Community (EC).

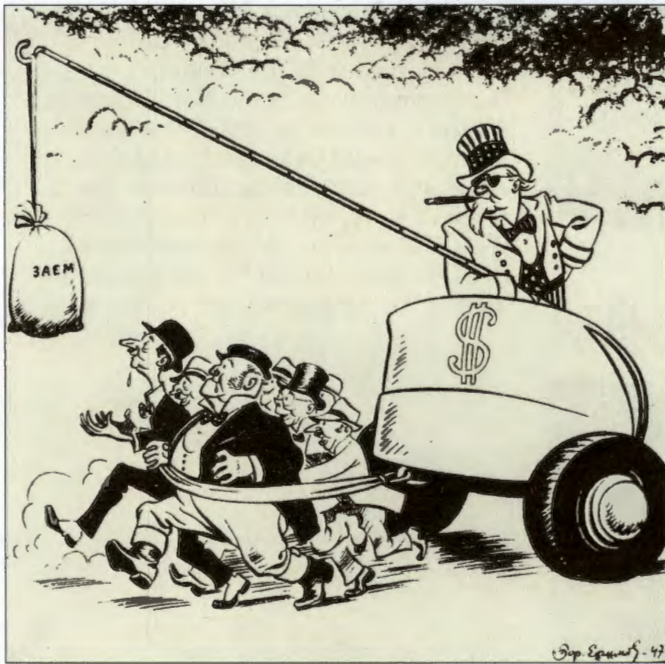
The democratic nations of Europe rose enthusiastically to the life-giving bait of the so-called Marshall Plan. They met in Paris in July 1947 to thrash out the details. There Marshall offered the same aid to the Soviet Union and its allies, if they would make political reforms and accept certain outside controls. In fact, the Americans worried that the Russian bear might hug the Marshall Plan to death, and therefore made the terms deliberately difficult for the USSR to accept. Nobody was surprised

when the Soviets walked out, denouncing the "Marshall Plan" as one more capitalist trick.

The Marshall Plan called for spending \$12.5 billion over four years in sixteen cooperating countries. Congress at first balked at this mammoth sum. It looked even more huge when added to the nearly \$2 billion the United States had already contributed to European relief through the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA) and the hefty American contributions to the United Nations, IMF, and World Bank. But a Soviet-sponsored communist coup in Czechoslovakia finally awakened the legislators to reality, and they voted

United States Foreign Aid, Military and Economic, 1945–1954 Marshall Plan aid swelled the outlay for Europe. Note the emphasis on the "developed" world, with relatively little aid going to what are now called "Third World" countries.





American Motor of the Latest Type

In this Russian view, the conquering Truman uses U.S. moneybags to induce dollar-hungry European nations to draw the U.S. capitalistic chariot.

the initial appropriations in April 1948. Congress evidently concluded that if Uncle Sam did not get the Europeans back on their feet, they would never get off his back.

Truman's Marshall Plan was a spectacular success. American dollars pumped reviving blood into the economic veins of the anemic Western European nations. Within a few years, most of them were exceeding their prewar outputs, as an "economic miracle" drenched Europe in prosperity. The Communist parties in Italy and France lost ground, and these two keystone countries were saved from the westward thrust of communism.

A resolute Truman made another fateful decision in 1948. Access to Middle Eastern oil was crucial to the European recovery program and, increasingly, to the health of the U.S. economy, as domestic American oil reserves dwindled. Yet the Arab oil countries adamantly opposed the creation of the Jewish state of Israel in the British mandate territory of Palestine. Should Israel be born, a Saudi Arabian leader warned Truman, the Arabs "will lay siege to it until it dies of famine." Defying Arab wrath as well as the objections of his own State and Defense Departments and the European Allies, all of them afraid to antagonize the oil-endowed Arabs,

Truman officially recognized the state of Israel on the day of its birth, May 14, 1948. Humanitarian sympathy for the Jewish survivors of the Holocaust ranked high among his reasons, as did his wishes to preempt Soviet influence in the Jewish state and to retain the support of American Jewish voters. Truman's policy of strong support for Israel would vastly complicate U.S. relations with the Arab world in the decades ahead.



