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AFFLUENCE AND ITS DISCONTENTS, 1953–1963

CHAPTER OUTLINE

- Reorienting Containment, 1953–1960 • Affluence—A “People of Plenty” • Discontents of Affluence • Debating the Role of Government
- New Frontiers, 1960–1963 • The Politics of Gender • The Expanding Civil Rights Movements, 1953–1963 • November, 1963

CONTAINMENT OF COMMUNISM continued to dominate American foreign policy between 1953 and 1963. President Dwight David Eisenhower modulated the pitch of the anticommunist rhetoric coming from a Republican White House, but both he and his Democratic successor, John F. Kennedy, supported the national bureaucracy’s plans for new ways to fight the Cold War.

At home, Ike and JFK supported, with differing degrees of enthusiasm, social and economic programs that were initiated during the 1930s and 1940s. Eisenhower nudged the GOP away from the conservatism of the last Republican president, Herbert Hoover. Ike reminded fellow Republicans that many voters still blamed Hoover and their party for the Great Depression. Eisenhower’s administration thus accepted the key elements of the New Deal: the economic regulatory structure, the safety net of Social Security, the ability of labor to bargain collectively, and the building of infrastructure projects. Calling Eisenhower’s policies too cautious, Kennedy came to the presidency promising more vigorous governmental action at home and, especially, overseas.

The 1950s and early 1960s marked the midpoint of an economic expansion that had begun during the Second World War and would continue until the early 1970s. Sustained growth encouraged talk about “affluence.” Economic data bolstered such optimistic claims. Between 1941 and 1950, the real income of the bottom 50 percent of the population grew by more than one third. The bottom 20 percent saw its income rise by a higher percentage than the top 20 percent. Economic growth also generated discontent, particularly over conformity, restive young people, and commercial mass culture. At the same time, continued economic

CHRONOLOGY

1953	Eisenhower becomes president ♦ Korean War ends
1954	New Look in foreign policy unveiled ♦ <i>Brown</i> Cases decided ♦ Geneva Peace Accords signed
1955	Montgomery bus boycott begins ♦ <i>National Review</i> founded
1956	Federal Highway Act passed ♦ Eisenhower reelected
1957	Eisenhower sends troops to Little Rock ♦ Congress passes Civil Rights Act ♦ <i>Sputniks</i> orbited
1958	National Defense Education Act passes
1959	Khrushchev visits U.S. ♦ Castro overthrows Batista in Cuba
1960	Kennedy elected President
1961	Bay of Pigs Invasion fails ♦ Berlin Wall goes up
1962	Cuban Missile Crisis endangers world
1963	Civil Rights groups hold March on Washington ♦ Kennedy assassinated

disparities and racial discrimination sparked debate over greater use of governmental power—and the meanings of liberty and equality—in a time of affluence.

REORIENTING CONTAINMENT, 1953–1960

The U.S. strategy for containing communism shifted emphasis during the 1950s. Bipolar confrontation between the United States and the Soviet Union over European issues gave way to greater reliance on nuclear weaponry and on subtle power plays in the Third World: the Middle East, Asia, Latin America, and Africa.

Eisenhower Takes Command

Eisenhower honored a campaign pledge to travel to Korea and help end U.S. military involvement there. Negotiations temporarily broke down, however, over whether North Korean and Chinese prisoners of war (POWs) might refuse repatriation to their home nations and remain in South Korea. Anxious to conclude matters, Eisenhower began to hint about using nuclear weapons if diplomacy failed. Talks resumed, and on July 27, 1953, both sides signed a truce that established a commission of neutral nations to handle the issue of repatriating POWs. (Subsequently, the POWs were given the choice to be repatriated or not.) A conflict that claimed the lives of more than 2 million Asians, mostly noncombatants, and 53,000 Americans finally ended. A formal peace treaty remained unsigned, however, and the 38th parallel between the two Koreas became one of the most heavily fortified borders in the world.

At home, Ike patiently wrested control of the national security issue from more militant anticommunists. Anticommunist forces in Congress exceeded the wishes of the Eisenhower administration when enacting the Communist Control Act of 1954, which barred the American Communist Party from running candidates in elections

and extended the Subversive Activities Control Act of 1950. With a GOP president in the White House, however, Republicans began turning away from the more confrontational styles of anticommunist politics associated with Joe McCarthy.

McCarthy finally careened out of control. He used his Senate subcommittee to rail against the Eisenhower administration and about supposed subversives in the U.S. Army. The senator also denounced, as “unfit to wear the uniform,” a well-respected general who had denied McCarthy’s charges. A special Senate committee began investigating the sensational allegations, and these “Army-McCarthy Hearings” turned into a television mini-series that began in April of 1954. Under the glare of TV lights, McCarthy could seem to be hurling slanders rather than offering evidence. And his habit of interrupting the proceedings with a “point of order” made for tiresome television. In late 1954 McCarthy’s colleagues in the Senate, including half of his fellow Republicans, voted to “condemn” him for “unbecoming” conduct. Three years later, McCarthy died, still in office but exiled from the national spotlight. Eisenhower’s decision to allow McCarthy to self-destruct, rather than to confront him head-on, seemed vindicated.

Indeed, presidential historians now generally see Eisenhower as a skilled chief executive. By expanding the White House staff, he could employ the full power of the presidency while seeming to do relatively little. Eisenhower, in the words of one scholar, conducted a “hidden hand presidency.” Ike encouraged the idea that George Humphrey, his first secretary of the treasury, and Sherman Adams, his first chief of staff, directed domestic matters. In foreign policy, he initially allowed John Foster Dulles, secretary of state from 1953 to 1959, to take center stage. Recognizing how regular TV coverage would increase presidential visibility, Ike honed his folksy image and became a capable television performer.

The New Look, Global Alliances, and Summity

Working behind the scenes, Eisenhower collaborated with his national security advisers to reinforce executive branch leadership in foreign policy. He allowed Dulles to warn, repeatedly, that a new administration might seek to “roll back,” rather than simply to contain, communism. The excesses of legislators like McCarthy helped the White House justify its claims for a constitutional privilege to withhold national security materials from Congress and against a constitutional amendment to limit presidential power in foreign affairs. Eisenhower also extended Harry Truman’s earlier programs of domestic surveillance and continued a secret program to develop new aerial surveillance capabilities.

The Eisenhower administration also secretly reviewed overall military policy. It initially decided to rein in the military budget by introducing a **New Look**, which emphasized nuclear weaponry and air power as a way to halt the spiraling military expenditures, which had begun during Truman’s presidency. Ike calculated that he could never find enough domestic spending cuts to achieve his dream of balancing the federal budget. The former general and his allies in the military, moreover, recognized that the Cold War would not end any time soon and that they needed a national security policy that would be affordable over the “long haul.”

Eisenhower’s New Look became associated with the doctrine of **massive retaliation**. In early 1954, John Foster Dulles announced that the United States reserved the right to respond to military aggression “vigorously at places and

with means of our own choosing.” This thinly veiled threat to unleash U.S. nuclear weaponry aimed at keeping Soviet expansion in check. To widen the U.S. nuclear umbrella, Eisenhower expanded NATO to include West Germany in 1955 and added other mutual defense pacts with noncommunist nations in Central and Southeast Asia.

The Eisenhower administration soon began modifying the New Look and massive retaliation by emphasizing more flexible approaches to national security policy. It embraced covert action and economic pressure as useful strategies. The administration also elevated psychological warfare and informational programs into additional weapons of the Cold War. The government-run Voice of America extended its radio broadcasts globally. Washington secretly funded Radio Free Europe, Radio Liberty (beamed to the Soviet Union), and Radio Asia. In 1953 Eisenhower persuaded Congress to create the United States Information Agency (USIA) to coordinate anticommunist propaganda campaigns.

One piece of this cultural offensive fought the Cold War with jazz. Beginning in 1955, Willis Conover hosted a two-hour, six-night per week program that hailed jazz as “music of freedom.” Opening with “Take the ‘A’ Train,” Duke Ellington’s signature tune, *Music USA: The Jazz Hour* reached more than 100 million listeners around the globe. After Conover’s death in 1996, an admiring obituary quipped that his show would “bombard Budapest with Billy Taylor, strafe Poland with Oscar Peterson and drop John Coltrane on Moscow.”

The United States and the USSR, in the hope of stabilizing their rocky relationship, began holding high-level “summit meetings” in 1955. In May, the same month the Warsaw Pact went into effect, U.S. and Soviet leaders finally agreed to end the occupation of Austria and to transform it into a neutral nation. Two months later, the United States, the Soviet Union, Britain, and France met in Geneva, Switzerland, and inaugurated cultural exchanges. Some optimistic observers began talking about the “Spirit of Geneva.” During fall of 1959, hoping to heal a rift over the future of divided Berlin, Khrushchev toured the United States. He called on a farm family in Iowa, visited Hollywood, and toured Disneyland. Although a 1960 summit meeting in Paris fell apart after the Soviets shot down an American U-2 spy plane over their territory, the tone of Cold War rhetoric became somewhat less strident during Eisenhower’s presidency.

The United States and the Soviet Union also began negotiations over their already vast stockpiles of nuclear weapons. Eisenhower’s “Open Skies” initiative of 1955 proposed mutual reconnaissance flights over each other’s territory to verify efforts at reduction. The Soviets balked, but some progress was made in limiting atomic testing. Responding to the health hazards of radioactive fallout, both nations slowed aboveground testing and discussed a broader test-ban agreement.

For some Americans, these efforts came too late. Documents finally declassified in the 1980s confirmed that people who had lived or worked “downwind” from nuclear test sites during the 1940s and 1950s suffered a number of atomic-related illnesses. More than one-third of the crew that worked on the Hollywood movie *The Conqueror* (1956), shot in a downwind area of Utah, contracted or died of cancer. Subsequent revelations also showed that the government had covertly experimented with radioactive materials on unsuspecting citizens.

Meanwhile, events in Eastern Europe tested the likelihood of the United States and the Soviet Union clashing militarily in this region. Dissidents within the Soviet-dominated “satellite” countries resented their badly managed communist economies and detested their police-state regimes. Seizing on hints that the Soviet Union might relax its heavy hand, insurgents in Poland staged a three-day rebellion in June 1956. They forced the Soviets to accept Wladyslaw Gomulka, an old foe of Moscow, as Poland’s head of state.

Hungarians then rallied in support of Imre Nagy, a communist-nationalist who promised a multiparty political system for his country. After failed attempts at finding an accommodation, Soviet military forces moved against the new Hungarian government. Hungary’s insurgents appealed to the United States for assistance. Apparently, they took seriously U.S. rhetoric from Secretary of State Dulles about “rolling back” Soviet power in Eastern Europe. Military strategists at the Pentagon, however, recognized the danger of mounting any military operation so close to Soviet territory. Soviet armies crushed the Hungarian uprising and killed thousands, including Nagy.

Covert Action and Economic Leverage

Meanwhile, the U.S. campaign to contain communism shifted toward the Third World, with covert action and economic pressure as primary tools. These approaches, less visible and less expensive than military deployments, also seemed less likely to provoke political controversy at home or a showdown with the Soviets abroad.

The CIA, headed by Allen Dulles, brother of the secretary of state, played a key role in advancing U.S. policy goals. In 1953 the CIA helped engineer the election of the anti-communist Ramón Magsaysay as president of the Philippines. That same year, the CIA facilitated a coup in Iran, overthrowing Mohammed Mossadegh’s constitutional (and left-leaning) government and restoring Shah (emperor) Reza Pahlavi to power. The increasingly dictatorial Iranian leader ensured that his country would remain allied with Washington and supportive of American oil interests. In 1954 the CIA spearheaded a successful plot to topple President Jacobo Arbenz Guzmán’s elected government in Guatemala. Officials in Washington and executives of the United Fruit Company desired the ouster of Arbenz, whose broad support included that of Guatemala’s communist party. The CIA strategy included a full-scale propaganda offensive that helped undermine Arbenz’s popular appeal among Guatemalans.

Impressed by these covert operations, the National Security Council widened the CIA’s mandate. By 1961 the CIA deployed approximately 15,000 agents, as compared to about 6,000 only eight years earlier, around the world.

Eisenhower also employed economic strategies—trade and aid—to contain communism and win allies. Governmental initiatives sought to open new opportunities for American enterprises overseas, discourage other countries from adopting state-directed economic systems, and encourage expanded trade ties. Supporters of these efforts credited U.S. policy with encouraging greater stability in recipient countries. U.S. military aid to the Third World nations also rose sharply between 1953 and 1963. This buildup of armaments provided the United States with stronger anticommunist allies but also contributed to the development of military dictatorships.

The Third World When pursuing containment, the Eisenhower administration employed a broad definition of “communist.” In many nations, groups advocating labor rights and land redistribution had allied with local communist movements. Opponents of these groups could hope to win U.S. support by mentioning the word “communist” to policymakers in Washington, D.C.

In Latin America, the White House gravitated toward dictatorial regimes that welcomed U.S. economic investment and opposed leftist movements. Eisenhower publicly honored dictators in Peru and Venezuela and privately praised the anti-communism of Paraguay’s General Alfredo Stroessner, a tyrant who sheltered former Nazis and ran his country as if it were a private fiefdom. Eisenhower’s administration cultivated close ties with Cuban dictator Fulgencio Batista, and the CIA secretly trained Batista’s repressive security forces.

