



# 30

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**W**HILE VICTORY IN World War II brought relief and exhilaration to the nation, the beginning of the Atomic Age hung ominously like a cloud over the future. "Anglo-Saxon science has developed a new explosive 2,000 times as destructive as any known before," announced the stentorian voice of NBC's star newscaster H. V. Kaltenborn on the evening of August 6, 1945. "For all we know, we have created a Frankenstein!" Unable to sleep, country music singer Fred Kirby on August 7 wrote a somber hit song, "Atomic Power." "They're sending up to Heaven to get the brimstone fire," the song began; it ended: "We will not know the minute, and we will not know the hour." On August 8, the *Milwaukee Journal* published a map with concentric circles to show what the Hiroshima bomb would have done to Milwaukee. "If we, a professedly Christian nation, feel morally free to use atomic energy in that way," declared the leaders of the Federal Council of Churches on August 9 in a statement signed jointly by Methodist bishop G. Bromley Oxnam and John Foster Dulles, the chairman of the FCC's Committee on a Just and Durable Peace and a future secretary of state, "... men elsewhere will accept that verdict. Atomic weapons will be looked upon as part of the arsenal of war and the stage will be set for the sudden and final destruction of mankind." "Instead of congratulating ourselves," editorialized the *Christian Century* on August 15, "we should now be standing in penitence before the Creator of the power which the atom has hitherto kept inviolate." Still, some 80 percent of Americans polled approved of the decision to drop the bomb to end the war. Among the American

troops poised to invade Japan, the reaction was nearly universal: “Thank God for the atom bomb!”

The world had entered the Atomic Age, a phrase at once heard everywhere. Mixed with stunned realizations that something almost apocalyptic had happened were promises that atomic power would mean lightning-fast transportation, miracle cures, and power so abundant that the need for human labor would practically vanish. There were also the usual crass jokes and commercial hype inseparable from American life: bars offered “atomic cocktails,” department stores touted “atomic sales,” and a Los Angeles burlesque house invited customers to ogle its “Atom Bomb Dancers.”

Though spared the devastation experienced by many of the warring nations, Americans were emotionally exhausted at the end of the struggle, and they yearned to spend their wartime savings on things that had been denied them during the war. They aspired to get out of cramped housing, to find good jobs, buy a car, and have a good family home. Yet memories nagged of all-too-recent privations: what guarantee was there that troop demobilization would not bring back the Depression?

## PATHS BACK TO NORMAL LIFE

World War II changed the face of American society in many ways. Women, for example, had entered the workforce in large numbers. At war’s end, some wanted to resume being housewives and mothers, but some relished life outside the home, valued the security that a steady job could bring, and wanted the freedom to choose what they would do. Sometimes their aspirations clashed with the eagerness of thousands of returning servicemen to get back their old jobs or find new ones.

The war had also stirred African American aspirations. Blacks who had defended their country or migrated to wartime jobs in northern cities believed that the time had come to recognize blacks as full citizens. Millions of whites, however, were as determined as ever to cling to old patterns of segregation and discrimination.

A swollen federal government was one of World War II’s enduring legacies. During the war, the government set prices, allocated workers, rationed food and consumer goods, and, to some extent, combated workplace racial discrimination. Every wage earner faced the burden of taxation (before the war only the rich had paid income taxes), and the national debt seemed astronomical.

These strains produced a conservative reaction. Wartime prosperity for millions of working-class Americans had dissipated much of the energy driving New Deal social reforms. The president of the National Association of Manufacturers, long an opponent of the New Deal, expressed a widely held view when he argued for “jobs, freedom and opportunity” and demanded that “enterprise must be free of restraint and government regulation.” Congress reflected this desire to move away from economic and social reform. Since 1942, Congress had been dominated by a conservative coalition of Republicans and southern Democrats who believed that the federal government should end economic controls and not tamper with race relations.

### Harry S Truman

Americans had a new president when the war ended, one who was not very well known. “Who the hell is Harry Truman?” demanded Admiral William D. Leahy upon hearing that FDR had suddenly died on April 12, 1945. Millions asked the same question.

Harry Truman was born in rural Missouri in 1884 and was the last president to lack a college education. After serving with distinction in the Great War, he opened a Kansas City haberdashery in 1919. Within a year, he went bankrupt. Desperate, he turned to politics. In 1926, with the support of the Pendergast machine, which dominated Kansas City-area politics, he was elected county judge. In 1934 he became the machine’s nominee for Senator, and he won in the Democratic landslide. Washington insiders, however, disdained him as a hack. In 1940, FDR had supported a rival in Truman’s senatorial primary, and the machine dropped him. But Truman stumped the state and won by building a coalition of farmers and workers, whites and blacks.

During World War II, Truman’s unwavering support for the New Deal brought him the highly visible chairmanship of a Senate committee supervising the awarding of government contracts and exposing corruption. When FDR decided to drop his staunchly liberal vice president, Henry Wallace, in 1944, Truman’s acceptability to all party factions made him Roosevelt’s compromise choice as a running mate.

As he readily admitted, Truman came to the presidency ill equipped. Roosevelt had shut him out of crucial policy discussions; he knew nothing of the Manhattan Project or the Yalta negotiations until after he became president. Lacking experience in foreign



**“The Buck Stops Here!”** President Harry S. Truman at his desk in the Oval Office.

affairs, at the outset he tended to view the world in terms of local politics. He cultivated the image of a no-nonsense man of action; on his desk a sign read “The Buck Stops Here.” But his bravado masked deep insecurity. Truman feared that he was unprepared to be president — but he also felt that if a man of the people could not do the job, something was wrong with the system. Some of the new president’s personal qualities got him into trouble. Personal loyalties made him prone to cronyism. He quickly replaced much of FDR’s cabinet with friends, infuriating veteran New Dealers. And his hot temper was often on display. When a music critic denigrated his daughter’s attempt at concert singing, he publicly threatened to punch “the son-of-a-bitch” in the nose.

But Truman was a man of immense integrity. He readily accepted responsibility for all aspects of his administration and was resolutely committed to the interests of his country as he perceived them. He felt that the government should care for those unable to care for themselves. He shared some of the racial prejudice of his day, but he also hated discrimination. Above all, he was persistent and resilient in defending the policies he had inherited from his predecessor.

As FDR’s successor, Truman tried to maintain the New Deal. In September 1945 he asked Congress to

bring millions of new workers under Social Security, raise the minimum wage, establish national health insurance, launch new regional development projects similar to the TVA, guarantee full employment, and reorganize the executive branch. He was, however, a committed believer in the virtues of the free enterprise system.

Congress did pass an Employment Act in 1946 — but it gutted provisions requiring the government to launch public works projects when unemployment reached a specific level. The act simply set up a Council of Economic Advisers to recommend policies to prevent depressions. Congress also approved a modified version of the president’s plan for governmental reorganiza-

tion. But the conservative-leaning Democratic Congress would do no more to continue the New Deal.

### ❧ *Reconversion and the Baby Boom*

After V-J Day, American servicemen and the American public wanted a return to a peacetime society — and they wanted it quickly. “Bring the boys home,” the public clamored — and they were heard. The armed forces shrank from 12 million in 1945 to 1.6 million in 1947.

Rapid demobilization and “reconversion” — the transition to a peacetime economy — brought dislocations but not the dreaded return of the Great Depression. The New Deal’s safety net — unemployment benefits and Social Security — cushioned the impact of lost wartime jobs. More important, under the Servicemen’s Readjustment Act of 1944, or “GI Bill of Rights,” the federal government spent \$13 billion for veterans’ benefits, including unemployment compensation, housing subsidies, education, and small-business loans. By 1947 over a million ex-servicemen were among the 2.5 million Americans attending college. Furthermore, pent-up consumer demand in the form of unspent billions in forced wartime savings stimulated the private sector and created tens of thousands of jobs.

Reversing a steady drop in fertility rates since the early nineteenth century, postwar America experienced a demographic surge known as the baby boom. The birth rate, at a historic low of 19.4 per thousand in



**Upward Mobility** This Penn State student, a veteran photographed in February 1946, was one of the early beneficiaries of the GI Bill. He lived with his wife and daughter in a trailer, paying \$28 monthly rental. His desk was built out of orange crates, and he earned three or four dollars a night by selling sandwiches in fraternity houses to purchase such “extras” as clothing and entertainment. Many of the parents of the postwar “baby boom” generation got their college education under the GI Bill — and lived under such conditions.

1940, hit 24 per thousand in 1946 and did not fall again until the 1960s. In the 1950s, three- and four-child families were the norm.

Having grown up amid depression and war, young Americans of the late 1940s and early 1950s seemed serious and focused. Those attending college under the GI Bill rushed through the curriculum so they could begin earning money and raising families. They were more security-conscious than their parents had been — or their children would be. Shunning risk, they preferred working for corporations, not opening their own businesses. “Security has become the big goal,” reported *Fortune* magazine. “[They] want to work for somebody else . . . preferably somebody big.”

### ☞ *Prices, Wages, and Strikes*

Reconversion caused Truman innumerable headaches. Businesses and farmers pleaded for wartime controls to be scrapped so they could buy desperately needed equipment. Workers demanded raises, and consumers wanted to spend their savings. The administration, however, feared runaway inflation if controls were

lifted too rapidly. Soon after V-J Day it was announced that the Office of Price Administration (OPA) would continue to control prices. Business groups raged; one overheated Republican orator denounced OPA administrators as “the single most important collection of American fascists we’ve got.”

Labor unions, increasingly militant, faced the president with difficult economic decisions immediately after the war. As union leaders scrapped wartime no-strike pledges, strikes crippled key industries. Truman asked Congress for authority to declare an emergency and assume direct control over any industry he deemed vital to the national interest. He wanted the power to order workers back on the job, to fine or jail resisting labor leaders, to set wages and prices, and to draft anyone refusing to work. Labor pressured Congress into rebuffing the White House. Still, the administration mediated settlements in which unions won approximately two-thirds of their wage demands and made hefty gains in fringe benefits. Management passed along the costs to consumers.

In the spring of 1946, bushy-browed John L. Lewis led his 400,000 United Mine Workers out on strike. “I have pleaded your case not in the quavering tones of a mendicant asking alms, but in the thundering voice of the captain of a mighty host, demanding the rights to which free men are entitled,” he roared. For the average American, Lewis was at best self-serving and at worst a traitor, and the new strike threatened to shut down every steam-driven apparatus in America. When mine owners refused to negotiate, Truman seized the mines. After fifty-nine days the president brokered an agreement in which the miners got modest gains. Meanwhile the railroad brotherhoods called a nationwide walkout. Even though his legal authority to do so was in doubt, Truman went before Congress to announce that the government was taking over the railroads. As he began speaking, an aide rushed up the aisle with the message that all but one of the brotherhoods had agreed to a compromise. Eventually it too gave in.

Through his decisive actions, Truman had restrained organized labor and held inflation to 7 percent in the first ten months after V-J Day, but his refusal to scrap controls offset whatever public good will he might have won. As the July 1, 1946, expiration date for the OPA approached, Truman appealed to Congress to extend the hated agency’s authority — which it did, but only after stripping the OPA of most of its powers. Truman vetoed the bill, allowing the OPA to expire on schedule — and in two weeks inflation skyrocketed to

25 percent. “Prices Soar, Buyers Sore, Steers Jump Over the Moon,” headlined the *New York Daily News*. On July 15, a humbled Congress restored controls for a year.

Americans had endured the war with high hopes for postwar life. Instead, returning veterans found shortages, rationing, controls, black markets, inflation, and gridlock. The 1946 film *The Best Years of Our Lives*, portraying veterans returning to an indifferent, squabbling nation, caught the bittersweet mood. Democrats and the president received the blame. “To err is Truman,” said wags. “Had enough?” asked the Republicans in the 1946 election. Voters had. A landslide gave the GOP control of Congress for the first time since 1928.

### ↻ *The Eightieth Congress*

The leader of the new Republican Congress was Senator Robert A. Taft of Ohio. The son of William Howard Taft, “Mr. Republican” was a foe of the New Deal, a champion of business, a prewar isolationist, and a stern anticommunist. Yet Taft favored some social reform, including federally sponsored public housing and aid to education, and he saw himself as defending workers against union bosses and a president who threatened to draft strikers. He and Truman confronted each other with open contempt.

When the Eightieth Congress convened in early 1947, much of the public, angered by the postwar strikes, strongly supported the centerpiece of the conservative program: the Taft-Hartley bill. Its object was to correct the widely perceived tilt in favor of unions that came with the enactment of the New Deal’s Wagner Act of 1935. In June 1947, Congress passed the Taft-Hartley Act by large margins. Although the bill did not go as far as some conservatives wanted, it outlawed the closed shop (in which union membership was a condition of employment) and banned a list of “unfair labor practices.” It permitted employers to sue unions for breach of contract and to petition the National Labor Relations Board for elections to determine bargaining agents. When the president found that a strike imperiled national health or safety, he could impose “cooling off” periods and seek court injunctions suspending the job action. Unions were forced to submit annual financial statements to the government and were forbidden to contribute to political parties, and union officials had to swear that they did not belong to the Communist Party.