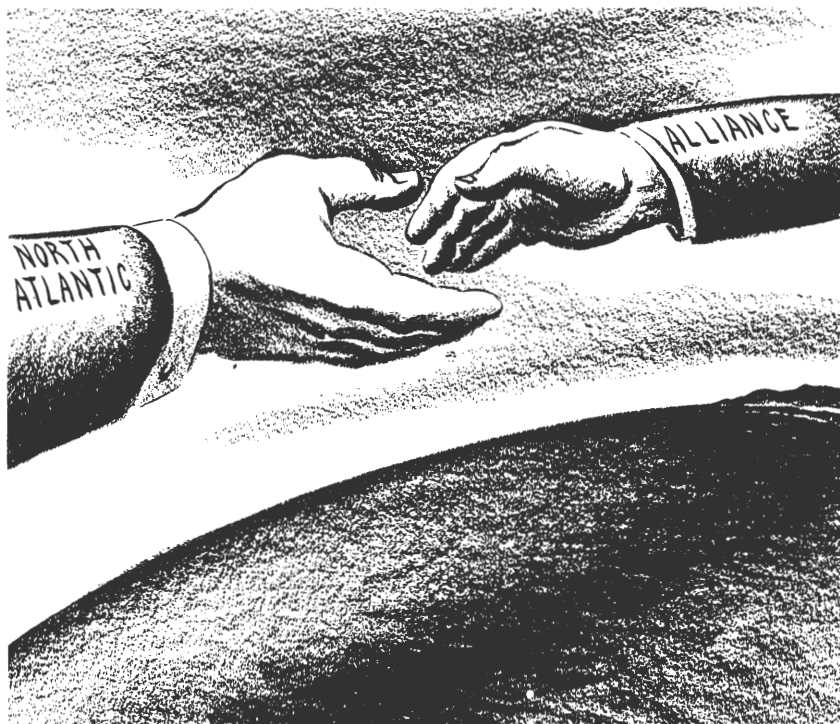
America Begins to Rearm

The Cold War, the struggle to contain Soviet communism, was not war, yet it was not peace. The standoff with the Kremlin banished the dreams of tax-fatigued Americans that tanks could be beaten into automobiles.

The Soviet menace spurred the unification of the armed services as well as the creation of a huge new national security apparatus. Congress in 1947 passed the National Security Act, creating the Department of Defense. The department was to be housed in the sprawling Pentagon building on the banks of the Potomac and to be headed by a new cabinet officer, the secretary of defense. Under the secretary, but now without cabinet status, were the civilian secretaries of the navy, the army (replacing the old secretary of war), and the air force (a recognition of the rising importance of airpower). The uniformed heads of each service were brought together as the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

The National Security Act also established the National Security Council (NSC) to advise the president on security matters and the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) to coordinate the government's foreign fact-gathering. The "Voice of America," authorized by Congress in 1948, began beaming American radio broadcasts behind the iron curtain. In the same year, Congress resurrected the military draft, providing for the conscription of selected young men from nineteen to twenty-five years of age. The forbidding presence of the Selective Service System shaped millions of young people's educational, marital, and career plans in the following quarter-century. One shoe at a time, a war-weary America was reluctantly returning to a war footing.

The Soviet threat was also forcing the democracies of Western Europe into an unforeseen degree of unity. In 1948 Britain, France, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Luxembourg signed a path-breaking treaty of defensive alliance at Brussels. They then invited the United States to join them.



The proposal confronted the United States with a historic decision. America had traditionally avoided entangling alliances, especially in peacetime (if the Cold War could be considered peacetime). Yet American participation in the emerging coalition could serve many purposes: it would strengthen the policy of containing the Soviet Union; it would provide a framework for the reintegration of Germany into the European family; and it would reassure jittery Europeans that a traditionally isolationist Uncle Sam was not about to abandon them to the marauding Russian bear—or to a resurgent and domineering Germany.

The Truman administration decided to join the European pact, called the North Atlantic Treaty Organization in recognition of its transatlantic character. With white-tie pageantry, the NATO treaty was signed in Washington on April 4, 1949. The twelve original signatories pledged to regard an attack on one as an attack on all and promised to respond with “armed force” if necessary. Despite last-ditch howls from immovable isolationists, the Senate approved the treaty on July 21, 1949, by a vote of 82 to 13. Membership was boosted to fourteen in 1952 by the inclusion of Greece and Turkey, to fifteen in 1955 by the addition of West Germany.

The NATO pact was epochal. It marked a dramatic departure from American diplomatic convention, a gigantic boost for European unification, and a signifi-

Reaching Across the Atlantic in Peacetime, 1948 When the United States joined with the Western European powers in the North Atlantic Alliance, soon to be called the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, it overcame its historic isolationism in the wake of wars. By 1955 former enemy West Germany would be admitted to NATO to help defend Western Europe against Soviet aggression.

cant step in the militarization of the Cold War. NATO became the cornerstone of all Cold War American policy toward Europe. With good reason pundits summed up NATO’s threefold purpose: “to keep the Russians out, the Germans down, and the Americans in.”