Events in Cuba dramatized growing hostility to U.S. policy. In late 1959, a revolutionary movement led by Fidel Castro toppled Batista’s pro-U.S. regime and pledged to reduce Cuba’s dependence on the United States. The Eisenhower administration responded with an economic boycott. Castro turned to the Soviet Union, openly embraced communism, squashed dissent at home, and promised to encourage Cuban-style insurgencies throughout Latin America.

This prompted the Eisenhower administration to revisit policies that seemed to be generating animosity and sparking anti-U.S. political movements throughout Latin America. Its review ultimately recommended greater emphasis on encouraging democratic political processes, human rights, and economic growth in Latin America. Meanwhile, the CIA pondered how best to hamstring, and then eliminate, Castro.

In the Middle East, distrust of nationalism and neutralism shaped U.S. policy. In 1954 when Colonel Gamal Abdel Nasser led a successful military coup in Egypt against a corrupt monarchy, he promised to rescue other Arab nations from European domination and guide them toward “positive neutralism” in the Cold War. Nasser denounced Israel, boosted Egypt’s economic and military power, extended diplomatic recognition to the People’s Republic of China, and purchased advanced weapons from communist Czechoslovakia.

The Eisenhower administration viewed Nasser’s moves as neither positive nor neutral. It cancelled loans for the Aswan Dam, a project designed to improve agriculture along the Nile River and provide power for new Egyptian industries. Nasser responded, in July 1956, by seizing the British-controlled Suez Canal, which remained of economic and symbolic importance to Britain. Its forces, joined by those of France and Israel, attacked Egypt in October and seized back the canal.

Eisenhower distrusted Nasser but also opposed Britain’s blatant attempt to retain its imperial position. Denouncing the Anglo-French-Israeli action, he threatened to destabilize Britain’s currency unless the invasion ended. Eventually, a plan supported by the United States and the UN gave Egypt control over the Suez Canal. Even so, U.S. influence in the area suffered as the Soviet Union underwrote construction of the Aswan Dam.

With Nasser-style nationalism now tilting toward Moscow, the Eisenhower administration feared “Nasserism” spreading throughout the energy-rich Middle East. In spring 1957 the **Eisenhower Doctrine** pledged that the United States would use military force to defend Middle Eastern countries “against overt armed aggression from any nation controlled by international communism.” When governments

in Lebanon and Jordan faced revolts by domestic forces friendly to Nasser, Eisenhower dispatched U.S. Marines to Lebanon, and Britain helped Jordan's King Hussein retain his throne. These actions dovetailed with Eisenhower's preference for supporting governments that embraced the status quo, but they also intensified Arab nationalism and anti-Americanism.

The Eisenhower administration tried to squelch left-leaning political movements in other parts of the Third World as well. In 1958 the CIA furnished planes and pilots to rebels trying to overthrow Achmed Sukarno, leader of Indonesia, who drew support from that nation's large communist party. The rebellion failed, and Sukarno tightened his grip on power. CIA operatives also became involved in a plot against Patrice Lumumba, a popular black nationalist in the Congo. Lumumba's opponents assassinated him in 1961, and scholars still debate the precise role the CIA played in his death.

Eisenhower's effort to thwart communism and neutralism in the Third World set the stage for the most substantial U.S. commitment—in Indochina. During the Korean War, the Truman administration had dramatically increased economic aid for France's war to retain its colony in Indochina against a communist-nationalist movement led by Ho Chi Minh (Chapter 27). Eisenhower continued Truman's policy, but the French electorate increasingly soured on this colonial war. Then, during the early spring of 1954, French forces in the valley of Dien Bien Phu became surrounded by Ho's troops. France appealed to the Eisenhower administration for air support and, perhaps, for a nuclear strike. Opposition from both Great Britain and a bipartisan group in the U.S. Congress helped confirm Eisenhower's inclination to reject military invention. In May 1954, the trapped French troops surrendered, and previously scheduled peace negotiations opened in Geneva. The stunning defeat at Dien Bien Phu prompted France to abandon a colony it had created in 1887.

The **Geneva Peace Accords of 1954**, which the Eisenhower administration refused to sign, divided French Indochina into three new nations: Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam. The accords temporarily split Vietnam at the 17th parallel into two jurisdictions—North Vietnam and South Vietnam—until a subsequent election could unify the country under a single government. Ho Chi Minh and his communist allies in China and the Soviet Union accepted this settlement, confident that Ho would win the political contest scheduled for 1956.

Eisenhower's advisers feared that a communist electoral victory in Vietnam might set off a geopolitical chain reaction that could "endanger the stability and security" of noncommunist nations throughout Asia, a formulation known as the "**domino theory**." After Ho Chi Minh's communist government started consolidating its control over the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (North Vietnam), nearly 800,000 noncommunist Vietnamese ultimately moved southward. Eisenhower ordered covert operations and economic programs to forestall Ho Chi Minh from assuming control of a unified Vietnam.

The United States sought to create a viable, anticommunist ally in the southern part of Vietnam. The CIA helped orchestrate a program for training an anticommunist combat force and stage a rigged 1955 election that installed Ngo Dinh Diem as the first president of the Republic of Vietnam (South Vietnam). Once again, "super spy" Edward Lansdale played a key role in the U.S. effort.

An anticommunist Catholic, Ngo Dinh Diem soon renounced the Geneva Peace Accords and the election intended to create a unified government for all of

Vietnam. He consolidated his political power, augmented his military forces, and cracked down on his opponents. Diem’s policies increasingly cost him support inside South Vietnam, especially among the sizeable Buddhist population, and encouraged the factions in North Vietnam that favored moving militarily against Diem rather than waiting for his regime to collapse from within. Diem became increasingly dependent on the United States and ever more disconnected from political conditions in his own country.

The Eisenhower administration sent billions of dollars and hundreds of military advisers to prop up Diem’s government. Meanwhile, in early 1959, North Vietnam finally decided to send troops as well as supplies into the South. They traveled along a shifting route of highways and roads that became known as the “Ho Chi Minh Trail.” Although Ike feared that any direct U.S. military involvement in South Vietnam would be a “tragedy,” he supported increased aid and tied America’s policy to Diem’s shaky political and military fortunes. Any decision about whether Eisenhower’s commitments would ever lead the United States to intervene with its own military forces would fall to his successors.

AFFLUENCE—A “PEOPLE OF PLENTY”

In his farewell address of 1961, Dwight Eisenhower warned that the greatest danger to the United States was not communism but the nation’s own **military-industrial complex**. This term signified an informal relationship among military, political, and economic elites committed to expanding national security capabilities. This complex, the former general said, threatened to so accelerate the costs of Cold War containment that the burden of military expenditures would eventually harm the U.S. domestic economy.

Eisenhower’s speech contained several ironies. Most obviously, his administration, while trying to contain costs, failed to prevent ever-larger sums of money from flowing to the military. Moreover, Ike’s selection of corporate executives to head the Department of Defense seemingly dramatized the very same linkage his farewell address had decried. In addition, Eisenhower’s warnings about possible impending danger came after eight years during which his White House had praised the nation’s continued economic growth.

In 1940 the United States had still teetered on the brink of economic depression. Twenty years later, it could claim a GNP more than five times that of Great Britain and roughly 10 times that of Japan. National security policies facilitated U.S. access to raw materials and energy. Government spending for these same policies, what economists sometimes called “military Keynesianism,” also pumped money into the economy. By 1955, military expenditures accounted for about 10 percent of the GNP.

Economic Growth

The post-1953 decade, despite three brief recessions, would mark the midpoint of a period of steady economic growth that would eventually stretch from the Second World War to the early 1970s. During the Fifties, the historian David Potter called Americans a “people of plenty.” Corporations turned out vast quantities of consumer goods and enjoyed rising profits. The label “Made in America” announced both the quality of particular products and the economic power of the United States.

Newer American-based industries, such as those involving chemicals and electronics, dominated world markets. Corning Glass reported that most of its sales in the mid-1950s came from products that had been unknown in 1940. General Electric proclaimed, “progress is our most important product.”

The new suburbs displayed the fruits of this booming economy. Because these outlying areas invariably lacked adequate mass transit, life revolved around the automobile. Car buying expanded during the 1950s as the two-car family and new suburban shopping malls, surrounded by acres of free parking, became tangible symbols of economic growth. Widespread ownership of kitchen appliances, television sets, and automobiles supported the claim that Americans were a people of plenty.

Complaints about the success of capitalism, a feature of political discourse during the 1930s, largely disappeared. Capitalism seemed to work—and spectacularly well. Only a new vocabulary could describe its wonders. *Fortune* magazine celebrated “The Rich Middle-Income Class” and the “Wonderful Ordinary Luxury Market.” Harvard economist John Kenneth Galbraith reached the bestseller lists at the end of the 1950s with a book entitled *The Affluent Society* (1958).

The idea of affluence fit nicely with the dominant vision that celebrated constant economic growth and steady improvement of living standards as a uniquely American way of life. The gulf between rich and poor no longer seemed to be between people with cars and those without them, but between people with Cadillacs and Lincolns and those with Fords and Chevrolets. “Luxury has reached the masses,” proclaimed *Fortune* magazine.

Keynesian economists such as Galbraith argued that greater government expenditures would generate even faster growth, but the Eisenhower administration demurred. Fearing that increased spending would fuel inflation, it remained

The “Mrs. America” Gas Kitchen. In 1959, the American National Exhibition in Moscow featured a “typical housewife” working in this RCA/Whirlpool “Mrs. America” gas kitchen, a symbol of the streamlined material progress of the postwar United States.



The Typical Housewife. *This photograph depicts a different view of the “typical housewife” in her kitchen.*

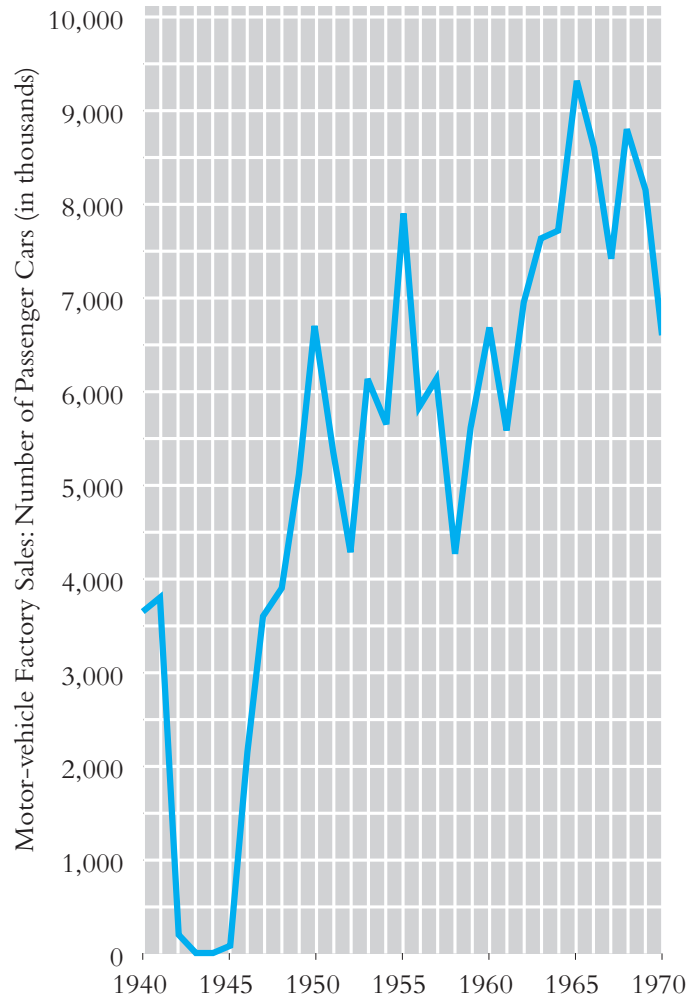


committed, at least rhetorically, to restraining even the Pentagon’s budget. By the mid-1950s the federal government was running balanced budgets.

Highways and Waterways

Eisenhower did, however, endorse several costly new programs. He supported the **Highway Act of 1956**, citing national-security considerations. Financed largely by a national tax on gasoline, the act funded a nationwide system of limited-access expressways. It initially aimed at building, over a 10-year period, more than 40,000 miles of highway. Touted as the largest public works project in world history, this program delighted the oil, concrete, and tire industries; provided steady work for construction firms and labor unions; and boosted the interstate trucking business. It also confirmed the victory of the automobile over competing modes of surface transportation.

The White House also supported expensive water-diversion projects in the West. The Army Corps of Engineers and the Bureau of Reclamation, governmental agencies with powerful supporters in business and in Congress, spent billions of dollars on dams, irrigation canals, and reservoirs. Irrigation turned desert into cropland, and elaborate pumping systems even forced rivers to flow uphill. By 1960 much of the West enjoyed access to trillions of gallons of water per year, and governmental expenditures laid the basis for substantial economic growth in the “sunbelt states” of Texas, California, and Arizona.



Auto Sales, 1940–1970

These water projects came at a price. Technologically complicated and costly to build, they spawned similarly complex bureaucracies to operate them. As a consequence, local communities lost power to government agencies and large-scale entrepreneurs, who pushed aside smaller farmers and ranchers. American Indian tribes, especially, found sections of their land being flooded for reservoirs or purchased by agribusinesses. Moreover, these vast projects—which diverted surface waters, tapped into groundwater tables, and dotted the West with dams and reservoirs—produced ecological problems. They degraded habitats and contributed to the buildup of salt byproducts in the water and the soil. Some scientists began to warn about the overuse of pesticides such as DDT.