Unions and liberals viewed Taft-Hartley as an attempt to destroy organized labor. So did Truman, who despite his fulmination against greedy union leaders

and strikers knew that he needed organized labor’s support in the 1948 election. Truman vetoed the bill, but Congress promptly overrode his veto.

The Eightieth Congress took a postmortem slap at Franklin Roosevelt by sending to the states (which quickly ratified it) the Twenty-second Amendment, limiting future presidents to two terms. Ironically, Democrats would benefit most from the amendment, which in the future would deny third terms to popular GOP presidents Eisenhower and Reagan, though it may have thwarted a third-term run by Bill Clinton as well.

### ↻ *Toward the Good Life*

Truman and the Republicans fought their political battles in the midst of rising prosperity spawned by a burgeoning technological revolution. Between 1945 and 1950, consumers encountered the automatic transmission, the long-playing record, the electric clothes dryer, the automatic garbage disposal — and, above all, television, experimentally introduced in 1939 but delayed by the war. When, over liberal objections, price controls ended in mid-1947, families started buying all the TVs, appliances, and gadgets that their paychecks and savings could bear.

In 1945, massive housing shortages created a nightmare. Not since 1929 had there been a good year for new housing starts. Now, almost 19 percent of American families were doubled up, another 19 percent were hunting for housing, and 13 percent had given up looking. Over the next decade Americans would require 16 million new homes, *Life* magazine predicted. Even the ugliest subsidized units were often too expensive. *Fortune* estimated that veterans would have to earn \$58 a week to afford the average new house. The mean weekly wage was \$46 a week.

The housing problem was solved by a private-public partnership. Traditionally, banks and other lenders had followed a very tight mortgage policy, demanding as much as 50 percent of the total cost as a down payment and allowing no more than ten years to pay off the loan. When the Federal Housing Administration and the Veterans Administration began guaranteeing private construction loans, banks offered 30-year mortgages at 4.5 percent. New home construction jumped from 117,000 in 1944 to 1.7 million in 1950, by which time the housing industry had become the engine of a booming economy.

In 1946, William Levitt began to change American life when he bought 1,200 acres on Long Island and named the tract Levittown. Within months, using war-



**Levittown, Long Island** By 1955, when this photograph was taken, the “little houses made of ticky-tacky” had become a substantial community. The two Levittowns (on Long Island and outside Philadelphia), quickly built in the late 1940s, became the archetype for the postwar suburban housing boom. Architectural critics sneered, but the first Levittowners were glad to have an affordable place to live after the privations of the Depression and the war.

time mass-production methods, he built 10,000 homes, selling for \$7,000 to \$10,000; veterans could buy for a home for payments of \$56 a month. Even bigger Levittowns soon followed elsewhere.

Some intellectuals sneered at the “little boxes made of ticky-tacky”; the *New York Times*’s architecture critic derided the tract developments as an “urban planning disaster.” But the need was desperate, and even the critics realized that the “Levittown houses turned the detached, single-family house from a distant dream to a real possibility for thousands of middle-class American families.”

### ☞ “*To Secure These Rights*”

Wartime labor shortages, coupled with pressure from civil rights activists and a few unions, had modestly increased blacks’ share of jobs in defense industries. In addition, a million African American soldiers served in Europe and the Pacific. “I spent four years in the Army to free a bunch of Frenchmen and Dutchmen, and I’m hanged if I’m going to let the Alabama version of the Germans kick me around when I’m back home,” vowed

a black veteran. The NAACP and CORE targeted job discrimination, disfranchisement, and racially motivated beatings and lynchings. They won some successes immediately after the war. Many southern African American veterans headed straight for voter registration offices. In spite of intimidation, there was progress. The number of registered black voters in the South increased from 2 percent in 1940 to 12 percent in 1947.

In 1946, Truman appointed the President’s Committee on Civil Rights composed of distinguished Americans of every race and region to make recommendations to improve race relations. Their 1947 report, *To Secure These Rights*, described pervasive segregation and discrimination that reduced blacks to second-class citizenship. It called for the “elimination of segregation based on race, color, creed, or national origin, from American life.” In February 1948 the president urged an unenthusiastic Congress to turn the recommendations into law. In the first special civil rights message by a president, Truman demanded a federal law against “the crime of lynching, against which I cannot speak too strongly” — something FDR had never attacked for fear of losing southern white support. As Truman expected, Congress failed to respond. On July 26, 1948, the president by executive order banned racial discrimination in federal hiring, and four days later he ordered an end to segregation in the armed forces — in spite of opposition from such military heroes as Generals Marshall and Eisenhower, who feared racial tensions in the ranks would destroy morale. Those worries proved unfounded. In coming

years the military would give millions of black men and women dignified, merit-based career opportunities.

Another significant improvement in race relations in the United States during the immediate postwar years was the integration of major league baseball. To break the racial barrier, in 1945 Brooklyn Dodgers owner Branch Rickey handpicked Jackie Robinson, a sharecropper's son who had starred at UCLA and served as an officer during the war. In April 1947, Robinson debuted as a Dodger, often enduring verbal and physical abuse. Robinson prevailed with remarkable self-discipline as well as magnificent talent. By the time he retired in 1956, numerous other black athletes were becoming stars.

## THE COLD WAR BEGINS

Americans emerged from World War II hopeful that with the defeat of the Axis the world would enter an era of unbroken peace. Perhaps it did. Some recent students of postwar international relations see the Cold-War era as the “long peace,” pointing out that for nearly sixty years since V-J Day the great powers have avoided direct military conflict. Nevertheless, out of the Soviet-American confrontation came a great arms race, a threat of nuclear holocaust, and “proxy wars” that would kill millions around the globe.

At one level the Cold War represented the clash of competing ideologies. Marxism-Leninism assured Soviet leaders that the Soviet Union and its Communist Party stood at the vanguard of the “progressive” working class, confronting imperialistic capitalism bent on subjugating the globe. There might be truces, as when the Soviet Union and the capitalist states joined forces against Nazi Germany, but there would never be true peace until the working class triumphed. On the other hand, virtually all Americans, from Truman and his advisers to ordinary voters, believed that “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness” were inalienable human rights, and that dictatorships were intrinsically evil — particularly if they were anti-religious and anti-American. During the 1930s Americans had heard about the *totalitarian* nature of Nazism — its demand for total state control, its aggressive expansionism, and its contempt for traditional values. Americans had learned from the Holocaust that pure evil could motivate an enemy. As the East-West clash unfolded, most Americans came to see Communism as the equally menacing totalitarian successor to Nazism.



**Jackie Robinson Steals Home** Joining the Brooklyn Dodgers in 1947, Jackie Robinson had become one of baseball's greatest stars by 1952 — and a trailblazer for African Americans' drive for civil rights and personal dignity.

But the East-West struggle grew also out of the conflicting geopolitical goals of the Soviet Union and the Anglo-American powers. The objectives of the Big Three were indeed irreconcilable. The Soviet Union's determination to dominate Eastern Europe as a security zone and to cripple Germany clashed with the principle of self-determination dear to American policymakers and with the balance-of-power and geopolitical precepts that guided British diplomats.

The confrontation began even before World War II was over. Days after Nazi Germany's defeat, Washington abruptly canceled Lend-Lease aid — an action that grated harshly on the Soviet leaders, even though it resulted from bureaucratic clumsiness and targeted Great Britain as well as the U.S.S.R. In July 1945, after Germany's defeat but before Japan's surrender, Truman, Churchill,<sup>1</sup> and Stalin met in the Berlin suburb of Potsdam. “I told Stalin that I am no diplomat,” the president recorded in his diary, “but usually said yes and no

1. Midway through the conference, Churchill was replaced by Clement Atlee, the leader of the Labour Party, after it won Britain's first postwar general election.

to questions after hearing all the argument.” The Soviet dictator’s reaction remains a mystery, but Truman felt that the first encounter went well. “I can deal with Stalin,” he wrote. “He is honest — but smart as hell.” Britain and the United States reluctantly accepted Polish occupation of Germany’s eastern territories and the Soviet annexation of prewar eastern Poland. In conversations with his British and American counterparts, Stalin was candid: “Any freely elected [Polish] government would be anti-Soviet,” he said, “and that we cannot permit.” Truman and his advisers were unhappy about the emerging Soviet sphere in Eastern Europe, but there was nothing they could do short of going to war — which Western public opinion would not allow.

### ↻ *The Iron Curtain Descends*

During his first eighteen months in office, Truman alternated between bombast and conciliation in his dealings with Soviet diplomats, acutely aware of his inexperience in foreign affairs and hoping that Stalin would live up to the promises about holding free elections in Eastern Europe.

American hesitancy to confront the Soviet Union in deed as well as word was due to a number of factors. First, the rapid demobilization of America’s armed forces made the threat of confrontation incredible. Second, Truman was indecisive about dropping Roosevelt’s generally conciliatory policy toward the Soviet Union. Third, although polls showed that in the five months following V-J Day Americans’ belief in the chances of cooperation with the Soviet Union dropped from 54 to 35 percent, the public remained reluctant to abandon the good feelings about Russia that the wartime alliance had generated.

Eventually the Kremlin did hold elections in Eastern Europe, but only after eliminating or intimidating all opposition. In Hungary, Bulgaria, Romania, and Poland, similar scenarios were played out between 1945 and 1947, culminating in one-party elections and the proclamation of “people’s democracies.” In Yugoslavia and Albania, Communist guerrillas who had led the anti-fascist resistance seized power on their own but made clear their intent to ally with Moscow.

The atomic bomb also loomed as a serious obstacle to good relations with the Soviet Union. While some American strategists, including Secretary of State James F. Byrnes, believed that the U.S. should use the bomb to pressure the Soviet Union, others, including Secretary of War Henry L. Stimson, believed that

flaunting the bomb would only serve to deepen Soviet insecurities. Although American military strategists knew that the Soviet Union was working desperately to build its own bomb (which was successfully tested in September 1949), no realistic plan surfaced to control the arms race that was about to begin. President Truman backed the so-called Baruch Plan, proposed by financier Bernard Baruch at the first meeting of the United Nations Atomic Energy Commission in June 1946. In it, the U.S. offered to turn over its stockpile of nuclear weapons to an international control agency under United Nations supervision if all other nations would pledge not to produce their own and agree to an adequate system of inspection. The plan was rejected by the Soviet Union because it precluded any effort on their part to catch up with the U.S. in the nuclear race and because they believed that the United Nations would not be evenhanded in such a role.

Truman’s attitude toward Moscow gradually hardened. One signal came in March 1946, when he accompanied former prime minister Churchill to Fulton, Missouri, to make what was billed as a major foreign policy address at Westminster College. With Truman applauding on the platform, Churchill warned that an “iron curtain” had fallen across Europe, and he asserted that there was nothing the Russians had “less respect for than weakness, especially military weakness.” Continuing, he warned: “What they desire is the fruits of war and the indefinite expansion of their powers and doctrines.” The only thing that stood between Western Europe, devastated by World War II, and the five hundred Soviet divisions in Eastern Europe was the United States. He called for a renewal of the “fraternal association” between English-speaking peoples. While some Americans denounced Churchill as a warmonger, others recalled that he almost alone had sounded the alarm bell against Hitler in the 1930s. Perhaps he was right again.

Churchill’s warning came while the Western and Soviet foreign ministers wrangled over peace treaties to be signed with Germany’s former allies. The treaties gave Britain and America control of occupied Italy, but the West acquiesced in the Soviet domination then emerging in Hungary, Romania, and Bulgaria, as well as in Poland.

### ↻ *Planning for National Security*

Truman’s views on the Soviet Union, and those of other American policymakers, were strongly influenced by a group of American foreign service officers who knew



the Soviet Union well and distrusted it deeply. None was more important than George F. Kennan, an expert on Russian history and culture and the American chargé d'affaires in Moscow before and immediately after the war. Having spent years closely observing the Soviet Union, Kennan hated Communism. Lenin, Stalin, and their henchmen were “a swarm of rats” who were seeking to destroy Western civilization, he once observed. During and immediately after the war, he had repeatedly questioned FDR’s tendency to rely on goodwill and personal relationships in dealing with Stalin and in 1946 sent a highly pessimistic and influential “long telegram” insisting that the fanaticism of Soviet leaders made any short-term compromise with them impossible.

