

Period 8: 1945–1980

In a Nutshell

After World War II, the United States grappled with prosperity and unfamiliar international responsibilities while struggling to live up to its ideals.

Key Concepts

Part 1

- A. The United States responded to an uncertain and unstable postwar world by asserting and attempting to defend a position of global leadership, with far-reaching domestic and international consequences.
- B. After World War II, the United States sought to stem the growth of Communist military power and ideological influence, create a stable global economy, and build an international security system.
- C. As the United States focused on containing communism, it faced increasingly complex foreign policy issues, including decolonization, shifting international alignments and regional conflicts, and global economic and environmental changes.
- D. Cold War policies led to continued public debates over the power of the federal government, acceptable means for pursuing international and domestic goals, and the proper balance between liberty and order.

Part 2

- E. Liberalism, based on anticommunism abroad and a firm belief in the efficacy of governmental and especially federal power to achieve social goals at home, reached its apex in the mid-1960s and generated a variety of political and cultural responses.
- F. Seeking to fulfill Reconstruction-era promises, civil rights activists and political leaders achieved some legal and political successes in ending segregation, although progress toward equality was slow and halting.
- G. Stirred by a growing awareness of inequalities in American society and by the African American civil rights movement, activists also addressed issues of identity and social justice, such as gender/sexuality and ethnicity.
- H. As many liberal principles came to dominate postwar politics and court decisions, liberalism came under attack from the left as well as from resurgent conservative movements.

Part 3

- I. Postwar economic, demographic, and technological changes had a far-reaching impact on American society, politics, and the environment.
- J. Rapid economic and social changes in American society fostered a sense of optimism in the postwar years, as well as underlying concerns about how these changes were affecting American values.
- K. As federal programs expanded and economic growth reshaped American society, many sought greater access to prosperity even as critics began to question the burgeoning use of natural resources.

- L. New demographic and social issues led to significant political and moral debates that sharply divided the nation.

Significant Topics

1. Post-World War II Foreign Policy

The United States developed a foreign policy after World War II that was based on collective security and a multilateral economic framework that bolstered non-Communist nations.

- a. United Nations, 1945

2. The Cold War

The Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union fluctuated between periods of direct and indirect military confrontation and periods of mutual coexistence.

- a. Cold War, 1945-1991

- b. Iron Curtain

- c. containment

- d. Truman Doctrine, 1947

- e. Marshall Plan, 1948

- f. Berlin airlift, 1948

- g. North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), 1949

h. development of the hydrogen bomb, 1952

i. New Look, 1955

j. massive retaliation

k. brinkmanship

l. Sputnik I, 1957

m. space race

n. Nikita Khrushchev

o. peaceful coexistence

p. flexible response

q. Cuban Missile Crisis, 1962

r. Limited Test Ban Treaty, 1963

s. Nixon Doctrine

t. detente

u. Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty I (SALT I), 1972

v. Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty II (SALT II), 1979

w. Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan, 1979

3. **The Red Scare**

Americans debated policies and methods designed to root out Communists within the United States, even as both parties tended to support the broader Cold War strategy of containing communism.

a. fellow-traveler

b. House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC)

c. Alger Hiss

d. McCarran Internal Security Act, 1950

e. McCarran-Walter Act, 1952

- f. Julius and Ethel Rosenberg

- g. Joseph McCarthy

- h. McCarthyism

- i. Army-McCarthy Hearings, 1954

4. **The American National Security State**

Americans debated the merits of a large nuclear arsenal, the “military-industrial complex,” and the appropriate power of the executive branch in conducting foreign and military policy.

- a. National Security Council, 1947

- b. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), 1947

5. **Decolonization and the Spread of Nationalism**

Postwar decolonization and the emergence of powerful nationalist movements in Asia, Africa, and the Middle East led both sides in the Cold War to seek allies among new nations, many of which remained nonaligned.