Owner of a hobby farm in Pennsylvania, Eisenhower took a personal interest in agricultural policy. Although the number of farms in the United States plummeted during the 1950s, new machine technologies, corporate-style operations, and hybrid seeds spurred greater agricultural production. As overproduction thus continued to drive down commodity prices, government support programs continued to prop up farm incomes. The idea that Washington should guarantee farmers “parity,” or a fair price for their labor, remained the centerpiece of federal

agricultural policy. Despite some efforts to tinker with existing arrangements, the parity system survived. The Eisenhower administration also tried to increase agricultural exports and began the “Soil Bank Program” that paid farmers for taking land out of production.

Labor- Management Accord

Most corporate leaders, supportive of the kind of government involvement required to build highways and water projects, were learning to live with labor unions as well. The auto industry showed the way.

Union leaders recognized that closer cooperation with corporate management could guarantee employment stability and political influence for their members. Roughly 35 per cent of the nonagricultural workers held a union card during the 1950s. Taking its cue from the United Auto Workers (UAW), one of the most militant unions back in the 1930s, organized labor agreed to bargain aggressively on issues that immediately affected worker paychecks and fringe benefits but to abide by their contracts with management and to disavow aggressive tactics such as wildcat strikes. To police this new labor-management détente, both sides looked to the federal government’s National Labor Relations Board (NLRB). Meanwhile, in 1955, the American Federation of Labor (AFL) and the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO), long at odds, merged. The 1950s thus seemed to signal an end to the kind of labor-capital conflict that had marked the 1930s and late 1940s.

Labor activists expressed concern. Nearly two-thirds of all unionized workers lived in only 10 states. Worse, companies in some areas of union strength, such as the Northeast, were already beginning to move jobs to states in the South, where the union movement lacked strong roots. The 1947 Taft-Hartley Act, moreover, allowed for state laws that could frustrate new organizing drives, such as the unsuccessful effort in the South known as “Operation Dixie.”

Business leaders, on the other hand, generally applauded the new direction in labor-management relations. *Fortune* magazine noted that General Motors had paid a price in terms of more costly employee benefits and higher wages, but that it “got a bargain” on the larger issue of labor peace. To safeguard their control over decision making, corporations expanded their supervisory personnel, a practice that increased consumer prices. The labor-management accord also divided the industrial work force: Workers in the more profitable sectors could bargain far more effectively over wages and benefits than those in areas with smaller profit margins.

Some non-unionized businesses voluntarily expanded benefits for their workers. Companies such as Sears and Eastman Kodak encouraged a cooperative corporate culture, which included health and pension plans, profit-sharing arrangements, and social programs. Some firms created private recreational parks for exclusive use by their employees. Satisfying workers, corporate executives reasoned, would reduce the appeal of both unionization and governmental welfare measures.

During the 1950s and early 1960s real wages (what workers make after adjusting their paychecks for inflation) rose steadily, and jobs were plentiful. The frequency of industrial accidents dropped; fringe benefits (health insurance, paid vacation time, and retirement plans) improved; and job security was generally high.

Political Pluralism

Economic growth also gained credit for producing political stability. Observers of the political scene often framed the politics of the 1950s in terms of memories of the past and visions of the future. After the conflicts of the 1930s, the disruptions during the Second World War, and the Great Fear of the early Cold War period, the 1950s seemed an era of relative tranquility. An increasingly prosperous nation, most observers agreed, would effectively mute social conflict and eventually solve major problems. The future, according to one prominent sociologist, would see the end of clashing political ideologies.

According to this dominant viewpoint, which political scientists called “pluralism” (or “interest-group pluralism”), American politics already featured a roughly equal bargaining process among well-organized interest groups. John Kenneth Galbraith coined the term “countervailing power” when claiming that labor unions, consumer lobbies, farm organizations, and other groups could check the desires of giant corporations. No single group could dictate terms to the others, celebrants of political pluralism claimed, because so many interests felt so securely empowered. Pluralists shrugged off signs of decline in political participation, clearly evident in how few people cast ballots on election days, by arguing that voter behavior showed widespread satisfaction with how well the process of political pluralism worked.

In addition to praising the process, pluralists praised the results. Public leaders, it seemed, could find a solution to problems. Short-term conflicts over specific issues would never disappear, but supporters of the pluralist vision insisted that America’s growing economy would continue to help moderate political passions and point warring interests toward agreement on fundamental arrangements. As a professor at Harvard Law School put it, constant economic growth meant that “in any conflict of interest,” it was “always possible to work out a solution” because an expanding economy guaranteed that any settlement would leave all interests “better off than before.”

A Religious People

Most observers professed an analogous faith in religious pluralism. Congress, as part of the crusade against “atheistic communism,” constructed a nondenominational prayer room on Capitol Hill; added the phrase “under God” to the Pledge of Allegiance; and declared the phrase “In God We Trust,” which had been emblazoned on U.S. currency for nearly a century, as the nation’s official motto. In the view of pluralists, the intense religious allegiances no longer divided people as much as in the past. President Eisenhower declared that “our government makes no sense unless it is founded in a deeply felt religious faith—and I don’t care what it is.”

Religious leaders echoed the theme of pluralism. Will Herberg’s *Protestant-Catholic-Jew* (1955) argued that these three faiths were really “saying the same thing” in affirming the “spiritual ideals” and “moral values” of the American way of life. The rabbi who headed the Jewish Chaplain’s Organization reassured Protestants and Catholics that they and their Jewish neighbors shared “the same rich heritage of the Old Testament ... the sanctity of the Ten Commandments, the wisdom of the prophets, and the brotherhood of man.” A 1954 survey claimed that more than 95 percent of the population identified with one of the three major faiths, and religious commentators praised how the “Judeo-Christian tradition” enriched American life.

This tradition could also produce religious celebrities. The Baptist evangelist Billy Graham achieved superstar status during the 1950s. Norman Vincent Peale, a minister in the Reformed Church of America, sold millions of books which declared that belief in a Higher Power could bring “health, happiness, and goodness” to daily life. His most famous volume, *The Power of Positive Thinking* (1952), remained a bestseller throughout the 1950s. The Catholic Bishop Fulton J. Sheen moved from radio to TV during the 1950s, and won an Emmy award for hosting a prime-time program entitled *Life Is Worth Living*.

Peale, Sheen, and Graham generally identified their religious ideals with conservative, anticommunist causes, but an emphasis on religious faith could be found all across the political spectrum. Dorothy Day, who had been involved in religiously based community activism since the early 1930s, continued to crusade for world peace and for domestic programs aimed at redistributing wealth. Church leaders and laypeople from all three major religions provided leadership in civil rights efforts. Refusing to preach to segregated audiences, Billy Graham gradually aligned his ministry with major goals of the movement.

DISCONTENTS OF AFFLUENCE

A vibrant body of social criticism accompanied the celebrations of economic growth, political pluralism, and religious faith. By the late 1950s, a diverse body of critical commentary warned about the threat of conformity, the problems of young people, the disease of mass culture, the evils of discrimination, and the effects of economic inequality.

Conformity in an Affluent Society

The Organization Man (1956), written by the sociologist William H. Whyte, Jr., indicted corporate culture for contributing to an unwanted byproduct of affluence: conformity.

This study saw corporate executives deferring to the dictates of their bosses, often at the expense of their own individual wishes and values. David Riesman, another sociologist, offered a broader critique of conformity in *The Lonely Crowd* (1950). This book envisioned a shift from an “inner-directed” culture, in which people looked to themselves and their immediate families for their sense of identity and self-worth, to an “other-directed” one, in which people looked to others for approval and increasingly measured their worth against images they saw in the mass media. An other-directed society, moreover, emphasized “adjustment” to the expectations of others rather than individual “autonomy.”

The Lonely Crowd claimed that *Tootle the Engine*, a popular children’s book, exemplified how mass culture taught baby boomers conformist values. After “Tootle” shows a preference for jumping the rails and frolicking in the fields, intense pressure from his community gets him “back on the tracks.” If he remains on the straight-and-narrow and follows lines laid down by others, Tootle learns, his future as a powerful and fast-moving locomotive seems assured.

The critique of conformity informed the bestselling books of journalist Vance Packard. *The Hidden Persuaders* (1957) criticized the advertising industry’s calculated appeals to the insecurities of consumers for encouraging conformist behavior. His book, Packard claimed, could help its readers “to achieve a creative life in these

conforming times” when so many people “are left only with the roles of being consumers or spectators.”

Critics such as Whyte, Riesman, and Packard invariably highlighted signs of conformity and loss of selfhood supposedly evident among middle-class men, but Betty Friedan warned about an analogous malaise among women. Top business executives expected middle-class wives to help their husbands deal with the demands of corporate life, and many women found themselves trapped in a stultifying sphere of domestic obligations. A conformist “feminine mystique,” Friedan wrote, stifled women’s individuality and power.

The 1950s, then, hardly lacked for social and political criticism, some of it far more radical than complaints about conformity. The much-vaunted American way of life, according to the sociologist C. Wright Mills, suffered from increasingly regimented work routines and meaningless leisure-time activities that rarely produced genuine satisfaction. Mills also argued that a “power elite”—composed of corporate executives, military planners, political leaders, prominent academics, and media celebrities—set the agenda for crucial public policy discussions. As a result, this undemocratic group could dominate decisions about national security matters and domestic spending priorities.

Restive Youth

Another body of critical analysis targeted the culture of young people. Some critics linked an apparent rise in juvenile delinquency to the sale of comic books. The *Seduction of the Innocent* (1954), by the psychologist Frederick Wertham, blamed comics featuring images of sex and violent crime for “mass-conditioning” children and stimulating social unrest. Responding to regulatory legislation by some U.S. cities and to calls for federal measures, the comic book industry drafted its own self-censorship code. Publishers who followed the code’s guidelines for portraying violence and deviant behavior could display a seal of approval. The “great comic book scare” soon faded away.

Other worrisome signs persisted, however. In 1954 Elvis Presley, a former truck driver from Memphis, rocked the pop music establishment and cultural purists with a string of “rock ’n’ roll” hits on the tiny Sun record label. Presley’s sensual, electric stage presence thrilled his young admirers and outraged critics. Presley and other youthful exponents of Fifties rock—including Buddy Holly from West Texas, Richard Valenzuela (Richie Valens) from East Los Angeles, Frankie Lyman from Spanish Harlem, and “Little Richard” (Penniman) from Georgia—leaped over cultural and ethnic barriers. They reshaped older musical forms, especially African American rhythm and blues and the “hillbilly” music of southern whites, into new sounds. Rock ’n’ rollers claimed to sing about the hopes and fears of the millions of their young fans. They celebrated the joy of “having a ball tonight”; decried the pain of the “summertime blues”; complained about the torment of being “a teenager in love”; and preached the promise of deliverance, through the power of rock, from “the days of old.” Songs such as “Roll over Beethoven” by Chuck Berry became powerful teen anthems.

Guardians of more genteel cultural forms recoiled at the sounds and sights of rock ’n’ roll. They denounced its lyrics, pulsating guitars, and screeching saxophones as an assault on the very idea of music. Even its name, critics complained, brazenly appealed to raging teenage hormones. Religious groups denounced rock as the “Devil’s music”; anticommunists detected a covert Red strategy to corrupt

youth; and segregationists saw it as part of a plot to encourage “race-mixing.” The FBI’s J. Edgar Hoover called rock music “repulsive to right-thinking people” and a social force that would soon have “serious effects on our young people.” The danger of rock ’n’ roll seemed on display in *The Blackboard Jungle* (1955), a movie about a racially mixed group of sexually active students who defy adult authority and terrorize high school classrooms.

Rock ’n’ roll music spoke, however, to the concerns of its young fans. Chuck Berry’s “School Days” challenged pieties about the benefits of schooling, as he sang of bored teenagers riding around “with no particular place to go.” This kind of social criticism in songs anticipated the more overtly rebellious music of the 1960s.

At the same time, rock music and the larger youth culture of the 1950s could also merge into that era’s general affluence. Sun Records, lacking sufficient capital to distribute Presley’s hit songs and promote his image, sold his contract to RCA. Colonel Tom Parker, his personal promoter, soon had the “Elvis Brand” affixed to everything from 45 rpm records to Hollywood musicals. Record companies and Top-40 radio stations saw teenagers, with their part-time jobs and their own allowances, as a market segment worth targeting. In “Sweet Little Sixteen,” Berry sang about an affluent teenager chasing after the latest fashions, the next rock ’n’ roll show, and “about half-a million framed autographs.” Record companies promoted performers who exalted the pursuit of “fun, fun, fun,” which apparently required the latest in “cool” clothes, late-model automobiles, and rock ’n’ roll records.

The Critique of Mass Culture

Concern about social conformity and youth culture merged into the wider **mass culture critique** of the 1950s. Much of the anxiety about the decline of individualism and the rise of disruptive young people stemmed from fears that the “hidden persuaders” who promoted the entire commercial culture industry could reach millions of people with standardized imagery and messages. Cosmopolitan cultural critics worried that “bad” art—seemingly evident in comics and rock ’n’ roll—would eventually purge anything “good” from the cultural marketplace. Moreover, they warned, the superficial imagery manufactured for a “mass” national audience threatened to wipe out vibrant local and regional cultural traditions.

