

# The Eisenhower Era

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1952–1960

*Every warship launched, every rocket fired  
signifies . . . a theft from those who hunger and are not fed,  
those who are cold and are not clothed.*

DWIGHT D. EISENHOWER, APRIL 16, 1953

**I**n President Dwight D. Eisenhower, the man and the hour met. Americans yearned for a period of calm in which they could pursue without distraction their new visions of consumerist affluence. The nation sorely needed a respite from twenty years of depression and war. Yet the American people unexpectedly found themselves in the early 1950s dug into the frontlines of the Cold War abroad and dangerously divided at home over the explosive issues of communist subversion and civil rights. They longed for reassuring leadership. “Ike” seemed ready both to reassure and to lead.

## The Advent of Eisenhower

Democratic prospects in the presidential election of 1952 were blighted by the military deadlock in Korea, Truman’s clash with MacArthur, war-bred

inflation, and whiffs of scandal from the White House. Dispirited Democrats, convening in Chicago, nominated a reluctant Adlai E. Stevenson, the witty, eloquent, and idealistic governor of Illinois. Republicans enthusiastically chose General Dwight D. Eisenhower on the first ballot. As a concession to the hard-line anticommunist wing of the party, the convention selected as “Ike’s” running mate California senator Richard M. Nixon, who had distinguished himself as a relentless red-hunter.

Eisenhower was already the most popular American of his time, as “I Like Ike” buttons everywhere testified. His ruddy face, captivating grin, and glowing personality made him a perfect candidate in the dawning new age of television politics. He had an authentic hero’s credentials as wartime supreme commander of the Allied forces in Europe, army chief of staff after the war, and the first supreme commander of NATO from 1950 to 1952. He had also been “civilianized” by a brief term as president of Columbia University from 1948 to 1950.

Striking a grandfatherly, nonpartisan pose, Eisenhower left the rough campaigning to Nixon, who relished pulling no punches. The vice-presidential candidate lambasted his opponents with charges that they had cultivated corruption, caved in on Korea, and coddled communists. He particularly blasted the intellectual (“egghead”) Stevenson as “Adlai the appeaser,” with a “Ph.D. from [Secretary of State] Dean Acheson’s College of Cowardly Communist Containment.”

Nixon himself faltered when reports surfaced of a secretly financed “slush fund” he had tapped while holding a seat in the Senate. Prodded by Republican party officials, Eisenhower seriously considered dropping him from the ticket, but a scared Nixon went on national television with a theatrical appeal filled with self-pity, during which he referred to the family cocker spaniel, Checkers. This heart-tugging “Checkers speech” saved him his place on the ticket.

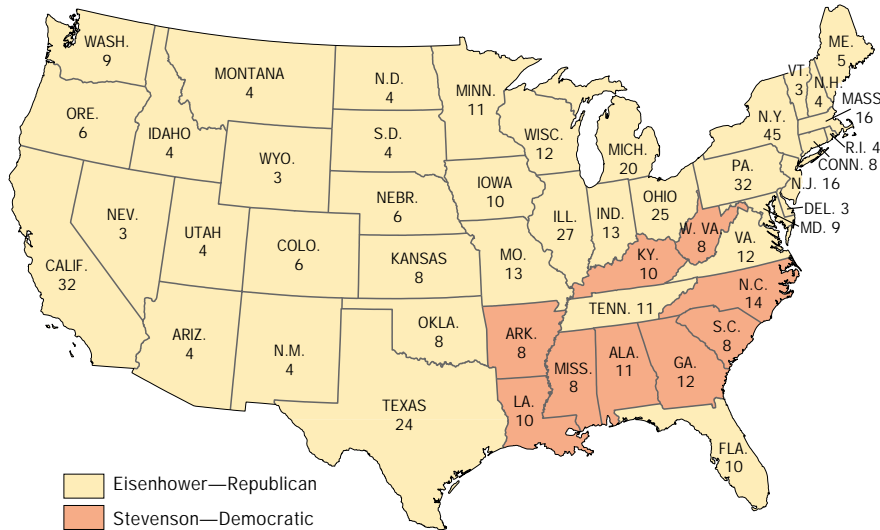
The maudlin Checkers speech also demonstrated the awesome political potentialities of television—foreshadowed by FDR’s mastery of the radio. Nixon had defied Republican party bosses and bent Eisenhower himself to his will by appealing directly to the American people in their living rooms. His performance illustrated the disturbing power of the new, vivid medium, which communicated with far more immediacy and effect than its electronic cousin, the radio, ever could.

