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THE AGE OF CONTAINMENT, 1946–1953

CHAPTER OUTLINE

- Creating a National Security State, 1945–1949
- The Era of the Korean War, 1949–1952
- Pursuing National Security at Home
- Postwar Social-Economic Policymaking
- Signs of a Changing Culture
- The Election of 1952

THE SECOND WORLD WAR, popularly portrayed as a struggle to preserve the “American way of life,” ended up transforming it. The fight against fascism propelled foreign-policy issues to the forefront of American politics, and postwar tensions kept them there. As combat operations gave way to friction between the United States and the Soviet Union, U.S. leaders overhauled military strategy. They claimed broad powers for the executive branch and called for a global stand against communism. The effort to shore up “national security” soon translated into an ever-larger military establishment and an economic system that could supply its needs.

At home, debate over increased governmental power generated immediate controversy. Wartime production, overseen by government bureaucracies in Washington, had finally ended the economic downturn of the 1930s. Should Washington help organize a postwar economy that satisfied household as well as military consumption? Should a more powerful and active government in Washington assist movements seeking greater equality? Could such a government limit security threats at home without endangering liberty? Questions such as these enlivened, and embittered, public debate in the aftermath of the Second World War.

CREATING A NATIONAL SECURITY STATE, 1945–1949

The wartime alliance between the United States and the Soviet Union proved little more than a brief marriage of convenience. Defeating the Axis had forced the two nations to cooperate, but collaboration began unraveling even before war’s end. A **Cold War** between the United States and the Soviet Union would feature mutual

CHRONOLOGY

1946	Employment Act passed ♦ Republicans gain control of Congress
1947	Truman Doctrine announced ♦ George Kennan's "Mr. X" article published ♦ National Security Act passed ♦ Marshall Plan proposed ♦ Taft-Hartley Act passed
1948	Marshall Plan adopted ♦ Berlin Airlift begins ♦ Truman wins reelection
1949	NATO established ♦ Soviet Union explodes atomic device ♦ Truman unveils his Fair Deal
1950	NSC-68 adopted ♦ Korean War begins
1951	Truman removes General MacArthur as commander in Korea ♦ <i>Dennis</i> decision in Supreme Court
1952	National Security Agency (NSA) created ♦ Republican Dwight Eisenhower elected president

suspicion and massive military buildup but few direct confrontations between the two superpowers.

Onset of the Cold War

Historians have dissected the onset of the Cold War from different perspectives. A familiar view focuses on Soviet expansionism, stressing a historically rooted appetite for new territory, an ideological zeal to spread communism, or some interplay between the two. According to this interpretation, the United States needed to adopt firm, anti-Soviet policies. Other historians—generally called **revisionists**—see the Soviet Union's desire to secure its borders as an understandable response to the invasion of its territory during both world wars. The United States, in this view, should have tried to reassure the Soviet Union (USSR), pursuing conciliatory measures instead of ones that intensified Soviet fears. Still other scholars maintain that assigning blame obscures how **clashing interests and differing political cultures made postwar conflict between the two superpowers unavoidable**.

Almost every view of the Cold War assigns the presidential administration of Harry Truman a central role. Truman initially hoped to bargain productively with the Soviet Union and its premier, Joseph Stalin. As differences between the former allies sharpened, however, Truman came to distrust Stalin and listen to hardline, anti-Soviet advisers.

The atomic bomb became an important source of friction. At the Potsdam Conference of July 1945, Truman had casually told Stalin, without mentioning the bomb, about a new U.S. weapon of "unusual destructive force." Well informed by Soviet intelligence operations about the Manhattan Project, **Stalin calmly advised Truman to make "good use" of this weapon**. Stalin also ordered Soviet scientists, with far less calm, to intensify their nuclear weapons program. Truman likely hoped that the bomb would scare the Soviets—and it did. Historians debate whether it frightened Moscow into more cautious behavior or made it a more aggressive Cold War adversary.

As atomic warfare against Japan gave way to atomic diplomacy with the Soviet Union, U.S. leaders differed over how to proceed. One group, recognizing the Soviets would soon possess atomic weapons, urged Truman to share technology with the USSR in hopes of forestalling a future arms race. Hardliners, fearing Soviet intentions and underestimating their nuclear knowledge, rejected this approach.

In 1946 Truman authorized Bernard Baruch, his special representative at the United Nations, to explore ways of controlling atomic power. The **Baruch Plan** proposed that the United States abandon its atomic weapons if the USSR met certain conditions. These included **the Soviets agreeing to outside monitoring of their weapons program** and surrendering their veto power in the UN on atomic issues. Soviet leaders, after dismissing the Baruch Plan, counter-proposed that the United States destroy its atomic weapons as the first step toward any bargain. The United States rejected this idea. Both nations used the deadlock to justify a stepped-up arms race.

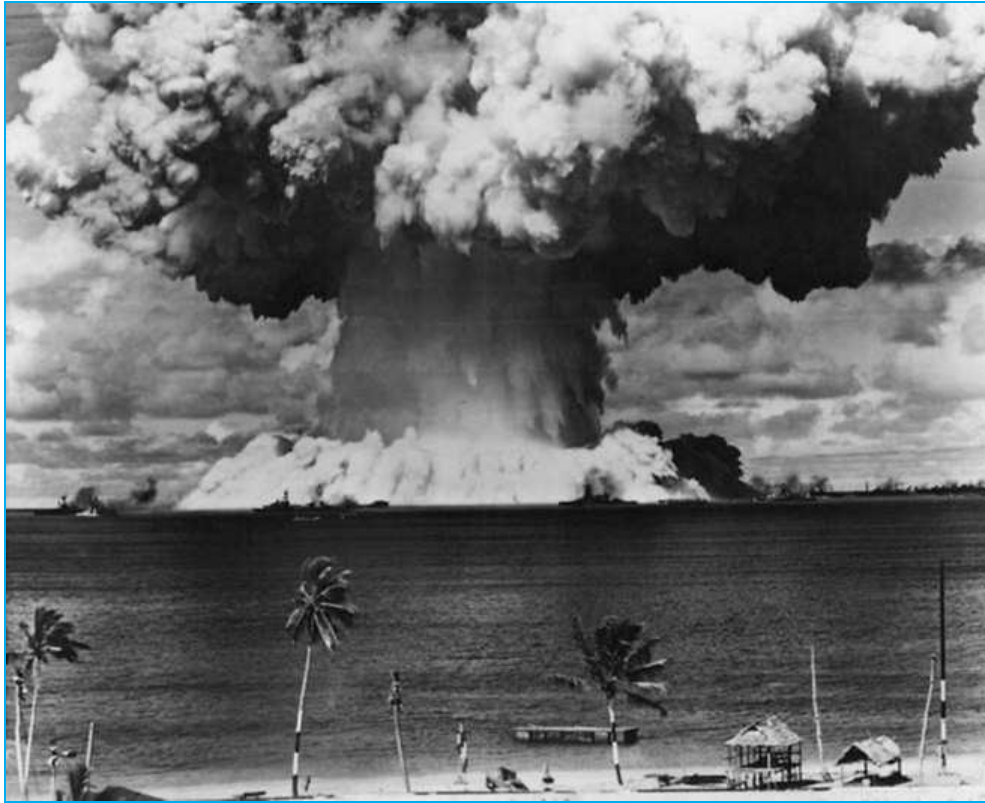
Other sources of friction involved U.S. loan policy and Soviet domination of Eastern Europe. **Truman ended Lend-Lease** assistance to the Soviet Union at the end of the war and linked any new loans for postwar reconstruction to Soviet cooperation with the United States over the future of Europe. This linkage strategy failed. Lack of capital and suspicions about the intentions of the United States and its allies provided the Soviets with excuses for their own hard-line stance. A repressive Soviet sphere of influence, **which Stalin called defensive and Truman labeled expansionist, spread over Eastern Europe.** By 1946, the former allies seemed ready to become bitter adversaries. Early that year, **Winston Churchill** famously declared that an “**Iron Curtain**,” with free nations on one side and communist ones on the other, had “descended across Europe.” The communist countries to the East, under the control of the Soviet Union, threatened the security of Western Europe, the British leader proclaimed.

Truman agreed and pledged to stop any communist aggression. His anticommunist initiatives, in both foreign and domestic affairs, extended the reach and power of the executive branch.

The Truman Doctrine and Containment Abroad

In March 1947, the president announced what soon became known as **the Truman Doctrine** when speaking to Congress about a civil war in Greece, where communist-led insurgents threatened to topple a pro-Western government. In private, London had informed Washington that it lacked the economic and military resources to act in Greece, long within Great Britain’s sphere of influence. Truman’s advisers feared a leftist victory in Greece would expose Turkey, a nation considered critical to the U.S. strategic position, to Soviet expansionism. In publically justifying **U.S. aid to Greece and Turkey**, Truman asserted that U.S. security interests now spanned the globe and that the fate of “free peoples” everywhere hung in the balance. Unless the United States aided people “resisting attempted subversion by armed minorities or by outside pressures,” totalitarian communism would spread and ultimately threaten the United States.

The Truman Doctrine’s global vision of national security encountered some skepticism. Henry Wallace, the most visible Democratic critic, chided Truman for exaggerating the Soviet threat and urged a more conciliatory approach toward Moscow. Conservative Republicans, though fervently anti-communist, looked with suspicion at the increase in presidential power and the vast expenditures that implementing the Truman Doctrine would seemingly entail. If Truman wanted broad support for his



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Testing the Atomic Bomb at Bikini Atoll. *This atomic test, one of 23 detonations at Bikini Atoll in the Marshall Islands during the late 1940s, raised a column of water 5,000 feet high. Although Bikini islanders were evacuated from the blast sites, the radiation still affected nearby people, including U.S. service personnel, and the area's ecology for years to come. As nuclear-related imagery spread through Cold War culture, new "bikini" swimsuits for "bombshell" women became a fashion rage.*

position, Republican Senator Arthur Vandenberg had already advised, he should "scare hell" out of people, something Truman proved quite willing to do when justifying his new doctrine. With votes from Republicans and Democrats, the president gained Congressional approval for \$400 million in assistance to Greece and Turkey, most of it for military aid, in the spring of 1947. This vote signaled broad, bipartisan support for a national security policy that came to be called **containment**.

The term *containment* first appeared in a 1947 article in the journal *Foreign Affairs* by George Kennan, the State Department's premier Soviet expert. Writing under the pseudonym "X," Kennan argued that the "main element" in U.S. policy "must be that of a long-term, patient but firm and vigilant containment of Russian expansive tendencies." The measured and limited containment policy, which Kennan later claimed he had outlined in this article, soon became associated with the urgent tone and expansive approach of the Truman Doctrine.