- a. Chinese Civil War

- b. Mohammed Mossadegh

- c. Gamal Abdel Nasser

d. Ho Chi Minh

6. **Wars in Korea and Vietnam**

The United States sought to “contain” Soviet-dominated communism through a variety of measures, including military engagements in Korea and Vietnam.

a. Korean War, 1950-53

b. Vietnam, 1954-1961 (Eisenhower Administration)

c. domino theory

d. Vietnam, 1961-1963 (Kennedy Administration)

e. Tonkin Gulf Resolution, 1964

f. Vietnam, 1965-1969 (Johnson Administration)

g. Vietcong

h. Tet Offensive, 1968

i. Eugene McCarthy

j. Robert Kennedy

k. My Lai, 1968

l. Vietnam War, 1969-1973 (Nixon Administration)

m. Vietnamization, 1969-1973

n. U.S. withdrawal from South Vietnam, 1973

o. War Powers Act, 1973

p. Fall of South Vietnam, 1975

7. **Vietnam – The War at Home**

Although the Korean conflict produced some minor domestic opposition, the Vietnam War saw the rise of sizable, passionate, and sometimes violent antiwar protests that became more numerous as the war escalated.

a. Students for a Democratic Society, 1960

b. Kent State, 1970

c. Pentagon Papers, 1971

8. **The U.S. and Latin America**

Cold War competition extended to Latin America, where the U.S. supported non-Communist regimes with varying levels of commitment to democracy.

a. Organization of American States, 1948

b. Alliance for Progress, 1961

c. Bay of Pigs, 1961

d. Mann Doctrine, 1964

e. U.S. Occupation of the Dominican Republic, 1965

f. Salvador Allende

g. Panama Canal Treaty, 1977

h. Sandinista Liberation Front

9. **The U.S. and the Middle East**

Ideological, military, and economic concerns shaped U.S. involvement in the Middle East, with several oil crises in the region eventually sparking attempts at creating a national energy policy.

- a. Palestine, 1948

- b. Suez Crisis, 1956

- c. Eisenhower Doctrine

- d. Yom Kippur War, 1973

- e. Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC)

- f. Camp David Accords, 1979

- g. mujahedeen

- h. Carter Doctrine, 1979

10. **The Civil Rights Movement**

Following World War II, civil rights activists utilized a variety of strategies — legal challenges, direct action, and nonviolent protest tactics — to combat racial discrimination. Continuing white resistance slowed efforts at desegregation, sparking a series of social and political crises across the nation, while tensions among civil rights activists over tactical and philosophical issues increased after 1965.

- a. Southern Manifesto, 1954

- b. Rosa Parks

- c. Martin Luther King, Jr.

- d. Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), 1957

- e. Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), 1960

- f. sit-in

- g. freedom rides, 1961

- h. public order laws

- i. James Meredith

- j. March on Washington, 1963

- k. Freedom Summer, 1964

- l. March from Selma to Montgomery, 1965

m. Watts, 1965

n. Black Power

o. Nation of Islam (Black Muslims)

p. Malcolm X

q. Black Panthers

r. race riots, 1968

s. George Wallace

11. Enforcing the Fourteenth Amendment

Decision-makers in each of the three branches of the federal government used measures including desegregation of the armed services, *Brown v. Board of Education*, and the Civil Rights Act of 1964 to promote greater racial justice.

a. Desegregation of the Armed Services, 1948

b. *Brown v. Board of Education*, 1954

- c. Civil Rights Act of 1957

- d. Civil Rights Act of 1964

- e. Voting Rights Act of 1965

12. The Rights Revolution

Activists began to question society's assumptions about gender and to call for social and economic equality for women and for gays and lesbians. Latinos, American Indians, and Asian Americans began to demand social and economic equality and a redress of past injustices.