Reconstruction and Revolution in Asia

Reconstruction in Japan was simpler than in Germany, primarily because it was largely a one-man show. The occupying American army, under the supreme Allied commander, five-star general Douglas MacArthur, sat in the driver’s seat. In the teeth of violent protests from the Soviet officials, MacArthur went inflexibly ahead with his program for the democratization of Japan. Following the pattern in Germany, top Japanese “war criminals” were tried in Tokyo from 1946 to 1948. Eighteen of them were sentenced to prison terms, and seven were hanged.

General MacArthur, as a kind of Yankee mikado, enjoyed stunning success. The Japanese cooperated to an astonishing degree. They saw that good behavior and the adoption of democracy would speed the end of the occupation—as it did. A MacArthur-dictated constitution was adopted in 1946. It renounced militarism, provided for women’s equality, and introduced Western-style demo-

In August 1949 Secretary of State Dean Acheson (1893–1971) explained publicly why America had “dumped” Jiang Jieshi:

“The unfortunate but inescapable fact is that the ominous result of the civil war in China was beyond the control of the government of the United States. Nothing that this country did or could have done within the reasonable limits of its capabilities could have changed that result; nothing that was left undone by this country has contributed to it. It was the product of internal Chinese forces, forces which this country tried to influence but could not.”

cratic government—paving the way for a phenomenal economic recovery that within a few decades made Japan one of the world’s mightiest industrial powers.

If Japan was a success story for American policymakers, the opposite was true in China, where a bitter civil war had raged for years between Nationalists and

communists. Washington had halfheartedly supported the Nationalist government of Generalissimo Jiang Jieshi in his struggle with the communists under Mao Zedong (Mao Tse-tung). But ineptitude and corruption within the generalissimo’s regime gradually began to corrode the confidence of his people. Communist armies swept south overwhelmingly, and late in 1949 Jiang was forced to flee with the remnants of his once-powerful force to the last-hope island of Formosa (Taiwan).

The collapse of Nationalist China was a depressing defeat for America and its allies in the Cold War—the worst to date. At one fell swoop, nearly one-fourth of the world’s population—some 500 million people—was swept into the communist camp. The so-called fall of China became a bitterly partisan issue in the United States. The Republicans, seeking “goats” who had “lost China,” assailed President Truman and his bristly mustached, British-appearing secretary of state, Dean Acheson. They insisted that Democratic agencies, wormy with communists, had deliberately withheld aid from Jiang Jieshi so that he would fall. Democrats heatedly replied that when a regime has forfeited the support of its people, no amount of outside help will save it. Truman, the argument ran, did not “lose” China, because he never had China to lose. Jiang himself had never controlled all of China.



The Hydrogen Bomb, 1954

This test blast at Bikini Atoll in the Marshall Islands was so powerful that one Japanese fisherman was killed and all twenty-two of his crewmates were seriously injured by radioactive ash that fell on their vessel some eighty miles away. Fishing boats a thousand miles from Bikini later brought in radioactively contaminated catches.

More bad news came in September 1949 when President Truman shocked the nation by announcing that the Soviets had exploded an atomic bomb—approximately three years earlier than many experts had thought possible. American strategists since 1945 had counted on keeping the Soviets in line by threats of a one-sided aerial attack with nuclear weapons. But atomic bombing was now a game that two could play.

To outpace the Soviets in nuclear weaponry, Truman ordered the development of the “H-bomb” (hydrogen bomb)—a city-smashing device that was a thousand times more powerful than the atomic bomb. J. Robert Oppenheimer, former scientific director of the Manhattan Project and current chair of the Atomic Energy Commission, led a group of scientists in opposition to the crash program to design thermonuclear weapons. The H-bomb, these scientists warned, was so deadly that “it becomes a weapon which in practical effect is almost one of genocide.” Famed physicist Albert Einstein, whose theories had helped give birth to the atomic age, declared that “annihilation of any life on earth has been brought within the range of technical possibilities.”

But Einstein and Oppenheimer, the nation’s two most famous scientists, could not persuade Truman, anxious over communist threats in East Asia. The United States exploded its first hydrogen device on a South Pacific atoll in 1952. Not to be outdone, the Soviets countered with their first H-bomb explosion in 1953, and the nuclear arms race entered a perilously competitive cycle. Nuclear “superiority” became a dangerous and delusive dream, as each side tried to outdo the other in the scramble to build more destructive weapons. If the Cold War should ever blaze into a hot war, there might be no world left for the communists to communize or the democracies to democratize—a chilling thought that constrained both camps. Peace through mutual terror brought a shaky stability to the super-power standoff.