Network television, dominated by three large corporations (NBC, CBS, and ABC) and sustained by advertising revenue, provided a prominent target for this mass-culture critique. Picturing millions of passive viewers gathered around “the boob tube,” critics decried both the quality and the presumed impact of mass-produced TV programming. By the late 1950s the television networks were stocking their prime-time hours with western-themed series (about a mythical Old West) and staged quiz programs (whose contestants had been supplied the answers that they pretended to be puzzling over). Independent stations without network ties programmed the cultural leftovers: ancient B-pictures from Hollywood’s movie vaults, cheaply produced adventure series, and amateurish local programming. The head of the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) would soon denounce TV as a “vast wasteland.”

Critics also worried how TV was changing the fabric of everyday life. Architects rearranged living space so that the TV set could become the focal point of family gatherings. New products—such as the frozen TV dinner, the TV tray, the recliner chair, and *TV Guide* magazine—seemed banal.

The mass culture that critics decried, however, was embedded within the economic system and the pluralist political process that these same observers generally celebrated. Was it possible to eliminate the plague of mass culture without sacrificing economic growth and political pluralism? If, for example, Congress legislated against comic books, its effort at censorship might end up curtailing free expression. If local communities were to step in, as some had done with comics, the results might be even worse. The prospect of southern segregationists confiscating civil rights literature, or local censorship boards banning books by celebrated authors or “art films” from Europe, hardly appealed to the cosmopolitan, well-educated critics of mass culture. Their extensive critique seemed short on solutions. Criticism of mass culture thus did nothing to halt the flood of consumer products and forms of entertainment aimed at an ever-expanding popular audience.

DEBATING THE ROLE OF GOVERNMENT

Although Eisenhower occasionally hinted at rolling back the New and Fair Deals, he actually presided over a modest expansion of the reach of the federal government. There was a broader Social Security system, a higher minimum wage, better unemployment benefits, and a new Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (HEW). Eisenhower liked to call his approach “modern Republicanism.”

The New Conservatism

Eisenhower’s brand of Republicanism angered members of a political movement eventually called the “new conservatism.” This movement drew much of its energy from Republicans who conceded Eisenhower’s popularity but questioned his commitment to conservative GOP principles. Moreover, Eisenhower appeared to be allowing too many congressional Republicans to cross the aisle and support Democratic-backed spending programs. And a leading modern Republican, New York’s governor Nelson Rockefeller, seemed every bit as enamored of state-level welfare programs as his Democratic counterpart on the West Coast, California’s Edmund (Pat) Brown.

Arizona Senator Barry Goldwater claimed to hear modern Republicans such as Rockefeller singing “the siren song of socialism.” Goldwater emerged as the key political spokesperson for the new conservatism. After he won a second term in the U.S. Senate in 1958, a year when several other prominent GOP conservatives lost, a national magazine hailed him as “The Glittering Mr. Goldwater.” Conservatives, Democrats as well as Republicans, saw a savior. Goldwater delighted them by assailing Eisenhower’s policies as insufficiently conservative, overly enamored of elite constituencies on the East Coast, and too indebted to the Democratic Party’s agenda. Modern Republicanism resembled a “Dime Store New Deal,” a less expensive version of FDR’s programs, according to Goldwater.

Goldwater’s critique was summed up in a slim, ghostwritten book, *The Conscience of a Conservative* (1960). By refusing to take stronger military measures against the Soviet Union and by not making “victory the goal” of U.S. policy, Eisenhower was likely endangering the nation’s security. The senator from Arizona portrayed most domestic programs, including those supported by Eisenhower, as threats to individual liberty and as steps toward national bankruptcy. The GOP needed a clean break from the Democratic Party’s “New Deal antics.”

For economic ideas, the new conservatism looked not only to Europeans, such as Friedrich von Hayek and Ludwig von Mises, but to their American disciples, particularly Milton Friedman. Once a Keynesian, the quick-witted, fast-talking Friedman had later reoriented his economic ideas in a decidedly libertarian direction. Governmental action, he argued, generally interfered with self-correcting marketplace forces and thus generated additional problems rather than genuine solutions. When government absolutely needed to act, as it should have done more forcefully during the Great Depression, its touch must be as light as possible. Friedman wrote as clearly, and as quickly, as he spoke and could claim an impressive list of popular and scholarly publications. Headquartered at the University of Chicago, he helped symbolize a persistent pattern: Economists generally sympathetic to Keynesianism tended to migrate to institutions on either coast, while those embracing more classical, free market approaches generally gravitated toward the heartland.

Meanwhile, Friedman's eventual ally, the author-publisher William F. Buckley, Jr., was framing a broad, ideological platform for the new conservatism. In *God and Man at Yale* (1952), the devoutly Roman Catholic Buckley had attacked what he saw as a "collectivist" and antireligious tilt in higher education. He and his brother-in-law had later defended Senator Joe McCarthy in a book entitled *McCarthy and His Enemies* (1954). Then, in 1955, Buckley began his most ambitious enterprise: a new conservative magazine, the ***National Review***. This publication avoided the anti-Semitism of some old-line conservatives and adopted an organizational strategy for the long run. To this end, conservatives established Young Americans for Freedom (YAF) in 1960, several years before similar college-based political organizations emerged on the political left.

Buckley's group adopted another long-term approach to building a conservative movement, "fusionism." Avoiding political litmus tests, the *National Review* featured a creative tension that fused three broad constituencies: "traditionalist" conservatives, who insisted that social stability depended on the educated, talented few, such as themselves, dominating the nation's institutions; "libertarians," who favored drastically limiting the power of any governmental system and enlarging the realm of personal and entrepreneurial freedom; and staunch anticommunists, who endorsed the aggressive use of military power against the Soviets.

The *National Review* assembled an eclectic group of writers. Some of its older contributors had come from the political left of the 1930s, and a few younger ones would eventually move to that of the 1960s. While at the *National Review* of the 1950s, however, they collaborated on developing ideas that could guide the new conservatism. Any program for coexistence with communism, according to the magazine's manifesto, was "neither desirable nor possible, nor honorable." Excessive "bipartisanship" was robbing politics of necessary conflict, while "Big Brother government" and "union monopolies" were threatening economic freedom. In addition to taking strong stands on foreign and domestic policy, the *National Review* promised to cover cultural affairs from a conservative perspective that made "excellence (rather than 'newness') and "honest intellectual combat (rather than conformity)" its watchwords.

A zest for cultural combat animated other projects of the new conservatism. The writer Ayn Rand's fierce brand of secular libertarianism and commitment to sexual experimentation made her unwelcome at the staid *National Review*. The novel *Atlas Shrugged* (1957), however, confirmed her iconic status among libertarians who endorsed her call for ignoring any "public good" and for advancing,

instead, one's own self interest. To irritate conservatives such as Buckley, Rand called herself a "radical for capitalism." A number of conservative groups, however, did spread the religious ideals that Rand ridiculed. The Campus Crusade for Christ urged college students to live their lives according to traditional religious ideals and to preach this message among their peers. Seeking a wider audience, Clarence Manion, a prominent Catholic Democrat and former dean of Notre Dame Law School, staked out a forceful conservative presence on the radio dial of the 1950s. Off-air, Manion helped spearhead an effort to draft Barry Goldwater to run as Eisenhower's successor in 1960.

The Manion Forum of Opinion, broadcast weekly, also helped Goldwater's western brand of conservatism to gain ground in the new suburbs of the Sunbelt states. Many of these conservatives derived their family incomes from high-tech jobs in the military-related sector, a consideration that likely reinforced their call for increased spending on national defense. On domestic issues, however, these "suburban warriors" championed a vision of much more limited government. Their ideal examples of legislation were measures to prevent "outside" authorities, both state and national, from infringing on the local liberties of suburban communities.

The Case for a More Active Government

While a new conservatism argued for scaling back the domestic role of government, an even more eclectic group urged expanding its reach, at home as well as overseas. These activists criticized Eisenhower's reluctance to use the power of his office more forcefully. When unemployment shot up during an economic downturn in 1958–59, economists indebted to Keynesianism ridiculed Eisenhower's commitment to a balanced budget. They called for greater government spending, even if this meant a temporary deficit, to stimulate economic activity. Even after economic conditions improved, Keynesian economists such as John Kenneth Galbraith and Paul Samuelson urged significant deficit spending as a spur to greater growth. During the 1950s, Samuelson's Keynesian-oriented textbook (or a less-demanding knockoff) became the standard choice for younger professors who taught introductory economics.

Other advocates for more active government, while avoiding the rhetoric of conservatives such as Goldwater and his suburban warriors, still criticized Eisenhower's national security policies for their timidity. *Deterrence and Survival in the Nuclear Age* (1957), better known as the **Gaither Report**, urged an immediate increase of about 25 percent in the Pentagon's budget. Prepared by analysts with ties to the defense industry and links to NSC-68 (see Chapter 27), the Gaither Report also endorsed building fallout shelters, developing intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs), and expanding conventional military forces. A report from the prestigious Rockefeller Foundation echoed the same themes and endorsed similar spending goals.

Eisenhower reacted cautiously. Keeping his defense budget well below the levels critics had proposed, he even reduced the size of several Army and Air Force units. As a consequence of super-secret U-2 surveillance flights over the Soviet Union, Eisenhower knew that the Soviets were lagging behind, rather than outpacing, the United States in military capability. Their missile program, he also learned, featured a few well-publicized successes but many unreported problems.

Concerns about national security and calls for greater government spending also affected U.S. educational policies. Throughout the 1950s critics complained about schools imparting “life-adjustment” skills instead of teaching traditional academic subjects. Rudolf Flesch’s bestselling *Why Johnny Can’t Read* (1956) anticipated books that asked why Johnny and his classmates couldn’t add or subtract very well either, and why they lagged behind their counterparts in the Soviet Union in science. These critics urged more funding for public schools. Simultaneously, the nation’s leading research universities sought greater federal aid for higher education, and prominent scientists urged expanded government funding for basic scientific research. The case for increased spending suddenly became more compelling when, in October 1957, the Soviets launched the world’s first artificial satellite—a 22-inch sphere called *Sputnik* (Russian for “satellite”) that circled the earth, initially accompanied by a “beep beep” soundtrack, for nearly three months.

A ***Sputnik Crisis*** soon gripped Washington when a second Soviet satellite, carrying a dog named Laika, went into orbit in early November. The USSR had seemingly soared beyond the United States in both space exploration and rocketry. The missile technology needed to lift up the *Sputniks*, argued Eisenhower’s critics, could eventually rain down nuclear weapons on U.S. cities. The United States needed, therefore, to expand its military arsenal, educational resources, and research capabilities.

After the *Sputniks*, phrases such as “national security” and “national defense” cleared the way for federal money to flow more freely to educational institutions. The National Defense Education Act of 1958 funneled financial aid to university programs in science, engineering, foreign languages, and the social sciences. This act marked a milestone in overcoming congressional opposition, especially from southerners who feared that economic aid could increase pressure for racial integration, to federal funding of education. The Soviets’ apparent superiority in satellite technology also fueled an ambitious R&D effort overseen by a new National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA).

Many hoped that domestic social welfare programs would become similar beneficiaries of increased federal spending. Galbraith’s *The Affluent Society* saw a dangerous tilt in the “social balance” away from “public goods.” Affluent families could vacation in their new automobiles, but they needed to pass through shabby cities along litter-filled roadsides. The researcher who improved automobile performance was well rewarded. But anyone “who dreams up a new public service” is accused of wasting tax dollars, Galbraith’s book sardonically noted.

Galbraith’s critique seemed mild when compared to that of the socialist writer Michael Harrington. His passionate essays about economic inequality recalled the radical literature of the 1930s and his own apprenticeship at Dorothy Day’s *Catholic Worker* during the early 1950s. At least one-third of the nation’s people—living in rural areas, small towns, and cities—barely subsisted in a land of supposed abundance. Avoiding detached economic analysis, Harrington crafted dramatic stories about how poverty ravaged the health and spirit of people whose lives had been largely untouched by the economic growth of the post-Depression era.

During the early 1960s, when addressing social and economic issues became a legislative priority, Galbraith and Harrington became political celebrities. They first entered the public arena, however, through the critical culture of the 1950s. The 1960 election, moreover, promised to feature presidential and congressional candidates who

would generally draw on the calls for more active foreign and domestic policies that had emerged during the modern Republican administration of Dwight Eisenhower.

NEW FRONTIERS, 1960–1963

By 1960, it seemed that the time for translating some of the calls for a more active federal government into congressional legislation and executive orders was at hand. The off-year election of 1958 had not only deposed some conservative Republican stalwarts but helped embolden public officials sympathetic to more energetic government in both foreign and domestic policy. One of these people was John Fitzgerald Kennedy.

The Election of 1960

A wealthy, politically ambitious father claimed to have groomed John Fitzgerald Kennedy for the White House. The young Kennedy graduated from Harvard University, won military honors as a naval officer during the Second World War, became a representative from Massachusetts in 1946, and captured a Senate seat six years later. Kennedy was better known for his social life than his command of legislative details, but he parlayed charm and youthful good looks into political stardom. His 1953 marriage to Jacqueline Bouvier added another dash of glamour. A favorite of the media herself, Jackie won plaudits for her taste in the arts, stylish dress, and fluency in several languages. After John Kennedy narrowly missed winning the vice presidential nomination in 1956, he took aim at the top spot on the 1960 Democratic ticket.