- a. American GI Forum, 1948

- b. *The Feminine Mystique*, 1963

- c. Equal Pay Act, 1963

- d. Title VII, 1964

- e. National Organization for Women (NOW), 1966

- f. Stonewall Riot, 1969

- g. Equal Rights Amendment, 1972

h. Chicano Movement

i. César Chávez

j. American Indian Movement (AIM), 1968

k. Russell Means

l. Alcatraz, 1969

m. Wounded Knee, 1973

n. Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act, 1974

13. The War on Poverty

Despite the perception of overall affluence in postwar America, advocates raised awareness of the prevalence and persistence of poverty as a national problem, sparking efforts to address this issue. Liberalism reached its zenith with Lyndon Johnson's Great Society efforts to use federal power to end racial discrimination, eliminate poverty, and address other social issues while attacking communism abroad.

a. Lyndon Johnson's Great Society, 1964

b. War on Poverty, 1964

c. Medicaid, 1965

d. Medicare, 1965

14. The Warren Court, 1954-1969

Liberal ideals were realized in Supreme Court decisions that expanded democracy and individual freedoms, Great Society social programs and policies, and the power of the federal government, yet these unintentionally helped energize a new conservative movement that mobilized to defend traditional visions of morality and the proper role of state authority.

a. *Baker v. Carr*, 1962

b. *Engel v. Vitale*, 1962

c. *Gideon v. Wainwright*, 1963

d. *Griswold v. Connecticut*, 1965

e. *Miranda v. Arizona*, 1966

15. 1960s Radicalism

Groups on the left also assailed liberals, claiming they did too little to transform the racial and economic status quo at home and pursued immoral policies abroad.

a. Students for a Democratic Society

b. Berkeley Free Speech Movement, 1964-1965

16. Post-War Economic Prosperity

A burgeoning private sector, continued federal spending, the baby boom, and technological developments helped spur economic growth, middle-class suburbanization, social mobility, a rapid expansion of higher education, and the rise of the “Sun Belt” as a political and economic force.

- a. GI Bill of Rights, 1954

- b. National Defense Student Loans, 1958

- c. Sun Belt

17. Immigration

Internal migrants as well as migrants from around the world sought access to the economic boom and other benefits of the United States, especially after the passage of new immigration laws in 1965.

- a. Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965

18. The Environmental Movement

Responding to the abuse of natural resources and the alarming environmental problems, activists and legislators began to call for conservation measures and a fight against pollution.

- a. Silent Spring, 1962

- b. Earth Day, 1970

- c. Environmental Protection Agency, 1970

- d. Clean Air Act, 1970

e. Three Mile Island, 1979

19. Post-World War II American Culture

Economic and social changes, in addition to the anxiety engendered by the Cold War, led to an increasingly homogeneous mass culture in the 1950s, as well as challenges to conformity by artists, intellectuals, and rebellious youth.

20. Changes in American Society

Although the image of the traditional nuclear family dominated popular perceptions in the postwar era, the family structure of Americans was undergoing profound changes as the number of working women increased and many social attitudes changed.

21. Baby Boomers and the Transformation of American Society

Young people who participated in the counterculture of the 1960s rejected many of the social, economic, and political values of their parents' generation, initiated a sexual revolution, and introduced greater informality into U.S. culture.

a. baby boom

b. Beats

c. rock and roll

d. counterculture (hippies)

e. Woodstock, 1969

22. Political Polarization in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s

Conservatives and liberals clashed over many new social issues, the power of the presidency and the federal government, and movements for greater individual rights. Conservatives, fearing juvenile delinquency, urban unrest, and challenges to the traditional family, increasingly promoted their own values and ideology.

- a. New Right

- b. southern strategy

- c. Watergate, 1972

- d. *Roe v. Wade*, 1973

- e. Right-to-Life Movement

- f. Proposition 13, 1978

- g. *Bakke v. University of California*, 1978

- h. Phyllis Schlafly

Additional Information

Examples:

1. Central Treaty Organization (CENTO), 1955

2. Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO), 1955

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