Containment thus became a catchphrase for a global, anticommunist national security policy. As popularly articulated, containment linked all leftist insurgencies, wherever they occurred, to a totalitarian movement controlled from Moscow that directly threatened American security. Even a small gain for the Soviets in one part of the world could encourage communist aggression elsewhere. Although foreign policy debates included sharp disagreements over precisely how to pursue

containment, most American leaders came to support an activist, anticommunist foreign policy that spanned the globe.

Truman's Loyalty Program and Containment at Home

Nine days after proclaiming the Truman Doctrine, the president issued Executive Order 9835. It authorized a system of government loyalty boards empowered to gather evidence in order to determine if there were “reasonable grounds” for concluding that a federal employee belonged to a subversive organization or espoused ideas that might endanger national security. Persons found to pose a “security risk” would lose their government jobs. The Truman administration also empowered the Justice Department to identify political organizations it deemed subversive and place them on a new Attorney General’s List. The Loyalty Program, partly intended to show that Truman’s administration considered communism a serious domestic threat, suggested that containing communist activities at home would require the type of aggressive measures being adopted overseas.

The Truman administration thus embarked on what became a controversial approach to containing communism, including Soviet espionage, at home. Although few people ever doubted that the Soviets were conducting spy operations inside the United States, there has long been sharp disagreement over their scope and effectiveness. Such debates now take place in light of recently declassified evidence from Soviet and U.S. surveillance files which reveal that both nations conducted a wide range of intelligence activity. By 1943, a U.S. Army unit had begun intercepting transmissions between Moscow and the United States. Collected as the VENONA files and finally released in 1995, these intercepted messages show that the Soviet Union had helped finance America’s Communist Party, placed informants in governmental agencies, and obtained secret information about U.S. atomic work. Uncovering Soviet espionage, in short, was a legitimate objective. Historians remain divided, however, over the reliability and relevance of specific pieces of the evidence collected by the VENONA project—and also over how much of the intercepted information became immediately available to the Truman administration.

There is little doubt, though, that Truman’s loyalty policy worried a diverse group of critics. The president defended the program by claiming that the harmful potential from a relatively few security risks demanded a response unprecedented in peacetime. Truman’s position, however, angered more fervent anticommunists, particularly Republicans, who accused the president of doing too little to fight subversion at home. Civil libertarians, in contrast, charged Truman with whipping up fear about communist activity that far exceeded any actual threat. They called for a carefully targeted approach. Internal security policy, for example, needed to treat an atomic scientist with links to the Soviet Union differently from an outspoken clerical worker in a non-sensitive governmental position.

The National Security Act, the Marshall Plan, and the Berlin Crisis

Shaking off criticism, the Truman administration continued to extend its containment initiative. It secured congressional approval of the National Security Act of 1947, which created several new government bureaucracies. The old Navy and War Departments would become transformed, by 1949, into a new Department of Defense. An entirely new addition to the executive

branch, the National Security Council, obtained broad authority over planning the new containment policy. The Air Force became a separate service equal to the Army and Navy. The National Security Act also created the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) to gather information about communist threats and conduct covert activities outside the United States.

The CIA quickly became the most flexible arm of this new national security apparatus. A series of secret presidential directives expanded the CIA's role, while its activities and budget remained shrouded from public scrutiny. Soon, the CIA's covert operations crisscrossed the globe. CIA operatives cultivated ties with anti-Soviet groups in Eastern Europe and within the Soviet Union. The agency helped finance pro-U.S. labor unions in Western Europe to curtail the influence of leftist organizations. It orchestrated covert campaigns to prevent the Italian Communist Party from winning an electoral victory in 1948 and to bolster anticommunist political parties in France, Japan, and elsewhere.

The Truman administration also linked economic initiatives in Western Europe to its overall containment policy. Fearing that Europe's economic problems might create opportunities for local communist movements, Secretary of State General George C. Marshall sought to strengthen the region's economies. Under his 1947 proposal, known as the European Recovery Program or simply the Marshall Plan, U.S. funds would help postwar governments in Europe to coordinate programs of economic reconstruction. Although invited to participate, the Soviet Union quickly denounced the Marshall Plan as the economic component of a larger U.S. effort to dominate all of Europe.

The Marshall Plan, enacted by Congress in early 1948, ultimately achieved the hopes of its architects. It helped brighten the economic picture in Western Europe, where industrial production rebounded. Improved standards of living enhanced political stability and helped undercut the appeal of leftist movements. Between 1946 and 1951, the United States provided nearly \$13 billion in assistance to 17 Western European nations. When critics in the United States condemned the Marshall Plan as an expensive "giveaway" scheme, supporters stressed how it would expand both overseas markets and investment opportunities for American businesses. They also hailed it for contributing to the larger containment strategy for safeguarding national security.

While lobbying for the Marshall Plan, the Truman administration also sought to expand U.S. military forces. The Soviet Union helped install a pro-Moscow government in Czechoslovakia in early 1948, and some U.S. officials warned of a Soviet military strike into Western Europe. Truman declared that "moral God-fearing peoples ... must save the world from Atheism" and Soviet totalitarianism. As a brief war scare gripped Washington, national security planners successfully implored Congress to increase defense spending, largely for new aircraft, and reinstate a draft system for the military.

Policymakers in the United States viewed the future of Germany, initially divided into four zones of occupation, as crucial to the security of Western Europe. In June 1948, the United States, Great Britain, and France announced a program of currency reform as the first step toward integrating their separate sectors into a Federal Republic of Germany or West Germany. Having been invaded by German forces in both world wars, however, the Soviet Union worried about Germany again becoming an economic power. Hoping to sidetrack Western plans for strengthening Germany, the Soviets cut off all highways, railroads, and water routes into West Berlin, which was located within their zone of military occupation.

This **Berlin Blockade** failed. American and British aircraft, in what became known as the **Berlin Airlift**, delivered virtually all of the items West Berliners needed to continue their daily routines. Truman, hinting at a military response, dispatched to Great Britain two squadrons of B-29 bombers, reportedly able to bring atomic bombs within reach of Soviet territory. Unable to seal off West Berlin, Stalin abandoned his blockade in May 1949. The Soviets then created the German Democratic Republic, or East Germany, out of their military sector. **West Berlin, which survived as an anticommunist enclave inside East Germany, would remain a focus of Cold War tensions for years to come.**

The Election of 1948

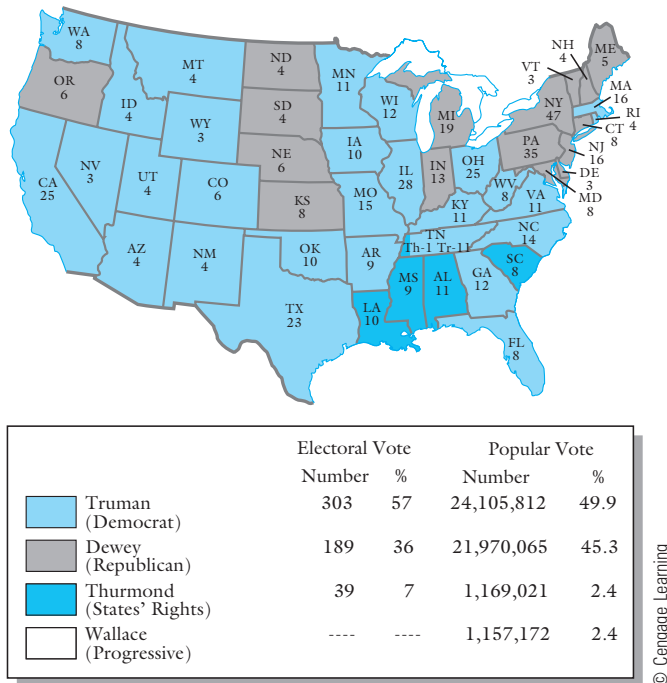
Meanwhile, national security issues helped Harry Truman win the 1948 presidential election. For several years, the president had been losing the support among those Democrats—led by his secretary of commerce, Henry A. Wallace—who considered Truman’s containment policies overly confrontational. When Wallace continued to criticize these initiatives, the president had ousted him from the cabinet. Two months later, in the off-year national elections of November 1946, voters had given the Republicans control of Congress for the first time since 1928. Although Truman’s political fortunes had improved somewhat by late 1947, few political handicappers liked his chances in 1948.

Truman faced three other presidential hopefuls. **Challenged from the left by a new Progressive Party, which nominated Wallace, and from the right by Thomas E. Dewey, the Republican nominee, and J. Strom Thurmond, the pro-segregationist candidate of the new States’ Rights Party, or Dixiecrats, the president waged a vigorous campaign.** Only months before Election Day, Truman called the GOP-controlled Congress into special session and presented it with a list of domestic programs, including a plan for national health care, abhorrent to most Republicans. Then he denounced “that do-nothing, good-for-nothing, worst Congress” for failing to enact his agenda.



AP Images/Byron Rollins

Dewey Defeats Truman? *U.S. President Harry S. Truman holds up an Election Day edition of the Chicago Daily Tribune, which mistakenly announced “Dewey Defeats Truman” in the 1948 presidential election. The president told well-wishers, “That is one for the books!”*



MAP 27.1 Presidential Election, 1948

This electoral map helps show how, in this close election, Truman won the presidency with less than 50 percent of the popular vote.

Truman's victory now seems less surprising to historians than it had to analysts in 1948. Despite the GOP's electoral successes in 1946, the Democratic Party was hardly enfeebled. Democratic congressional candidates identifying with the legacy of Franklin Roosevelt, rather than with the presidency of his successor, generally polled more votes in their districts than did Truman in 1948. Loyalty to the memory of Roosevelt and his New Deal programs helped bring the Democrats their victory.

After Truman endorsed his party's call for new civil rights measures, the president survived the revolt of the Dixiecrats. Their presidential candidate, South Carolina's Thurmond, denounced Truman for backing a "civil wrongs" program and assailed the national Democratic Party for having fallen under the control of "radicals, subversives, and reds." Although the Dixiecrat movement portended a political shift among Southern whites, who had voted overwhelmingly Democratic since the late 19th century, Truman carried all but four states of the old Confederacy in 1948.

Truman's staunch anticommunism helped bury Henry Wallace's challenge. Hampered by his Progressive Party's refusal to reject support from the U.S. Communist Party, Wallace received less than 3 percent of the popular tally and no electoral votes. The 1948 election suggested a blueprint for winning elections to come: Successful presidential candidates must never appear "soft" on national security issues.

THE ERA OF THE KOREAN WAR, 1949–1952

To implement his containment policy, Truman continued to mobilize the nation's economic and military resources. A series of Cold War crises in 1949 and the outbreak of war on the Korean peninsula in 1950, which heightened anticommunist fervor in the United States, boosted support for funding a vastly expanded national security state.