Truman’s secretary of state, James F. Byrnes, was a South Carolina politician known more for his ability to manipulate Congress than for his diplomatic expertise. By the time Truman accompanied Churchill to Fulton, Missouri, he and Byrnes had decided that British and American interests in Europe and the Near East were identical and that Soviet expansion must be stopped. But the persistence of neo-isolationism, coupled with ongoing liberal sympathy with the Soviet Union, had kept Truman from publicly confronting Moscow and pursuing a consistently hard-line policy. In the fall of 1946, however, former vice president Henry Wallace — now Truman’s secretary of commerce — forced the president’s hand. A staunch liberal, Wallace had grown alarmed as East-West relations deteriorated. “Communists everywhere want eventually a Communist world,” he conceded, but “for the moment I believe they are essentially interested . . . in strengthening the Soviet Union as an example of the kind of socialism they have in mind.” He became convinced that the president had fallen under the influence of doctrinaire anti-Communists. On September 17, Wallace delivered a nationally broadcast address at Madison Square Garden, supposedly stating administration policy. Unwisely, Truman had approved the speech without carefully reading it. Wallace attacked “getting tough” with the Soviet Union and called for Soviet-American friendship to be the cornerstone of American foreign policy. From Germany, where he was promising the people of the western zones that America would not abandon them to the Soviets, Byrnes demanded that the president choose between him and Wallace. Unhesitatingly, Truman demanded Wallace’s resignation. “I don’t understand a dreamer like that,” he subsequently wrote in his diary. “The Reds, phonies and the ‘parlor pinks’ seem to be banded together and are becoming a national dan-

ger. I am afraid they are a sabotage front for Uncle Joe Stalin.” It was a major policy decision.

In January 1947, Byrnes was replaced as secretary of state by General George C. Marshall. Unlike Byrnes — who tended to conduct foreign policy without consulting the White House — Marshall was unswervingly loyal to the president, an austere, inspiring leader, and a strong advocate of standing up to the Soviets. A superb administrator, Marshall’s practice was to select able subordinates and delegate authority.

Marshall revitalized the notoriously hidebound State Department, which neither FDR nor Truman respected. The three most important men on whom Marshall relied did much to shape America’s Cold War strategy. As his chief deputy, Marshall retained Dean Acheson, a political realist and disciple of theologian Reinhold Niebuhr. Acheson, who was to become Truman’s closest foreign policy adviser, readily accepted that the U.S. should have “limited objectives” in the postwar world, but by 1946 he saw it as his moral duty to stand up to the threat posed by Marxism-Leninism and Soviet imperialism. An Atlantic-oriented elitist, Acheson viewed Western Europe as crucial to American interests and believed that foreign policy should be left to experts who would periodically inform Congress and the public of their goals, but otherwise operate independently — generally in secret. For assistant secretary for economic affairs, Marshall chose Houston cotton broker Will Clayton, an international businessman committed to molding the non-Communist world into an interdependent economic unit by lowering trade barriers and establishing stable exchange rates. And Marshall named Kennan to head the department’s new policy planning staff, ensuring that at last the not-so-subtle Kremlinologist would be heard.

### ☞ *The Truman Doctrine and the Marshall Plan*

In February 1947, an economically ailing Great Britain quietly informed Washington that it could no longer dominate the eastern Mediterranean, through which ran its strategic lifeline to Middle Eastern oil and India. Two Mediterranean countries were then being threatened by Communism. Greece had been torn since 1944 by civil war between Communist-led partisans and the pro-British but repressive monarchy. And Soviet troops were massing on Turkey’s borders as Moscow ratcheted up demands for a naval base and free access to the Mediterranean. Both countries had been Great Britain’s strategic responsibility, but the British could no longer carry the primary burden.

At Acheson and Marshall's urging, Truman stepped into the breach. Acutely aware that the Republicans had won the 1946 elections, the State Department informally sought bipartisan support from congressional leaders. Acheson painted a dark picture. A Communist victory in Greece and the establishment of a Russian military presence on the Turkish Straits "might open three continents to Soviet penetration." The Soviets were "engaging in one of the greatest gambles in history," and only the United States could call their bluff. "Not since Rome and Carthage" had the West faced such a grim challenge. The Republican chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Michigan's Arthur Vandenberg, shed his isolationist past (in part thinking of his large constituencies of Polish-Americans) and now supported aiding nations threatened by "international communism." But, he warned, to gain support for such a break with isolationism, the president must "scare hell" out of the American people.

Truman did just that. On March 12, 1947, he made a dramatic appearance before Congress to ask for \$400 million in aid to Greece and Turkey. More important, he requested approval of a sweeping declaration of opposition to Soviet imperialism. "It must be the policy of the United States," he said, "to support free peoples who are resisting subjugation by armed minorities or by outside pressure." After brief debate, Congress approved both the aid and the policy statement.

Truman's promise to stand by societies threatened by Communism became known as the Truman Doctrine. It was endorsed by many New Deal liberals, by in-

ternationalist businessmen, by converted isolationists led by Vandenberg, by émigrés and ethnic groups from Eastern Europe, and by anti-Communist ideologues of various hues.

By early 1947 war-ravaged Western Europe was in dire straits. Journalists reported its "plague and pestilence, suffering and disaster, famine and hardship, the complete political and economic dislocation." Bombing had destroyed most of the continent's industrial base. Drought had killed much of the 1946 wheat crop, and food reserves were dangerously low. Millions of displaced persons wandered the countryside and glutted cities. German coal production was moribund, and in England the coal shortage was so great that power had to be shut off for hours every day. Prices rose in Italy to 35 times their prewar level, and in Hungary inflation reached 11,000,000,000,000 pengos to the dollar. American officials knew that extremism tended to flourish in conditions of economic and social insecurity. The French and Italian Communist parties were those countries' most powerful organizations, and it appeared that they would dominate future governments if nothing was done to provide food, clothing, and shelter.

Responding to this crisis in a June 1947 Harvard commencement speech, Secretary of State Marshall outlined a massive aid program. A notable feature of Marshall's proposal was his call to European nations to frame an *integrated* plan for recovery. If it agreed upon a joint approach to rehabilitation, Europe could count on the United States to supply "friendly aid." Marshall made

## IN THEIR OWN WORDS

### The Truman Doctrine, 1947

*When it appeared that the Soviet Union was poised to extend its influence beyond Eastern Europe and into the Mediterranean, President Truman went before Congress to ask for aid for Greece and Turkey, as well as to ask for congressional approval of a declaration of opposition to Soviet imperialism. In the process he articulated what became known as the Truman Doctrine.*

One of the primary objectives of the foreign policy of the United States is the creation of conditions in which we and other nations will

be able to work out a way of life free from coercion. This was a fundamental issue in the war with Germany and Japan. Our victory was won over countries which sought to impose their will, and their way of life, upon other nations. . . .

At the present moment in world history nearly every nation must choose between alternative ways of life. The choice is too often not a free one.

One way of life is based upon the will of the majority, and is distinguished by free institutions, representative government, free elections, guarantees of individual liberty,

freedom of speech and religion, and freedom from political oppression.

The second way of life is based upon the will of a minority forcibly imposed upon the majority. It relies upon terror and oppression, a controlled press and radio; fixed elections, and the suppression of personal freedoms.

I believe that it must be the policy of the United States to support free peoples who are resisting attempted subjugation by armed minorities or by outside pressures.

I believe that we must assist free peoples to work out their own destinies in their own way.



**Germany Emerges from the Rubble** This pair of news photographs carried the following caption in 1950: “Drive to Victory and Six Years After [in] Germany. . . Six years ago American forces fought their way ashore on the beaches of Normandy and began the drive that was to end in victory and the liberation of Europe from the Nazi heel. Many places familiar in the headlines of war news six years ago present a different aspect today, although nearly all still bear the scars of war. . . [Above:] Fifth Division troops advancing through the rubble of Frankfurt. Bottom: the exact spot as it looks six years after with streets and battered buildings repaired.”

three things clear: the United States would not fund a collection of national shopping lists; the scheme would have to provide for the economic reconstruction of Germany and its integration into the European economy; and the Soviet Union and its satellites were welcome to join. Kennan, Acheson, and Clayton believed that for a variety of reasons they could not exclude the Communist powers. Aside from wanting the United States to appear magnanimous, American officials feared that if the East European nations were not invited, French and Italian Communists would prevent participation

by their governments. Washington hoped that the prospect of integrating their economies with those of the West would ensure either that the USSR and its client states opened up their economies (and hence their political systems) to Western influence — or else that they never joined.

American planners correctly anticipated the Kremlin’s reaction. Stalin ordered the Polish and Czechoslovak governments to reject American aid (which, despite their pro-Soviet orientation, they had hoped to get). In the fall of 1947, Moscow began tying Eastern Europe’s economies to the Soviet Union in highly disadvantageous ways for the smaller countries. Europe’s division into hostile blocs was gelling. But in Western Europe the Marshall Plan’s success was not yet certain.

In the United States, leftists denounced the “Martial Plan,” while Taft and the Republicans fumed about “pouring money down foreign ratholes.” Administration representatives insisted that the Marshall Plan was a weapon in the struggle against world Communism. In the spring and summer of 1947 the French and Italian coalition governments, at Washington’s urging, expelled their Communist members. But if Europe’s economic woes did not ease, State Department officials told Congress, Communists would win the upcoming elections.

### ↻ *Strategies for the Cold War*

To improve coordination among the armed forces and increase the nation’s intelligence capacity, Congress passed in July 1947 the National Security Act. It created a unified military establishment by setting up a cabinet-level Department of Defense, with the Army, Navy, and Air Force becoming subcabinet departments answerable to the secretary of defense. A new body, the National Security Council (NSC), composed of the president, vice president, the secretaries of defense, state, and treasury, and the chief of intelligence, would meet regularly for strategic planning. The act made permanent the Joint Chiefs of Staff, a creation of World War II, and established the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) to coordinate intelligence gathering abroad. The CIA replaced the wartime Office of Strategic Services (OSS) and it was authorized to use both open and secret methods in the collection of information to protect national security. In later years the CIA also planned and carried out covert military and political operations in behalf of American interests abroad.

In 1948, Congress established what has been called a “cultural Marshall Plan,” the Fulbright Exchange

Program. Named for Senator J. William Fulbright of Arkansas, himself a Rhodes Scholar and former university president, the program sponsored exchanges of students and intellectual elites between the U.S. and a growing number of nations. Many of the critical leaders of foreign nations in the postwar years were participants in the Fulbright Program and hundreds of American professors taught abroad as Fulbright professors.

The U.S. also made military linkages around the world in the early days of the Cold War. In 1946 the U.S. granted independence to the Philippines but retained military bases in the islands and remained a strong presence there. In 1948 the U.S. led the way in founding the Organization of American States (OAS) in an effort to promote hemispheric solidarity, and American military advisers visited a number of Latin American nations to offer advice on strengthening their armed forces. In a move with profound implications for the future, in 1948 President Truman, over the objections of the State Department (where Middle East specialists feared the reaction in oil-rich Arab nations), recognized the new state of Israel. Truman's decision was partly to court the Jewish vote as the election of 1948 approached, but he also surmised that Israel would be a strategically critical ally in the Middle East.

### ∞ “Containment” Takes Shape

In the summer of 1947 an anonymous article entitled “The Sources of Soviet Conduct” appeared in the prestigious journal *Foreign Affairs*. It soon became known that the author, “Mr. X,” was George Kennan, and opinion-makers viewed the article correctly as official policy. Russian wartime and postwar expansion, Kennan argued, was another example of the age-old westward push of aggressors from the Eurasian heartland, and the United States — the heir and guardian of Western civilization and the most powerful of the Atlantic democracies — must lead in confronting the Communist menace. Kennan called his policy *containment*. The policy did not suggest aggressively seeking war, but rather keeping Communism out of the industrialized centers of paramount American strategic interest: Western Europe and Japan. If the Communist advance could be parried there, Soviet expansionism would stall and the Soviet system would eventually crumble. The Communist challenge was a blessing in disguise, Kennan concluded, because it would force the American people to accept “the responsibilities of moral and political leadership that history plainly intended them to bear.”

As the rationale of containing Communism took hold in the United States, “cold warriors” of three different kinds appeared among politicians, policymakers, and opinion-molders, as well as among citizens who paid attention to foreign affairs. First were the many prewar isolationists who had become aggressive nationalists after the Pearl Harbor attack showed that the oceans were not great barriers protecting “Fortress America,” but rather highways across which hostile ships and airplanes could rain down destruction on the Western Hemisphere. Led by *Time-Life* publisher Henry Luce, many America-Firsters decided that if the United States could not hide from the rest of the world, it must flex its economic and military muscles to control it.