Often accompanied by Jackie and by his brothers, Robert and Ted, John F. Kennedy (JFK), had begun barnstorming the country during the late 1950s. This early presidential campaigning, along with a talented staff and his family's vast wealth, helped Kennedy overwhelm two Democratic challengers, Senators Hubert Humphrey of Minnesota and Lyndon Johnson of Texas, who were also promising to support new governmental initiatives. By pledging to separate his Catholic religion from his politics and by confronting those who appealed to anti-Catholic prejudice, Kennedy defused the religious issue that had doomed the candidacy of Al Smith in 1928 (see Chapter 24).

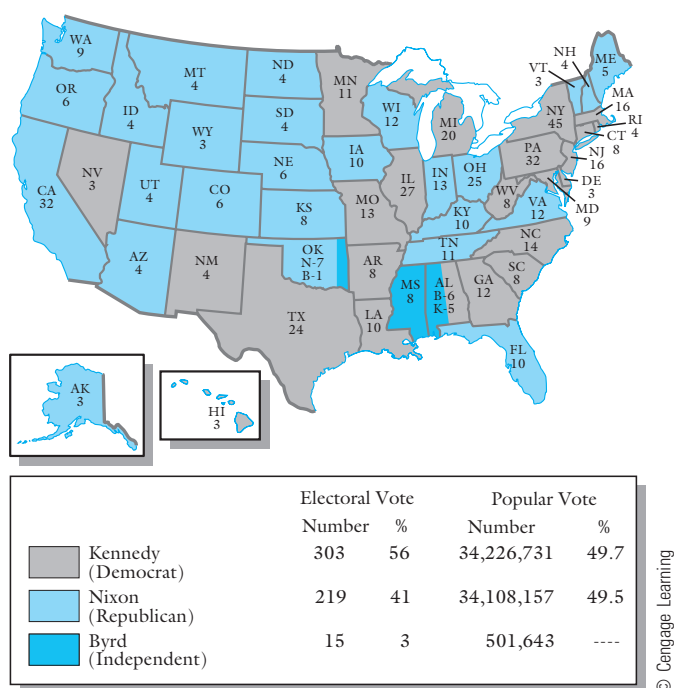
Eisenhower's Vice President Richard Nixon, running for the Republicans, defied easy labeling. Champions of the new conservatism hardly needed to be reminded of Nixon's anticommunist credentials, but his record during the Eisenhower administration, particularly on civil rights, appeared that of a modern Republican. Nixon was never likely to be, conservatives lamented, Barry Goldwater. Indeed, some Democrats with suspicions about Kennedy's personal makeup could arguably insist that Nixon's stand on policy issues hardly differed from that of JFK. Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., who would become Kennedy's "court historian," replied by dashing off an anti-Nixon manifesto that asked this rhetorical question: *Kennedy or Nixon: Does It Make Any Difference?*

Nixon spent much of the 1960 presidential campaign, however, on the defensive. Eisenhower would likely have run for a third term were it not for the 22nd Amendment, and he appeared unenthusiastic about Nixon's candidacy. Nixon himself seemed notably off-balance during the first of several televised debates in which a tanned, relaxed Kennedy emerged, according to surveys of TV viewers, with a clear victory over a pale, nervous Nixon. (Radio listeners, in contrast,

awarded Nixon no worse than a draw.) Despite chronic and severe health problems, which his entourage concealed, Kennedy projected personal vigor and energy, if not much experience in directing affairs of state.

Kennedy's 1960 campaign highlighted issues from the 1950s that, taken together, became the agenda for his **New Frontier**. Although Senator Kennedy's civil rights record had been mixed, candidate Kennedy declared support for new legislation and, in an important symbolic act, dispatched aides to Georgia to assist the civil rights leader Martin Luther King, Jr., who was facing jail time for a minor traffic violation. Kennedy also endorsed new social programs to rebuild rural communities, increase educational opportunities, and improve urban conditions.

Two other key parts of Kennedy's New Frontier—promoting greater economic growth and conducting a more aggressive foreign policy—also emerged from the critical culture of the 1950s. Dismissing Eisenhower's policies as too moderate, Kennedy suggested using tax cuts and deficit spending to juice the economy. He also criticized Eisenhower for failing to rid the hemisphere of Castro in Cuba and for allowing a “missile gap” to develop in the arms race with the Soviet Union. By spending more on national security, Kennedy claimed, he could create a more “flexible response” against communism, especially in the Third World. Flexible response became the umbrella term to cover a wide range of military and non-military strategies that Kennedy promised to deploy against communism.



MAP 28.1 Presidential Election, 1960

In one of the closest elections in American history in terms of the popular vote, Kennedy only narrowly outpolled Nixon. Kennedy's more commanding victory in the electoral vote produced some discussion about the consequences of the Electoral College one day producing a president who had failed to carry the popular vote, a situation that the election of 2000 did produce.

The “American people are tired of the drift in our national course ... and ... they are ready to move again,” Kennedy proclaimed.

The 1960 election brought Kennedy the narrowest of victories. He defeated Nixon by only about 100,000 popular votes, and his victory in the Electoral College rested on razor-thin margins in several states, including Illinois. Republicans urged their candidate to challenge Kennedy’s suspicious vote total there, but Nixon chose to accept the disputed result. JFK’s triumph owed a considerable debt to his vice presidential running mate, Lyndon Baines Johnson, whose regional appeal helped the Democratic ticket carry the Deep South and his home state of Texas. Even Johnson’s political talents, though, could not help Kennedy when it came to the broader election results. The Democrats failed to duplicate their successes of 1958 and lost 20 seats in the House of Representatives and one in the Senate.

Supporters of the new president forgot about the closeness of his election, as JFK and Jackie, already first-name celebrities, riveted media attention on the White House. The couple hobnobbed with movie stars and hosted prominent intellectuals. Kennedy’s inauguration featured designer clothing, a poignant appearance by the aged poet Robert Frost, and an oft-quoted speech in which JFK challenged people to “ask not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country.” The “best and the brightest,” the name a journalist later bestowed on the hard-driving people who joined Kennedy’s administration, promised to launch exciting and difficult crusades, even to the frontier of outer space.

Foreign Policy Implementing flexible response gained Kennedy’s immediate attention. Although Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara quickly found that the alleged missile gap never existed, the Kennedy administration boosted the defense budget anyway. It supported military assistance programs, propaganda agencies, and covert-action plans. In one of his most popular initiatives, the president created the Peace Corps, a volunteer program that sent Americans, especially young people, to nations around the world to work on development projects that might undercut communism’s appeal. Peace Corps volunteers gained valuable experience, and many later staffed the growing number of non-governmental organizations that operated overseas.

Eisenhower’s effort to reorient U.S.-Latin American policy away from dictators and toward socioeconomic programs was repackaged as Kennedy’s “Alliance for Progress.” Unveiled in spring 1961 in hopes of checking the spread of insurgencies that looked to Fidel Castro for inspiration and aid, the Alliance promised \$20 billion in loans over a 10-year period to Latin American countries that would undertake land reform and economic development measures. Many Latin Americans judged Kennedy’s Alliance, which underestimated obstacles to social and economic change, as more symbolic than substantive.

Cuba and Berlin The worst fiasco of the Kennedy presidency, an ill-conceived 1961 CIA mission against Cuba, also had its roots in the Eisenhower administration. The CIA had been secretly planning an invasion to oust Fidel Castro. Overriding the doubts of key advisers, Kennedy approved this Eisenhower-era plan. On April 17, 1961, however, when U.S.-trained forces

(mainly anticommunist Cuban exiles) landed at the Bahia de Cochinas (Bay of Pigs) on the southern coast of Cuba, the expected popular uprising against Castro failed to materialize. Instead, forces loyal to the Cuban revolution quickly surrounded and captured members of the mission. Kennedy rejected any additional steps, including the air strikes the Cuban exiles had expected, and initially denied any U.S. involvement in this **Bay of Pigs Invasion**. The CIA's role quickly became public knowledge, however, and anti-U.S. sentiment swept across Latin America. Castro tightened his grip over Cuban life and strengthened his ties to the Soviet Union.

Kennedy responded by calling the Bay of Pigs Invasion a mistake—and by devising a new, covert program called “Operation Mongoose.” It abandoned the idea of an invasion in favor of destabilizing Cuba's economy and, in concert with organized crime figures, trying to assassinate the Cuban leader.

Meanwhile, two other dramatic confrontations began unfolding, more slowly, in Berlin and in Cuba. In June 1961 Nikita Khrushchev and Kennedy met in Vienna, Austria, where the Soviets proposed ending the Western presence in Berlin and reuniting the city as part of East Germany. Kennedy refused to abandon West Berlin, but in August 1961 the communist regime began to erect a barbed-wire fence and then a concrete barrier to separate East from West Berlin. This Berlin Wall became a symbol of communist repression. Kennedy's assertion in a 1963 speech, “*Ich bin ein Berliner*,” delivered in front of the wall to a cheering crowd of West Berliners, provided a memorable image of JFK's presidency.

Superpower confrontation, however, had already escalated to a potentially lethal level during the **Cuban Missile Crisis** of October 1962. The Soviet Union, responding to pleas from Castro, sent sophisticated armaments to Cuba. After U-2 spy planes revealed missile-launching sites in Cuba, the Kennedy administration declared it would never allow the Soviet Union to place nuclear warheads so close to U.S. soil. It demanded that the Soviets dismantle the missile silos and turn back supply ships heading for Cuba. After tense strategizing sessions with his top advisers, Kennedy rejected a military strike against Cuba, fearing it might lead to war with the Soviet Union. Instead, he ordered the Navy to “quarantine” Cuba. The Strategic Air Command went on full alert for a possible nuclear conflict. Both sides also began frantic, secret diplomatic maneuvers to forestall such a catastrophe.

Washington and Moscow, after 13 anxious days, did negotiate an end to this nuclear showdown. On October 28, 1962, Khrushchev ordered the Soviet missiles in Cuba dismantled and the supply ships brought home; Kennedy promised not to invade Cuba and secretly assured Khrushchev that he would complete a previously ordered withdrawal of U.S. missiles from Turkey. When Soviet archives were opened in the mid-1990s, Americans learned that the Missile Crisis had been even more dangerous than earlier imagined. Unknown to the Kennedy administration in 1962, the Soviets had already placed tactical nuclear weapons, which could have reached U.S. targets, inside Cuba. Some historical evidence suggests Castro favored atomic conflict over diplomatic concessions.

By underscoring the risk of nuclear conflict, however, the Cuban Missile Crisis made the two superpowers more cautious. To prevent a future confrontation or an accident, they established a direct telephone hot-line between Moscow and Washington, D.C.

Southeast Asia and Flexible Response

In Southeast Asia, Kennedy continued the U.S. effort to preserve a noncommunist state in South Vietnam. After the Bay of Pigs debacle, in which the overthrow of an already established communist government had failed, JFK became determined to prevent any communist-led “war of national liberation” from toppling a noncommunist regime.

Even so, the odds against nurturing a pro-U.S. government in South Vietnam seemed to grow longer as Kennedy’s own presidency lengthened. Opposition to the regime of Ngo Dinh Diem, in power since the mid-1950s, had now coalesced in the National Liberation Front (NLF). Formed in December 1960, the NLF included non-communist groups that resented Diem’s dependence on the United States; communists who demanded more extensive land reform; an array of political leaders fed up with Diem’s corruption and cronyism; and groups directly beholden to Ho Chi Minh’s communist government in the North. North Vietnam continued sending supplies and troops to the South in support of the anti-Diem coalition.

The Kennedy administration saw Vietnam as the crucial test case for flexible response. It dispatched the Green Berets, elite U.S. troops who were trained in “counterinsurgency” tactics, to aid the South Vietnamese government. It also sent teams of social scientists, charged with “nation building,” to consult on socioeconomic reforms and internal security. Finally, JFK dispatched U.S. combat troops. These forces, numbering nearly 24,000 by late 1963, would supposedly only advise, rather than actively fight alongside, South Vietnam’s forces.

South Vietnam still lacked a credible government. Diem miscalculated badly when responding to protests from independent Buddhist groups, estranged from the president and his Catholic advisers. The decision, in May 1963, to fire on Buddhist demonstrators in the city of Hue prompted a series of confrontations between protestors and Diem’s government. As part of the anti-government effort, several Buddhist monks committed suicide by setting fire to their robes. The Kennedy administration recognized these self-immolations as a sign of the deep-seated opposition to Diem—and as a public relations disaster. Diem dismissed the Buddhists as communist dupes, and his sister-in-law announced that she welcomed another “monk barbecue show.” The Kennedy administration signaled to South Vietnam’s powerful military that U.S. support for Diem was nearing its end.

Domestic Policymaking

Kennedy’s campaign had promised an ambitious domestic agenda, but relatively little happened immediately. To begin, conservative Republicans and Southern Democrats retained enough clout in Congress to stall or vote down proposals with which they disagreed. Despite his own lengthy service in Congress, Kennedy seemed initially uncertain about how to deal with its old-line leadership. He eventually sided with confidants who advised that a slow approach would reap success toward the end of his first term.