NATO, China, and the Bomb

In April 1949, the United States, Canada, and 10 European nations formed the **North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)**. They pledged that an attack against one nation would automatically be treated as if a strike against all. Republican Senator Robert Taft called NATO a provocation to the Soviet Union, an “entangling alliance” in violation of settled foreign policy principles, and a threat to Congress’s constitutional power to declare war. Still, the NATO concept prevailed, and the United States would continue to pursue its containment policy in Europe through this important “mutual defense” pact.

Meanwhile, events in China heightened Cold War tensions. Although the United States had extended Jiang Jieshi’s struggling Nationalist government billions in military aid and economic assistance, Jiang’s forces had steadily lost ground to those of Mao Zedong’s communist movement. Mao pledged to transform China into a major world power. Experienced U.S. diplomats privately predicted that incompetence and corruption would speed Jiang’s downfall, but the Truman administration publicly portrayed Jiang as the respected leader of an embattled but “free” China.

In 1949, when Mao’s armies forced Jiang off the mainland to the nearby island of Formosa (Taiwan), many Americans wondered how communist forces could have triumphed. Financed by conservative business leaders, the powerful “China lobby” blamed Truman and his new secretary of state, Dean Acheson, for having “lost” China to communism. This domestic political pressure and new international tensions quickly convinced the Truman administration to embrace Jiang’s fledgling government on Taiwan and to refuse diplomatic recognition for Mao’s “Red China.”

The communist threat grew more alarming when, in 1949, the Soviets exploded a crude atomic device, marking the end of the U.S. monopoly. Besieged by critics who saw recent history marked by Soviet gains and U.S. losses, Truman authorized U.S. scientists to develop a deadly new weapon, the hydrogen or “Super” bomb. “It is part of my responsibility as Commander-in-Chief to see to it that our country is able to defend itself against any possible aggressor,” Truman declared.

NSC-68 and the Korean War

The Truman administration also reviewed its core assumptions about foreign policy. The task of coordinating this review fell to Paul Nitze, a hardliner who shaped a top-secret policy paper, NSC-68 (National Security Council Document 68). It opened with a dramatic account of a global clash between “freedom,” spread by U.S. power, and “slavery,” promoted by the Soviet Union, the center of an international communist movement. Despairing of fruitful negotiations with the Soviets, NSC-68 urged a dramatic upgrade of U.S. national security capabilities. The United States should “find every weak spot in the enemy’s armor” and “hit him with anything that comes to hand,” one of NSC-68’s architects insisted. NSC-68 thus endorsed covert action, economic pressure, propaganda campaigns, and a massive military buildup. Because Americans might oppose larger military spending and budget deficits, the report cautioned, U.S. actions should be labeled as “defensive” and spending increases presented as a stimulus to the economy rather than as a drain on national resources. The details of NSC-68 remained classified until 1975, but the Truman administration immediately invoked its assumptions when framing specific policies and shaping public opinion.

The alarmist tone of NSC-68 seemed to be confirmed in June 1950 when communist North Korea invaded South Korea. Truman characterized the invasion, which U.S.



MAP 27.2 Divided Germany and the NATO Alliance

This map shows the geopolitics of the Cold War. Which countries aligned with the United States through NATO? Which aligned with the Soviet Union through the Warsaw Pact? Note how Berlin became a divided city, even though it was located within East Germany.

intelligence agencies had failed to anticipate, as a simple case of Soviet-inspired aggression and invoked the rhetoric of containment: “If aggression is successful in Korea, we can expect it to spread through Asia and Europe to this hemisphere,” the president declared. The State Department characterized the relationship between the Soviet Union and North Korea as resembling “that between Walt Disney and Donald Duck.”

The Korean situation, however, defied a one-dimensional analysis. Japanese military forces had occupied Korea between 1905 and 1945, and after Japan’s defeat in the Second World War, Koreans had expected it to reemerge as one independent

nation. Instead, the Soviet and U.S. zones of occupation resulting from the war became the basis for two separate states, artificially **divided at the 38th parallel**. The Soviet Union backed a communist government in North Korea, headed by the dictatorial **Kim Il-sung**. The United States supported **Syngman Rhee**, the leader of an unsteady and autocratic, but anticommunist, government in South Korea.

On June 25, 1950, after consulting with Soviet and Chinese leaders and receiving their tacit approval, Kim Il-sung moved troops across the 38th parallel in an attempt to reunify Korea. Rhee appealed to the United States for military assistance, and Truman responded without consulting Congress.

Korea quickly escalated into an international conflict, the **Korean War**. The Soviets, unaware of the details of Kim's plans, were boycotting the UN when North Korea's military action began and could not veto a **U.S. proposal to send a UN peacekeeping force to Korea**. Acting under UN auspices, the United States rushed assistance to Rhee, who moved to quell dissent in the South as well as to repel the armies of the North.

The United States confronted several options in Korea. It could simply contain communism by driving North Korea's forces back across the 38th parallel. It could risk a wider war and seek to reunify Korea under Rhee's leadership. This option seemed somewhat fanciful when North Korean forces pushed rapidly southward. Within three months, they captured Seoul, the capital of South Korea, and approached the southern tip of the Korean Peninsula. UN troops, most of them from the United States, seemed initially unprepared. American firepower, however, gradually took its toll on North Korea's elite troops and on the untrained recruits sent to replace them.

General Douglas MacArthur, the U.S. Army commander who led UN forces in Korea, then devised a plan that most other strategists considered crazy: an amphibious landing behind enemy lines. Those stunned by his audacious proposal were even more astounded by its results. On September 15, 1950, General MacArthur's troops landed at **Inchon**, suffered minimal casualties, and quickly recaptured Seoul.

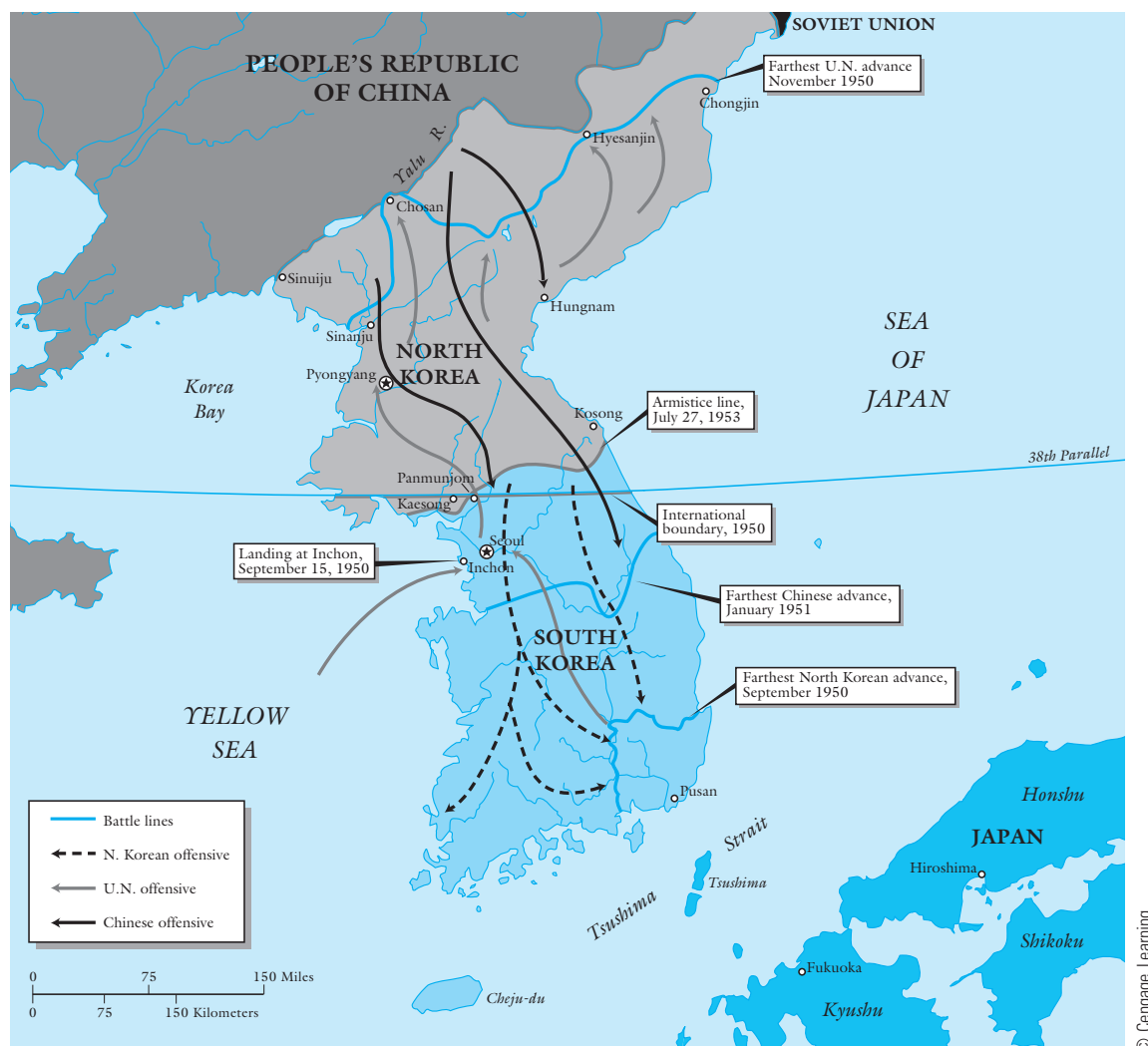
The shifting tide of battle devastated Korea. The Korean War is called a "limited" war because it never spread off the Korean Peninsula or involved nuclear weapons, but its impact was hardly narrow. Intense bombing preceded every military move, and neither side seemed particularly concerned about civilian casualties. The number of estimated dead and wounded reached perhaps one tenth of North and South Korea's combined population. While rival armies battled for Seoul, the city became rubble, with only the capitol building and a train station left standing.

As MacArthur's troops drove northward, Truman faced a crucial decision. Emboldened by success, MacArthur urged moving beyond containment to an all-out war of "liberation" and reunification. Other U.S. military strategists warned that China would retaliate if MacArthur's forces approached its border. Truman did allow the general to carry the war into the North but cautioned against provoking intervention by China or the Soviet Union.

When MacArthur pushed near to the Chinese–Korean border, however, China sent at least 400,000 troops into North Korea and forced MacArthur back across the 38th parallel. China's Mao Zedong envisioned helping unite Korea under communist control. **With China now in the war and MacArthur seeking authority to use nuclear weapons**, the Truman administration hastily reassessed U.S. priorities. "I could not bring myself to order the slaughter of 25,000,000 non-combatants" by using the atomic bomb, the president later claimed. Although Truman

maintained a “limited” war, MacArthur’s troops eventually regrouped and regained the initiative. As they moved back northward, Truman ordered the general to negotiate a truce at the 38th parallel. MacArthur, challenging the president, argued for a victory over North Korea—and over China, too. Truman thereupon relieved MacArthur of his command in April 1951. The Constitution made military officers subordinate to the president, the nation’s commander in chief, Truman declared.