The second group of cold warriors were internationalists in the Wilsonian tradition. Unlike the America-Firsters, they tended to see American interests as tightly bound to those of the democracies of Western Europe. Before Pearl Harbor, they had typically advocated giving maximum aid to Britain, even at the cost of becoming embroiled in the war. The United Nations — a more effective and American-led version of the League of Nations — had been their brainchild. But Soviet brutality in Eastern Europe and intransigence in the Security Council (which crippled the UN's ability to act), as well as growing fears of Communist intentions in Western Europe, by 1946-1947 led most internationalists to oppose what they perceived as Soviet expansionism. In doing so, they largely adopted the containment ideas of the third group of cold warriors — the small but now influential circle of men like Kennan and Averill Harriman, who knew Stalinist Russia from firsthand experience and had no illusions about it.

In February 1948, Communists staged a coup in Prague and seized control of Czechoslovakia, a move that jolted Congress into action. President Truman immediately requested authorization to reinstate conscription and universal military training, which had been allowed to expire after the war in keeping with American preferences for a small, volunteer military during peacetime. More important, the stalled Marshall Plan legislation passed both houses by lopsided margins. To maintain conservative support, the White House named automobile executive Paul Hoffman to head the administering agency. Under the Marshall Plan, between 1948 and 1952 the United States delivered about \$12.4 billion in aid to Western Europe (today's equivalent would be about \$86 billion). The Marshall Plan proved to be one of the most farsighted policies ever initiated by the United States, for it launched the

economic recovery that may well have saved Western Europe from Communism and certainly rebuilt the region into a partner for American trade and investment.

### ∞ *Reviving Western Germany and the Berlin Blockade*

In many ways the postwar fate of Germany became the most critical focus of the Cold War. At first, the Soviets stripped their eastern Germany zone of occupation of most of its remaining industrial assets as reparations, but were thwarted in their efforts to extract similar reparations in the West. It became increasingly clear that the Soviets intended to treat East Germany as a Communist satellite. On the other hand, in 1946 American secretary of state Byrnes assured German leaders that the U.S. would promote the economic rehabilitation of Germany and support the prompt establishment of a provisional government. The Truman administration built on these commitments to Germany; in January 1947 the American and British zones merged as a single economic unit, and the French (who for obvious historical reasons initially opposed the economic and political rebuilding of Germany) joined reluctantly in June. In July the U.S. extended Marshall Plan aid to the three western zones of occupied Germany.

The first great test of the containment policy in Europe came on June 24, 1948. In response to the American policy of establishing a unified economic and political unit in West Germany, Moscow decided to apply pressure on the western sector of Berlin, located 110 miles inside the Soviet zone and connected to West Germany only by a highway and a railroad. Soviet authorities suddenly suspended overland (but not air) access to Berlin that the American, British, and French forces in the former Reich's capital enjoyed under the Potsdam agreement. Stalin seems to have been motivated by the West's refusal to set up a four-power government for all of Germany, as promised by the Potsdam accords. He feared that Britain and the United States intended not only to rehabilitate but to rearm West Germany and unleash it against the Soviet Union. If his former allies could cut off German reparation shipments from their zones, reasoned Stalin, then the Soviets could prevent access to the 2.4 million Berliners inside the Soviet zone of occupied Germany. Stalin calculated that by blockading West Berlin he could either force the West out of the city and allow Moscow complete control over eastern Germany, or else get Western agreement to four-power governance over all of Germany, permit-

ting Moscow to block creation of a pro-Western government and to lure a neutralized Germany into the Eastern orbit.

When the Berlin crisis erupted, Truman seemed on the ropes. His party was splintering, his popularity was at an all-time low, and the Republicans had just nominated a formidable candidate, New York governor Thomas E. Dewey, to run against him in the election of 1948. Some of his advisers argued for abandoning Berlin as strategically untenable. Others, including the U.S. commander in Germany, General Lucius Clay, favored breaking the blockade by force. Truman did neither. He believed that if America surrendered West Berlin, all of non-Communist Europe would lose heart and be vulnerable to Communist takeovers. On the advice of General Omar Bradley, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Truman rejected Clay's advice that American troops fight their way into Berlin. Instead, he mounted a massive airlift, joined by the Royal Air Force, to provide Berliners with needed supplies. If there were to be hostilities, the Soviets would have to initiate them by shooting down Allied aircraft. Truman also announced that sixty "atomic capable" American B-29s were being based in Britain, presumably ready to bomb the Soviet Union.

The B-29 ploy was a bluff. The planes had not yet been adapted to carry a nuclear payload; indeed, the United States had fewer than fifty nuclear bombs in 1948, and many of them were not usable. Stalin probably knew this through his intelligence sources, but he chose not to challenge the airlift.

West Berlin required 2,500 tons of food, coal, and medicine a day. Within a week American and British cargo planes were supplying Berliners with that minimum, and later the daily volume reached 4,000 tons. With the frustrated Soviets standing by, the morale of West Germans soared, and the U.S. reaped a propaganda bonanza. Truman decided to keep the airlift going indefinitely, and at its peak the remarkable operation delivered 13,000 tons a day to the besieged city. After 324 days of blockade, on May 12, 1949, the Kremlin backed down and reopened ground routes. Containment had withstood its first test.

The Berlin blockade further polarized Europe and ensured that Germany would remain divided for forty years. When in the course of 1949 the United States and its allies (including the reluctant French) created a West German state — the Federal Republic of Germany — the Soviets immediately set up the Communist German Democratic Republic in the east.



**The Berlin Blockade** On May 5, 1949, Berliners cheer an American cargo plane as it approaches to land at the city's Tempelhof Airport. At the time this photograph was taken, it had just been officially announced that the eleven-month Berlin Blockade would be lifted in a few days. Notice the apartment houses being reconstructed in the background.

## TRUMAN'S SECOND ADMINISTRATION: THE FAIR DEAL AND A GLOBAL COLD WAR

Harry Truman won the presidency in his own right in the election of 1948. While such polls vary dramatically over time, one survey of fifty-eight historians conducted in 2000 ranked Truman fifth in its list of “greatest presidents.” Ranked behind Lincoln, the two Roosevelts, and Washington, Truman finished ahead of such notable presidents as Wilson and Jefferson. Granting such an elevated stature to Harry Truman is partly explained by his transparent honesty and willingness to make tough decisions, but it also recognizes his importance in laying the groundwork for the post–World War II Western alliance that confronted and contained the Soviet Union for more than four decades.

Truman was not very successful in shepherding his domestic program through Congress. However, much of his domestic agenda, the “Fair Deal,” would reappear on the agenda of liberal reformers throughout the remainder of the century. In foreign affairs Truman made a long series of critically important decisions aimed at rebuilding Western Europe and Japan, building a military alliance capable of halting Soviet expansion, and, finally, committing American troops to a war in Korea to keep the south from being overrun by the Communist north.

### Truman's Stunning Victory

Despite Truman's popular stand in Berlin, Republicans had high hopes as the 1948 election approached. The president's low poll numbers and a splintering of the Democratic coalition made it seem that the White House was theirs for the taking. Conservatives favored Taft, but northeastern Republicans, mildly liberal and internationalist, wanted an alternative and feared that the dour Taft would repel voters. They approached the immensely popular Eisenhower, but he was not yet ready to run. So moderate Republicans turned to New York governor Dewey, the loser in 1944. His liberal record as governor (including support for black civil rights) and his advocacy of military alliances and foreign aid put him in the mainstream, while his suave manner made him seem the antithesis of the abrasive Truman. The GOP chose progressive California governor Earl Warren for the vice presidency and endorsed most New Deal reforms and Truman's foreign policy.

The Democrats were coming unraveled. On the left, former vice president Wallace campaigned as the champion of social and racial justice and the advocate of friendship with the U.S.S.R. After breaking with Truman, Wallace, who refused to disavow Communist support, tried to rally old New Dealers to his Progressive Party. Democratic liberals admired Wallace, but in the end most labor leaders and New Dealers decided that embracing his new Progressive Party would tar them with the pro-Communist brush. Anti-Soviet liberals like Eleanor Roosevelt, theologian Reinhold Niebuhr, historian Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., and CIO chief Walter Reuther formed the Americans for Democratic Action (ADA), which supported Wallace's call for extending the New Deal at home but resolutely opposed Communism abroad. After Eisenhower turned them down (as he had also rebuffed the GOP), the ADA and CIO reluctantly decided to stick with the man from Missouri.

On the right, many southern Democrats were angered by Truman's steps toward desegregation. At the Democratic convention Truman's backers sought to appease southern delegates with a policy statement criticizing discrimination only in vaguest terms. Liberals, however, demanded a plank attacking lynching and promising broad support for civil rights. Young Minneapolis mayor Hubert Humphrey electrified liberals by calling on the party to "get out of the shadow of states' rights and walk forthrightly into the bright sunshine of human rights." As some southerners walked out, the dispirited convention renominated Truman and named an old party warhorse, Kentucky Senator Alben W. Barkley, as his running mate.

As the 1948 election approached, Truman's approval rating had improved only slightly from the dismal low of 32 percent recorded in 1946. Nonetheless, the president gamely defended New Deal liberalism, and he and his chief political aide, Clark Clifford, developed a sound campaign strategy. Accepting the nomination, he announced that he would call Congress into a special session and dared the Republicans to enact the moderately liberal GOP platform — and when they failed to do so, he relentlessly lambasted the "do-nothing Eightieth Congress." To capture the midwestern and western farm belts, Truman demanded agricultural price supports and stressed his rural Missouri origins. In metropolitan areas he sought union and African American votes by reminding them of his veto of Taft-Hartley and his civil rights recommendations. The president's decision to recognize Israel weaned many Jewish liberals away from Wallace.

The White House hoped to hold most of the Solid South. But that seemed unlikely, as alienated "Dixiecrats" formed the States' Rights Democratic Party and nominated Governor Strom Thurmond of South Carolina for the presidency. Their plan was to win enough electoral votes to throw the election into the House, where they could bargain for their conservative agenda.

The confident Dewey conducted a dignified, bland campaign. According to the *Louisville Courier-Journal*, his four major speeches could be condensed into four sentences: "Agriculture is important. Our rivers are full of fish. You cannot have freedom without liberty. The future lies ahead."

Harry Truman was one of the few people in the United States who believed that he could win. He went on a 31,000-mile whistle-stop tour, making short, fiery speeches. Sometimes available money seemed insufficient to keep Truman's train rolling. But the voters re-



AT THE HOW-DID-IT-HAPPEN CLUB

NOVEMBER 7, 1948

**The Experts Stumped** After Harry Truman's surprise victory, the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch's* cartoonist D. R. Fitzpatrick on November 7, 1948, shows puzzlement everywhere "At the How-Did-It-Happen Club." Actually, the answer is easy: Polling ceased long before votes were cast, so that the last-minute surge of "undecideds" to Truman went unnoticed. Such a gross error in opinion sampling would not be made today.

sponded with shouts of "Give 'em hell, Harry!" He was the first presidential candidate to campaign in Harlem. The growing success of the Berlin airlift helped him, but still, pollsters predicted a GOP landslide.

On election night, as the first returns dribbled in, the *Chicago Tribune* ran a headline trumpeting "DEWEY DEFEATS TRUMAN!" But in a stunning upset that made him forever the underdog's hero, Truman garnered 24 million popular votes to Dewey's 22 million. Wallace and Thurmond trailed far behind with slightly more than 1 million each, and Dixiecrat hopes of throwing the election into the House fizzled as Truman took a majority of electoral votes — 303, to Dewey's 189 and Thurmond's 39. Truman's coattails even gave the Democrats razor-thin majorities in both houses of Congress.

The pollsters had missed a massive last-minute shift to Truman. The Dixiecrat rebellion reassured black voters who had questioned Truman's commitment to civil rights, while Wallace's challenge made it difficult to accuse Truman of being "soft on Communism." Dewey

came across as cold, arrogant, and boring. “You have to really know Dewey well in order to dislike him,” one Republican insider said. Bitter Republicans swore never again to wage a “me-too” campaign.

### ∞ *The Fair Deal*

In his State of the Union message in 1949, Truman unveiled a domestic program that he called the Fair Deal. He proposed raising the minimum wage from forty to seventy-five cents an hour, extending Social Security, repealing Taft-Hartley, providing low-cost federal housing, guaranteeing farmers’ income, providing federal health insurance, and passing civil rights legislation. Truman’s Fair Deal defined the liberal Democratic agenda for the second half of the twentieth century.

Bits of the Fair Deal were enacted. Congress raised the minimum wage and Social Security benefits and brought more than 10 million additional people (including some of the country’s most disadvantaged workers) under Social Security. With Taft’s backing, funds were provided for slum clearance and the construction of 810,000 units of low-cost housing. And Congress gave the states federal matching grants to build non-profit clinics and hospitals.