Ferretting Out Alleged Communists

One of the most active Cold War fronts was at home, where a new anti-red chase was in full cry. Many nervous citizens feared that communist spies, paid with Moscow gold, were undermining the government and treacherously misdirecting foreign policy. In 1947 Truman launched a massive “loyalty” program. The attorney general drew up a list of ninety supposedly

disloyal organizations, none of which was given the opportunity to prove its innocence. The Loyalty Review Board investigated more than 3 million federal employees, some 3,000 of whom either resigned or were dismissed, none under formal indictment.

Individual states likewise became intensely security-conscious. Loyalty oaths in increasing numbers were demanded of employees, especially teachers. The gnawing question for many earnest Americans was, Could the nation continue to enjoy traditional freedoms—especially freedom of speech, freedom of thought, and the right of political dissent—in a Cold War climate?

In 1949 eleven communists were brought before a New York jury for violating the Smith Act of 1940, the first peacetime antiseditation law since 1798. Convicted of advocating the overthrow of the American government by force, the defendants were sent to prison. The Supreme Court upheld their convictions in *Dennis v. United States* (1951).

The House of Representatives in 1938 had established the Committee on Un-American Activities (popularly known as “HUAC”) to investigate “subversion.” In 1948 committee member Richard M. Nixon, an ambitious red-catcher, led the chase after Alger Hiss, a prominent ex-New Dealer and a distinguished member of the “eastern establishment.” Accused of being a communist agent in the 1930s, Hiss demanded the right to defend himself. He dramatically met his chief accuser before the Un-American Activities Committee in August 1948. Hiss denied everything but was caught in embarrassing falsehoods, convicted of perjury in 1950, and sentenced to five years in prison.

Was America really riddled with Soviet spies? Soviet agents did infiltrate certain government agencies, though without severely damaging consequences, and espionage may have helped the Soviets to develop an atomic bomb somewhat sooner than they would have otherwise. Truman’s loyalty program thus had a basis in reality. But for many ordinary Americans, the hunt for communists was not just about fending off the military threat of the Soviet Union. Unsettling dangers lurked closer to home. While men like Nixon and Senator Joseph McCarthy led the search for communists in Washington, conservative politicians at the state and local levels discovered that all manner of real or perceived social changes—including declining religious sentiment, increased sexual freedom, and agitation for civil rights—could be tarred with a red brush. Anticommunist crusaders ransacked school libraries for “subver-



Richard Nixon, Red-hunter Congressman Nixon examines the microfilm that figured as important evidence in Alger Hiss's conviction for perjury in 1950.

sive" textbooks and drove debtors, drinkers, and homosexuals, all alleged to be security risks, from their jobs.

Some Americans, including President Truman, realized that the red hunt was turning into a witch hunt. In 1950 Truman vetoed the McCarran Internal Security Bill, which among other provisions authorized the president to arrest and detain suspicious people during an "internal security emergency." Critics protested that the bill smacked of police-state, concentration-camp tactics. But the congressional guardians of the Republic's liberties enacted the bill over Truman's veto.

The stunning success of the Soviet scientists in developing an atomic bomb was attributed by many to the cleverness of communist spies in stealing American secrets. Notorious among those who had allegedly

Atomic scientist Edward Condon (1902–1974) warned as early as 1946—three years before the Soviets exploded their own atomic bomb—that Americans' confidence in their nuclear monopoly was a dangerous delusion that could unleash vicious accusations and scapegoating:

"The laws of nature, some seem to think, are ours exclusively. . . . Having created an air of suspicion and distrust, there will be persons among us who think our nations can know nothing except what is learned by espionage. So, when other countries make atom bombs, these persons will cry 'treason' at our scientists, for they will find it inconceivable that another country could make a bomb in any other way."

"leaked" atomic data to Moscow were two American citizens, Julius and Ethel Rosenberg. They were convicted in 1951 of espionage and, after prolonged appeals, went to the electric chair in 1953—the only people in American history ever executed in peacetime for espionage. Their sensational trial and electrocution, combined with sympathy for their two orphaned children, began to sour some sober citizens on the excesses of the red-hunters.



Democratic Divisions in 1948

Attacking high prices and "High-Tax Harry" Truman, the Republicans had won control of Congress in the congressional elections of 1946. Their prospects had seldom looked rosier as they gathered in Philadelphia to choose their 1948 presidential candidate. They noisily renominated warmed-over New York governor Thomas E. Dewey, still as debonair as if he had stepped out of a bandbox.

Also gathering in Philadelphia, Democratic politicians looked without enthusiasm on their hand-me-down president and sang, "I'm Just Mild About Harry." But their "dump Truman" movement collapsed when war

hero Dwight D. Eisenhower refused to be drafted. The peppery president, unwanted but undaunted, was then chosen in the face of vehement opposition by southern delegates. They were alienated by his strong stand in favor of civil rights for blacks, who now mustered many votes in the big-city ghettos of the North.