MacArthur returned to the United States a war hero. Initial polls reported strong opposition to Truman’s dumping the popular general. Truman’s approval ratings dipped under 30 percent. Yet during Senate hearings on MacArthur’s dismissal, other strategists dismissed his scenario for Korea as the “wrong war in the wrong place.” Expanding and securing American power elsewhere around the world, particularly in Europe, should remain the central objective of U.S. policy. This broader goal dictated merely the containment, not a rollback, of communism in Korea, they successfully argued. MacArthur’s once luminous image, along with his political ambitions, soon faded.



MAP 27.3 Korean War

This map shows the ebb and flow of military action and the armistice line that still divides the two Koreas. Note the advances made first by North Korean and then by UN (United States-led) troops.

Truman still needed to secure a peace settlement for Korea. As negotiations stalled, another military hero, Dwight Eisenhower, the Republican candidate for president in 1952, promised to go to Korea if elected and accelerate the peace process. Harry Truman would leave office in 1953 without formally ending the Korean War.

Korea and Containment

Meanwhile, the Korean War, by seeming to justify a global anticommunist stance, helped the Truman administration implement the broad vision of NSC-68. The White House formulated plans to rearm West Germany, scarcely five years after the defeat of the Third Reich, and to expand NATO's military forces throughout Western Europe. Its proposal for direct military aid to Latin American governments, which had been rejected in the past, now slid through Congress. In the Philippines, the United States stepped up military and CIA assistance to the government of Ramon Magsaysay so it could suppress the leftist Hukbalahap (or Huk) movement. Here, Edward Lansdale, America's "super spy," played a key role in advising Magsaysay. In 1951, Washington finally signed a formal peace treaty with Japan and secured a security pact that granted the United States a sprawling military base on the island of Okinawa. The United States acquired similar bases in the Middle East, bolstering its strategic position in that oil-rich area. The ANZUS mutual defense pact of 1952 linked the United States to Australia and New Zealand.

In addition, Truman greatly expanded economic assistance for France's effort to retain its colonial possession in Indochina against the challenge from communist Ho Chi Minh's Democratic Republic of Vietnam. Policymakers in Washington had hardly favored a communist-led government in Indochina but worries about identifying the United States too closely with French colonialism in Southeast Asia had initially limited U.S. support for France's military effort against Ho's forces. Following the outbreak of the Korean conflict, however, the Truman administration elevated preventing a communist victory in Indochina into an important policy goal.

Warning of potential communist gains, U.S. policymakers became increasingly insistent about opposing overseas movements that seemed to lean toward the political left. The U.S. occupation government in Japan, for example, restricted the activities of labor unions, suspended an antitrust program that American officials had earlier implemented, and barred communists from posts in Japan's government and universities. As in Germany, the United States tried to contain communism elsewhere by strengthening pro-U.S. elites and by promoting economic growth through marketplace rather than state-directed mechanisms.

Containment considerations also prompted the United States to ally with South Africa. In 1949 the all-white (and militantly anticommunist) Nationalist Party instituted a legal-social system called apartheid, based on elaborate rules of racial separation and subordination of blacks. Some State Department officials warned that a close relationship with South Africa, by implying support for apartheid, would damage America's international reputation, but the Truman administration nonetheless supported South Africa's white supremacist regime.

Most importantly, the elaboration of containment during the Korean War era featured the military buildup proposed in NSC-68. When the Truman administration asked for a dramatic increase in U.S. military capacities, congressional Republicans complained but most ultimately joined Democrats in voting the needed funding. By

early 1953, U.S. military production totaled seven times what it had been before the North Korean attack. The United States also continued to expand its worldwide system of military bases. When later commenting on the importance of the Korean War, Dean Acheson reportedly claimed that “Korea came along and saved” the Truman administration’s plans for implementing NSC-68.

This expanded containment policy, shaped in line with NSC-68, included more than military moves. Throughout the world, economic pressure, CIA covert activities, and propaganda campaigns helped implement containment objectives. Truman’s global “Campaign of Truth,” a sustained informational and psychological offensive, countered Soviet propaganda with mass-mediated imagery and cultural exchanges sponsored by Washington. A rhetoric organized around the concept of “national defense” took hold: the Defense Department replaced the War Department, and the new phrase *national security* supplanted the older, more limited language of gauging the best *national interest*.

NSC-68, in sum, provided a blueprint for how the United States, in the name of containment and national security, could reinvent itself as a global superpower. The United States extended its reach into Iran, Greece, and Turkey, all once inside Britain’s sphere of influence; initiated the Marshall Plan and NATO; transformed former enemies—Italy, Germany, and Japan—into anti-Soviet bulwarks; assumed control of hundreds of Pacific islands; launched research to develop the H-bomb; winked at apartheid to win an anticommunist ally in South Africa; solidified its sphere of influence in Latin America; and acquired military bases around the world. NSC-68 became a master plan for using military, economic, and covert action to advance a worldwide national security policy.

While the Truman administration fortified strategic positions overseas, its national security policies produced what the historian Michael Sherry has called “the militarization of American life.” By 1951, two-thirds of the federal budget went for military-related spending. With continued bipartisan support from Congress, the White House carried out a massive buildup that brought the increasing merger between military and economic policymaking. Congress granted a new Atomic Energy Commission broad authority to oversee development of a U.S. nuclear power industry. To develop ideas for advanced weaponry and the new policy initiatives that a global strategy of national security implied, Congress created a think tank called RAND, an acronym for Research and Development. Cost-conscious members of Congress complained about expensive defense contracts, but the prospect of these arrangements creating jobs in their home districts helped mute opposition.

PURSuing NATIONAL SECURITY AT HOME

Although containment abroad generally gained bipartisan support, Harry Truman’s programs for containing subversive influences at home encountered bitter, sustained opposition. Civil libertarians continued to complain about “witch hunts” against people who merely expressed dissent on prevailing policies. Militant anticommunists, taking their cue from Truman’s own rhetoric, leveled increasingly alarming allegations about internal communist subversion being left unchecked. Even dedicated anticommunists began to worry that exaggerated charges and wild goose chases after unlikely subversives harmed the effort to identify authentic Soviet agents. The search for supposed subversives eventually touched many areas of postwar life.

Anticommunism and the U.S. Labor Movement

The politics of anticommunism helped unsettle the U.S. labor movement. After the end of the Second World War, many workers took part in strikes for increased wages and benefits and a greater voice in workplace routines and production decisions. Strikes brought both the auto and the electronics industries to a standstill. In Stamford, Connecticut, and Lancaster, Pennsylvania, general strikes led to massive work stoppages that spread to other cities. After Truman threatened to seize mines and railroads that had been shut down by work stoppages and to order strikers back to work, labor militancy began to subside.

In 1947 a Republican-controlled Congress effectively tapped anticommunist sentiment to help pass the Labor-Management Relations Act, popularly known as the **Taft-Hartley Act**. The law negated some gains made by organized labor during the 1930s. It limited a union's power to conduct boycotts, to compel employers to accept "closed shops" in which only union members could be hired, and to continue a strike that the president judged harmful to national security. In addition, the measure required union officials to sign affidavits stating that they did not belong to the Communist Party or any other "subversive" organization. A union that refused to comply was effectively denied protections under national labor laws. Truman vetoed Taft-Hartley, but Congress overrode him. By the end of the Truman era, some type of loyalty-security check had been conducted on about 20 percent of the U.S. workforce, more than 13 million people.

Anticommunism also affected internal union politics and labor-management relations. Some union members had long seen communist organizers as more loyal to the Communist Party than to their own unions or to the nation. Differences over whether to support the Democratic Party or Henry Wallace's Progressive effort in 1948 had also splintered a number of unions. In the years following Truman's victory, the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) expelled 13 unions—a full third of its membership. Meanwhile, many workers found that their political commitments could put their own jobs at risk.

Containing Communism at Home

Anticommunists scrutinized workers in the entertainment industry with special zeal. In 1947, the **House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC)** opened hearings into communist influences in Hollywood. Basking in the glare of newsreel cameras, members of this committee seized on the refusal of ten screenwriters, producers, and directors—all current or former members of the American Communist Party—to testify about political allegiances within the film community. "**The Hollywood Ten**" claimed that the **First Amendment** barred HUAC from scrutinizing their political activities. The federal courts upheld HUAC's investigative powers, however, and the Hollywood Ten eventually went to prison for contempt of Congress.

Meanwhile, heads of the Hollywood studios drew up a "blacklist" of workers, allegedly subversives whom they agreed not to hire. Leaders in other sectors of the entertainment industry, particularly television, adopted a similar policy. The fate of prominent performers dominated media accounts of blacklisting activities, but many anonymous labor union members, who worked behind the scenes in technical and support positions, also lost their source of livelihood.

Soon, many workers in the entertainment field were unable to find jobs unless they agreed to appear as "friendly witnesses" before HUAC or other investigative

committees. They were then asked to provide the names of people they had seen at some “communist meeting” in the increasingly distant past. Some of those called to testify, such as the screenwriter Lillian Hellman, refused to answer any questions. Others, such as the movie director Elia Kazan and the writer Budd Schulberg, cooperated. Decisions over whether or not to “name names” would divide people in the entertainment industry and the labor union movement for decades.

The search for subversives also created anticommunist celebrities. Ronald Reagan, who was president of the Screen Actors Guild and a secret informant for the FBI (identified as “T-10”), testified about communist influence in Hollywood. Richard Nixon, then an obscure member of Congress from California, began his remarkable political ascent in 1948 when Whittaker Chambers, a journalist formerly active in communist circles, came before HUAC. Chambers charged Alger Hiss, a prominent Democrat with a lengthy career in public service, with having been a party member and with passing classified information to Soviet agents during the late 1930s.

The Hiss-Chambers-Nixon affair continues to spark intense controversy. Hiss portrayed himself as the victim of a frame-up. Legal considerations barred an indictment of Hiss for espionage, but the government charged him with perjury for allegedly lying to Congress. Ultimately convicted on two counts, Hiss spent nearly four years in prison. To Nixon and his supporters, the case of Alger Hiss, who had advised Franklin Roosevelt during the Yalta Conference (see Chapter 26), demonstrated how deeply rooted communist subversion had become and how only new political leadership in Washington could uncover it.

In the mid-1990s long-classified documents made newly available revived the Hiss controversy. A few scholars continued to see the Hiss case, like that of the Hollywood Ten, as more hype than substance. **The vast majority, however, concluded that Hiss (along with several other high-ranking government officials) had likely passed information to the Soviets during the 1930s and 1940s.** Historians continue to differ, however, over the precise nature of this material and its value to Moscow.

