

1950's - Post World War II Era

-After WWII, the U.S. was better able than its allies to adjust its economy from wartime to peacetime because the U.S. had suffered no widespread wartime destruction (the war was not fought on U.S. soil, so U.S. cities and factories were not destroyed, unlike Europe and Japan)

1950s

- marked by the beginnings of the space race, suburbanization, and a continuing baby boom.

- **Baby Boom**- Population burst caused by the delay in marriages during WWII (soldiers came home from the war, got married and had lots of kids, causing a population burst).
- **Suburbanization** - Immediately after WWII, white, middle-class Americans migrated from the cities to the suburbs.
- **Space Race**: Cold War competition between the United States and the Soviet Union
- **Interstate Highway Act 1956**- Increased suburban growth.

Vietnam War

-Civil war between Communist North Vietnam and U.S. backed South Vietnam.

- **Gulf of Tonkin Resolution**- Increased U.S. involvement in the Vietnam war and provided justification for Johnson's involvement in Vietnam.
- U.S. became involved to prevent the spread of communism in Southeast Asia/Indochina (following the policy of containment).
- **Domino Theory**- Idea that if one country falls to communism, others around it will as well. Used by the U.S. as a justification for the Vietnam War.
- **Anti-War Protests** - grew in the late 1960's and early 1970's because many Americans believed that the war was unjust and a civil war and therefore the U.S. shouldn't be involved.
 - Social conflict over the war.
 - Impact on popular culture – Music (Fortunate Son), Poetry (Bob Dylan)
 - **26th amendment** - lowered the voting age to 18, was a result of the participation of the U.S. in the Vietnam War (many 18-year olds went to war, causing the people to feel they deserved the right to vote).

U.S. pulls out of Vietnam in 1975 resulting in a North Vietnam victory and all of Vietnam falling to communism.

Effects of Vietnam War

- **The War Powers Act 1973**- Limited the president's ability to send troops into combat abroad (asserted the role of Congress in the commitment of troops). Passed by Congress as a response to the U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War.
- The U.S. questioned its role as a police officer of the world.
- Caused a reluctance to commit U.S. troops for extended military action abroad.
- Showed that foreign policy can be altered by public opinion.
- Led to greater public distrust of governmental policies.
- U.S. experience in the war showed that superior military technology does not guarantee victory.

President John F. Kennedy

Vice President – Lyndon Johnson (LBJ) of Texas to balance ticket.

Domestic Policy: New Frontier -

- **Space program**. The Soviet Union launched Sputnik which led Kennedy to set a goal of landing a man on the Moon and increase funding for science and math education.
- **Established the Peace Corps**- Volunteer support to developing nations.

Foreign Policy:

- **Bay of Pigs Invasion 1961**- An effort supported by Kennedy to remove a communist dictator (Fidel Castro) from power in Cuba. Kennedy's most significant foreign policy failure.
- **Cuban Missile Crisis 1962**- The Soviet Union (Nikita Khrushchev) placed nuclear weapons in Cuba (only 90 miles off the U.S. coast).
 - Kennedy attempted to deal with the situation by imposing a naval blockade to isolate Cuba from the Soviet Union. Eventually led to Kennedy negotiating the limited Nuclear Test Ban Treaty with the Soviet Union

Civil Rights Movement

Movement to end segregation based on race during the 1950s & 1960s:

- **NAACP** (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People)- Focused on higher education, full political participation, and continued support for civil rights. Challenged school segregation.
- **President Truman issues executive order desegregating armed forces.**
- **Jackie Robinson breaks color barrier in Major League Baseball.**

- **Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka** (1954) - Required the integration (desegregation) of all public schools in the U.S. Overturned Plessy v. Ferguson ruling of “separate but equal.” Says that “separate educational facilities are inherently unequal.” Demonstrates that the Supreme Court can change an earlier decision.
 - **Little Rock 9** - In 1957 President Dwight D. Eisenhower sends federal troops into Little Rock, Arkansas to enforce a Supreme Court decision to desegregate public schools. This showed that the Federal Government would enforce court decisions on integration.

Martin Luther King Jr.- Leader of the civil rights movement during the 1960’s.

- **Non-Violent Direct Action**
 - Civil Disobedience- Lunch counter sit-ins and freedom riders are examples of nonviolent attempts to oppose segregation.
 - Refusal to follow unjust laws.

Rosa Parks- Practiced civil disobedience by refusing to give up her seat on a bus to a white man in Montgomery, Alabama. Martin Luther King Jr. led the bus boycott in Montgomery, Alabama.

Malcolm X- Civil right leader during 1950’s and 60’s that advocated Black separatism & Black Nationalism

Civil Rights Legislation:

- **Civil Rights Act 1964**- Passed to correct racial and gender discrimination. Ended the Jim Crow laws.
- **Voting Rights Act 1965**- Removed the literacy test as a voting qualification because different standards of literacy had been applied to different groups of voters. Attempted to remove racial barriers within voting.

Lyndon Baines Johnson (LBJ)

- **Great Society**- Attempted to end poverty and discrimination in the U.S. Similar to the New Deal because it increased government commitment to the well-being of the people.
- Major goal was to reform society through expanded government social welfare programs
 - **Volunteers in Service to America (VISTA)**- Similar to Kennedy’s Peace Corps because it attempted to improve the quality of people’s lives.
 - **Medicare**- Established by Congress in 1965 to provide health care to the elderly.

Vietnam War reduced Johnson’s domestic reform programs (Great Society could not accomplish as much because the U.S. was distracted by the Vietnam War).

Decided not to run for reelection in 1968 because his Vietnam War policies had reduced his popularity with voters.

Richard Nixon:

Domestic Policy

Watergate

Woodward & Bernstein – exposed the Watergate Scandal.

Pardoned by Gerald Ford

Foreign Policy

Détente – relaxed tensions with the Soviet Union. Signed the Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty (SALT) which limited number of nuclear weapons which the U.S. and Soviet Union could have.

Oil Crisis – OPEC embargo after U.S. supported Israel Yom Kippur War. Nixon encouraged conservation efforts

Jimmy Carter

Domestic Policy

Energy Crisis – continued – emphasized development of alternative energy resources. Put solar panels on the White House

Foreign Policy

Camp David Peace – helped Israel and Egypt come to a peace agreement. Egypt became first Arab country to recognize Israel's right to exist. Considered greatest accomplishment of Carter presidency

Ronald Reagan

Domestic Policy

Trickle Down Economics – Massive tax cuts (especially to the wealthy and businesses) and less regulation of business in the hope that it would encourage more business investment and wealthy would “trickle down” to everyone else. Economic growth followed, but so did increasing wealthy inequality and a growing national debt.

Foreign Policy

- Military build-up
- Increased tensions with the Soviet Union. Called them the “evil empire.” Urged Gorbachev to “tear down this wall.” – Berlin Wall
- By end of presidency, improved relations with Soviet Union

George Bush

Foreign

Persian Gulf War – After Iraq invaded Kuwait, U.S. led a coalition of dozens of countries to force out Iraq. U.S. effort was in part motivated by concerns about oil reserves.