This strategy meant that Kennedy did not press for the government-spending measures he had promised would speed economic growth. He feared any action that might unbalance the federal budget and thus alienate fiscal conservatives and business leaders. Relations with corporate leaders nevertheless turned ugly in 1962, when Kennedy clashed with the president of U.S. Steel over that company’s decision

to raise prices beyond the guidelines suggested by the White House. Kennedy's threat to retaliate against the steel company enraged his corporate critics, and his subsequent back peddling on price increases disappointed people desiring vigorous presidential leadership.

In 1962 the White House finally asked Congress to lower tax rates as a means of promoting economic growth. The economy continued its rebound from the downturn of 1957–58, but Kennedy now argued that lower tax rates for everyone, along with special deductions for businesses that invested in new plants and equipment, would produce more jobs and greater growth. Despite opposition from fiscal conservatives who feared an unbalanced federal budget and from those who thought Kennedy's proposal tilted toward corporations and the wealthy, the president's tax bill slowly moved through Congress. Kennedy publicly signaled support for Keynesian-style policies and denounced “myths” about an unbalanced budget, modest federal debt, and “big government.”

On the social welfare issues, the Kennedy administration proposed a higher minimum wage and new urban rebuilding programs. It also supported the Area Redevelopment Bill of 1961, which called for directing federal grants and loans to impoverished areas such as Appalachia, the 13-state region running along the Appalachian Mountain chain from southern New York to northern Mississippi.

THE POLITICS OF GENDER

The 1950s and early 1960s saw significant changes in how and where people lived and worked. This era produced especially important changes in the everyday politics of gender.

The New Suburbs and Gender Politics

In middle-class homes, especially in the new suburbs, women discovered the ambiguous impact of technological innovation. If new conveniences—automatic clothes washers, more powerful vacuum cleaners, home freezers—eased old burdens, they also created new ones. The time that women spent on domestic duties was not reduced so much as shifted to goals such as more frequently manicured floors and more carefully pressed clothes, which the latest household gadgets enabled.

Life in the new suburbs, moreover, was structured by a broad pattern of “separate spheres”: a public sphere of paid work and politics dominated by men, and a private one of unpaid housework and childcare reserved for women. Because relatively few businesses initially located in the new suburbs, men commuted from home to work, while women found employment opportunities about as scarce as professional child-care facilities. Mothers thus spent considerable time tending to their baby-boomer children. In contrast to the urban neighborhoods or small-town communities where many suburban housewives had grown up, newly constructed suburbs contained few older relatives or younger single women who could help with household and child-care duties.

Without mothers or grandmothers living close by, young suburban mothers often turned to child-care manuals for advice. The various editions of *Baby and Child Care* (1946), written by Dr. Benjamin Spock, sold millions of copies. Like

earlier advice books, Spock's assigned virtually all child-care duties to women and implied that the family and the nation itself depended on how well mothers looked after the Baby-Boom generation.

An alarmist tone in these books reflected—and helped generate—a widespread concern about juvenile delinquency. A problem teen, according to one 1950s study, sprang from a “family atmosphere not conducive to development of emotionally well-integrated, happy youngsters, conditioned to obey legitimate authority.” The ideal mother devoted herself to rearing her children. Women who sought careers outside of the home and marriage risked being labeled as maladjusted and deviant—real-life versions of the *femmes fatales* who populated *film noirs* (see Chapter 27).

Variations on this message appeared nearly everywhere. Even the nation's prestigious women's colleges assumed their graduates would pursue men and marriage. In a 1955 commencement address at Smith College, Adlai Stevenson, the Democratic Party's urbane presidential aspirant, reminded graduates of their “duty” to keep a husband “truly purposeful, to keep him whole.” Popular magazines, psychological literature, and pop-culture imagery suggested that wives and mothers held the keys to social stability. This meant that women who desired alternative arrangements, either in their work or their sexual preferences, needed to be pressured, much as *Tootle the Engine*, to return to the straight and narrow.

Competing portraits, however, painted a somewhat more complicated picture of gender arrangements. Most men told researchers that they preferred an “active partner” to a “submissive, stay-at-home” wife. Popular TV shows, such as *Father Knows Best* and *Leave It to Beaver*, suggested that fathers should be more engaged in family life than they seemed to be. Advice manuals, while envisioning suburban husbands earning their family's entire income, increasingly urged them to be “real fathers” at home. Parenting literature increasingly emphasized family togetherness, and institutions such as the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) offered courses on how to achieve it.

This call for family togetherness was partly a response to what cultural historians now see as an incipient “male revolt” against the “male breadwinner role.” Hugh Hefner's *Playboy* magazine, which debuted in 1953, epitomized this trend. It ridiculed men who neglected their own happiness in order to support a wife and children as suckers rather than saints. *Playboy*'s first issue proclaimed: “We aren't a ‘family magazine.’” In Hefner's version of the good life, a man rented a “pad” rather than owned a home, drove a sports car rather than a station wagon, and admired the Playmate of the Month rather than the Mother of the Year.

Signs of Women's Changing Roles

Meanwhile, greater numbers of women were working outside the house. Female employment, even among married women, rose steadily as jobs expanded in the clerical and service sectors. In 1948 about 25 percent of married mothers worked outside the home; at the end of the 1950s nearly 40 percent did. With the 1960 introduction of a new method of oral contraception, the birth control pill, women could enjoy greater control over family planning and career decisions—and over decisions about their own sexual behavior. By 1964 one-quarter of the couples that used contraception relied on “The Pill.” At the same

time, activists began to press for an end to anti-abortion laws that restricted the ability of women to find legal and relatively safe ways to terminate pregnancies.

Employment opportunities still remained circumscribed. Virtually all of the nation's nurses, telephone operators, secretaries, and elementary school teachers were women. Historically, pay scales in these areas lagged behind those for men in occupations that required comparable training. Jobs for women in the unionized job sectors remained rare. And chances for advancement in the corporate field were similarly limited. As the number of low-paying jobs for women expanded during the 1950s, better-paying professional opportunities actually narrowed. Medical, law, and other professional schools admitted lower percentages of women than in the past. When Sandra Day (who would later become U.S. Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor) graduated with honors from a prestigious law school during the 1950s, not a single private firm offered her a job. She worked, without pay, in the public sector. The number of women on college faculties shrank even from the low levels of earlier decades.

Although employers still invoked the "family wage" to justify higher pay for men, more women than ever before were trying to support a family on their own paychecks. This was especially true for women of color. Recognizing that images of domesticity hardly fit the lives of many African American women, *Ebony* magazine celebrated black women who combined success in parenting and at work.

Mass-circulation magazines aimed at women of European descent also carried increasingly mixed messages about gender roles. Although social commentators commonly labeled a woman's pursuit of activities outside the home as "unnatural," popular magazines increasingly featured stories about women in public life and in business. The 1950s, in short, saw growing diversity in both the social roles that women were assuming and the ways in which mass culture represented them.

A New Women's Movement

The seeds of a resurgent **women's movement** were also being sown, although more quietly, between 1953 and 1963. All across the political spectrum, women began speaking out on contemporary issues. The energy of women such as Phyllis Schlafly, whose book *A Choice, Not an Echo* (1964) became a leading manifesto from the political right, helped fuel the new conservatism. African American activists such as Bernice Johnson Reagon (whose work with the Freedom Singers combined music and social activism) and Fannie Lou Hamer (who spearheaded the organization of a racially integrated Freedom Democratic Party in Mississippi) fought discrimination based on both race and gender. Women union leaders pushed for greater employment opportunities and more equitable work environments. Chicana farm workers became key figures in union-organizing efforts in California. Women also played a central role in protests, through organizations such as the Committee for a Sane Nuclear Policy (SANE) and the Women's Strike for Peace, against the U.S.–Soviet arms race. During Kennedy's final year in office, Betty Friedan published *The Feminine Mystique*. Widely credited with helping to revive organized feminist activity in the United States, Friedan's book drew on her own social criticism from the late 1950s and articulated the dissatisfaction that many middle-class women felt about the narrow confines of domestic life and the lack of public roles available to them.



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Bernice Johnson Reagon. During the civil rights crusade, “freedom songs” fostered solidarity. The singers pictured here include Bernice Johnson Reagon, a member of the Freedom Singers. Later, she founded the all-woman a cappella singing group, *Sweet Honey in the Rock*.

To address women’s concerns, Kennedy appointed a Presidential Commission on the Status of Women, chaired by Eleanor Roosevelt. After negotiating differences between moderate and more militant members, the commission issued a report that documented discrimination against women in employment and wages. Kennedy responded with a presidential order to eliminate gender discrimination within the federal civil service. He also supported the Equal Pay Act of 1963, which made it a federal crime for employers to pay lower wages to women who did the same work as men.

THE EXPANDING CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENTS, 1953–1963

When Dwight Eisenhower took office, the U.S. Supreme Court was preparing to rehear a legal challenge to racially segregated educational systems. The NAACP and its chief legal strategist, Thurgood Marshall, spearheaded this cause. Before the rehearing took place, Eisenhower appointed Earl Warren, a former Republican governor of California, as chief justice. The Supreme Court, with Warren in its center chair, entered the widening civil rights struggle.

The Brown Cases, 1954–1955

The Supreme Court litigation popularly known as “the *Brown* decision” actually included a series of constitutional rulings, the **Brown Cases**. In 1954, Chief Justice Warren wrote a unanimous opinion (in *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*) declaring that states could not segregate their public schools on the basis of race without

violating the constitutional right of African American students to equal protection of the law. A companion case decided the same day (*Bolling v. Sharpe*) outlawed racially segregated schools in the District of Columbia. Although the *Brown* and *Bolling* decisions technically applied only to schools, they suggested that other segregated public facilities could no longer survive constitutional challenge. In 1955, though, a follow-up Supreme Court decision, known as “*Brown II*,” decreed that the process of dismantling illegally segregated school systems should not go into effect immediately; desegregation could, instead, move forward “with all deliberate speed.”

Implementing the *Brown* cases challenged the nation’s political, social, and cultural institutions. The politics of civil rights sometimes seemed focused on the 16 states that the Census Bureau officially called “the South,” but demographic changes helped make them more than a regional phenomenon.

During the 1950s the South was becoming more like the rest of the country. New cultural forces, such as network television, penetrated the region. Machines were displacing the region’s predominantly black fieldworkers. The absence of strong labor unions and the presence of favorable tax laws attracted northern-based businesses. National chain stores extended throughout the South.

Meanwhile, the racial composition of cities in the West, Midwest, and Northeast became more like that of the South. In 1940, more than three-quarters of the nation’s African Americans lived in the South, many on farms and in small towns. During and after the Second World War, much of this population left the rural South and became important to political life in northern urban areas, where Republicans joined Democrats in generally supporting efforts to end racial discrimination. As more African Americans voted Democratic, however, the GOP gained ground among white voters in the South and in the new suburban neighborhoods, especially in the Middle and Far West.

The most familiar stories about civil rights activities during the 1950s have long concentrated on the South, but recent histories emphasize how the struggle became nationwide in scope. Efforts to end segregation and racial discrimination emerged in virtually every Northern and Western city. These urban-based movements employed a variety of tactics, such as “shop where you can work” campaigns, which urged consumers to patronize only businesses that would employ them. They tried to bring more workers from non-European backgrounds into the union movement and the public-service sector, enlarging jobs in police and fire departments as well as in all of the agencies of state and local government. Increasingly, though, gaining legal-constitutional leverage seemed crucial to future successes.

As African Americans mounted new attacks on segregation and discrimination in the South, white segregationists pledged “massive resistance” to the *Brown* decisions and went to court with delaying tactics. One hundred members of Congress signed a “Southern Manifesto” in 1956 that condemned the Supreme Court’s desegregation rulings as a “clear abuse of judicial power” and pledged support for any state that intended “to resist forced integration by any lawful means.”

Defiance went beyond the courtroom. White vigilantes unfurled the banners of the Ku Klux Klan and formed new racist organizations, such as the White Citizens Council. People who worked in the civil rights cause constantly risked injury and death. Racial tensions escalated. In August 1955, two white Mississippians murdered 14-year-old Emmett Till, a visitor from Chicago, because they thought he had

acted “disrespectful” toward a white woman. Mamie Till Bradley insisted that her son’s death not remain a private incident. She demanded that his maimed corpse be displayed for “the whole world to see” and that his killers be punished. When their case came to trial, an all-white Mississippi jury quickly found the two men—who would subsequently confess their crime to a magazine reporter—not guilty.

The Montgomery Bus Boycott

The southern civil rights movement increasingly supplemented legal maneuvering with direct action. Following an earlier, partially successful 1953 campaign to desegregate the transportation system in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, activists in Montgomery, Alabama, raised their sights. After police arrested Rosa Parks for defying a segregation ordinance that required segregated seating on municipal buses, Montgomery’s black community demanded complete desegregation, boycotted public transportation, and organized carpools as alternative transit. Joining with Rosa Parks, a longtime bastion of the local NAACP chapter, many other black women in Montgomery helped coordinate the complicated, months-long boycott. Responding to events in Montgomery, the Supreme Court extended the premise of the *Brown* decisions on education and specifically declared segregation of public buses to be unconstitutional.