Truman's nomination split the party wide open. Embittered southern Democrats from thirteen states, like their fire-eating forebears of 1860, next met in their own convention, in Birmingham, Alabama, with Confederate flags brashly in evidence. Amid scenes of heated defiance, these "Dixiecrats" nominated Governor J. Strom Thurmond of South Carolina on a States' Rights party ticket.

To add to the confusion within Democratic ranks, former vice president Henry A. Wallace threw his hat into the ring. Having parted company with the administration over its get-tough-with-Russia policy, he was nominated at Philadelphia by the new Progressive party—a bizarre collection of disgruntled former New

The Harried Piano Player, 1948 Besieged by the left and right wings of his own party, and by a host of domestic and foreign problems, Truman was a long shot for reelection in 1948. But the scrappy president surprised his legions of critics by handily defeating his opponent, Thomas E. Dewey.



That Ain't the Way I Heard It! Truman wins.

Dealers, starry-eyed pacifists, well-meaning liberals, and communist-fronters.

Wallace, a vigorous if misguided liberal, assailed Uncle Sam's "dollar imperialism" from the stump. This so-called Pied Piper of the Politburo took an apparently pro-Soviet line that earned him drenchings with rotten eggs in hostile cities. But to many Americans, Wallace raised the only hopeful voice in the deepening gloom of the Cold War.

In his inaugural address, January 1949, President Harry S Truman (1884–1972) said,

"Communism is based on the belief that man is so weak and inadequate that he is unable to govern himself, and therefore requires the rule of strong masters. . . . Democracy is based on the conviction that man has the moral and intellectual capacity, as well as the inalienable right, to govern himself with reason and justice."

With the Democrats ruptured three ways and the Republican congressional victory of 1946 just past, Dewey's victory seemed assured. Succumbing to overconfidence engendered by his massive lead in public-opinion polls, the cold, smug Dewey confined himself to dispensing soothing-syrup trivialities like "Our future lies before us."

The seemingly doomed Truman, with little money and few active supporters, had to rely on his "gut-fighter" instincts and folksy personality. Traveling the country by train to deliver some three hundred "give 'em hell" speeches, he lashed out at the Taft-Hartley "slave labor" law and the "do-nothing" Republican Congress, while whipping up support for his program of civil rights, improved labor benefits, and health insurance. "Pour it on 'em, Harry!" cried increasingly large and enthusiastic crowds, as the pugnacious president rained a barrage of verbal uppercuts on his opponent.

On election night the *Chicago Tribune* ran off an early edition with the headline "DEWEY DEFEATS TRUMAN." But in the morning, it turned out that "President" Dewey had embarrassingly snatched defeat from the jaws of victory. Truman had swept to a stunning triumph, to the complete bewilderment of politicians, pollsters, prophets, and pundits. Even though Thurmond took away 39 electoral votes in the South, Truman won 303 electoral votes, primarily from the South, Midwest, and West. Dewey's 189 electoral votes came principally from the East. The popular vote was 24,179,345 for Truman, 21,991,291 for Dewey, 1,176,125 for Thurmond, and 1,157,326 for Wallace. To make the victory sweeter, the Democrats regained control of Congress as well.

As Truman's Fair Deal was rebuffed by a hostile Congress, critics like the conservative New York Daily News gloated that the odious New Deal was finally vanquished:

"The New Deal is kaput like the Thirty Years' War or the Black Plague or other disasters. . . . [Its demise] is like coming out of the darkness into sunlight. Like feeling clean again after a long time in the muck."

Truman's victory rested on farmers, workers, and blacks, all of whom were Republican-wary. Republican overconfidence and Truman's lone-wolf, never-say-die campaign also won him the support of many Americans who admired his "guts." No one wanted him, someone remarked, except the people. Dewey, in contrast, struck many voters as arrogant, evasive, and wooden. When Dewey took the platform to give a speech, said one commentator, "he comes out like a man who has been mounted on casters and given a tremendous shove from behind."