But most of Truman’s legislative initiatives failed. Taft-Hartley was not repealed, largely because Truman (feeling beholden to the unions) rejected compromise. Federal aid to education (on which Truman and Taft agreed) foundered because Roman Catholics demanded direct support for parochial schools — something anathema to Protestants, Jews, and liberals. Southern Democrats filibustered to death the president’s plan for a Fair Employment Practices Commission empowered to penalize job discrimination in the private as well as public sectors. A complicated and costly proposal for farm income support failed when the two most powerful farm lobbies clashed over the issue: Agribusiness interests, nurtured by New Deal policies and thriving thanks to agricultural exports under the Marshall Plan, denounced the plan for threatening to “socialize” American farming, while small farmers, in the midst of an ongoing exodus from the land, supported it. Finally, the administration’s proposals for national health insurance — a major gap in the Social Security program — were rejected by Congress under heavy pressure from the American Medical Association, which attacked the idea as “socialized medicine.”

Truman failed to enact most of his Fair Deal for sev-

eral significant reasons. Unlike the Depression decade in which New Deal legislation had been passed, the late 1940s were a period of overall economic expansion and rising personal expectations. White Americans were not yet ready to support meaningful attacks on racial discrimination or stubborn pockets of poverty — which few in the middle class had firsthand knowledge of. The class conflict of New Deal days was giving way to a public consensus that viewed class resentments as un-American and considered Truman’s appeals to various interest groups divisive. Although he had reassembled the New Deal coalition for his dramatic electoral victory, the president could not draw industrial workers, farmers, Catholics, “ethnics,” Jews, liberals, blacks, and southerners into coalitions to pass legislation. Increasingly, the issues that seized public attention were Communist expansionism abroad, fears of subversion at home, and the prospect of a nuclear war. America during the Truman years was simply not in the mood for reform.

Finally, Truman’s administration was buffeted by charges of corruption and cronyism. Although Truman was never personally implicated in “the mess in Washington,” many of his closest associates were — and Truman answered Republican attacks on his friends with equally partisan counterblasts. By the time his presidency ended in 1953, most voters were glad to see him go.

### ∞ *Ever-Colder War*

During Truman’s second term the United States poured \$13 billion into Europe and worked with various national governments to establish institutions and processes that would rehabilitate Western Europe’s economies. By 1952 industrial production in Europe had increased 30 percent over prewar levels and agricultural output rose by 11 percent. Trade within Europe, virtually destroyed by World War II, was resuscitated by the establishment in 1952 of the European Payments Union, which along with the European Coal and Steel Community, a remarkably successful step toward removing restrictions on the movement of those commodities in six European countries, laid the foundation for the subsequent European economic integration and ultimately the Common Market. The economic recovery of Europe, combined with strong support from the U.S., also aided in decisive election defeats for Communists in Italy and France in 1948. The Marshall Plan also served U.S. economic interests. Most of the money



poured into European countries was spent in the U.S., and with the revival of its economy, Western Europe became America's largest trading partner.

By 1948, events made it clear that the Cold War was becoming more and more complicated. The first crack in the Iron Curtain in East Europe appeared in 1948 when Yugoslav leader Josip Broz Tito successfully broke with Stalin and established an independent Communist regime. Truman's decision to recognize Israel, over the objections of Secretary of State George Marshall, placed the U.S. squarely on a collision course with Arab nationalism. In the Far East, the rapid crumbling of Nationalist Chinese government gave a new global significance to the Cold War and forced on the United States difficult decisions about selecting allies around the globe.

In 1949, Dean Acheson, who had left the State Department in 1947, replaced Marshall as Truman's secretary of state. Truman relied heavily on Acheson until his departure from office in 1953. The urbane Acheson had great respect for Truman's willingness to make tough decisions, and Truman regarded the secretary of state as "my good right hand." Regarded by conservatives as soft on Communism, but on the other hand too confrontational to suit Kennan and some liberals, Acheson was probably the single most influential architect of America's postwar policy of containing the Soviet Union.

### ☞ *NATO and the Building of the Western Alliance*

In the spring of 1949 the Truman administration took another momentous decision: to have the United States sponsor and join the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). By entering into its first formal alliance since 1778, the nation committed its troops to Western Europe's defense. Under the treaty the United States announced its willingness to go to war in the common defense — that "an armed attack against one or more . . . shall be considered an attack against them all." NATO initially linked the United States, Canada, Great Britain, France, Belgium, the Netherlands, Luxembourg, Denmark, Norway, Iceland, and Portugal.<sup>2</sup> Five days after the formation of NATO the Soviet Union assembled representatives of its seven East European satellites in Warsaw, where they signed a mutual de-

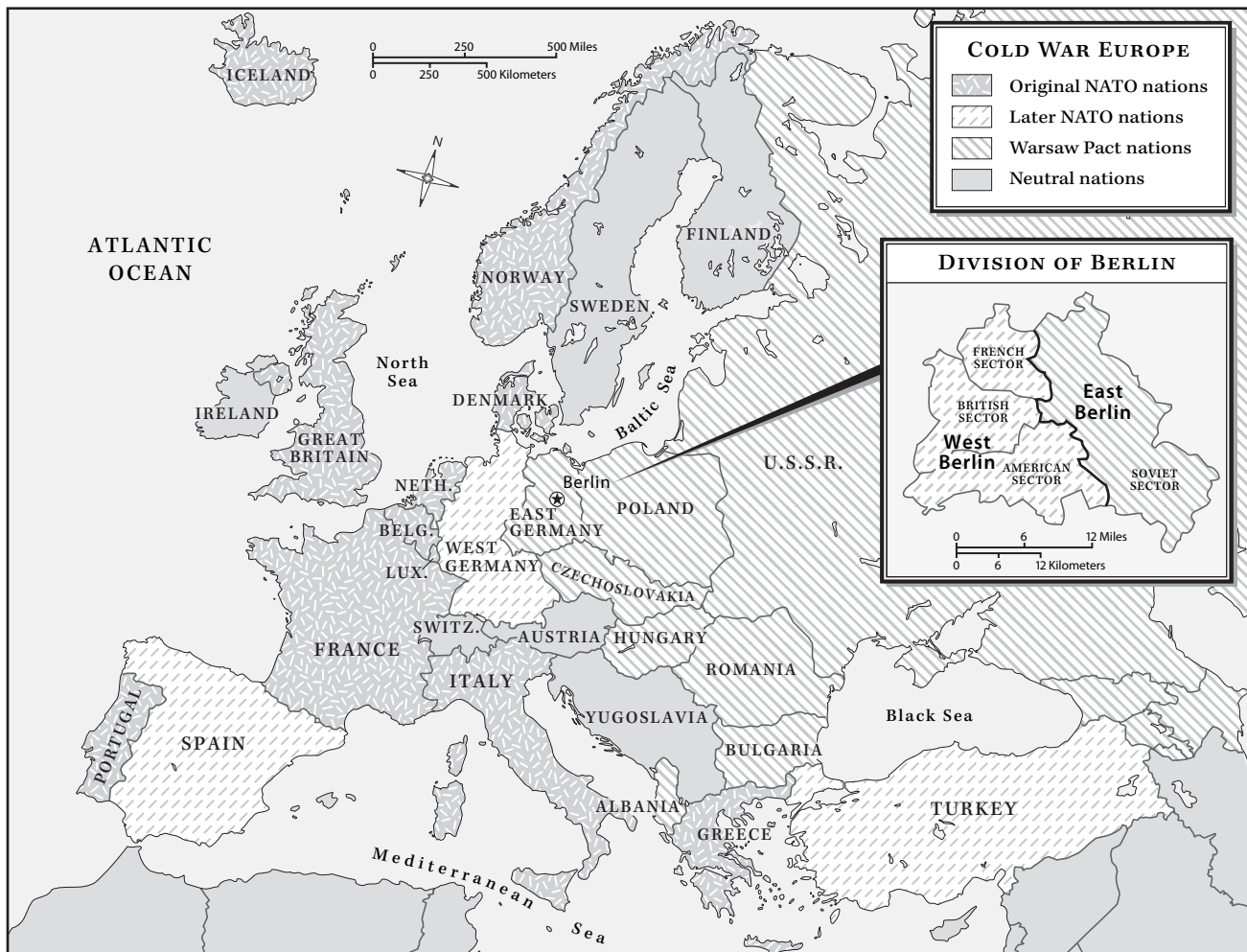
2. Greece and Turkey joined in 1952, West Germany in 1955, and Spain in 1979. After the Cold War, most of the formerly Communist states of Eastern Europe eventually also joined.



**Dean Acheson** Truman's last secretary of state was reviled by conservative Americans as a haughty elitist and "appeaser" of Communism. It is true that he did not suffer fools gladly, sported a natty mustache, and spoke with a clipped, upper-class accent, but he was also a fervent anti-Communist and a very effective diplomat. Here he is shown arriving at London's Heathrow Airport in 1950.

fense treaty that established the Warsaw Pact Organization, comparable to NATO. In fact, however, in the 1950s the Warsaw Pact operated entirely as an instrument of Soviet military domination in the east; joint military exercises were not conducted until 1961.

Fear of Soviet expansionism was not all that motivated the establishment of NATO; it was also intended to reassure the French in particular that Germany would never again threaten West Europeans. It assured that an eventually rearmed West Germany could be re-



garded as a safe partner, well integrated into the Western military and economic alliance. NATO's purpose, in the words of Lord Ismay, its first secretary-general, was "to keep the Russians out, the Americans in, and the Germans down."

In 1948 Stalin had launched a "peace offensive" whose goal was to enlist European leftists and neutralists in a movement to disarm Germany. This alarmed American planners, because they feared above all a neutralized Germany that might become a Soviet ally. Thus the U.S. embarked on a program to build West Germany's military and economic ties with the Atlantic powers. In turn, this meant beefing up Western forces in Germany so that if an invasion came, Soviet troops could be stopped before they reached the Rhine — thus assuring West Germans that the West would neither abandon them nor drop nuclear bombs on Soviet forces occupying them. In 1950 Truman named Dwight D. Eisenhower to be supreme NATO commander, and he sent four American divisions to Eu-

rope to form the core of a NATO army. These troops were to serve as a tripwire if Soviet troops attacked. In effect, Western Europe had been placed behind an American atomic shield. There was no evidence of a Russian plan to invade the West, but the Soviets continued to maintain hundreds of divisions in Eastern Europe and East Germany. American officials felt that they could not gamble that the hundreds of thousands of Red Army soldiers were in Eastern Europe for purely defensive purposes or that at some future date the Soviet Union might not either miscalculate or formulate more aggressive strategies.

### ☞ *The Soviet Atom Bomb and the Remobilization of the American Military*

The condition of American military forces in 1948 was deplorable. Truman and Secretary of Defense Louis Johnson believed that American interests around the globe could be defended on a budget of \$14 billion a

year and an ill-equipped, undermanned American army of ten divisions. The atomic bomb, they thought, was protection enough. But then, on July 14, 1949, the Soviet Union shocked the West by exploding an atomic device, several years earlier than American experts had predicted.

The Soviet bomb forced a swift reevaluation of the West's military strategy in Europe, and President Truman ordered the National Security Council to undertake a comprehensive reevaluation of American policy. In April 1950, State and Defense Department officials led by Paul Nitze, Kennan's successor as chief Cold War strategist,<sup>3</sup> produced a secret document known as NSC-68. Abandoning Kennan's plea that American strategic interests be confined to Western Europe, the Middle East, and Japan, NSC-68 saw *any* extension of the area under Communist control as a direct threat to the United States. This was not a new idea: American planners had for several years recognized that access to markets and key raw materials (petroleum, rubber, and various strategic metals) was essential for the security and prosperity of Western Europe, Japan, and indeed the United States. But NSC-68 turned this operating assumption into the strategic decision that no significant territory around the globe should be yielded to Communism.

Underlying NSC-68 was an assumption that the American economy was vastly expandable. The paper attacked the parsimony that caused Truman to try to defend American security on the cheap. "One of the most significant lessons of our World War II experience," NSC-68 pointed out, "was that the American economy, when it operates at a level approaching full efficiency, can provide enormous resources for purposes other than civilian consumption while simultaneously providing a higher standard of living." NSC-68 urged in strong language that the United States "strike out on a bold and massive program of rebuilding the West's defensive establishment to the point that it would surpass that of the Soviet world" and meet "each fresh challenge promptly and unequivocally."

Pursuing these objectives meant sharply increasing the size and firepower of American armed forces, and the deployment of large numbers of American ground forces in Europe. NSC-68 also recommended the immediate development of the thermonuclear (hydrogen)

3. Kennan left the State Department in late 1949, convinced that American policy was taking on more commitments than it could handle and was coming to rely excessively on a military response to the Soviet threat.

bomb. The first American "Super" bomb was successfully tested at the end of 1952, followed nine months later by the explosion of a Soviet thermonuclear device in August 1953. Many of Truman's advisers balked at the military expansion envisioned because of the costs involved, but Secretary of State Dean Acheson persevered, and the president supported the expanded definition of containment.

