

UNIT 8 BRIEF SUMMARY... Post-WWII Era

College Board Period 8, 1945-1980

The Cold War, The Civil Rights Movement... 50s-60s-70s



Before the end of WWII, the **big three**, **FDR**, **Winston Churchill** (England), and **Josef Stalin** (Soviet Union), met at **Yalta** to discuss what the post war world would look like. The three weighty issues to be decided were: the occupation of Germany, the creation of the United Nations, and the status of Eastern Europe. The Soviets wanted a sphere of influence in Eastern Europe to prevent a third major German attack. The U.S. and England wanted democratic elections to take place. A number of compromises were reached. The **United Nations** would be created, free and fair elections would be held in Poland, and Germany would be divided among the allies. The rest of Eastern Europe would be under the total control of the Soviets... after Stalin refused to follow through earlier plans to allow elections and insisted on having his buffer zone. Some historians postulate that had American not appeased Stalin with Eastern Europe, the Cold War may not have been so cold. Others propose the nation would have gone right back to war. After FDR's death in April of 1945, **Harry Truman** became president. He was not afraid to make difficult decisions such as dropping the atomic bomb. Although he allowed Stalin to take Eastern Europe, he would not stand by and watch Greece and Turkey fall. He issued what is known as the **Truman Doctrine** in 1947. This doctrine proclaimed that America would have to abandon its isolationist past and oppose communism everywhere it threatened to spread. This foreign policy would guide America, for better or worse until 1991. (image: Cold War flags, historyofrussia.org)

The **Cold War** was an ideological conflict between the **democratic United States** and the **communist Soviet Union**. During the Cold War both sides didn't shoot at each other due the destructiveness of nuclear weapons in an idea known as **M.A.D. (mutually assured destruction)**. Although both sides participated in a number of **proxy wars (such as the Korean War and the Vietnam War)**, in which they supported the opposing sides. The **Cold War** lasted from 1945-1991, ending with the collapse and break-up of the Soviet Union. The Cold War was a consideration in all major foreign policy decisions during that time. **George Keenan** was an experienced American Diplomat who specialized in Soviet affairs. He issued the **long telegram** which declared that the only thing the Soviets respected was strength. The United States should not try to **appease** the Soviets, he declared. The U.S. should vigorously oppose all Soviet expansion with full economic and military force. This policy, known as **containment**, became America's main foreign policy for the duration of the cold war.

The first place Truman applied the **Truman Doctrine** was in war torn Europe. Many countries were struggling to survive and began looking to communism as the answer. But, according to Truman, intervening would be a waste of time unless you gave the countries a hand out of poverty. The president's Secretary of State, **George Marshall**, came up with an economic package called the **Marshall Plan** to economically rebuild Europe. At first Congress didn't want to spend the millions that the plan would need to succeed. But fear of communism prompted them to approve the ambitious plan. The **Marshall Plan** was a tremendous success, and a dramatic departure from pre-war foreign policy. **Berlin**, Germany's Capital, was deep in the Soviet Sector of Germany (**Stalin** had refused to follow the original plan of elections and rebuilding Germany... as agreed to initially at **Yalta**). In 1948, the Soviets closed access, thus preventing American, English, and French shipments of supplies to West Berlin. The British and Americans flew in supplies in an effort known as the **Berlin Airlift**. After nearly a year the Soviets reopened access. America was sending a continued message that there would be no more appeasement.

China was also crippled by the war, and it had two sides fighting for control, the **communists**, under **Mao Zedong** and the **Nationalists** under **Chang Kai-shek (also known as Jiang Jeshi)**. The United States supported the nationalists, but Chang lost the support of the Chinese people who were turning more toward Zedong. Eventually, China became communist under Mao. The Republican Party blamed the Democrats for the loss, claiming that they were "soft" on communism. This claim would haunt America years later in **Vietnam**. The fall of China and Eastern Europe to **communism** provoked a hysteria known as the **Red Scare**. It was the second such scare (the first was in 1919, after World War I). A husband and wife named **Julius and Ethel Rosenberg** were convicted of spying for the Soviets and were executed. Senator **Joe McCarthy**, in the fanatical fury, claimed that commie spies had infiltrated the government. He held hearings that recklessly accused people of being communist, and ruined many people's lives. This phenomenon became known as **McCarthyism**.