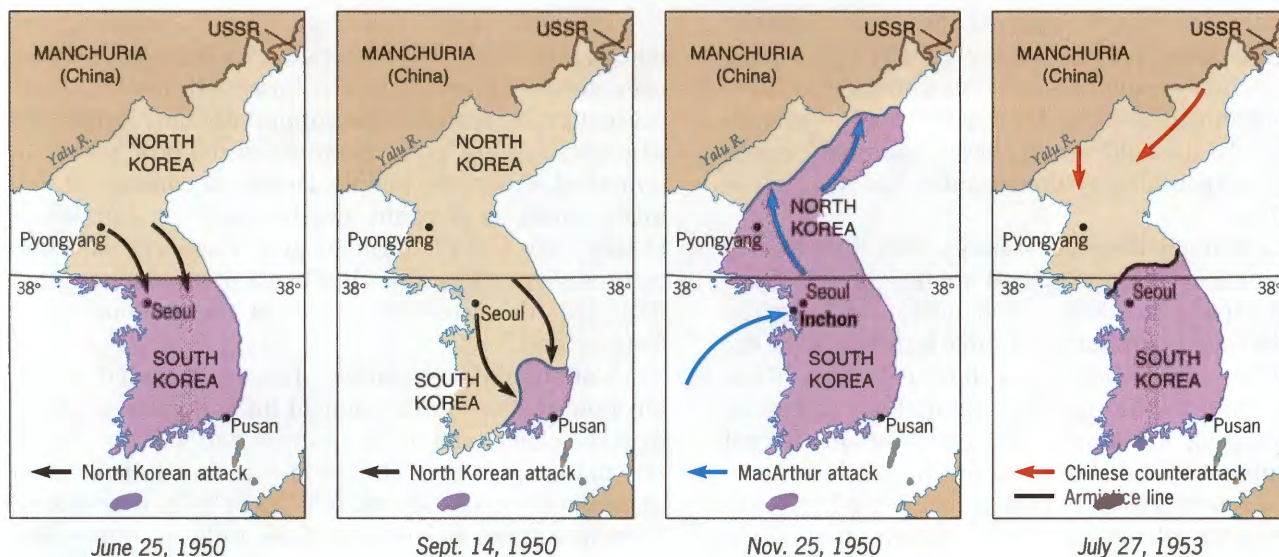
Smiling and self-assured, Truman sounded a clarion note in the fourth point of his inaugural address, when he called for a "bold new program" ("Point Four"). The plan was to lend U.S. money and technical aid to underdeveloped lands to help them help themselves. Truman wanted to spend millions to keep underprivileged peoples from becoming communists rather than spend billions to shoot them after they had become communists. This farseeing program was officially launched in 1950, and it brought badly needed assistance to impoverished countries, notably in Latin America, Africa, the Near East, and the Far East.

At home Truman outlined a sweeping "Fair Deal" program in his 1949 message to Congress. It called for improved housing, full employment, a higher minimum wage, better farm price supports, new TVAs, and an extension of Social Security. But most of the Fair Deal fell victim to congressional opposition from Republicans and southern Democrats. The only major successes came in raising the minimum wage, providing for public housing in the Housing Act of 1949, and extending old-age insurance to many more beneficiaries in the Social Security Act of 1950.



The Korean Volcano Erupts (1950)

Korea, the Land of the Morning Calm, heralded a new and more disturbing phase of the Cold War—a shooting phase—in June 1950. When Japan collapsed in 1945, Soviet troops had accepted the Japanese surrender north of the thirty-eighth parallel on the Korean peninsula, and American troops had done likewise south of that line. Both superpowers professed to want the reunification and independence of Korea, a Japanese colony since 1910. But, as in Germany, each helped to set up rival regimes above and below the parallel.



The Shifting Front in Korea

By 1949, when the Soviets and Americans had both withdrawn their forces, the entire peninsula was a bristling armed camp, with two hostile regimes eyeing each other suspiciously. Secretary of State Acheson seemed to wash his hands of the dispute early in 1950, when he declared in a memorable speech that Korea was outside the essential United States defense perimeter in the Pacific.

The explosion came on June 25, 1950. Spearheaded by Soviet-made tanks, North Korean army columns rumbled across the thirty-eighth parallel. Caught flat-footed, the South Korean forces were shoved back southward to a dangerously tiny defensive area around Pusan, their weary backs to the sea.

President Truman sprang quickly into the breach. The invasion seemed to provide devastating proof of a fundamental premise in the “containment doctrine” that shaped Washington’s foreign policy: that even a slight relaxation of America’s guard was an invitation to communist aggression somewhere.

The Korean invasion also provided the occasion for a vast expansion of the American military. Truman’s National Security Council had recommended in a famous document of 1950 (known as National Security Council Memorandum Number 68, or NSC-68) that the United States should quadruple its defense spending. Buried at the time because it was considered politically impossible to implement, NSC-68 was resurrected by the Korean crisis. “Korea saved us,” Secretary of State Acheson later commented. Truman now ordered a mas-

sive military buildup, well beyond what was necessary for the immediate purposes of the Korean War. Soon the United States had 3.5 million men under arms and was spending \$50 billion per year on the defense budget—some 13 percent of the GNP.