### 30 Cold War in Asia

The Soviet atomic bomb was not the only shock to American planners in late 1949. On October 1, 1949, Mao Zedong announced the establishment of the People's Republic of China. "China has stood up," he proclaimed, as his nation became a Communist state of 800 million people. America's wartime ally, Chiang Kai-shek, fled to Taiwan with discredited remnants of his corrupt regime.

The relatively few American policymakers who understood China knew that Mao was no Soviet puppet and believed that the United States might be able to exploit Sino-Soviet tensions. Stalin distrusted Mao as a potential rival and was surprised by his victory, won with a peasant-based army that consistently ignored Soviet experts. But for the moment the People's Republic of China became Moscow's ally. One-third of the human race was now ruled by Communist regimes.

The rapidity of China's "loss" horrified the many Americans who had long thought of that country as the beneficiary of Christian evangelism and the Open Door Policy. American business traditionally had viewed China as a huge potential market for exports. "With God's help, we will raise Shanghai up and up, ever up, until it is just as good as Kansas City," a Senator had boasted in the 1930s. The fact that China had succumbed to Communism seemed to millions of Americans the result of someone's stupidity — or betrayal.

In fact, the United States could have done nothing to forestall Communist victory in China. All across Asia, nationalist revolts were brewing against Western imperialism, and the devastation of World War II made China ripe for revolution. Mao's Communist army in China's far northeast had mounted the only vigorous resistance to the Japanese; rather than fighting Japan, Chiang had stockpiled American military gear with an eye to a postwar showdown with Mao, which broke out shortly after V-J Day.

Prewar isolationists — who during World War II had tended to advocate an "Asia-first" strategy — blamed

Chiang's fall on the Truman administration.<sup>4</sup> Supported by *Time* publisher Henry Luce, congressional Republicans blasted the Democrats for what they termed one of the greatest foreign policy failures of the twentieth century. Taft accused Truman and Acheson of pursuing an erroneous Europe-first policy and of appeasing the Soviets, and demagogues like Joseph McCarthy (discussed below) claimed that treason lay at the bottom of the collapse of China.

The Truman administration, however, saw industrialized but devastated Japan, not chronically impoverished China, as the focal point of the Cold War in Asia. Excluding the Soviet Union from any significant role, the United States occupied Japan after 1945 and forever changed the face of that nation. Authoritarian and paternalistic, General Douglas MacArthur headed the occupation regime and quickly won the respect of Japanese from the emperor to ordinary people.

American policy was to remake Japan as a democratic and peace-loving society. MacArthur drew up a constitution for Japan in 1947 patterned after that of the United States. Under it, Japan "forever renounced war as a sovereign right of the nation." American occupation officials reformed Japanese education, safeguarded civil liberties, including those of women, barred high military and civilian officials from office, and conducted war-crimes trials.

As tensions with the Soviet Union grew, MacArthur and the Truman administration began to envisage Japan as a balance to Soviet influence in the western Pacific — and a country that, like western Germany, must not be allowed to fall to Communism after the withdrawal of American occupation forces. Abandoning early attempts to break up large Japanese industries and redistribute land, occupation authorities now promoted industrial production and managerial efficiency, began to furnish economic aid, and encouraged former Japanese leaders to run for office. To the Soviet Union and China, all this seemed like the ominous rebuilding of a former enemy.

Concern with ensuring Japan's economic recovery and with placating France combined to lead the Truman administration to take the first small steps toward involvement in Vietnam. Before World War II, France

4. A major step along this road, they charged, had been the failure of George Marshall's effort, at Truman's behest, to mediate between Chiang and the Communists in 1945-1946. Acknowledging the hopeless incompetence of Chiang's regime, Marshall recommended — and Truman agreed to — the abandonment of active American aid to the Nationalists after full-scale civil war resumed in 1947.



**The Conqueror** At their first meeting, General MacArthur towers over formally clad Emperor Hirohito, who had come to call on the American proconsul. MacArthur strikes a deliberately nonchalant pose beside the emperor, who before and during the war had been revered as a divine figure by his subjects. The Japanese public came to admire MacArthur greatly for his work in overseeing the rebuilding of their country.

had ruled Indochina, but Japan occupied the colony in 1941. During World War II, the United States encouraged Indochina's Communist-led but also nationalistic Vietminh movement under Ho Chi Minh, which (like Mao's Communists in China) constituted the only effective anti-Japanese movement. FDR had opposed returning the colony to postwar French rule. But with Roosevelt's death, the onset of the Cold War, and the perceived need to placate France and rebuild Japan's export economy, the United States tacitly supported French efforts to regain control of Indochina. From 1946 through 1954, France and the Vietminh fought a bitter war.

Cold War ideologies soon engulfed the Indochinese struggle. France in 1950 created an anti-Communist South Vietnamese puppet state. In the north, Ho set up the Communist-dominated Democratic Republic of Vietnam, which Moscow and Beijing recognized — making it, to the Truman administration, an agent of international Communism. During the next three years, the United States gave France \$775 million to fight the Vietminh, and also sent a few military advisers to help South Vietnam fend off Communist guerillas.

### ☞ *The Korean War*

The Cold War first turned hot in Korea. After World War II, the former Japanese colony had come under Soviet occupation north of the 38th parallel and under American occupation south of that line. Efforts by the United Nations to unify the country in 1947 failed, largely because of Soviet intransigence. In 1948 the Kremlin set up a Communist regime in the north, headed by Kim Il Sung; that same year, the equally dictatorial but fiercely anti-Communist Syngman Rhee took power in South Korea after elections sponsored by the United States. The two regimes hated each other, and each vowed to reunite the peninsula under its own rule.

#### WOULD AMERICA FIGHT?

Although the United States signed an agreement with Rhee's regime in 1948, granting substantial military and economic assistance, there was some question about American willingness to defend South Korea militarily. Partly this was a consequence of the lack of readiness of U.S. conventional forces. Moreover, by early 1949 neo-isolationists within the GOP launched a campaign claiming that the greatest danger to America came not from abroad but from internal Communist subversion. Even mainstream conservatives such as Taft insisted that, because America's resources were limited, the United States ought to give first priority to ensuring its own prosperity by balancing the budget. Neo-isolationists not only opposed stationing of American troops in Europe but also warned against involvement in an Asian land war. In addition, many of Truman's own advisers recoiled at the expense of a global containment policy. Perhaps responding to these critics (scholars still debate why), Acheson announced in January 1949 that South Korea lay outside the American defensive perimeter and should rely on UN protection. Other statements by Acheson and MacArthur indicated that neither South Korea nor

Taiwan could automatically expect U.S. intervention in case of attack.

The Communists could have easily concluded that America was writing off South Korea. Recently disclosed Soviet documents reveal that in early 1950 both Moscow and Beijing gave tacit approval to Kim Il Sung's determination to reunify Korea. American actions may also have provoked the North Koreans. In May 1950, the administration announced plans to negotiate a peace treaty with Japan as quickly as possible, with neither the Soviets nor the Chinese allowed to participate and with the United States gaining the right to construct military installations in Japan. For Moscow and Beijing alike, unifying Korea under Communist control would counter a rehabilitated and pro-American Japan.

On June 25, 1950, the well-trained and well-equipped North Korean army swept down the peninsula, scattering South Korea's small and undisciplined army. From the beginning, Truman and Acheson assumed that the invasion was part of a wider Communist thrust to conquer all of Asia — or perhaps a diversionary feint before a Soviet attack in Europe. They swiftly brought Korea and Taiwan back within the American line of defense. On June 26 the president directed the Seventh Fleet to protect Taiwan and authorized a military response in Korea. He regarded the North Korean attack as a test of the "free world's" determination to defend democracy.

The Soviet Union was boycotting the sessions of the U.N. Security Council at the time of North Korea's attack because of America's veto of membership in the organization for Communist China. This blunder allowed the United States to obtain U.N. resolutions condemning the North Koreans as aggressors and calling upon member nations to contribute to an American-led force to defend South Korea. Truman at once named General MacArthur to command the army of liberation. The military effort in Korea was thoroughly American-dominated. The United States supplied 50 percent of the ground forces (most of the remainder came from South Korea), 86 percent of the naval power, and 93 percent of the air power.

#### GRIM REALITY OF WAR

After six weeks of fighting, remnants of the South Korean army and a small U.N. (chiefly American) force held only an enclave around Pusan. Then, on September 15, MacArthur made a daring landing at Inchon on Korea's western coast. Against light resistance, American marines and South Korean troops advanced inland

while their comrades in the south drove northward from Pusan. Seoul was recaptured on September 26.

At this juncture, the Truman administration faced a major decision. MacArthur urged invading North Korea and reunifying the peninsula. He insisted that neither the Soviet Union nor Communist China would intervene. Acheson agreed. Truman was not so sure, but he was persuaded by the argument that if UN forces merely restored the boundary at the 38th parallel, North Korea would attack again in the future. On September 27 the president instructed MacArthur to advance north unless he encountered Soviet or Chinese troops. Ten days later the UN approved reunifying Korea. By November 21 American troops could see Chinese sentries posted across the Yalu River, separating China and North Korea, and MacArthur announced that most American soldiers would be home for Christmas.

Instead, thirty-three Chinese divisions crossed the Yalu and shattered MacArthur's unwisely divided columns. Fighting the bitter cold, the mountainous terrain, and Chinese human-wave charges, American and South Korean soldiers retreated. At Chosin Reservoir, 23,000 were captured or killed. Three weeks later, the front line of battle reached well south of Seoul, and it was the Communists' turn to talk about reunifying Korea. By the end of January 1951, American forces halted the Chinese advance, allowing UN forces to retake the initiative. By March, Seoul was back in UN hands, and soon the 38th parallel was regained.

#### MACARTHUR VS. TRUMAN

Truman had learned his lesson, but MacArthur had not. MacArthur demanded a naval blockade of China, air attacks on Chinese military and industrial targets, and the introduction of Chiang Kai-shek's troops in Korea. He wanted not only to conquer North Korea but also to "sever Korea from Manchuria by laying a field of radioactive wastes across all the major lines of enemy supply." The administration knew that such acts would risk a global conflict, and — to MacArthur's rage — the State Department on March 20 began considering a negotiated settlement with the North Koreans and Chinese. Three days later the general issued a statement threatening to attack China's "coastal areas and interior bases." He also wrote a public letter to the Republican minority leader in the House, calling for an all-out war in Asia to defeat the Communists and criticizing "the diplomats" for being willing to fight with words only. Such insubordination flouted the American tradition of civilian control of the military. Tru-

man was outraged. "The son of a bitch isn't going to resign on me," the president told General Omar Bradley. "I want him fired." With the concurrence of the Joint Chiefs, Truman on April 11 relieved MacArthur of his command.

Fully aware of MacArthur's popularity, the Republicans blasted the Democrats once more as soft on Communism. The conqueror of Manila and Inchon had not been in the United States for fourteen years, and the nation welcomed him as a hero. After a series of tickertape parades, MacArthur made his "farewell" speech to a joint session of Congress. "Old soldiers never die, they just fade away," he intoned — hardly expecting such a fate for himself. For a while there was talk of the GOP running MacArthur for president. Testifying before two senatorial committees in May and June 1951, MacArthur pinned responsibility for the lack of a clear-cut victory on pusillanimous politicians and political generals. He called for an all-out military effort to defeat Communism in Asia, even if it meant a fight to the finish with China, because the course of events in that region would determine the course of world affairs for the "next ten thousand years."

In what was perhaps its finest hour, the Truman administration fought back, making clear that not only American security interests were at stake in the dismissal of MacArthur but also the hallowed principle of civilian control of the military. "Taking on Red China," Bradley told the Senators, would have led only "to a larger deadlock at greater expense." Because the United States regarded the Soviet Union as its main adversary and Europe as the principal Cold War prize, MacArthur's course "would involve us in the wrong war at the wrong place at the wrong time and with the wrong enemy."

#### ARMISTICE AND CONTAINMENT

Gradually the logic of the administration's argument took hold, and furor over MacArthur's firing faded. When in June 1951 the Soviets suggested an armistice along the 38th parallel, Washington welcomed the move. Tense negotiations began between the Communist and U.N. sides, dragging on through 1952 while thousands of American troops — and far more Koreans and Chinese — continued to die. (One issue was whether Communist POWs should be returned against their will. Many feared to go home.) The stalemated talks became an issue in the 1952 election when the Republican candidate, Dwight D. Eisenhower, promised to go to Korea to end the war. He made good on

his promise, secretly threatening the Communists with nuclear attack if they did not agree to a compromise.