Even Eisenhower reluctantly embraced the new technology of the black-and-white television screen. He allowed himself to be filmed in a New York TV studio giving extremely brief “answers” to a nonexistent audience, whose “questions” were taped later, then carefully spliced with Eisenhower’s statements to give the illusion of a live discussion. “To think that an old soldier should come to this,” Ike grumbled. These so-called “spots” foreshadowed the future of political advertising. They amounted, as one critic observed, to “selling the President like toothpaste.” Devoid of substance, they vastly oversimplified complicated economic and social issues. “What about the high cost of living?” one spot asked. “My wife Mamie worries about the same thing,” Ike answered. “I tell her it’s my job to change that on November fourth.”

In future years television made possible a kind of “plebiscitarian” politics, through which lone-wolf politicians could go straight to the voters without the mediating influence of parties or other institu-

tions. The new medium thus stood revealed as a threat to the historic role of political parties, which traditionally had chosen candidates through complex internal bargaining and had educated and mobilized the electorate. And given television’s origins in entertainment and advertising, political messages would be increasingly tuned to the standards of show business and commercialism. Gradually, as television spread to virtually every household in the land, those standards would rule politics with iron sway as ten-second television “sound bites” became the most common form of political communication.

The outcome of the presidential election of 1952 was never really in doubt. Given an extra prod by Eisenhower’s last-minute pledge to go personally to Korea to end the war, the voters overwhelmingly declared for Ike. He garnered 33,936,234 votes to Stevenson’s 27,314,992. He cracked the solid South wide open, ringing up 442 electoral votes to 89 for his opponent. Ike not only ran far ahead of his ticket but managed to pull enough Republicans into office on his military coattails to ensure GOP control of the new Congress by a paper-thin margin.



Presidential Election of 1952 (with electoral vote by state) A Democrat quipped that “if the voters liked the Republicans the way they liked Ike, the two-party system would be in bad shape.” Fortunately for Democrats, Eisenhower scored a personal, not a party, victory. Republicans won minuscule majorities in Congress, majorities that disappeared in the congressional elections two years later.

## “Ike” Takes Command

True to his campaign pledge, president-elect Eisenhower undertook a flying three-day visit to Korea in December 1952. But even a glamorous Ike could not immediately budge the peace negotiations off dead center. Seven long months later, after Eisenhower had threatened to use atomic weapons, an armistice

was finally signed but was repeatedly violated in succeeding decades.

The brutal and futile fighting had lasted three years. About fifty-four thousand Americans lay dead, joined by perhaps more than a million Chinese, North Koreans, and South Koreans. Tens of billions of American dollars had been poured down the Asian sinkhole. Yet this terrible toll in blood and treasure bought only a return to the conditions of 1950: Korea remained divided at the thirty-eighth parallel. Americans took what little comfort they could from the fact that communism had been “contained” and that the bloodletting had been “limited” to something less than full-scale global war. The shooting had ended, but the Cold War still remained frigidly frozen.

As a military commander, Eisenhower had cultivated a leadership style that self-consciously projected an image of sincerity, fairness, and optimism. He had been widely perceived during the war as an “unmilitary” general, and in the White House he similarly struck the pose of an “unpolitical” president, serenely above the petty partisan fray. He also shrewdly knew that his greatest “asset” was his enjoyment of the “affection and respect of our citizenry,” as he confided to his diary in 1949.