The focus of **containment** was on Europe but quickly turned to Asia at the outbreak of the **Korean War** in 1950. Communist **North Korea** invaded **South Korea** and was nearly victorious. The **United Nations**, led by the United States assisted South Korea in fighting off North Korea. This was the first time that black and white soldiers fought together, as Harry Truman had **integrated** the armed forces in 1948. The **Chinese** intervened on the side of North Korea and the war on drug on for nearly three years. Eventually an **armistice** was signed in 1953; it divided the country back to approximately where it began, the **DMZ** was created at this 38th Parallel where it remains today. When both the Soviets and Americans exploded **Hydrogen Bombs**, people were terrified of a nuclear war. They dug **bomb shelters** and school children practiced **duck and cover drills**. The United States and its allies formed **N.A.T.O. (North American Treaty Organization)** for protection. The Soviets formed rival **Warsaw Pact**. Things would remain this way until 1991, although when the Berlin Wall came down in 1989 the fear of these alliances battling each other subsided.

50s

The 1950's are looked upon as an idyllic time when everyone was in a happy daze. America was prospering, babies were being born – **Baby Boom** – and people were moving into new homes in the **suburbs**. Beneath the surface discontent about **conformity**, economic inequality, political alienation, and **segregation** simmered and would boil over in the next decade. The **G.I. Bill** gave returning soldiers loans to get homes, businesses and go to college. Many of them moved to the newly built **suburban homes**. The first of these planned communities was called **Levittown**. The soldiers and their wives began the **baby boom**, perhaps the most prolific explosion of child births ever (in 1957 a baby was born every seven seconds!).

(image: Levittown newspaper advertisement, 1957, capitalcentury.com)



A new wave of **consumerism** swept society. Just as in the 1920's, advertisers enticed people into buying things that they didn't need. Manufacturers used **planned obsolescence**, purposely made a new style of an item every year, to encourage people to buy the latest version of their product. Automobiles, new appliances, and clothes were purchased on a brand new invention, the **plastic credit card**. People ran themselves into debt, especially to purchase the most coveted item, the **television**. By 1960, 90% of homes had at least one television. Children were pampered by adoring parents and the term **teenager** came to describe adolescents. Teens had money to spend on music, movies and food. The music they spent it on was **rock-n-roll**. The term rock-n-roll was a euphemism for dancing and sex. Rock music was originally called race music because it was created by African Americans, and most radio stations refused to play it. Eventually, rock gained acceptance in mainstream music through the likes of **Elvis Presley** and others. The same pattern would be followed in the 1980's with rap music. The fast food franchise **McDonalds** got its start in 1955, although not the first fast food joint it became the most iconic... American diets would never be the same. Want fries with that?

Not everyone was happy in the 1950's. A group of **social critics** called the **Beatniks** protested in literature. They didn't like the **social conformity** and **consumerism** that was rampant in America, much like it was in the 1920's. Another group not satisfied was **African Americans**. They had fought in World War II and Korean War, but failed to achieve **racial equality**. The court case **Brown v. Board** (1954) stated that **schools** must **integrate** "with all deliberate speed". This decision overturned the **Plessey v. Ferguson** case of 1896 and its separate but equal ruling. In Montgomery, Alabama in 1955 African Americans **boycotted** the bus system, due to **segregation**. The leader of the boycott, **Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.**, would become a visionary leader of the emerging **Civil Rights Movement**. Eventually the buses were **desegregated**. In 1957, at Little Rock Arkansas nine African American students integrated the all-white Little Rock High. It took the United States **101st Airborne Army** to allow the **Little Rock nine** to safely attend school. It was the first time since **reconstruction** (1865-1877) that federal troops occupied a city.