The Korean War was a “limited war,” a frustrating byproduct of the Soviet-American nuclear stalemate, as well as a Korean civil war. Though the United States possessed atomic devices that could have been used to devastate North Korea and China, it dared not use them for fear of Soviet nuclear retaliation. Thus began nearly forty years of covert and limited, conventional East-West conflicts; a sweeping military triumph was unthinkable in view of the threat of atomic annihilation.

In a sense, however, Korea marked a clear-cut victory for containment. The United States and its allies “held the line” against Communist aggression. Just as the Berlin blockade reassured non-Communist West Europeans that the Americans would stand by them, so the Korean War demonstrated that the United States would defend what was left of non-Communist East Asia — even at the price of uncritical alignment with autocrats like Rhee. It globalized containment, and was a natural outgrowth of NSC-68’s call to confront Communist expansionism everywhere. In the long run, the development of a democratic, industrialized, and capitalist Republic of Korea in the South made the war seem a triumph for American aims in Asia.

## ESPIONAGE, ANTICOMMUNISM, AND MCCARTHYISM

From the beginning of the Cold War until the end of the fighting in Korea, a mounting anti-Communist hysteria swept through every aspect of American life. Partly, the reaction was the result of real and imaginary fears of Soviet espionage. Particularly troubling was Russia’s success in stealing nuclear secrets. Only after the collapse of the Soviet Union did the extent of American Communist support for Soviet espionage become fully clear. While these revelations hardly exonerate the excesses of the anti-Communist crusaders, they make more understandable the fears and concerns that gripped many American policymakers and politicians.

The anti-Communist movement also revealed a growing social and cultural divide in the country that had important political consequences. To some extent, the furor was part of a larger nativist backlash, manifest in white supremacists movements and new outbreaks of anti-Semitism. But it also demonstrated a traditional American distrust of social and political

elites, who during the postwar years were portrayed as being soft on Communism. Republican opportunists exploited these fears in the hopes of discrediting New Deal programs and liberalism in general. Some modern political observers date the party realignment of the last half of the twentieth century to the success of the Republican Party in rallying a vast body of Christian, working Americans through its opposition to “godless Communism.”

Just as the Truman administration turned to stronger measures to draw the line in Western Europe and stop Communist advances in East Asia, hysterical anti-Communist witch-hunting erupted at home. Careers were ruined, lives disrupted, liberties trampled, trust destroyed, fools taken seriously, scoundrels empowered, and a few citizens hounded to suicide. The nation passed through one of the darker moments in its history — years indelibly associated with the name of the sinister junior Senator from Wisconsin, Joseph McCarthy.

### ↻ *Espionage and Security*

Between the 1919 “Red Scare” and the early post-World War II years, Communism did not inspire hysterical fear among most Americans. But, inevitably, Cold War tensions changed the mood. In 1945 the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC), the descendant of the prewar Dies Committee set up to investigate pro-fascist groups, gained permanent status and began targeting domestic Communism. HUAC’s activities were spearheaded by Mississippi Democrat John Rankin, a virulent segregationist and anti-Communist conservative. The Republican victory in the 1946 election brought to the chairmanship of HUAC J. Parnell Thomas of New Jersey, who immediately targeted Hollywood as a center of a dangerous Communist conspiracy.

There *were* Communists in Hollywood. During the Depression, in the 1930s, many movie writers had been a part of the flirtation with the far left. On October 20, 1947, HUAC began hearing anti-Communist testimony from “friendly witnesses” encouraged by the studio bosses to cooperate with the committee, including the popular actor Gary Cooper. Then came a parade of writers and directors who were or had been members of the American Communist Party. Most sought refuge in the First Amendment’s guarantee of freedom of speech rather than in the Fifth Amendment’s protection against self-incrimination. Several were defiant and abusive. The “Hollywood Ten” were convicted of





**The Rosenbergs** This poignant photograph was taken in August 1950, immediately after Julius and Ethel Rosenberg were arraigned and jailed—in separate cells—on espionage charges.

contempt of Congress and, after the Supreme Court upheld their convictions, were sentenced to a year in prison.<sup>5</sup>

HUAC's investigation intimidated the motion picture industry. All major studios pledged not to hire Communists or Communist sympathizers. Dozens of writers, directors, and actors in the United States found themselves blacklisted. Soon the witch-hunt spread to the new television industry.

Even before HUAC declared war on Communism in Hollywood, reacting to fears of Soviet espionage and hoping to forestall GOP charges that Democrats were

5. J. Parnell Thomas also wound up in prison after being convicted of corruption. He and one of the Hollywood Ten met on a work detail, shoveling manure. When Thomas sneered something about "still carrying the old hammer and sickle?" the Communist retorted: "Still throwing around the old chickenshit, Thomas?"

soft on Communism, the Truman administration took drastic steps against Communist subversion. On March 21, 1947, just as he was proclaiming the Truman Doctrine, the president issued Executive Order No. 9835, mandating a loyalty investigation of each applicant for a federal job. Agency heads became "personally responsible" for their underlings' loyalty. The review was to be carried out by the Civil Service and FBI but supervised by a central Loyalty Review Board.

During the next five years the Civil Service conducted more than 3,000 investigations and the FBI made some 14,000 inquiries. Of 380 employees dismissed, only 221 were subsequently indicted, and most of these were never convicted. More significantly, 2,500 individuals resigned under suspicion. In most cases, the charge was not sabotage, espionage, or treason, but rather "sympathetic association" with alleged subversives or with members of organizations identified by the attorney general as subversive. But at the time such charges could ruin an individual. Nor was there any check on the attorney general's authority to designate groups as "subversive." Truman's order led to a massive expansion of the FBI and to the accumulation of hundreds of thousands of "loyalty files." Contradicting accepted notions of justice in American society, loyalty tests in 1951 placed the burden of proof on the person being investigated.

In 1949 and 1950 several sensational incidents of Soviet espionage in the United States came to light, worsening the hysteria. One recent study based on post-Cold War Soviet secret documents concluded that Soviet espionage in the U.S. during World War II was far more extensive than imagined, and that 349 American citizens who were members of the American Communist Party participated in Soviet espionage, many of them still unidentified. "Not every American Communist was a spy," historian Harvey Klehr concluded, "but almost every spy was a Communist." In February 1950, on the heels of the first Soviet nuclear test and the fall of China, physicist Klaus Fuchs — one of the Manhattan Project scientists — was arrested in Britain. Fuchs confessed to betraying atomic secrets to Moscow during World War II. Within months, several Americans, including Julius and Ethel Rosenberg, were arrested in the United States as members of the same spy ring. Tried before a militantly anti-Communist federal judge in 1951, the Rosenbergs were executed in 1953, causing a furor of protest from those who believed them innocent. Recently revealed Soviet evidence seems to show that Julius was both a veteran Communist and a



“handler” of other agents and couriers, but that Ethel’s involvement was peripheral. Her execution seems to have resulted from prosecutors’ futile efforts to pressure Julius to confess.<sup>6</sup>

The most celebrated spy case of the century was that of Alger Hiss, a career bureaucrat in the Treasury and State departments who had accompanied FDR to Yalta. As early as 1939 Whittaker Chambers, a former Soviet agent, had confidentially named Hiss as a spy but showed no proof. In 1948 Chambers repeated his charges before HUAC, this time producing microfilm of documents that he said Hiss had passed to him in 1938. Hiss denied the charges, but was indicted for perjury. (The statute of limitations for espionage had expired.) Truman denounced the accusations as a “red herring,” and State Department officials, including Hiss’s friend Dean Acheson, defended Hiss. Nonetheless, in January 1950 Hiss was convicted and sentenced to five years in prison.

Recently declassified American and Soviet documents reveal that Hiss had belonged to a clandestine Communist “cell” since 1935, that for years he passed documents to the Soviet military intelligence, and that Moscow secretly decorated him in 1945, soon after he had accompanied Roosevelt to Yalta. When public accusations were leveled at Hiss, the U.S. government evidently chose not to reveal all that it knew about him in order to avoid compromising its intelligence sources. So for half a century the Hiss case polarized the nation. Liberals saw Hiss as the victim of a witch-hunt, condemned for his New Deal sympathies and upper-class manner. Conservatives — whose only proof of Hiss’s guilt was the circumstantially confirmed word of the turncoat Chambers — saw Hiss as the incarnation of the elitist traitor. “It was the Hiss case that completely changed the public’s perception of domestic Communism,” Richard Nixon, a member of HUAC who would use anti-Communist rhetoric to further his national aspirations, later wrote. “People were now alerted to a serious threat to our liberties.”

Meanwhile the federal courts had begun moving against the American Communist Party. In July 1948 a federal grand jury indicted twelve party leaders on charges of violating the Smith Act — a 1940 law (originally directed mainly against pro-Nazis) that made it a federal crime to conspire to overthrow the government or to belong to a group advocating its overthrow. In 1951 the Supreme Court upheld the Smith Act and the

6. Even the hardened J. Edgar Hoover was privately shocked by this tactic and its outcome.

conviction of those Communist leaders who had been tried under it.

Determined to leave no room for doubt, Congress in 1950 passed the McCarran (or Internal Security) Act. That measure branded the international Communist conspiracy an immediate threat to the United States. Members of Communist-affiliated organizations were required to register with the federal government, on pain of being fined up to \$10,000 and imprisoned for up to five years. The act also authorized the government to deport naturalized citizens and alleged subversives during periods of national emergency.

### ∞ *The Politics and Religion of Anti-Communism*

In reality, during the Cold War the Soviet Union sponsored massive espionage efforts that threatened American interests. The anti-Communist campaign spawned by the threat, however, was often marred by political demagoguery, opportunism, chicanery, and downright deceit. Much that was done obscured distinctions between politics and spying — often combining such terms as Communist, sympathizer, fellow traveler, and liberal. In such a political mix, anti-Communist demagogues tainted real efforts to thwart espionage. In the end, the red-baiting furor hobbled real efforts to find Communist infiltrators. By the late 1950s, noted one conservative, the sins of the witch-hunters had made it impossible to accuse anyone of being disloyal for fear of being “hailed up for committing McCarthyism.”

Nonetheless, it would have been impossible to keep the issue out of politics. GOP strategists remembered that in the spring of 1948 a Gallup poll had found that 65 percent of the public thought that foreign policy problems were the most important issue in the campaign, and that 73 percent saw Truman as too easy on the Russians. Party leaders also recalled that Dewey had barely mentioned foreign affairs in his campaign. The lesson was clear. If the Republicans were to regain the White House, they would have to blast the Democrats as soft on Communism. “I look at that fellow [Dean Acheson],” said a disgusted Senator Hugh Butler of Nebraska, “I watch his smart aleck manner and his British clothes and that New Dealism, everlasting New Dealism in everything he says and does, and I want to shout, Get Out! Get Out! You stand for everything that has been wrong in the United States for years.” Anti-elitist class prejudices were always near the surface in the anti-Communist crusade. “No feature of the Hiss case is more obvi-

✱ IN THEIR OWN WORDS

**“The American Idolatry,” 1950**

*In the tense atmosphere of the Cold War, many churches and church leaders felt compelled to make vigorous denunciations of Communism and defenses of the American way of life. Reinhold Niebuhr, one of the most respected theologians of the day, cautioned against a too-fervent championing of national interests.*

If the ministers of our great urban churches become again the simple priests and chaplains of this American idolatry, subtly com-

pounded with a few stray Christian emphases, they will merely add one more dismal proof in the pages of history that a religiously sanctified self-idolatry is more grievous than its secular variety. This is how the gospel becomes a salt that has lost its savor.

The gospel cannot be preached with truth and power if it does not challenge the pretensions and pride, not only of individuals, but of nations, cultures, civilizations, economic and political systems. The good fortune of America and its power place it under the

most grievous temptations to self-adulation. If there is no power and grace in the Christian church “to bring down every high thing which exalteth itself against the knowledge of God,” the church becomes not merely useless but dangerous.

We Protestants speak critical words about the idolatrous pretensions of the Roman Church. But some of these pretensions are actually more plausible than this miserable identification of the “laws of God” with a particular form of democracy. . . .

ous or troubling as history,” Chambers wrote, “than the jagged fissure, which it did not so much open as reveal, between the plain men and women of the nation, and those who affected to act, think and speak for them. It was, not invariably, but in general, the ‘best people’ who were for Alger Hiss.” The anti-Communist crusade was, in the words of one supporter, “Americanism with its sleeves rolled up.”

Some historians have argued that the anti-Communist movement contributed in critical ways to modern conservatism in America by creating a bond between working-class Americans and the Republican Party. The growing fissure between a liberal-leaning intelligentsia which was increasingly loyal to the Democratic Party and a militant anti-Communist conservatism that leaned toward the Republican Party was nowhere more apparent than in the fault lines that appeared in American religion in postwar years.