Ike thus seemed ideally suited to soothe the anxieties of troubled Americans, much as a distinguished and well-loved grandfather brings stability to his family. He played this role well as he presided over a decade of shaky peace and shining prosperity. Yet

critics charged that he unwisely hoarded the “asset” of his immense popularity, rather than spend it for a good cause (especially civil rights), and that he cared more for social harmony than for social justice.

## The Rise and Fall of Joseph McCarthy

One of the first problems Eisenhower faced was the swelling popularity and swaggering power of anti-communist crusader Senator Joseph R. McCarthy. Elected to the Senate on the basis of a trumped-up war-hero record, “Tailgunner Joe” was just an obscure junior senator from Wisconsin until he crashed into the limelight with the spectacular charge that scores of known communists worked in the State Department. In a February 1950 speech in Wheeling, West Virginia, McCarthy accused Secretary of State Dean Acheson of knowingly employing 205 Communist party members. Pressed to reveal the names, McCarthy later conceded that there were only 57 genuine communists and in the end failed to root out even one. But the speech won him national visibility, and McCarthy’s Republican colleagues realized the usefulness of this kind of attack on the Democratic administration. The supposedly fair-minded Senator Robert Taft urged McCarthy, “If one case doesn’t work, try another.” Ohio’s Senator John Bricker reportedly said, “Joe, you’re a dirty s.o.b., but there are times when you’ve got to have an s.o.b. around, and this is one of them.”

McCarthy’s rhetoric grew bolder and his accusations spread more wildly after the Republican victory in 1952. McCarthy saw the red hand of Moscow everywhere. The Democrats, he charged, “bent to whispered pleas from the lips of traitors.” Incredibly, he even denounced General George Marshall, former army chief of staff and ex-secretary of state, as “part of a conspiracy so immense and an infamy so black as to dwarf any previous venture in the history of man.”

McCarthy flourished in the seething Cold War atmosphere of suspicion and fear. He was neither the first nor the most effective red-hunter, but he was surely the most ruthless, and he did the most damage to American traditions of fair play and free speech. The careers of countless officials, writers, and actors were ruined after “Low-Blow Joe” had “named” them, often unfairly, as communists or communist sympathizers. Politicians trembled in

the face of such onslaughts, especially when opinion polls showed that a majority of the American people approved of McCarthy’s crusade. His intervention in certain key senatorial elections brought resounding defeat for his enemies.

Eisenhower privately loathed McCarthy but publicly tried to stay out of his way, saying, “I will not get in the gutter with that guy.” Trying to appease the brash demagogue from Wisconsin, Eisenhower allowed him, in effect, to control personnel policy at the State Department. One baleful result was severe damage to the morale and effectiveness of the professional foreign service. In particular, McCarthyite purges deprived the government of a number of Asian specialists who might have counseled a wiser course in Vietnam in the fateful decade that followed.

McCarthy finally bent the bow too far when he attacked the U.S. Army. The embattled military men fought back in thirty-five days of televised hearings in the spring of 1954. The political power of the new broadcast medium was again demonstrated as up to 20 million Americans at a time watched in fascination while a boorish, surly McCarthy publicly cut

*In a moment of high drama during the Army-McCarthy hearings, attorney Joseph Welch (1890–1960) reproached McCarthy in front of a huge national television audience for threatening to slander a young lawyer on Welch's staff:*

“Until this moment, Senator, I think I never really gauged your cruelty or your recklessness. Little did I dream you could be so cruel as to do an injury to that lad. . . . If it were in my power to forgive you for your reckless cruelty, I would do so. I like to think that I am a gentleman, but your forgiveness will have to come from someone other than me. . . . Have you no decency, sir, at long last? Have you left no sense of decency?”

his own throat by parading his essential meanness and irresponsibility. A few months later, the Senate formally condemned him for “conduct unbecoming a member.” Three years later, unwept and unsung, McCarthy died of chronic alcoholism. But “McCarthyism” has passed into the English language as a label for the dangerous forces of unfairness and fear that a democratic society can unleash only at its peril.