After a campaign lasting more than a year, the Montgomery bus boycott succeeded. City officials, saddled with financial losses and legal defeats, agreed to end Montgomery’s separatist transit policy. Events in Montgomery suggested that black activists, even in the segregated South, could effectively mobilize—and then organize—community resources to fight racial discrimination.

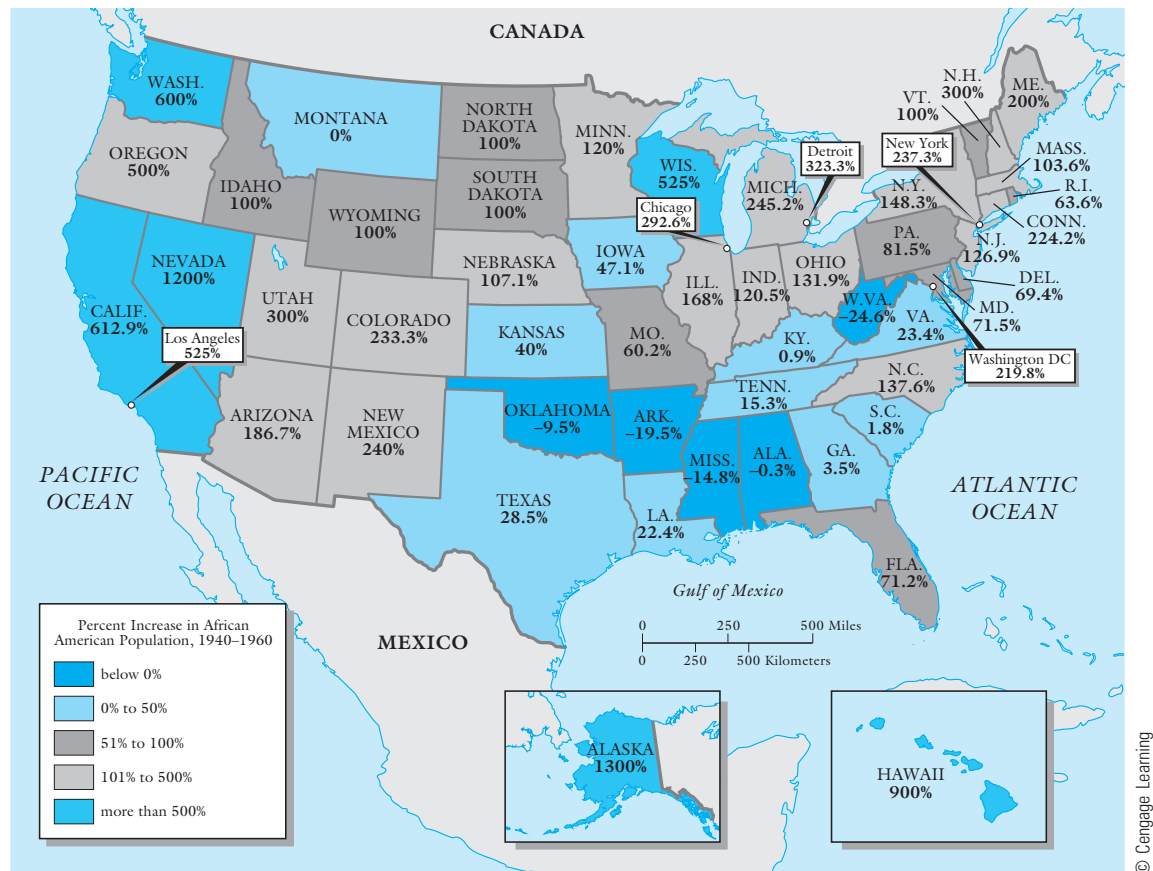
The bus boycott also vaulted **Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.**, one of its leaders, into the national spotlight. Born and educated in Atlanta, with a doctorate in theology from Boston University, King and other black ministers followed up the victory in Montgomery by forming the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC). In addition to demanding desegregated public facilities, the SCLC sought to organize an ongoing sociopolitical movement that would work for other changes.

The young, male ministers in the SCLC sought assistance across generational and gender divides. Tapping the strategic wisdom of Bayard Rustin, who had been involved in civil rights activism since the 1940s, and the tactical skills of Ella Baker, another veteran organizer, Dr. King led the SCLC’s effort to register African American voters throughout the South.

King and the SCLC relied on civil disobedience to obtain change. According to Dr. King, nonviolent direct action would dramatize, through both word and deed, the evil of racial discrimination. King’s powerful presence and religiously rooted rhetoric carried the message of civil rights to most parts of the United States and the world.

The Politics of Civil Rights: From the Local to the Global

All across the country, civil rights activities went forward. Shortly after the conclusion of the Montgomery bus boycott, New York City passed the nation’s first “open housing” ordinance, a model for other local and state measures aimed at ending racial discrimination in the sale and rental of homes and apartments. Efforts to change housing patterns faced tough going, however. Typically, white homeowners in those urban and older suburban neighborhoods



MAP 28.2 Shifts in African American Population Patterns, 1940–1960

During and after the Second World War, large numbers of African Americans left the rural South and migrated to new locations. Which states had the largest percentage of outmigration? Which saw the greatest percentage of population increase? How might this migration have affected American life?

where African Americans or Latinos might hope to buy or rent adopted the exclusionary strategies used so effectively by their counterparts in the new suburbs.

In cities and states outside the South, civil rights groups also sought legislation to outlaw discrimination in hiring. In 1958, for example, a labor union-civil rights coalition in California, joining under slogans such as “Fight Sharecropper Wages,” defeated an anti-union right-to-work proposal they said threatened to drive down pay rates for all workers. Buoyed by this success, the same coalition began lobbying members of the legislature to enact a California-wide open housing measure.

Political institutions in Washington, D.C., felt similar pressure to act on civil rights. The Supreme Court lent its support at crucial times, such as during the Montgomery bus boycott, but Congress remained deeply divided on racial issues. With southern segregationists, all members of the Democratic majority, holding key posts on Capitol Hill, antidiscrimination measures faced formidable obstacles.

Even so, Congress did pass its first civil rights measure in more than 80 years. The **Civil Rights Act of 1957** expedited lawsuits by African Americans who claimed that southern states were systematically abridging their right to vote. The law also created a Commission on Civil Rights, an advisory body empowered to study

alleged violations and recommend remedies. In 1960, with the crucial support of Lyndon Johnson of Texas, the Democratic leader in the Senate, a second civil rights act added more procedures to safeguard voting rights. These civil rights measures became law against fierce opposition from southern Democrats and conservative Republicans such as Barry Goldwater.

President Eisenhower initially hesitated to use his executive power to aid civil rights efforts. He did support the Civil Rights Act of 1957 but held back when some Republicans urged a dramatic presidential step—such as barring racial discrimination on all construction projects financed by federal funds. A confirmed gradualist, Eisenhower saw ending racial segregation as a slow, lengthy process. He also viewed desegregation as primarily a local matter and doubted that federal power could change the attitudes of people strongly opposed to integration.

In 1957, however, events in Little Rock, Arkansas, forced Eisenhower to invoke his executive power and enforce a federal court decree ordering the desegregation of the city's Central High School. Orval Faubus, the state's segregationist governor, had promised to prevent black students from entering the school building and deployed his state's National Guard to block them. Confronting this direct challenge to national authority, Eisenhower took command of the Arkansas National Guard and augmented its forces with members of the U.S. Army. Black students, escorted by armed troops, finally entered Central High. The primary issue at stake, Eisenhower insisted, was a state's defiance of a federal court order rather than school desegregation.

The confrontation in Little Rock also underscored the international dimension of civil rights politics in the United States. Washington often found itself on the defensive when foreign critics pointed to the U.S. record on civil rights. The Soviet Union delighted in telling people, particularly in the Third World, how racial discrimination showed “the façade of the so-called ‘American democracy.’” When the U.S. Supreme Court, in *Cooper v. Aaron* (1958), unanimously invalidated an Arkansas law intended to block school integration, the Eisenhower administration's global informational campaign stressed America's support for liberty and equality, and it encouraged the world press to highlight this important constitutional decision.

Indeed the State Department during the 1950s sent Dizzy Gillespie, Louis Armstrong, Duke Ellington, and many other African American jazz musicians as “goodwill ambassadors” to build more cordial relationships with new states in Africa and Asia. These tours presented jazz as an authentic American art form symbolizing freedom. They tried to counter Soviet charges by highlighting the accomplishments of African Americans. America's cultural diplomacy, in fact, encouraged racially integrated musical acts to perform abroad—even though they might have been unwelcome in many venues at home. Racial discrimination and conflict, warned Secretary of State Dulles, was “not helpful to the influence of the United States abroad.” The Cold War's battle for hearts and minds throughout the world provided yet one more pressure on behalf of civil rights efforts.

The Politics of American Indian Policy

The Eisenhower administration struggled with its policy toward American Indians. It attempted to implement two programs, **Termination and Relocation**, already underway before it took office. The first called for an end to the status

of Indians as “wards of the United States” and a grant of all the “rights and privileges pertaining to American citizenship.” The goals of Termination, to be pursued on a tribe-by-tribe basis, were to abolish reservations, liquidate tribal assets, and curtail the social services offered by the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA).

Under the Relocation program, which had begun in 1951, Indians were encouraged to leave rural reservations and seek jobs in urban areas. In 1954 the BIA intensified its relocation efforts, with Minneapolis, St. Louis, Dallas, and several other cities joining Denver, Salt Lake City, and Los Angeles as relocation sites. Proponents of Termination and Relocation insisted that American Indians could easily be assimilated into the mainstream of U.S. life.

These initiatives quickly failed. As several tribes were terminated during the 1950s, almost 12,000 people lost their status as tribal members, and the bonds of communal life for many Indians grew weaker. Land once held by tribes fell into the hands of commercial, non-Indian developers. Indians from terminated tribes also lost both their exemption from state taxation and social services from the BIA. They gained little in return. Relocation went no better. Most relocated Indians found only low paying, dead-end jobs and discrimination from both public and private institutions.

American Indian activists and their allies mobilized against Termination and Relocation. By 1957 their efforts forced the government to scale back the initial timetable, which had called for liquidating every tribe within five years. In 1960 the party platforms of both the Republicans and Democrats repudiated Termination, and in 1962 the policy was stopped. The Relocation program continued, however, and by 1967 almost half of the nation’s Indians lived in relocation cities. This policy neither touched the deep-rooted problems that many Indians confronted, including a life expectancy only two-thirds that of whites, nor provided significantly better employment or educational opportunities.

Spanish-Speaking Communities and Civil Rights

Millions of Spanish-speaking people, many recently arrived in the United States, also began mobilizing in order to realize the nation’s rhetorical commitment to liberty and equality. Puerto Ricans began moving in larger numbers from their island commonwealth to the mainland in the 1950s. By the early 1960s New York City’s Puerto Rican population was nearly 100 times greater than it had been before the Second World War. Large numbers of Puerto Ricans also settled in Chicago, Boston, and Hartford, Connecticut. Officially U.S. citizens, most of the newcomers spoke only Spanish; social and cultural clubs helped them connect with the Puerto Rican communities they had left behind. At the same time, Puerto Ricans began to organize against the discrimination they faced in housing and jobs. The Puerto Rican-Hispanic Leadership Forum, organized in 1957, presaged the emergence of groups that looked more to social and economic conditions—and, ultimately, greater political clout—in the United States than to cultural affinities with Puerto Rico.

Meanwhile, Spanish-speaking people from Mexico were continuing to move to California and the Southwest, where they joined long-established Mexican American communities. In 1940 Mexican Americans had been the most rural of all the major ethnic groups; by 1950, in contrast, more than 65 percent of Mexican Americans were living in urban areas, a figure that would climb to 85 percent during

the 1960s. Mexican Americans were becoming a political force in many southwestern cities and an important constituency for the national Democratic Party.

Beginning in 1942 and continuing until 1967 the U.S. government sponsored the *bracero* (or farmhand) program, which brought nearly 5 million Mexicans northward to fill agricultural jobs. Many *braceros* and their families remained in the United States after their work contracts expired. Legal immigrants from Mexico joined them, as did undocumented immigrants, who became targets of a government dragnet called “Operation Wetback.” (“Wetback” was a term of derision, implying a person of Mexican descent had illegally crossed the Rio Grande River to reach the United States.) During a five-year period the government claimed to have rounded up and deported to Mexico nearly 4 million undocumented immigrants. This operation, critics charged, helped stigmatize even U.S. citizens of Mexican heritage and justify further discriminatory treatment.

As a result, civil rights groups representing Mexican Americans intensified earlier mobilization efforts. Labor organizers sought higher wages and better working conditions in the factories and fields, even as the FBI labeled their efforts “communist inspired” and harassed unions with large Mexican American memberships, such as the United Cannery, Agricultural, Packing and Allied Workers of America (UCAPAWA). A lengthy mining strike in New Mexico became the subject of the independent motion picture *Salt of the Earth* (1954). Pressure from Washington, the film industry, and anticommunist labor unions throughout the 1950s prevented distribution of this collaboration among blacklisted filmmakers, striking miners, and their families.