Meanwhile, the Truman administration pursued its own anticommunist course at home. It dismissed hundreds of federal employees under its loyalty program. Truman’s attorney general, Tom Clark, secretly authorized J. Edgar Hoover, head of the FBI, to compile a list of alleged subversives the government could detain during any national emergency without any legal hearing.

Fear that subversives might immigrate to the United States helped shape several provisions of **the McCarran-Walter Act.** Also known as **The Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952**, this congressional statute authorized the denial of immigrant status to anyone who might compromise national security by bringing dangerous ideas into the country. The law also allowed the deportation of immigrants, even those who had become naturalized citizens, who belonged to organizations on the Attorney General’s List. Calling these measures “un-American,” Truman rejected McCarran-Walter, but Congress overrode his veto.

At the same time, Hoover’s FBI undertook an extensive campaign of surveillance. It compiled confidential dossiers on a wide range of artists and intellectuals suspected of communist ties. Some of its targets, including the writers Ernest Hemingway and John Steinbeck, had no links to the Communist Party. The FBI often singled out prominent African Americans. Its agents kept close tabs, for instance, on civil rights activist Bayard Rustin. Richard Wright (author of the acclaimed novel *Native Son*), W. E. B. Du Bois (a celebrated African American historian),

and Paul Robeson (a well-known entertainer-activist) encountered trouble from the State Department and immigration officials. Their association with the U.S. Communist Party and identification with anti-imperialist and antiracist organizations throughout the world threatened their ability to travel overseas. In addition, suspicions of homosexuality could make people, including the nominally closeted Rustin, targets for governmental surveillance and discrimination.

Targeting Difference

Public focus on homosexual behavior generally increased during the postwar era. During the Second World War, very visible gay and lesbian subcultures had emerged, particularly in larger cities such as New York and San Francisco. After the war, Dr. Alfred Kinsey's research on sexual behavior—his first volume, on male sexuality, appeared in 1948—claimed that homosexuality could be found throughout American life and that many people pursued a wide range of sexual behaviors, from exclusively heterosexual to exclusively homosexual. In 1952, transsexuality hit the headlines when the press revealed that, after a series of “sex-change” operations in Europe, George W. Jorgensen, Jr. had become a “blonde beauty,” Christine Jorgensen.

By this time, a small “homophile” movement had emerged to challenge the most egregious forms of discrimination. Gay men formed the Mattachine Society (in 1950), and lesbians later founded the Daughters of Bilitis, organizations that sought legal protection for the basic constitutional rights of people who were homosexual. They condemned police departments for singling out businesses catering to gays and lesbians when making raids for “disorderly conduct” and the Post Office for banning homosexual publications on the basis of “decency” requirements.

The homophile movement of the 1950s, however, confronted aggressive new efforts to restrict the visibility of homosexuality. The Kinsey Report's implicit claim that homosexuality was simply another form of sexuality, alongside the emergence of new gay and lesbian organizations, helped fuel this campaign. The fact that several founders of the Mattachine Society had also been members of the Communist Party, coupled with the claim that Soviet agents could blackmail homosexuals more easily than heterosexuals, helped link homosexuality with the communist threat to national security. “One homosexual can pollute a Government office,” a U.S. Senate report claimed.

Today, historians of sexuality see a “Lavender Scare” about homosexuality accompanying the “Red Scare” about communism. Popular imagery portrayed both homosexuality and communism as subversive “diseases” that inwardly “sick” people, who seemed outwardly little different than other Americans, could spread throughout the body politic. Suspicion of “sexual deviance” became an acceptable basis for subjecting government employees to loyalty board hearings and, ultimately, denying them the legal and constitutional protections enjoyed by heterosexuals.

The “Great Fear”

The postwar search for subversion unfolded within an atmosphere of anxiety that some cultural historians call the “Great Fear.” Genuine threats, such as the atomic program of the Soviets, helped heighten the impact of spurious claims about communist agents roaming military bases or gay subversives shaping foreign policy. A growing sense of insecurity, in turn, intensified efforts to safeguard national security.

As this sense of fear was settling over U.S. politics, the Justice Department announced the arrests, in 1950, of several members of a spy ring that had seemingly been channeling nuclear secrets to Moscow. Two of the arrested, Julius and Ethel Rosenberg, the parents of two young children and members of the Communist Party, became the central characters in a controversy over atomic espionage.

The Rosenberg spy case became a Cold War melodrama. The couple's trial, the guilty verdicts, the death sentences, the numerous legal appeals, the worldwide protests, and their 1953 executions for having committed espionage, captured media attention. To their supporters, the Rosenbergs (who died maintaining their innocence) had fallen victim to anticommunist hysteria. Federal officials, according to the couple's defenders, seemed primarily interested in sacrificing scapegoats at the altar of the Great Fear. To others, however, solid evidence pointed toward their involvement in an extensive operation, which included the confessed British spy Klaus Fuchs. Documents released after the fall of the Soviet Union in 1989 now clearly confirm Julius Rosenberg's spying activities. Ethel Rosenberg had apparently known about his work, but the evidence of her direct involvement in passing along information to the Soviets remains ambiguous.

The performance of the nation's criminal justice system in cases such as that of the Rosenbergs also helps to complicate the historical picture. Federal prosecutors never moved, for example, against some people who almost certainly were atomic spies. Theodore Hall, a physicist who worked on America's bomb and whose expertise about nuclear matters obviously exceeded that of Julius or Ethel Rosenberg, was among them. Officials may have feared revealing valuable counter-intelligence operations—or, perhaps, illegal surveillance activities. In any case, only the Rosenbergs, of all those who were prosecuted, faced a charge that carried the death penalty.

In addition, historians continue to differ over how well U.S. courts performed during the Great Fear. Did judges adequately balance the protection of national-security concerns with those for civil liberties? During a 1949 prosecution of leaders of the American Communist Party for sedition, the trial judge accepted the Justice Department's argument that the 11 defendants be considered participants in an international conspiracy. Their Marxist ideas and publications, even without any proof of subversive acts, could justify convicting them of sedition against the U.S. government. In contrast, civil libertarians insisted that government prosecutors never showed how Communist Party publications and speeches, by themselves, posed any "clear and present danger" to national security. In this view, *political expression* should enjoy the protection of the First Amendment and only *illegal activity* should be put on trial.

When the convictions of the Communist Party leaders were appealed to the Supreme Court in *Dennis v. U.S.* (1951), a majority of the justices endorsed the view of national security advanced by the Truman administration: The Soviet threat was so serious that pro-communist expression, in the absence of any overt illegal activity, could constitute sedition. Several years later, with the passing of the Great Fear, the Supreme Court would back away from the *Dennis* decision (see Chapter 28).

Meanwhile, the Truman administration continued incurring the ire of more zealous red-hunters. In Congress, Republicans and conservative Democrats denounced Truman's anticommunist initiatives as too limited and passed the Subversive Activities Control Act of 1950. It created a Subversive Activities Control Board (SACB) to oversee the registration of groups allegedly controlled or infiltrated by communists. It barred

communists from working in the defense industry, holding a labor-union office, and acquiring a passport. Unaware of J. Edgar Hoover's secret detention program, Congress also authorized the confinement of alleged subversives during any national emergency.

Truman responded ambiguously to the Subversive Activities Control Act. He vetoed the law, a futile gesture that Congress quickly overrode, but his administration continued to pursue its own loyalty program and to sanction the FBI's covert detention plan, which offered fewer legal safeguards than the one created by Congress. Still, Truman failed to erase doubts about his anticommunist credentials. **Joseph McCarthy**, a Republican senator from Wisconsin, eventually became the Truman administration's most tenacious critic.

Joseph McCarthy

An intelligence officer during the Second World War, McCarthy had entered politics as a battle-tested combat vet, "Tailgunner Joe." Elected to the U.S. Senate in 1946, McCarthy showed little interest in legislative matters, but he emerged as a two-fisted investigator of communist subversion during the height of the Great Fear.

McCarthy became a political celebrity when he claimed, during a 1950 speech in **Wheeling, West Virginia**, to have compiled a list of 205 communists then working in the State Department. Americans rightly feared the future, according to McCarthy, "not because our only powerful potential enemy has sent men to invade our shores, but rather because of the traitorous actions of those who have been treated so well by this Nation." Although McCarthy quickly shrank his number of subversives to 57, he also expanded his attacks. Secretary of State Dean Acheson and his predecessor, General George C. Marshall, soon came into range.

Adept at using political imagery and sexual innuendo, McCarthy linked the Lavender and Red Scares. He portrayed key members of Truman's administration as both overly privileged and insufficiently manly. People like Acheson who had been "born with silver spoons in their mouths" represented effete "enemies from within." McCarthy derided the smartly dressed Acheson as the "Red Dean of fashion" and as the leader of the "lace handkerchief crowd."

Initially, McCarthy seemed unstoppable. He substantiated none of his more sensational claims but lacked neither imagination nor targets. In the summer of 1950 a Senate subcommittee, after examining government files, concluded that McCarthy's charges against the State Department amounted to "the most nefarious campaign of half-truths and untruths in the history of this republic." McCarthy responded that the files had been "raped," and he went after Millard Tydings, the Democratic senator who had chaired the subcommittee. In the November 1950 elections, Tydings went down to defeat, in part because of a fabricated photograph that linked him to communist activities.

Despite McCarthy's erratic course, influential people initially tolerated, even encouraged, him. **Conservative, anti-communist leaders of the Roman Catholic Church embraced McCarthy, himself a Catholic.** Leading Republicans welcomed McCarthy's assaults on their Democratic rivals. Others insisted the senator's commitment to the cause of anticommunism outweighed complaints about his slapdash investigations and overzealous methods. In contrast, critics charged that the senator personified an old form of demagogic "attack politics," and they called his careless, flamboyant style "McCarthyism."

The National Security Constitution and the Structure of Governance

Focusing on the furor over the politics of McCarthyism, however, can obscure fundamental changes in constitutional governance that generated relatively little controversy. Except for the 22nd Amendment, adopted in 1951, which barred presidents from following Franklin Roosevelt's example and being elected to more than two terms, there were no formal modifications to the written Constitution during the era of the Great Fear. But congressional legislation, beginning with the National Security Act of 1947, and several executive orders by the office of the president significantly altered the nation's structure of governance. Scholars now see a new national security framework taking shape during the early postwar years.

The view that the office of the president possessed only limited powers, for example, gave way to the idea that protecting national security justified greatly extending the reach of the executive branch. Truman encountered no constitutional roadblocks when taking the United States into an undeclared war in Korea. Similarly, his desire to strengthen the executive branch's power to gather intelligence bore fruit. In 1952, Truman issued a secret executive order that created the super-secret National Security Agency (NSA). Using sophisticated technology, NSA began collecting any information, from communications networks around the globe, which might affect the nation's safety. Covert eavesdropping on a massive scale became part of the new, partially unwritten national security framework.