## **Desegregating the South**

America counted some 15 million black citizens in 1950, two-thirds of whom still made their homes in the South. There they lived bound by the iron folkways of a segregated society. A rigid set of antiquated rules known as Jim Crow laws governed all aspects of their existence, from the schoolroom to the restroom. Every day of their lives, southern blacks dealt with a bizarre array of separate social arrangements that kept them insulated from whites, economically inferior, and politically powerless. Later generations, black and white alike, would wonder at how their ancestors could have daily made their way through this anthropological museum of cruel and stifling customs.

Blacks everywhere in the South, for example, not only attended segregated schools but were compelled to use separate public toilets, drinking fountains, restaurants, and waiting rooms. Trains and buses had “whites only” and “colored only” seating. Because Alabama hotels were prohibited from serving blacks, the honeymooning Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and his wife, Coretta, spent their wedding night in 1953 in a blacks-only funeral parlor. Only about 20 percent of eligible southern blacks were registered to vote, and fewer than 5 percent were registered in some Deep South states like Mississippi and Alabama. As late as 1960, white southern sensibilities about segregation were so tender that television networks blotted out black speakers at the national political conventions for fear of offending southern stations.

Where the law proved insufficient to enforce this regime, vigilante violence did the job. Six black war veterans, claiming the rights for which they had fought overseas, were murdered in the summer of 1946. A Mississippi mob lynched black fourteen-year-old Emmett Till in 1955 for allegedly leering at a white woman. It is small wonder that a black clergyman declared that “everywhere I go in the South the Negro is forced to choose between his hide and his soul.”

In his notable book of 1944, *An American Dilemma*, Swedish scholar Gunnar Myrdal had exposed the contradiction between America's professed belief that all men are created equal and its sordid treatment of black citizens. There had been token progress in race relations since the war—Jack Roosevelt (“Jackie”) Robinson, for example, had cracked the racial barrier in big-league baseball when the Brooklyn Dodgers signed him in 1947. But for the most part, the national conscience still slumbered, and blacks still suffered.

Increasingly, however, African-Americans refused to suffer in silence. The war had generated a new militancy and restlessness among many members of the black community (see “Makers of America: The Great African-American Migration,” pp. 892–893). The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) had for years pushed doggedly to dismantle the legal underpinnings of segregation and now enjoyed some success. In 1944 the Supreme Court ruled the “white primary” unconstitutional, thereby undermining the status of the Democratic party in the South as a white person's club. And in 1950 NAACP chief legal

# MAKERS OF AMERICA



## The Great African-American Migration

The great social upheavals of World War II continued to transform America well after the guns had fallen silent in 1945. Among the groups most affected by the war's impact were African-Americans. Predominantly a rural, southern people before 1940, African-Americans were propelled by the war into the cities of the North and West, and by 1970 a majority lived outside the states of the old Confederacy. The results of that massive demographic shift were momentous, for African-Americans and for all of American society.

So many black southerners took to the roads during World War II that local officials lost track of their numbers. Black workers on the move crowded into boardinghouses, camped out in cars, and clustered in the juke joints of roadside America en route to their new lives.

Southern cotton fields and tobacco plantations had historically yielded slender sustenance to African-American farmers, most of whom struggled to make ends meet as tenants or sharecroppers. The Great Depression dealt black southerners yet another blow, for when New Deal farm programs paid growers to leave their land fallow, many landlords simply pocketed the money and evicted their tenants—white as well as black—from their now-idle fields. As the Depression deepened, dispossessed former tenants and sharecroppers toiled as seasonal farm workers or languished without jobs, without shelter, and without hope.