NSC-68 was a key document of the Cold War period, not only because it marked a major step in the militarization of American foreign policy, but also because it vividly reflected the sense of almost limitless possibility that pervaded postwar American society. NSC-68 rested on the assumption that the enormous American economy could bear without strain the huge costs of a gigantic rearmament program. Said one NSC-68 planner, “There was practically nothing the country could not do if it wanted to do it.”

Truman took full advantage of a temporary Soviet absence from the United Nations Security Council on June 25, 1950, to obtain a unanimous condemnation of North Korea as an aggressor. (Why the Soviets were absent remains controversial. Scholars once believed that the Soviets were just as surprised as the Americans by the attack. It now appears that Stalin had given his reluctant approval to North Korea’s strike plan but believed that the fighting would be brief and that the United States would take little interest in it.) The Council also called upon all U.N. members, including the United States, to “render every assistance” to restore peace. Two days later, without consulting Congress, Truman ordered American air and naval units to support South

Korea. Before the week was out, he also ordered General Douglas MacArthur's Japan-based occupation troops into action alongside the beleaguered South Koreans.

Officially, the United States was simply participating in a United Nations "police action." But in fact, the United States made up the overwhelming bulk of the U.N. contingents, and General MacArthur, appointed U.N. commander of the entire operation, took his orders from Washington, not from the Security Council.



The Military Seesaw in Korea

Rather than fight his way out of the southern Pusan perimeter, MacArthur launched a daring amphibious landing behind the enemy's lines at Inchon. This bold gamble on September 15, 1950, succeeded brilliantly; within two weeks the North Koreans had scrambled back behind the "sanctuary" of the thirty-eighth parallel. Truman's avowed intention was to restore South Korea to its former borders, but the pursuing South Koreans had already crossed the thirty-eighth parallel, and there seemed little point in permitting the North Koreans to regroup and come again. The U.N. Assembly tacitly authorized a crossing by MacArthur, whom President Truman ordered northward, provided that there was no intervention in force by the Chinese or Soviets.

The Americans thus raised the stakes in Korea, and in so doing they quickened the fears of another potential player in this dangerous game. The Chinese communists had publicly warned that they would not sit idly by and watch hostile troops approach the strategic Yalu River boundary between Korea and China. But MacArthur pooh-poohed all predictions of an effective intervention by the Chinese and reportedly boasted that he would "have the boys home by Christmas."

MacArthur erred badly. In November 1950 tens of thousands of Chinese "volunteers" fell upon his rashly overextended lines and hurled the U.N. forces reeling back down the peninsula. The fighting now sank into a frostbitten stalemate on the icy terrain near the thirty-eighth parallel.

An imperious MacArthur, humiliated by this rout, pressed for drastic retaliation. He favored a blockade of the Chinese coast and bombardment of Chinese bases in Manchuria. But Washington policymakers, with anxious eyes on Moscow, refused to enlarge the already costly conflict. The chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff



Truman Takes the Heat

declared that a wider clash in Asia would be "the wrong war, at the wrong place, at the wrong time, and with the wrong enemy." Europe, not Asia, was the administration's first concern; and the USSR, not China, loomed as the more sinister foe.

Two-fisted General MacArthur felt that he was being asked to fight with one hand tied behind his back. He sneered at the concept of a "limited war" and insisted that "there is no substitute for victory." When the general began to take issue publicly with presidential policies, Truman had no choice but to remove the insubordinate MacArthur from command (April 11, 1951). MacArthur, a legend in his own mind, returned to an uproarious welcome, whereas Truman was condemned as a "pig," an "imbecile," a "Judas," and an appeaser of "Communist Russia and Communist China." In July 1951 truce discussions began in a rude field tent near the firing line but were almost immediately snagged on the issue of prisoner exchange. Talks dragged on unproductively for nearly two years while men continued to die.