Civil rights organizations such as the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) and the Unity League sought to desegregate schools and other public facilities throughout California and the Southwest. Lawyers for these groups faced a strategic dilemma. Legal challenges brought on behalf of plaintiffs of African descent, as in the *Brown* cases, relied on the claim that state laws separating “whites” and “negroes” violated constitutional guarantees of equality. Most states, though, classified persons whose ancestors came from Mexico as legally “white.” As earlier cases such as *Westminster* had shown (see Chapter 27), school officials in states such as California and Texas cited “language deficiencies,” rather than “race,” as justification for segregating students of Mexican descent. The “other white” legal status of Mexican Americans, in other words, complicated the ability of organizations such as LULAC to frame court challenges that could rely on legal precedents involving “white-against-black” discrimination.

Urban-Suburban Issues

The growth of suburbia during the 1950s helped to highlight urban issues, many of them related to changing racial patterns. Throughout this period, both public and private institutions began shifting financial resources away from cities, especially away from neighborhoods in which Latinos and African Americans lived. Adopting a policy called **redlining**, lending institutions generally denied loans for homebuyers and businesses in areas that were labeled “decaying” or “marginal” because they contained aging buildings, dense populations, and growing numbers of people of non-European descent. The Federal Housing Administration (FHA) and other governmental agencies channeled most lending toward the newer suburbs. In 1960, for example, the FHA failed to put up

a single dollar for home loan guarantees in Camden or Paterson, New Jersey—cities in which minority populations were growing—while it poured millions of dollars into surrounding, largely all-white suburbs.

Urban renewal programs, authorized by the Housing Act of 1949 (see Chapter 27), often seemed aimed at “urban removal.” Although this Fair Deal measure had called for “a feasible method for the temporary relocation” of persons displaced, developers generally ignored the requirement. For several decades, the person who directed New York City’s vast construction projects, Robert Moses, consistently understated the number of people dislocated by his urban renewal and highway building programs. Defenders of Robert Moses insisted that he pursued a progressive vision that ultimately benefited all New Yorkers, but the costs of progress—and perhaps its benefits—hardly seemed equally shared.

Meanwhile, plans for federally built public housing faltered. Although suburban areas, where land was abundant and inexpensive, seemed the obvious place to locate affordable housing, middle-income homeowners used their political clout and zoning laws to freeze out government sponsored housing projects. At the same time, private housing interests lobbied to limit the number of public units actually constructed in urban areas and to ensure that they would offer tenants fewer amenities, including closets with doors, than could be found in private units. Originally conceived as short-term alternatives for families who would soon move to their own homes, publicly built facilities became stigmatized as “the projects,” permanent housing of last resort for people with chronically low incomes.

The urban-suburban policies came under sustained criticism. In 1960 both the Democratic and Republican Parties pledged to create a new cabinet office for urban affairs and to reconsider Washington’s role in addressing the cycle of continued suburban growth and onrushing urban decay.

New Forms of Direct Action, 1960–1963

Although John F. Kennedy had talked about new civil rights legislation, his administration initially tried to placate the segregationist wing of his Democratic Party. The president and his brother, Robert, who had become attorney general, listened sympathetically when J. Edgar Hoover, director of the FBI, falsely warned of continuing ties between Martin Luther King, Jr. and members of the Communist Party. To monitor King’s activities, the FBI illegally recorded many of his private conversations and clamped a tight web of surveillance around his every move. King’s movement also faced another challenge: that from activists who favored moving on to new forms of direct action.

In early 1960 African American students at North Carolina A & T College in Greensboro sat down at a drugstore lunch counter and politely asked to be served in the same manner as white customers. This was the beginning of the **sit-in movement**, a new phase of civil rights activism. In both the South and the North, young demonstrators staged nonviolent sit-ins at restaurants, bus and train stations, and other public facilities. Singing civil rights anthems such as “We Shall Overcome” to inspire solidarity, the sit-in movement encouraged further activism. In 1961 interracial activists from CORE and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), a student group that emerged from the sit-in movement, risked racist retaliation by reviving a form of direct action that CORE had first tried in the 1940s: “freedom rides” across the South.

The new **freedom riders** were challenging the Kennedy administration to enforce federal court decisions that had declared state laws requiring segregation on interstate buses (and in bus stations) to be unconstitutional.

The new grassroots activism forced the Kennedy administration into action of its own. It dispatched U.S. marshals and National Guard troops to protect the freedom riders. It also deployed federal power to help integrate educational institutions in the Deep South, including the Universities of Mississippi and Alabama. In November 1962 Kennedy issued the long promised executive order that banned racial discrimination in federally financed housing. The following February he sent Congress a civil rights bill that called for speedier trials in cases involving challenges to racial discrimination in voting.

Nearly 1,500 civil rights demonstrations took place across the country the following spring. Protests in the urban Northeast and Midwest generally focused on improving educational opportunities. Most of these called for accelerating school integration plans, but a “Walk to Freedom March” in Detroit attracted more than 125,000 people on behalf of a broad agenda that included job creation and open housing legislation.

Events in the South, however, continued to attract the most attention. Beginning in the spring of 1963, violent conflict convulsed Birmingham. Direct action in this Alabama industrial center, according to Dr. King, was to create a situation “so crisis packed that it will inevitably open the door to negotiation” over desegregation of public facilities. Instead, white police officers unleashed dogs and turned high-pressure water hoses on demonstrators, including children. Four young girls were later murdered (and 20 people injured) when white supremacists bombed Birmingham’s Sixteenth Street Baptist Church, a center of the local civil rights campaign. After thousands of African Americans rallied in protest—and two more children were killed, this time by police officers—the Kennedy administration again took action. It conceded that images from Birmingham played badly in the international scene and among African American communities outside of Alabama.

Birmingham’s determined civil rights activists were starring in real-life dramas that were quickly reaching the entire world via television. Kennedy had already used the same medium when pleading for a national commitment to the battle against discrimination. Recent events had raised “a moral issue ... as old as Scriptures and ... as clear as the Constitution.” Racial violence was “weakening the respect with which the rest of the world regards us,” the president insisted in a June televised address.

The White House still hoped to influence the direction and pace of change. It crafted additional civil rights legislation designed to dampen enthusiasm for demonstrations and other forms of direct action. It now called for a ban against racial discrimination in public facilities and housing and for new measures to protect the voting rights of African Americans in the South. The administration soon recognized that its legislative proposals would not derail a **March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom**, modeled after the earlier march in Detroit and sponsored by a coalition of civil rights and labor organizations scheduled for the late summer of 1963. It belatedly endorsed the demonstration.

On August 28, 1963, an integrated group of more than 200,000 people marched through the nation’s capital to the Lincoln Memorial. There, Dr. Martin



AP Images/Bill Hudson

Racial Conflict in Birmingham. *Images such as this 1963 photograph of a confrontation in Birmingham, Alabama, in which segregationists turned dogs on youthful demonstrators, helped rally public support for civil rights legislation. Events in Birmingham, however, also presaged the increasingly violent clashes that would punctuate the efforts to end racial discrimination.*

Luther King, Jr., delivered his famous “I Have a Dream” speech. Speakers on that day generally applauded Kennedy’s latest initiatives but urged a broader agenda, including a higher minimum wage and a federal program to guarantee new jobs. Well organized and smoothly run, the event received overwhelmingly favorable coverage from the national media and put additional pressure on the White House and Congress to lend a hand to civil rights efforts.

NOVEMBER, 1963

As fall turned to winter in 1963, the United States confronted three major policy issues. All had historical roots, but they now carried special urgency.

Policy Choices

First, there was the issue of using government power to stimulate the rate of economic growth. Candidate Kennedy and his economic advisers had promised a vibrant economy. During the fall of 1963, as his tax-cut proposal still languished in Congress, Kennedy presented his case to a radio and TV audience. He claimed that his plan would benefit the entire nation. “Every taxpayer and his family,” Kennedy promised, “will have more money left over after taxes for a new car, a new home, new conveniences, education and investment. Every businessman can keep a higher percentage of his profits



Photograph by Cecil Stoughton, White House, in the John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum, Boston

JFK and Jackie Arrive at Love Field, November 22, 1963. *President Kennedy and the First Lady, often treated in the manner of Hollywood movie stars, carefully orchestrated their public appearances. During Kennedy's final political trip to Texas, he and the First Lady traveled the short distance from Ft. Worth to Dallas by airplane, rather than automobile, as a way of making their arrival, marked by roses for the First Lady, appear more dramatic. Within hours, subsequent photographs of Jacqueline Kennedy would famously show her French-designed pink suit stained with the blood of the slain president, shot down while the presidential limousine passed through Dallas's Dealey Plaza.*

in his cash register or put it to work expanding or improving his business.” And greater economic growth would mean that “the federal government will ultimately end up with more revenues.”

Then, there were many questions about U.S. policy in Vietnam. The Kennedy administration puzzled over how to recast Eisenhower's containment policy and execute its own flexible response approach to counterinsurgency and nation building. U.S. officials concluded that the effort in South Vietnam suffered from the Diem government's incompetence, and they gave disgruntled South Vietnamese military officers the green light to orchestrate its overthrow. On November 2, 1963, Diem was routed from his presidential palace and—despite assurances to the contrary

from the coup's leaders—murdered. This coup, which brought a military regime to power in Saigon, bred even greater political instability throughout South Vietnam. The NLF and North Vietnam, in turn, ratcheted up their military pressure.

After nearly three years of constant fine-tuning, Kennedy's Southeast Asian policy appeared no more coherent than Eisenhower's. The overall goal remained consistent: prevent communist forces from toppling an anticommunist government in Saigon. The United States could not afford to "lose" South Vietnam. By late November 1963, however, Kennedy's policy in Vietnam again appeared in a state of flux, perhaps even disarray.

Finally, there were political dilemmas associated with civil rights. Constantly pushed by spreading campaigns of direct action, the Kennedy administration renewed efforts to mobilize its political resources on behalf of long-promised congressional legislation. Recognizing that a measure to address discrimination in housing would never pass, White House strategists concentrated on using federal power to eliminate state-sanctioned segregation in the South and to advance a "fair employment" agenda everywhere. The latter goal, however, faced considerable opposition from business groups and from segments of the labor movement.

The Assassination of John F. Kennedy

The Kennedy White House, although still struggling to reframe both its foreign and domestic policies, expected JFK would win re-election in 1964. The apparent GOP candidate, Barry Goldwater, could count on his new conservative base, but it seemed too narrow, and likely too fragile, to provide a genuine threat to another Kennedy campaign.

On November 22, 1963, however, John F. Kennedy was assassinated as his presidential motorcade moved through Dallas. Vice President Lyndon Johnson, who had accompanied Kennedy to Texas, took the oath of office and rushed back to Washington. Equally quickly, the Dallas police arrested Lee Harvey Oswald and pegged him as JFK's assassin. FBI surveillance had already discovered what most everyone else would soon know: Oswald had vague ties to organized crime; had once lived in the Soviet Union; and had a bizarre set of political affiliations, including shadowy ones with groups interested in Cuba. Oswald declared his innocence but never faced trial. Jack Ruby, a Dallas nightclub owner, killed Oswald on national television, while the alleged gunman was in police custody. An investigation by a special commission headed by Chief Justice Earl Warren concluded that both Oswald and Ruby had acted alone.

The motivations for the president's assassination and the Warren Commission's account of a lone gunman came under intense scrutiny. Competing theories about the number of shots, the trajectory of the bullets, the nature of Kennedy's wounds, and the twisted affiliations of the assassin proliferated. The tragedy in Dallas still provokes myriad conspiracy theories and controversies.

Kennedy's life and presidency remain topics of historical debate and tabloid-style speculation. Researchers have provided new details about his poor health, reliance on exotic medications, and dalliances with women—all of which were kept from the public at the time. Historians speculate about how Kennedy's lifestyle might have affected his ability to make crucial decisions, and they debate what

JFK might have done in Vietnam had he won the 1964 presidential election. The passage of time, in short, has diminished neither scholarly nor popular interest in John F. Kennedy and in his 1,000-day presidency.

CONCLUSION

Tensions with the Soviet Union, which brought the superpowers to the brink of nuclear war during the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962, dominated national security calculations between 1953 and 1963. The United States stockpiled nuclear weapons, employed new forms of economic pressure, and expanded covert activities. Left-leaning movements in the Third World, particularly in Cuba and Southeast Asia, became of growing concern to U.S. policymakers.

At home, the post-1953 decade brought economic growth. A cornucopia of new consumer products encouraged talk about an age of affluence but also generated apprehension about conformity, unruly youth, and mass culture. At the same time, the millions of people whom economic growth bypassed and those who faced racial and ethnic discrimination, saw their causes move toward the center of public debates over the meaning of liberty and equality. Critics charged the Eisenhower administration with failing to use government power to support civil rights efforts and to promote faster and more equitably distributed economic growth. Policy initiatives of the early 1960s, associated with Kennedy's New Frontier, grew out of the critical culture of the 1950s. More quietly, in both the political and cultural arenas, a new conservative movement was also taking shape. It saw government's social-economic role needing to be reduced, not expanded.

Although the Kennedy administration preferred to focus on foreign policy, the press coverage of domestic events, particularly those associated with direct action on behalf of civil rights, forced it to consider how government power might be used to address the issues of liberty and equality at home.

The years that immediately followed Kennedy's assassination would continue to highlight questions about liberty, equality, and power. Was the United States spreading freedom in Vietnam? Was government sufficiently active in pursuing egalitarian initiatives at home? The troubled era of "America's longest war," 1963–74, would turn on how different people and activist groups attempted to respond to these questions.