(image: Little Rock Central High School, 1957, blackpast.org)



The outward **conformity** of the 1950s was partially fueled by **Cold War** fears which created an us versus them mentality along with an overwhelming desire to be the "good guys" and fit in, especially with the **Second Red Scare** at the beginning of the decade (**McCarthyism**) which exposed the risk of being non-conformist (or risk of paranoia ruining your life if you didn't "fit in" as all-American, God-fearing, democracy loving, clean cut "good guy." – BTW: Soviets were the "bad guys.") With the power of nuclear weapons, the United States policy in the 1950's was **massive retaliation**. If the Soviets did something, we would respond with nuclear weapons. This would ratchet... *ha... ratchet...* up tensions and increase fears of a nuclear war. The **Soviets** launched the first **satellite** in 1957 named **Sputnik**. This beeping satellite terrified Americans. They feared that the Soviets were capable of launching nuclear weapons from outer space. This gave rise to an entire genre of bad movies about aliens. Congress passed the **National Defense Education Act** of 1958 (NDEA) to increase student's knowledge in science and math and prevent the Soviets from remaining ahead in the **space race**. They also passed the **National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA)** to oversee our new space program, which was stationed in Titusville, Florida (the Space Coast). As the nation approached the 1960s, it was filled with excitement and energy from a growing economy but also filled with fear of war. Beneath the excitement, just as with the Roaring Twenties, growing disillusionment, cultural conflicts, and especially non-conformity/rebellion soon exploded into a much different decade.

60s

The 1960's marked a dramatic shift from the **conformity** and **consensus** that the 1950's had imparted. The decade was rocked with a brush with nuclear war, the **assassinations** of political and cultural leaders, **protests, riots**, and a **war**. In what many consider to be America's worst year, 1968 had virtually all of the above elements in one calendar year. 1960 was an election year.

The two candidates were very dissimilar from one another. Republican **Richard Nixon** was an experienced, shrewd politician, but cold and ruthless. Democrat **John Kennedy** was youthful and inexperienced, but very charismatic and personable. The two met in the first ever **Presidential debate**, which was televised. Kennedy looked more presidential and may have convinced enough voters to elect him in the closest election in the 20th century.

Kennedy inherited a plan to train exiled Cubans and have them attack the newly **communist Cuba**. They trained on Cayo Costa in Lee County. The plan, called the **Bay of Pigs**, was a complete disaster. This was one of a number of events in the simmering cold war. The Soviets completed the **Berlin Wall** in 1961 separating east and west Berlin, essentially making East Germany a prison. The emboldened Soviets placed **missiles in Cuba**, 90 miles from Florida. The interstate was closed except for military traffic as the world watched and hoped a nuclear war would not occur. A tense standoff began as the United States demanded the Soviets remove the missiles. The world held its breath for thirteen days as the two countries glared frostily at each other. The Soviets finally backed down and removed the missiles, in exchange for our promise not to invade Cuba. **President Kennedy** was **assassinated** in November 1963. The new President, **Lyndon Baines Johnson**, embarked on an ambitious program to combat poverty and inequality. The program, called the **Great Society**, would introduce **head-start, Medicare, Medicaid**, a **civil rights act**, and a **voting rights act**. Johnson tried to help the lower tiers of society achieve the success of middle class enjoyed.

African Americans began the **civil rights movement** in 1954. By the mid 1960's they gained ground. **Dr. Martin Luther King Jr's** steady confrontational, **nonviolent approach** was working. He headed up the **Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC)**, a student organization the **Students Non Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC)** was formed for younger people to protest. But for many African Americans, it wasn't working quickly enough. It was true that the **poll tax** had been eliminated as did segregation in schools and public facilities. However, in the Deep South it persisted stubbornly. New leaders such as **Stokely Carmichael, H. Rap Brown**, and **Malcolm X** espoused a more militant stance. **Freedom Riders** were organized to integrate buses. **Freedom Summer** was held to register blacks to vote. The **Black Panthers** formed and began to arm themselves to fight the white opposition with bullets. **Malcolm X** was **assassinated** in 1965 in an internal power struggle in his organization, the **Nation of Islam**. That year the black ghetto of Watts, in Los Angeles, violently rioted what began many "long, hot summers" of discontent among inner city African Americans.