The specter of constitutional limitations on presidential power did arise in 1952, however, when Truman ordered his commerce secretary to seize control of the U.S. steel industry in order to prevent a threatened strike. Although Truman could have invoked a 60-day "cooling off" period under the Taft-Hartley Act, he sought to justify his action with a more fundamental, novel, and controversial constitutional claim: The president, as commander-in-chief, possessed extraordinary power whenever emergency action was required to safeguard national security. The steel companies quickly challenged this assertion in court.

When *Youngstown Sheet & Tube Company v. Sawyer* (1952) reached the Supreme Court, three justices who had been nominated by Truman supported his broad claim of executive power. Six others, for differing reasons, rejected Truman's position in this particular instance, but all supported a relatively expansive view of presidential authority whenever national security seemed more clearly at stake. Constitutional scholars would come to see this "Steel Seizure Case," then, as a short-term defeat for Truman but a long-term victory for those who claimed that national security considerations had reshaped the fundamental framework of American governance.

POSTWAR SOCIAL-ECONOMIC POLICYMAKING

Harry Truman embraced Franklin Roosevelt's domestic agenda, and many supporters of FDR's New Deal still championed his Second Bill of Rights of 1944 (see Chapter 26). This document envisioned all Americans someday having the "right" to a new set of substantive liberties, including employment, food and shelter, education, and health care. Whenever people could not obtain these "liberties," the national government should assume responsibility for providing access to them. Following the Second

World War, most Western European nations were creating or expanding “welfare states” that provided people a broad range of substantive rights, including healthcare. Their governments also adopted ongoing economic and social planning and used state power aggressively.

In the United States, however, proposals for government planning and new social welfare measures met determined opposition. Many of their opponents had earlier assailed wartime Washington’s role in economic decision making and FDR’s Second Bill of Rights. Any postwar attempt to build on the New Deal and wartime arrangements, insisted most Republicans and some Democrats, would threaten unconstitutional governmental intrusions into people’s liberties and undermine individual initiative and responsibility. Dixiecrat Democrats joined conservative Republicans to block any legislation that they feared might threaten local and state laws upholding white supremacy in the South. Business organizations, such as the National Association of Manufacturers (NAM), denounced the Truman administration as a menace to the nation’s free-enterprise system. Fiscal conservatives worried about new commitments of tax money.

The Employment Act of 1946 and Economic Growth

The 1946 debate over the Full Employment Bill eventually provided a new template for domestic policymaking. This measure, initially, would have empowered Washington to ensure employment for all citizens seeking work. To the bill’s opponents, the phrase “full employment” implied a step toward a European-style welfare state, even socialism.

As the effort to enact this bill stalled, a scaled-back approach emerged. The law that Congress finally passed, the **Employment Act of 1946**, called for “maximum” (rather than full) employment and specifically declared that private enterprise, not government, bore primary responsibility for economic decision making. This measure nonetheless created a new executive branch body, the Council of Economic Advisers, to formulate long-range policy recommendations, and it signaled that the national government would assume considerable responsibility for the performance of the economy. Constitutional observers thus judged the Employment Act of 1946, as with the National Security Act of 1947, as an informal amendment to the nation’s fundamental framework of governance.

The Employment Act of 1946 also showed a growing faith that *advice* to public officials from economic experts, as an alternative to government *planning*, could guarantee a constantly expanding economy. Economic growth would, in turn, produce a growing number of jobs and, ultimately, an expanding array of consumer goods. An influential group of U.S. economists, disciples of Britain’s John Maynard Keynes, were successfully arguing that their expertise could temper boom-and-bust cycles and rescue the nation’s economy from uncoordinated decision making by private companies and poorly informed policymaking by government officials.

The promise of economic growth dazzled postwar leaders. Using the relatively new measure of gross national product (GNP), economists could calculate the nation’s growing economic bounty. Developed in 1939, GNP—defined as the total dollar value of all goods and services produced in the nation during a given year—became the standard gauge of economic health. Corporate executives, who had feared that the end of the war would bring long-term labor unrest and trigger a deep recession, viewed a

rising GNP as a guarantor of social stability. *U.S. News and World Report*, a generally conservative news magazine, suggested that economists had “found the magic formula for almost endless good times.” The Truman administration welcomed the prospect of an expanding economy, which would increase federal tax revenues and, in turn, finance its foreign and domestic agendas. “With economic expansion, every problem is capable of solution,” insisted one policy analyst.

Truman and his advisers spread the gospel of economic growth. This new faith nicely dovetailed with their national security plans. Spending for the Cold War could serve as an automatic “pump primer” for the entire U.S. economy. The sharp increase in military expenditures soon signaled a tilt in economic policy that some observers began calling “military Keynesianism,” a policy of economic stimulation through governmental spending on the perceived needs of the Pentagon. Moreover, Cold War assistance programs, such as the Marshall Plan, could create new markets, especially for agricultural products, and investment opportunities overseas. Economic growth at home during the postwar period thus became linked to development in the world at large—and to the all-pervasive concern with national security.

Truman's Fair Deal

In 1949, Harry Truman unveiled a series of legislative proposals he called the “Fair Deal.” He called for extending popular New Deal programs such as Social Security and minimum wage laws; enacting legislation dealing with civil rights, national health care, and federal aid for education; and a measure repealing the Taft-Hartley Act of 1947. The Fair Deal also envisioned substantial spending on public housing projects and a complicated plan to support farm prices. The Fair Deal's core assumption—that sustained economic growth could finance new government programs—came to focus the Truman administration's policy planning.

Two prominent programs illustrate the emerging approach to domestic social policy. The GI Bill (officially titled the Serviceman's Readjustment Act of 1944), provided comprehensive benefits for those who had served in the armed forces. In theory, the measure applied to all veterans, but later studies showed that the 350,000 women who had served in the military tapped its provisions far less often than men, perhaps as a result of limited outreach by the Veterans Administration.

The GI Bill provided a wide array of assistance to those who used it. There was financial aid for college and job-training programs. By 1947, the year of peak enrollment, roughly half of the students enrolled in colleges and universities were receiving assistance under the GI Bill. Veterans also received preferential treatment when applying for government jobs; favorable financial terms when purchasing homes or businesses; and eventually, comprehensive medical care in veterans' hospitals. The Veterans Readjustment Assistance Act of 1952, popularly known as the “GI Bill of Rights,” extended these programs to those who had served during the Korean War. Although the postwar Congress never enacted FDR's Second Bill of Rights, it did extend some of its key provisions to veterans.

The Social Security program also expanded. Conservatives continually challenged this New Deal measure as fiscally unsound and an unwarranted extension of federal power, but supporters of Social Security always prevailed. They defended its provisions for the disabled and the blind and successfully argued that older people had earned the “income security” through years of work and monetary



© Margaret Bourke-White/Time Life Pictures/Getty Images

The Postwar College Scene. *This picture by the famed photo journalist Margaret Bourke-White shows veterans of the Second World War dominating available space in a classroom at the University of Iowa. Tapping financial support offered under the GI Bill (1944), more than 600 vets enrolled in 1946 at Iowa. Returning servicemen, who at one point made up more than 60 percent of this university's total enrollment, often taxed existing facilities. Much the same pattern emerged at other colleges, universities, and technical schools throughout the country.*

contributions withheld from their paychecks. The combined magic of economic growth and compound interest rates promised to ensure Social Security's financial solvency. Under the Social Security Act of 1950, the level of benefits increased significantly; the retirement portions of the program expanded; and coverage was extended to more than 10 million people, including agricultural workers.

The more expansive (and expensive) proposals, however, either failed or were scaled back. One of the Fair Deal's key goals, a national health insurance program, faced opposition from several different quarters. Consumer groups and labor unions, intent on creating nonprofit, community-run health plans, feared that a centralized system would unnecessarily bureaucratize medical care. The American Medical Association (AMA) and the American Hospital Association (AHA) opposed any governmental intervention in the traditional fee-for-service medical system, and they had already steered Congress toward a less intrusive alternative—greater federal funding for the new hospitals authorized under the Hill-Burton Act (1946). Large insurance companies, which were continuing to push their own private plans, also opposed the Truman initiative. Opinion polls suggested that many voters, many of whom

were enrolling in private health insurance plans such as Blue Cross and Blue Shield, found Truman's proposals confusing. Truman, who had first proposed an expanded health care system in 1945, watched his Fair Deal version die in Congress.

The Fair Deal's housing proposals made some headway. Continued shortage of affordable housing in urban areas stirred support for home-building programs. Even some avowed conservatives such as Ohio's Senator Robert A. Taft supported the Housing Act of 1949. This law authorized construction of 810,000 public housing units and provided federal funds for "urban renewal" zones, areas to be cleared of rundown dwellings and replaced with new construction. The Housing Act proclaimed ambitious goals but provided relatively modest funding, especially for its public housing component. Private construction firms and real estate agents welcomed funding for federal home loan guarantee programs—such as those established under the GI Bill and through the Federal Housing Administration (FHA)—but they lobbied effectively against publicly financed housing projects.

An ambitious proposal for overhauling agricultural policy, which sought to address the continual problem of overproduction, produced more controversy than change. Supporters of New Deal era measures, which bolstered farm prices, credited them with balancing the interests of producers and consumers, but opponents complained they artificially inflated the cost of food. Truman's secretary of agriculture, Charles Brannan, unveiled a plan designed to guarantee farmers a minimum income but to allow commodity prices to fluctuate in line with marketplace conditions. Influential farming organizations saw the Brannan Plan as a bureaucratic nightmare, and congressional Republicans glimpsed a financial horror story. This Fair Deal idea joined national healthcare in the reject pile.

Postwar policymaking ultimately focused on specific groups, such as veterans and older Americans, rather than on more extensive programs such as national healthcare, a comprehensive housing program, or the Brannan Plan. With its opponents dismissing the Fair Deal as a move toward a European-style "welfare state," the White House found it easier to defend more narrowly targeted programs that it could present as economic security measures for specific recipients who deserved government assistance.

Civil Rights

The Truman administration also struggled to place the national government's power behind a growing civil rights movement. After returning to the home front, veterans of African, Latino, Asian, and American Indian descent increasingly refused to remain passive bystanders when laws and discriminatory practices reduced them to second-class citizens. Moreover, people of color who had moved to cities seeking to escape discrimination and find wartime employment wanted to build on the social and economic gains they had made during the earlier 1940s.