Chronology

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| <p>1944 Servicemen's Readjustment Act (GI Bill)
Bretton Woods economic conference</p> <p>1945 Spock publishes <i>The Common Sense Book of Baby and Child Care</i>
Yalta conference
United States ends lend-lease to USSR
United Nations established</p> <p>1945-</p> <p>1946 Nuremberg war crimes trials in Germany</p> <p>1946 Employment Act creates Council of Economic Advisers
Iran crisis
Kennan's "Long Telegram" lays out "Containment Doctrine."</p> <p>1946-</p> <p>1948 Tokyo war crimes trials</p> <p>1947 Truman Doctrine
Marshall Plan
Taft-Hartley Act
National Security Act creates Department of Defense, National Security Council (NSC), and Central Intelligence Agency (CIA)</p> | <p>1948 United States officially recognizes Israel
"Voice of America" begins radio broadcasts behind iron curtain
Hiss case begins
Truman defeats Dewey for presidency</p> <p>1948-</p> <p>1949 Berlin crisis</p> <p>1949 NATO established
Communists defeat Nationalists in China</p> <p>1950 American economy begins postwar growth
McCarthy red hunt begins
McCarran Internal Security Bill passed by Congress over Truman's veto</p> <p>1950-</p> <p>1953 Korean War</p> <p>1951 Truman fires MacArthur
Rosenbergs convicted of treason</p> <p>1952 United States explodes first hydrogen bomb</p> <p>1957 Postwar peak of U.S. birthrate</p> <p>1973 U.S. birthrate falls below replacement level</p> |
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VARYING VIEWPOINTS

Who Was to Blame for the Cold War?

Whose fault was the Cold War? (And, for that matter, who should get credit for ending it?) For two decades after World War II, American historians generally agreed that the aggressive Soviets were solely responsible. This "orthodox" or "official" appraisal squared with the traditional view of the United States as a virtuous, innocent land with an idealistic foreign policy. This point of view also justified America's Cold War containment policy, which cast the Soviet Union as the aggressor that must be confined by an ever-vigilant United States. America supposedly had only

defensive intentions, with no expansionary ambitions of its own.

In the 1960s a vigorous revisionist interpretation flowered, powerfully influenced by disillusion over U.S. involvement in Vietnam. The revisionists stood the orthodox view on its head. The Soviets, they argued, had only defensive intentions at the end of World War II; it was the Americans who had behaved provocatively by brandishing their new atomic weaponry. Some of these critics pointed an accusing finger at President Truman, alleging that he aban-

done Roosevelt's conciliatory approach to the Soviets and adopted a bullying attitude, emboldened by the American atomic monopoly.

More radical revisionists like Gabriel and Joyce Kolko even claimed to have found the roots of Truman's alleged belligerence in long-standing American policies of economic imperialism—policies that eventually resulted in the tragedy of Vietnam (see pp. 928–930). In this view the Vietnam War followed logically from America's insatiable “need” for overseas markets and raw materials. Vietnam itself may have been economically unimportant, but, so the argument ran, a communist Vietnam represented an intolerable challenge to American hegemony. Ironically, revisionists thus endorsed the so-called domino theory, which official apologists often cited in defense of America's Vietnam policy. According to the domino theory, if the United States declined to fight in Vietnam, other countries would lose their faith in America's will (or their fear of American power) and would tumble one after the other like “dominoes” into the Soviet camp. Revisionists stressed what they saw as the *economic necessity* behind the domino theory: losing in Vietnam, they claimed, would unravel the American economy.

In the 1970s a “postrevisionist” interpretation emerged that is widely agreed upon today. Historians such as John Lewis Gaddis and Melvyn Leffler pooh-pooh the economic determinism of the revisionists, while frankly acknowledging that the United States did have vital security interests at stake in the post-World War II era. The postrevisionists analyze the ways in which inherited ideas (like isolationism) and the contentious nature of postwar domestic pol-

itics, as well as miscalculations by American leaders, led a nation in search of security into seeking not simply a sufficiency but a “preponderance” of power. The American *overreaction* to its security needs, these scholars suggest, exacerbated U.S.-Soviet relations and precipitated the four-decade-long nuclear arms race that formed the centerpiece of the Cold War.

In the case of Vietnam, the postrevisionist historians focus not on economic necessity, but on a failure of political intelligence, induced by the stressful conditions of the Cold War, that made the dubious domino theory seem plausible. Misunderstanding Vietnamese intentions, exaggerating Soviet ambitions, and fearing to appear “soft on communism” in the eyes of their domestic political rivals, American leaders plunged into Vietnam, sadly misguided by their own Cold War obsessions.

Most postrevisionists, however, still lay the lion's share of the blame for the Cold War on the Soviet Union. By the same token, they credit the Soviets with ending the Cold War—a view hotly disputed by Ronald Reagan's champions, who claim that it was his anti-Soviet policies in the 1980s that brought the Russians to their knees (see pp. 973–974). The great unknown, of course, is the precise nature of Soviet thinking in the Cold War years. Were Soviet aims predominantly defensive, or did the Kremlin incessantly plot world conquest? Was there an opportunity for reconciliation with the West following Stalin's death in 1953? Should Mikhail Gorbachev or Ronald Reagan be remembered as the leader who ended the Cold War? With the opening of Soviet archives, scholars are eagerly pursuing answers to such questions.