The **Supreme Court**, under the leadership of **Earl Warren**, became a liberal defender of people's rights. They ruled against **segregation**, for the rights of people accused of crimes (most famously **Miranda v. Arizona**). The court also ruled that congressional voting districts should be more representative and equal, known as "one man one vote". [**Wesberry vs Sanders case.**] Other Warren/Burger court cases were: **Gideon vs Wainwright, Escobedo vs Illinois, & Tinker vs Ohio**. **College Students** began to **protest** during the 1960's. At first it was a minority movement who wanted people to change society that they believed was morally corrupt. As the **Vietnam War** drug on, they protested that our involvement was immoral. The movement gained members, some of whom were **Hippies**. **Hippies** lived an **alternative lifestyle** dubbed the **counterculture**. They used drugs, had premarital sex, didn't bathe regularly, didn't hold jobs, and grew their hair long.

America's involvement in **Vietnam** was gradual. In the late 1940's, we gave money to the French to control the country. When the French were defeated at **Dien Bien Phu**, we sent advisors to help the **South Vietnamese** against the **communist North Vietnamese**. It was part of the **containment policy** known as the **Domino Theory** which stated that if Vietnam fell to **communism** its neighbors might succumb to communism as well. We increased the advisors to 16,000 by 1963. To not appear soft on communism, **President Johnson** looked for an excuse to **escalate** our involvement in Vietnam. He found it in 1964 at the **Gulf of Tonkin**. He claimed we were attacked by the North Vietnamese. Congress allowed the President to do what ever was necessary to control Vietnam. Johnson said of the **Gulf of Tonkin resolution** that it was "like grandmas night shirt, it covered everything". By 1968 we had 500,000 troops fighting in Vietnam.

The year 1968 opened with the Vietnamese attacking on their new year, Tet. The **Tet Offensive** was a simultaneous attack on 100 cities and bases. The North Vietnamese used the **Ho Chi Minh Trail**, named after the leader of North Vietnam to move troops and supplies through other, the neutral countries of Laos and Cambodia to avoid the American Army. Though the United States beat back the North Vietnamese, the American people were shocked. The Americans had been told we were winning the war, now it appeared very different on their televisions. This opened up a yawning **credibility gap** between Americans and their leaders. The **anti war movement** grew and began protesting more loudly. In March United States soldiers killed nearly 500 unarmed women, children, and old people in the **Mai Lai Massacre**. President Johnson decided not to run for reelection, which shocked the nation. **Robert Kennedy**, John's brother, decided to run for president. He was youthful and gave hope to many people. In April, **Martin Luther King Jr.** was **assassinated**, **riots** rocked over thirty cities. In June Robert Kennedy was assassinated. The **Democratic Convention** to choose a presidential candidate was marred by **violent student protests**. With the Democrats badly divided, the Republican Convention in Miami nominated **Richard Nixon**, who managed to win in November over Vice President Hubert Humphrey. The sixties ended on a higher note as America became the first country to have a **man walk on the moon in July 1969**.

70s

The 1970's marked a time of American **disillusionment**. We had lost a war, continuing **social unrest and protest**, learned that our **government lied** to us, had a **president resign** after being **caught lying**, experienced a major **energy crisis**, had **unemployment** at its highest since the Great Depression, faced a **polluted environment**, and a humiliating **hostage crisis**. From the interesting clothing (bell bottoms and plaid) to its polarizing music (disco) America didn't have much to be proud of at its **bicentennial**. Yes that is very biased.