Church membership increased dramatically during and after the war, triggering a great religious boom in the 1950s. In 1948 the World Council of Churches was founded, and in 1950 the Federal Council of Churches assumed a new name, the National Council of Churches of Christ in the U.S.A. Both of these bodies included mainstream Protestant denominations and Eastern Orthodox churches. Many conservative Protestant churches and the Roman Catholic Church spurned the ecumenical movement.

In an expansive and triumphant mood, mainstream Protestants aspired to speak with one voice for American values. “The Council has nothing to fear from the times, though it has much to desire of them,” declared the NCC’s founding message. “The Council stands as a

guardian of democratic freedom. . . . The revolutionary truth that men are created free follows from the revelation of God in Jesus Christ.” But, in truth, the NCC’s liberal social agenda represented only one segment of American religion.

As fears grew of Communist subversion and nuclear holocaust, differences between various religious groups and thinkers were thrown into sharp relief. Like the conservative Pope Pius XII, American Catholic leaders took a militantly anti-Communist stand. Joseph McCarthy was a Catholic, and many of his followers were working-class Catholics whose virulent anti-Communism stemmed from their fear of atheism and from their anger at Communist control of their ancestral homelands. McCarthyism’s targets were often agnostics, Jews, or liberal Protestants. In particular, many Jews worked in academia or the media, the primary areas under investigation; and many of them, drawn to social justice, civil liberties, and antifascist causes, had joined groups advocating radical change. Increasingly, these Catholic conservatives would find common cause with a rising fundamentalist/evangelical revival in American Protestantism, led by a charismatic and staunchly anti-Catholic young evangelist, Billy Graham (see Chapter 31).

Ultimately the anti-Communist campaign focused on the liberal agenda of the major Protestant denominations. On March 26, 1947, J. Edgar Hoover (a prominent Presbyterian layman) testified before HUAC: “I confess to a real apprehension so long as Communists are able to secure ministers of the Gospel to promote their evil work and espouse a cause that is alien to the religion of Christ and Judaism.” Methodist bishop G. Bromley Ox-

nam, whom various HUAC reports repeatedly labeled a Communist dupe, replied for the Protestants. He denounced both Communism for its atheism and HUAC for its violation of civil liberties. McCarthyism, he declared, represented “the rule of men and not of law.” The ongoing confrontation between liberal religion and the anti-Communist stance of Roman Catholics and Protestant evangelicals polarized American churches in the 1950s at the time when religion seemed most settled and pervasive in the culture. In many ways, the religious fault line that developed paralleled the one that was becoming increasingly clear in American politics.

### ☞ *McCarthyism*

The Hiss trial and the arrest and confession of Fuchs set the stage for the greatest of the anti-Communist demagogues, Senator Joseph McCarthy. A menacing-looking man<sup>7</sup> of mediocre talents, corrupt habits, and no scruples, he had been elected to the Senate in 1946 on a grossly inflated war record. His lackluster first-term performance made him seem a loser. But early in 1950, after dining with two advisers (one a staunchly anti-Communist Catholic priest), McCarthy was persuaded to revive his waning fortunes by raising the issue of Communist infiltration into American government.

In February 1950 (a month after Hiss’s conviction), McCarthy brandished before the Republican Women’s Club in Wheeling, West Virginia, what he said was a list of 205 card-carrying Communists in the State Department. Or was it 57? No one could tell because of his mumbling, and in a subsequent speech he claimed 81 card-carriers. Asked for proof, he produced new charges — that Owen Lattimore, a professor at Johns Hopkins University and an expert on China who advised the State Department, was a top espionage agent who had been responsible for America’s numerous foreign policy “disasters” in East Asia. When the FBI cleared Lattimore, McCarthy turned on Philip Jessup,

7. Revealing his own class prejudice, liberal journalist Richard Rovere memorably called McCarthy “a truckdriver in a blue serge suit.”



**McCarthy at Work** In the 1952 election campaign, Senator Joseph R. McCarthy brandishes a document purporting to prove that Democratic presidential candidate Adlai Stevenson has a record of associations with alleged subversive groups and endorses “the suicidal Kremlin-shaped policies of this nation.”

the American representative in the United Nations.

To look into McCarthy’s charges, the Senate established a subcommittee under conservative Maryland Democrat Millard Tydings, which found the accusations to be “a fraud and a hoax.” But McCarthy dismissed the committee as packed with reds, and in November 1950 he brought about Tydings’s electoral defeat. (Maryland McCarthyites circulated a faked photograph showing Tydings and American Communist leader Earl Browder together.) The Democratic Party was, according to McCarthy, “the property of men and women who have bent to the whispered pleas from the lips of traitors who wear the political label stitched with the idiocy of a Truman, [and] rotted by the deceit of a Dean Acheson.”

After the Republicans won control of Congress in 1952, McCarthy’s “investigative” role widened. He attacked the United States Information Agency, a government agency charged with airing the Voice of America radio broadcast across the Iron Curtain and with maintaining libraries abroad. McCarthy charged

✱ IN THEIR OWN WORDS

**Joseph McCarthy on the Attack, 1950**

*When Senator Joseph McCarthy originally gave this speech to the Republican Women's Club in Wheeling, West Virginia, he declared that he had a list of 205 members of the Communist Party who were employed in the U.S. Department of State. When he later entered the speech in the Congressional Record, as printed here, he reduced the number to 57. He did not actually have such a list, but in the charged atmosphere of the early years of the Cold War, such claims were enough to grab news headlines and spark fear.*

As one of our outstanding historical figures once said, "When a great democracy is destroyed, it will not be because of enemies from without, but rather because of enemies from within."

The reason why we find ourselves in a position of impotency is not because our only powerful potential enemy has sent men to invade our shores, but rather because of the traitorous actions of those who have been treated so well by this Nation. It has not been the less fortunate or members of minority groups who have been selling this Nation out, but rather those who have had all the benefits that the wealthiest nation on earth has to

offer — the finest homes, the finest college education, and the finest jobs in Government.

This is glaringly true in the State Department. There the bright young men who are born with silver spoons in their mouths are the ones who have been the worst. . . . In my opinion, the State Department, which is one of the most important government departments, is thoroughly infested with Communists.

I have in my hand 57 cases of individuals who would appear to be either card carrying members or certainly loyal to the Communist Party, but who nevertheless are still helping to shape our foreign policy. . . .

that the USIA stocked its libraries with "leftist" books, and sent two abrasive young staffers to Europe to root them out and intimidate State Department officials into cooperating.

McCarthy continued HUAC's assault on the media and then took on academia. State legislatures, swept up by the fervor of his purge, imposed loyalty oaths on state university faculties. About 500 state and local government employees lost their jobs after they were accused of disloyalty. Some 600 schoolteachers and 150 professors were also fired, mostly for invoking the Fifth Amendment. Blacklists, usually the products of gossip and innuendo, ruined the careers of dozens of journalists, particularly in the broadcast field.

The Truman-era red scare was a product, first, of early Cold-War fears. Even the authors of NSC-68 noted that as a free society the United States was at a disadvantage in waging the Cold War and that the federal government might have to curtail freedoms. Equally dreading the Communist "tide" and nuclear annihilation, Americans searched for scapegoats — and many thought that they found traitors burrowing within.

Second, red-baiting also grew out of Republican efforts to discredit the Democratic administration. Normally intelligent and decent Republicans like Taft, frustrated by defeat in 1948, egged McCarthy on. The threat of Communist subversion was the perfect political issue, reconciling (as British philosopher Bertrand Russell noted) the two principal fears of Americans — taxes and Communism. If American reverses abroad

were due to betrayal at home, there was no need for huge new expenditures on defense and foreign aid; all that was required was a domestic house cleaning.

Third, McCarthyism appealed to former isolationists, particularly German- and Irish-Americans, and to many Catholics worried about "Godless Communism." Themselves victims of nativist and Protestant suspicion, and often members of the working or lower middle class who resented liberal "WASPs" and Jews, "hyphenated" Americans could "prove" their patriotism by joining McCarthy's chorus. Many did. Responding to anti-foreign sentiment, in June 1952 Congress passed (over Truman's veto) the McCarran-Walter Act, which kept the national-origins quotas established in 1924 to limit immigration — and also barred "subversives."

Polls showed that McCarthyism, even at its height, appealed only to a minority of Americans. The majority, however, gave the inquisitors the benefit of the doubt — and seldom criticized red-baiting too vigorously, lest they themselves become suspect. Fear bred hysteria, which bred more fear.

McCarthy's downfall began when he attacked the U.S. Army. Investigating an alleged spy ring in the military in 1954, he heard about Dr. Irving Peress, a dentist drafted during the Korean War who had "taken the Fifth" when questioned about alleged Communist activities. McCarthy denounced as Communist sympathizers Peress's commanding officer, the secretary of the army, and even George Marshall.

But the secretary of the army counterattacked, fil-

ing twenty-nine charges against McCarthy and his staff. McCarthy responded with forty-six charges of his own. During hearings held from April 22 through June 17, 1954, McCarthy dominated the proceedings. For thirteen days he browbeat the secretary of the army before a national TV audience. It became apparent — as one of McCarthy’s Senate colleagues put it — that “Joe couldn’t tell the difference between Karl Marx and [comedian] Groucho Marx.” Constantly interrupting witnesses with insinuating comments or shouts of “Point of order!” McCarthy gave the nation a firsthand display of his tactics. Finally the army’s counsel, Joseph Welch, articulated the disgust felt by much of the committee and most viewers: “Have you no sense of decency, sir, at long last?”

Technically, neither the army nor McCarthy emerged victorious from the hearings, but the grand inquisitor had clearly lost. A Gallup poll revealed that by the close of the hearings McCarthy’s approval rating dropped to 35 percent. He had at last become a liability to the GOP.

On July 30, 1954, Senator Ralph Flanders, an elderly Vermont Republican, introduced a resolution calling for McCarthy’s removal from the Committee on Government Operations. Journalist Edward R. Murrow ran a series of film clips on TV, showing McCarthy at his worst. After months of debate and parliamentary maneuvering, the Senate voted on March 2, 1955, to censure him. He remained in the Senate, a spent force, and died of alcoholism in 1957.

## CONCLUSION: AN ANXIOUS AGE

The first postwar years were ones of recovery, consolidation, prosperity, limited social reform — and deep anxiety. Victory had drawn the nation together, bolstered people’s confidence, and whetted their desire to enjoy life. At the same time, the dawn of the Atomic Age meant that human beings had unlocked the power to destroy life on earth, and deteriorating relations with the Soviet Union kindled fears that World War III might be brewing.

Return to normality, for which everyone hungered, meant different things to different people. Prosperity bred by the war continued throughout the late 1940s and early 1950s, lifting millions of working-class Americans into the middle class and ensuring that a majority of Americans became conservative, committed to the status quo. For others — unorganized workers, some

women, and most minorities — the good life was far more elusive.

Despite all the passions it had aroused, the New Deal was neither expanded nor rolled back during postwar years, but it was consolidated. Republicans as well as Democrats accepted its basic structure, and the federal government continued to play a large role in the national economy. Though bitterly reviled, Harry Truman won the White House in his own right because he represented qualities prized by middle-class Americans: integrity, self-reliance, sympathy for the underdog, candor, and courage.

Victory did not bring the national security for which everyone had hoped and prayed during World War II. Although it did not crystallize until 1947-1948, the Cold War came to pit what most Americans saw as democracy and free enterprise against a new totalitarian foe. Then, in late 1949, the Communist world broke the American monopoly on nuclear weaponry and extended its reach to China. The nation became preoccupied with the search for Communist subversives, and domestic anti-Communism became a pervasive force that distorted domestic politics, threatened civil liberties, and sometimes warped foreign policy.

The Cold War created a powerful anti-Communist consensus in American public life, spanning most of the political spectrum. Farthest to the right were the often naive, sometimes cynical, and always shrill subversive-hunters. Mainstream conservative anti-Communists, preoccupied with economic markets and military bases and allied to an emerging military-industrial complex,<sup>8</sup> argued that America could be safe in a hostile world only if it dominated the globe through alliances and an overwhelming nuclear arsenal. Liberal internationalists and even some on the far left, many of them intellectuals, saw America’s welfare as inseparable from that of the rest of the world. Besides building alliances and dispensing military aid, the liberal internationalists urged the eradication of injustice around the globe, which they perceived as the breeding ground for Marxist revolution.

Liberal anti-Communists insisted that the United States could not morally qualify as the Free World’s leader against Communist tyranny if it did not commit itself to social justice at home; conservative anti-Communists seldom saw the urgency of such a coupling. But not until after 1965, when the United States under a lib-

8. For this concept, first publicly mentioned in 1961 by the outgoing President Eisenhower, see Chapter 31.

eral administration combined a military stand against Communist revolutionaries abroad with a massive effort to enact Truman's agenda of domestic reform at home, did the Cold War consensus collapse.

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