Drives to translate visions of liberty and equality into reality animated considerable grassroots pressure during the postwar period. African American organizations continued their earlier activism, including campaigns aimed at increasing job opportunities and access to affordable housing. On the West Coast, the Japanese American Citizens League (JACL) successfully campaigned against discriminatory laws affecting property ownership and immigration. The Community Service Organization (CSO) worked on issues that affected California's already sizeable Mexican American communities. These postwar activists hoped that the national government would assist their efforts.

During his 1948 presidential campaign, Truman did endorse the proposals of a civil rights commission he had established in 1946. Its report, entitled “To Secure These Rights,” called for federal legislation against lynching; a special civil rights division within the Department of Justice; antidiscrimination initiatives in employment, housing, and public facilities; and desegregation of the military. These proposals helped prompt the Dixiecrat revolt of 1948, but they also gained Truman political support from civil rights groups that hoped for greater assistance in Washington.

Civil rights thus became an increasingly important political issue. After successive Congresses failed to enact any civil rights legislation—including a law against lynching and a ban on the poll taxes that prevented most Southern blacks from voting—leaders of the movement turned to the White House and to the federal courts. The Justice Department, under Truman, continued the Roosevelt-era practice of using its legal resources to intervene in civil rights cases, especially in the South. It showed particular concern for challenging work arrangements that burdened both female domestic workers and rural agricultural laborers of African descent. These private employment contracts, the Justice Department argued, violated fundamental constitutional guarantees and justified greater use of government power to remedy their inequities.

The drive to end racial segregation in the U.S. military also gained the Truman administration’s attention. A plan by labor leader A. Philip Randolph to organize a protest campaign helped prompt Executive Order 9981 (1948), which called for gradual desegregation of the armed forces. Truman later claimed that the United States “could not endorse a color line at home and still expect to influence the immense masses that make up the Asian and African peoples.” His executive order began a lengthy, halting process in which the separate branches of the military proceeded at their own pace. In 1954, the secretary of defense finally announced the formal integration of the U.S. military, but informal discrimination continued. Mechanisms for using government power on behalf of advancing liberty and equality emerged much earlier in the armed services, however, than in almost any other area of American life.

Meanwhile, Harry Truman continued to note how segregation tarnished America’s image in a Cold War world “which is 90 percent colored.” Although Cold War politics could help justify government action against African American leaders allegedly linked to subversive causes, the crusade against communism on behalf of the “free world” also made racial discrimination into a foreign policy liability.

Truman’s Justice Department thus appeared in court to support litigants who were contesting government-required segregation. Most notably, it weighed in against “restrictive covenants” (legal agreements that prevented racial or religious minorities from acquiring real estate) and against segregated education. In 1946 the Supreme Court declared restrictive covenants unconstitutional and began chipping away at the “separate-but-equal” principle used since *Plessey v. Ferguson* (1896) to justify segregated schools. A federal court in California, ruling on a case brought the previous year in Orange County by LULAC and the NAACP, held that segregating students of Mexican descent in separate, and unequal, schools violated their constitutional rights. In 1948, a second federal court—with the case now entitled *Westminster School District v. Mendez*—agreed with the first. In 1950 the Supreme Court ruled that, under the 14th Amendment, racial segregation in state-financed graduate and law schools was unconstitutional. The familiar arguments used to legitimize racial segregation in public education seemed ripe for a successful challenge.

The years immediately after the Second World War, in sum, marked a turning point in domestic policymaking. The New Deal's vision of comprehensive socioeconomic by government planning gave way to a less expansive view: The nation could expect uninterrupted economic growth, enabling Washington to finance, through rising tax revenues, programs designed to assist specific groups. As one supporter of this new approach argued, postwar policymakers were sophisticated enough to embrace "partial remedies," such as the GI Bill, rather than to wait for fanciful "cure-alls," such as FDR's Second Bill of Rights.

SIGNS OF A CHANGING CULTURE

The pace of cultural change accelerated during postwar years. Encouraged by the advertising industry, Americans seemed, in one sense, to view anything new as "progress." Yet, in another, the speed and scope of change appeared to accentuate feelings of uneasiness and anxiety. As a result, the impulse toward containment affected postwar culture as well as foreign and domestic policymaking.

The Baseball "Color Line"

The interplay between celebrating and containing change could be seen in the integration of organized baseball during the 1940s and early 1950s. In 1947, Jackie Robinson finally cracked Major League Baseball's policy of racial segregation. A graduate of UCLA who had battled segregation while serving in the U.S. Army during the Second World War, Robinson had also played semi-professional football and in the Negro National Baseball League before joining the Brooklyn Dodgers. Some ballplayers opposed to integration, including several on Robinson's own club, considered a boycott. Baseball's leadership, seeking new sources of players and seeing a steady stream of African American fans coming through the turnstiles, threatened to suspend any player who would not play with or against Robinson.

Officially, organized baseball became desegregated. Shortly after Robinson's debut, the Cleveland Indians signed center fielder Larry Doby. Other top-flight players began abandoning the Negro leagues for clubs in the American and National circuits. Eventually, the skills of Robinson—named Rookie of the Year in 1947 and the National League's Most Valuable Player in 1949—and other players of African descent carried the day. Although light-skinned Latinos had long passed through the racial barrier, Orestes ("Minnie") Minoso, a Cuban-born veteran of the Negro circuits, became the first Afro-Latino to break into the big leagues in 1949. Major League teams began fielding greater numbers of African American and Latino players, and some accelerated recruitment efforts in Mexico and the Caribbean. During the 50th anniversary of Robinson's debut, Major League Baseball staged elaborate memorial ceremonies for Robinson, who had died in 1972, and congratulated the national pastime for having helped lead the fight for equal rights during the Cold War years.

These celebrations glossed over how postwar baseball's leadership had unofficially limited its own desegregation effort. Several teams waited years before integrating their rosters, claiming that they could find no talented African American or Latino prospects. More commonly, clubs restricted the number of nonwhite players they would take on and hired only whites as managers, coaches, and front-office personnel.

African American and Latino players who followed in Robinson's footsteps confronted continuing obstacles. They encountered overt, off-the-field discrimination during spring training in the South and Southwest and in many small towns elsewhere when playing in the minor leagues. Spanish-speaking players struggled to convince managers, sportswriters, and teammates that they could "understand" the subtleties of either baseball or North American culture.

The New Suburbia

In suburbia, too, change was simultaneously celebrated and feared—and thus subject to various strategies for limiting the impact of the new.

Suburban living had long been a feature of the "American Dream." The new Long Island town of Levittown, New York, which welcomed its first residents in October 1947, seemed to make that dream an affordable reality for middle-income families. Similar developments, such as Lakewood and Panorama City in California, soon began springing up in other parts of the country.

Nearly everything about Levittown and its counterparts seemed unprecedented. Levitt & Sons, a construction company that had mass-produced military barracks during the Second World War, claimed to be completing a five-room bungalow every 15 minutes. Architectural critics sneered at these "little boxes," but potential buyers stood in long lines for the chance to purchase one. By 1950, Levittown contained more than 10,000 homes and 40,000 residents. At the same time, bulldozers and construction crews were sweeping through other suburban developments across the country.

To assist potential buyers, the government offered an extensive set of programs. The FHA, established during the New Deal, helped underwrite an elaborate lending system. Typically, people who bought FHA-financed homes needed only 5 percent of the purchase price as a down payment; they could finance the rest with a long-term, government-insured mortgage. Veterans enjoyed even more favorable terms under the GI loan program. These government programs made it cheaper to purchase a suburban house than to rent an apartment in most cities. Moreover, the law provided suburban homeowners with an additional subsidy: They could deduct the interest payments on their mortgages from their federal income tax.

The new suburbs quickly gained a reputation for being ideal places for nurturing a **baby boom generation**. Sheer numbers helped identify "baby boomers," people born between 1946 and 1964, as a unique social and cultural force. The Great Depression and the Second World War had deflated the U.S. birth rate, but it began to soar even before the war's end. A number of factors, including earlier marriages and rising incomes, fueled a continuing boom in babies. More than 75 million babies were born in the United States during the baby boom era.

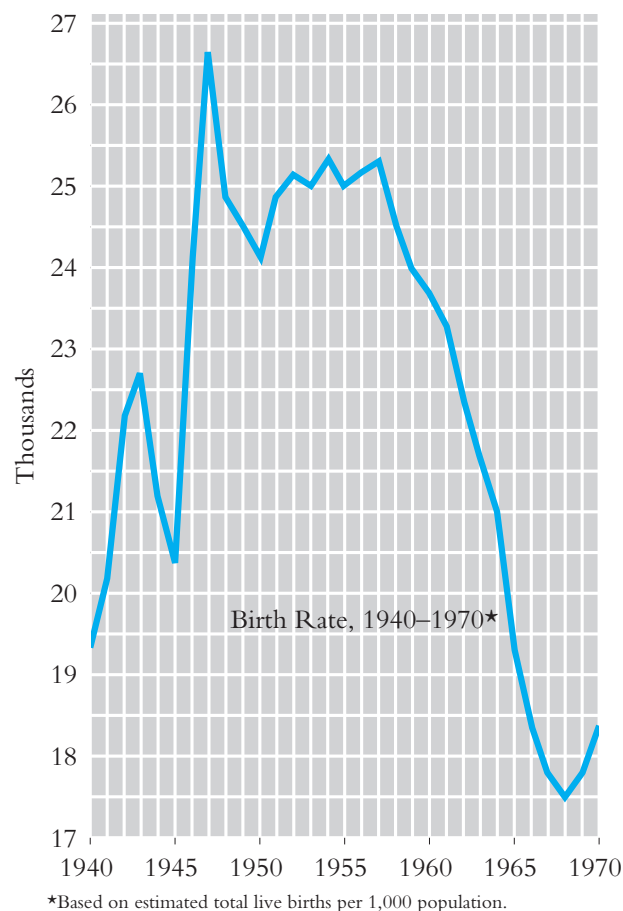
Although baby boomers lived everywhere, they became closely identified with the new suburbia. With houses occupying only about 15 percent of new suburban lots, large lawns served as private playgrounds. Suburban schools were as new as the homes, and their well-appointed facilities attracted both skilled, enthusiastic teachers and baby-boom children. In many respects, suburbia symbolized new possibilities, confidence in the future, and acceptance of change.

As contemporary observers noted, however, suburbia also appeared to offer a material and psychological refuge. Buying a suburban home seemed a way of containing

the impact of the social and cultural changes of the Cold War era. As African American families continued to migrate to Northern and Western cities in search of jobs and greater opportunity, for example, whites began to see a move to the new suburbs as a way to avoid living in racially integrated neighborhoods. Governmental policies contributed to this trend through the financial incentives provided to homebuyers. Even after the Supreme Court declared restrictive covenants unconstitutional, local officials often successfully undercut the ruling's immediate impact. Various informal and extra-legal arrangements prevented, until well into the 1960s, any African American from buying a home in Levittown.