Richard Nixon was elected as president largely due to his promise to achieve **peace with honor** in the **Vietnam War**. Nixon championed the **Silent Majority**. He made strides to reduce the number of combat troops in a process known as **Vietnamization**. **Vietnamization** is a policy where the South Vietnamese would be trained to fight for themselves. The war continued to linger until the eve of the next presidential election in 1972. The North Vietnamese continued to use a supply route called the **Ho Chi Minh Trail**, named after the leader of North Vietnam, the trail ran through the neutral countries of **Laos** and **Cambodia**. **Nixon** ordered the **secret bombing** of these two neutral countries. When the public learned of this widening of the war, massive protests broke out. On **Kent State** and **Jackson State** Universities, **National Guardsmen** shot and killed protesting students. Prior to the 1972 election Nixon proclaimed that **peace is at hand**. The ploy worked and he won a sweeping election. The **Paris Peace Accords** ended U.S. involvement in the war in January 1973. The total number of Americans killed was over 58,000. In 1975 the North Vietnamese defeated the South and **Vietnam** became a **united communist nation**. The U.S. normalized relations with them in 1994. (image: Richard Nixon, cnn.com)



In 1973 the congress reasserted its authority to make war with the **War Powers Act**. This law limits the president's ability to involve United States troops for longer than three months without congressional approval. What the **Gulf of Tonkin Resolution** allowed (during LBJ's term), the **War Powers Act** took away... **Nixon** was a skilled foreign policy negotiator. He played tensions between the **Soviets** and **China** perfectly. He visited both countries and softened the cold war in a policy known as **détente**, or a relaxation of tensions.

The **1972 election** would prove to be the end for Nixon. He was always paranoid and power hungry, he kept an **enemies list** with Bill Cosby and hundreds of other people on it. People working for Nixon's reelection campaign were caught breaking into the **Democratic Party National headquarters** in the **Watergate** building. The Watergate Scandal would eventually bring Nixon down. Congress and the American People wanted to know "What did the President know and when did he know it?" about the break in. Eventually, it was learned that Nixon ordered a cover up of the Watergate affair. Under the threat of **impeachment**, **Nixon resigned**. The most baffling issue was that Nixon won the election by the widest margin in the 20th Century, it was unnecessary to break into Watergate! Unfortunately, this sad event just deepened the public mistrust of the government. **Gerald Ford** took over as vice president when Nixon's vice president went to jail in a bribery scam. He then became president. He pardoned Nixon at the outset of his term, causing many people to distrust him. He was defeated by **Jimmy Carter** in the **1976 presidential election**.



Our support for **Israel** in its wars with its oil rich **Muslim** neighbors would have dramatic repercussions. The **Organization of Oil Producing Countries (O.P.E.C.)** would tighten the supply of oil, causing energy prices, including gas, to soar. The **energy crisis** was coupled with a slow down in the economy where **unemployment** would reach its highest levels since the Great Depression. None of the three presidents during the decade could solve the energy problem or the persistent, stubborn **stagflation**. (image: pumps closed during energy crisis, 1970s, history.com)

The 1970's included a struggle for equality of many different groups. They were encouraged by the progress of the 1960's **Civil Rights Movement**. **Hispanic Americans** and **Native Americans** won concessions from businesses and congress. The largest group to push for an **Equal Rights Amendment (ERA)** was women. They organized the **National Organization of Women (NOW)** to push for equal rights in the workplace. Women's rights activists got a boost from the Supreme Court case of **Roe v. Wade** in which abortion was legalized. The 1970's also experienced an environmental awareness, spurred by the book **Silent Spring** by **Rachael Carson**. The **environmentalists** pushed for more regulation on business pollution. The first **earth day** was celebrated in 1970.

President Carter handed the **Panama Canal** back to the Panamanians. He also brokered an historic peace agreement between **Israel** and **Egypt** called the **Camp David Accords**. He supported the **Afghanistan** rebels against the **Soviet invasion**. This invasion would devastate the **Afghanistan** allowing terrorist groups to operate with impunity. The ten year long invasion would also destroy the Soviet economy, eventually helping to topple the country. The biggest crisis he faced was that Iran had taken 50 American Embassy workers hostage. The **Iran Hostage Crisis** would lead to his defeat for reelection. The hostages were released on inauguration day 1980, after 444 days in captivity.... The same day we "got Gipper!"