Other policies and practices helped to limit diversity within the new postwar suburbs. Local governments could veto public housing projects in their communities. Although land and building costs would have been cheaper in the suburbs, public housing remained concentrated on relatively expensive, high-density urban sites. At the same time, the lending industry channeled government-guaranteed loans away from most urban neighborhoods, and private lenders routinely denied credit to African Americans and Latinos seeking to buy new suburban housing.

Leaders of the postwar housing industry denied any discriminatory intent. William Levitt could identify his private housing projects with the public crusade against communism. “No man who owns his house and lot can be a Communist,” he



The Baby Boom



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The New Suburbia: Levittown. *The success of Levittown, New York, in the late 1940s provided a pattern for mass-produced homes in new suburban developments elsewhere in the United States. Assistance from government financing programs, such as the GI Bill, and standardized production methods brought the cost of new suburban homes within the reach of millions of buyers.*

remarked in 1948. “He has too much to do.” Even as Levitt claimed he could help solve the problem of housing—and perhaps even that of communist subversion—he also resisted any suggestion that the private decisions of his construction business had anything to do with race.

Other architects of postwar suburbia saw nothing problematic about their operations. The private financial industry extended the vast majority of its loan guarantees to white men. Only rarely could single women, from any ethnic background, obtain loans. The FHA, a governmental agency, justified a similar policy on the grounds that men were the family breadwinners and that women seldom made enough money to qualify as good credit risks. Analogous justifications often kept men of non-European background from obtaining loans for housing in the new suburbs.

Postwar Hollywood

Hollywood turned out movies filled with powerful symbols of the Cold War era’s fascination with—and containment of—change. The motion picture industry still commanded the nation’s entertainment dollars at the start of the postwar period. As the overseas markets reopened and Hollywood’s male stars returned from military service, the U.S. film industry expected to prosper and prepared to cheer the nation through the Cold



The Michael Barson Collection

Deadly Is the Female. Also called *Gun Crazy* (1949), this example of a film noir played on fears of social breakdown and inspired the later movie *Bonnie and Clyde* (1967).

War much as it had through the Depression and the Second World War. Attendance at movie theaters reached an all-time high in 1948.

The familiar musical genre, filled with lively stars, upbeat tunes, and flashy dance sequences, provided a ready formula for expressing postwar optimism. MGM's *On the Town* (1949) saturated movie screens with hopeful imagery. During 24 hours of shore leave, three U.S. sailors sing and dance their way through the streets of New York, sample the city's cultural life, and romance three equally vibrant young women. Ending with a title card proudly proclaiming it had been filmed in "Hollywood, USA," this musical seemed to herald the film industry's own bright future.

By the time *On the Town* arrived in movie theaters, however, Hollywood's fortunes were changing. Attendance figures—along with profits—began to plummet in 1949. A year before, the Supreme Court had ruled that antitrust laws required the major studios to give up their highly profitable ownership of local movie theaters. This decision rocked Hollywood just as it faced labor strife, internal conflict over blacklisting, and soaring production costs. The challenge of television delivered yet another blow to an industry already reeling backward.

Meanwhile, Hollywood continued to release a cycle of motion pictures that came to be called *film noir*, or “dark cinema.” Almost always filmed in black and white and generally set in large cities, *film noir* purported to be peeking into the dark corner of postwar America. *Noir* characters still pursued their dreams and hopes but with little chance of attaining them. Failure and loss seemed to be the rule rather than the exception in these movies.

Film noir invariably featured alluring *femmes fatales*. These beautiful but dangerous female characters challenged the prevailing order, particularly its gender relationships. The *femme fatale* disdained the confinement that came with being a faithful, nurturing wife and mother. Usually unmarried and childless, her continual scheming to escape her containment threatened both men and women.

In *The File on Thelma Jordan* (1949), for instance, Barbara Stanwyck’s title character destroys the marriage of a naïve district attorney. Neither love nor even lust drives her illicit affair with him. Instead, she seduces this public official as part of an ambitious, but ultimately unsuccessful, scheme to manipulate the criminal justice system. The postwar era’s leading female stars—including Stanwyck, Joan Crawford, Rita Hayworth, and Lana Turner—achieved both popular and critical acclaim playing *femmes fatales*.

The Great Fear, at its height during the years from 1946 to 1953, accentuated pressure to contain supposed threats to domestic security. Still, economic growth, new expectations stemming from the war, and demographic shifts worked to alter many social and cultural patterns. The everyday lives of Americans—racial hierarchies, living arrangements, and social-cultural expectations—were changing.

THE ELECTION OF 1952

Harry Truman, his popular approval rating ultimately falling to near 20 percent, declined to run for another term in 1952. His presidency had put his Democratic Party on the defensive, while denunciations of communism and of Truman’s outgoing administration animated Republican campaign efforts.

Continuing Containment

Both major political parties embraced the policy of containment in 1952. Adlai Stevenson of Illinois, the Democratic presidential candidate, warned that “Soviet secret agents and their dupes” had “burrowed like moles” into governments throughout the world. “We cannot let our guard drop for even a moment,” he claimed. A solidly anticommunist stance, however, could not save Stevenson or his party. The Republicans linked Stevenson to the unpopular Truman presidency and highlighted several scandals that featured administration figures receiving kickbacks for granting government contracts. The GOP’s vice presidential nominee, Senator Richard Nixon of California, called Stevenson “Adlai the appeaser.” The Republican formula for electoral victory could be expressed in a simple equation, “K1C2”: “Korea, corruption, and communism.”

A Soldier-Politician

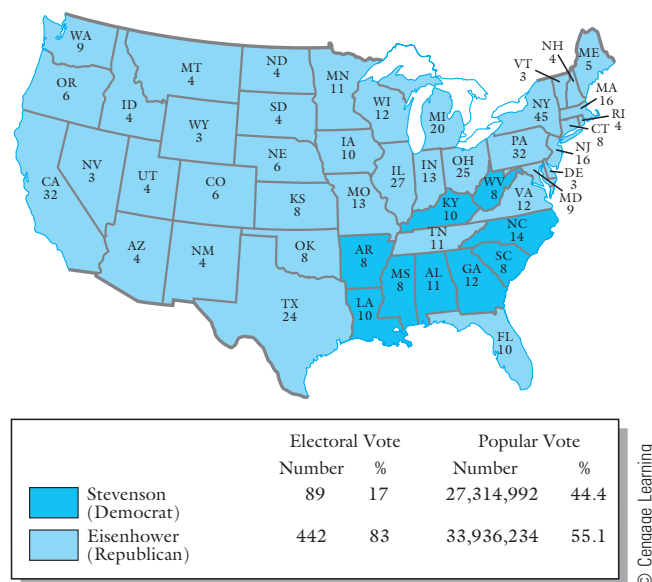
For a presidential candidate, Republicans ultimately turned to a hero of the Second World War, **General Dwight David Eisenhower**, popularly known as “Ike.” Eisenhower grew up in Kansas; graduated from West Point; ascended through Army ranks; and, as

Supreme Allied Commander, directed the Normandy invasion of 1944. He served as Army Chief of Staff from 1945 to 1948 and, after an interim period as president of Columbia University, became the commander of NATO, a post he held until resigning to seek the U.S. presidency. Eisenhower had never before sought elective office, but a half-century of military service had honed his political instincts and administrative skills. Still vigorous at 62 years of age, Eisenhower seemed much younger than the departing Truman, only six years his senior.

Eisenhower's personal appeal dazzled political insiders, media commentators, and ordinary voters. Although his partisan affiliations seemed hazy enough that Democrats (as well as Republicans) had courted him as their presidential choice in 1948, Eisenhower eventually emerged as the standard bearer of the GOP in 1952.

The crucial political battle of that year took place, before the general election, within Republican ranks. The more conservative party stalwarts rallied behind Senator Robert Taft of Ohio and his goals of reversing the New Deal and tempering Truman's global foreign policy. GOP leaders from the East and West Coasts saw Taft, his strength centered in the Midwest and South, leaning too far rightward on domestic issues and expressing insufficient enthusiasm for containment overseas. In contrast, Eisenhower had helped implement postwar national security policies as head of NATO and did not share Taft's animus toward the New Deal. After a fierce intra-party struggle, Eisenhower gained a narrow, first-ballot victory at the GOP national convention. Ike consoled Taft's supporters by endorsing a balanced federal budget and condemning "socialistic" domestic programs.

From the very outset, though, Eisenhower's major policy preferences, especially overseas, tilted more toward those of the Democrats than ones favored by Taft's wing of the GOP. Marketed as a middle-of-the-road candidate, Eisenhower



MAP 27.4 Presidential Election, 1952

An overwhelming victory for Eisenhower, this election saw Stevenson carrying a handful of states. Note that the so-called "Solid South," though, remained largely Democratic. The nation's political configuration, especially for presidential elections, would change substantially over the next two decades.

appeared ready to direct the nation through a cold war as skillfully as he had led it through a hot one. The Republican effort of 1952, the first to feature televised appeals, downplayed Eisenhower's uncertain grasp of complicated policy issues in favoring of highlighting his winning personality. A GOP campaign button simply announced "I Like IKE!"

The first military leader to gain the presidency since Ulysses S. Grant (1869–77), Eisenhower could claim a great personal victory. The Eisenhower–Nixon ticket rolled up almost 7 million more popular votes than the Democrats and carried the Electoral College ballots by a nearly five-to-one margin. The Republican Party, however, made only modest gains. It managed a single-vote majority in the Senate and an eight-vote edge in the House of Representatives. The New Deal political coalition still survived but showed increasing signs of fraying in the South. There, some of the segregationist vote that had gone to the Dixiecrats in 1948 began moving toward the Republicans, and Eisenhower carried four states in the Democratic Party's once "Solid South" in 1952.

CONCLUSION

An emphasis on safeguarding national security helped reshape national life during the years that followed the Second World War. As worsening relations between the United States and the Soviet Union produced a Cold War, the Truman administration pursued foreign policy initiatives that expanded the power of the government, particularly the executive branch. The militarization of foreign policy intensified when the United States, after going to war in Korea in 1950, began implementing the assumptions laid out in NSC-68.

Americans also debated how best to safeguard security and calm cultural anxieties on the home front. Prospects for enacting any Second Bill of Rights faded, but postwar policymakers insisted that a careful application of Keynesian economic principles could guarantee economic growth and thereby provide tax revenues to underwrite a limited expansion of domestic programs. The Truman administration also expressed support, even when it alienated white Southerners, for a civil rights agenda.

The 1952 election of Dwight Eisenhower gave the Republicans the presidency for the first time in two decades. Eisenhower's personal appeal, however, did not signal the imminent demise of the New Deal coalition that had held sway since the 1930s or the postwar containment policies championed by his predecessor, Harry Truman.