The spanking new munitions plants and bustling shipyards of the wartime South at first offered little solace to African-Americans. In 1940 and 1941, the labor-hungry war machine soaked up

unemployed white workers but commonly denied jobs to blacks. When the Army constructed a training camp near Petersburg, Virginia, it imported white carpenters from all parts of the United States, rather than employ the hundreds of skilled black carpenters who lived nearby. Fed up with such injustices, many African-Americans headed for shipyards, factories, foundries, and fields on the Pacific Coast or north of the Mason-Dixon line, where their willing hands found waiting work in abundance.

Angered by the racism that was driving their people from the South, black leaders cajoled President Roosevelt into issuing an executive order in June 1941 declaring that “there shall be no discrimination in the employment of workers in defense industries or government because of race, creed, color, or national origin.” Roosevelt’s action was a tenuous, hesitant step. Yet in its way Executive Order 8802 amounted to a second Emancipation Proclamation, as the federal government for the first time since Reconstruction had committed itself to ensuring justice for African-Americans.

The entire nation was now forced to confront the evil of racism, as bloody wartime riots in Detroit, New York, Philadelphia, and other cities tragically demonstrated. But for the first time, large numbers of blacks had a foothold in the industrial economy, and they were not about to give it up.

By war’s end the great wartime exodus had scattered hundreds of thousands of African-Americans to new regions and new ways of life—a second black diaspora comparable in its scale and consequence to the original black dispersal out of Africa itself. In the post-war decades, blacks continued to pour out of the South in search of economic opportunity and political freedom. In western and northern cities, blacks now competed for housing and jobs, and they also voted—many of them for the first time in their lives.

As early as 1945, NAACP leader Walter White concluded that the war “immeasurably magnified the Negro’s awareness of the disparity between the American profession and practice of democracy.” After the war, he predicted, African-Americans would be “convinced that whatever betterment of their lot is achieved must come largely from their own efforts.” The wartime migration thus set the stage for the success of the civil rights movement that began to stir in the 1950s. With their new political base outside the Old South, and with new support from the Democratic party, African-Americans eventually forced an end to the hated segregationist practices that had caused them to flee the South in the first place.

*A black woman described the day-in, day-out humiliations of life in a Jim Crow South:*

“You could not go to a white restaurant; you sat in a special place at the movie house; and Lord knows, you sat in the back of the bus. It didn’t make any difference if you were rich or poor, if you were black you were nothing. You might have a hundred dollars in your pocket, but if you went to the store you would wait at the side until all the clerks got through with all the white folks, no matter if they didn’t have change for a dollar. Then the clerk would finally look at you and say, ‘Oh, did you want something? I didn’t see you there.’”

franchised. Raised in a prosperous black family in Atlanta and educated partly in the North, he had for most of his life been sheltered from the grossest cruelties of segregation. But his oratorical skill, his passionate devotion to biblical and constitutional conceptions of justice, and his devotion to the non-violent principles of India’s Mohandas Gandhi were destined to thrust him to the forefront of the black revolution that would soon pulse across the South and the rest of the nation.

### **Seeds of the Civil Rights Revolution**

counsel Thurgood Marshall (later a Supreme Court justice), in the case of *Sweatt v. Painter*, wrung from the High Court a ruling that separate professional schools for blacks failed to meet the test of equality.

On a chilly day in December 1955, Rosa Parks, a college-educated black seamstress, made history in Montgomery, Alabama. She boarded a bus, took a seat in the “whites only” section, and refused to give it up. Her arrest for violating the city’s Jim Crow statutes sparked a yearlong black boycott of the city buses and served notice throughout the South that blacks would no longer submit meekly to the absurdities and indignities of segregation.

The Montgomery bus boycott also catapulted to prominence a young pastor at Montgomery’s Dexter Avenue Baptist Church, the Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. Barely twenty-seven years old, King seemed an unlikely champion of the downtrodden and dis-

When President Harry Truman heard about the lynching of black war veterans in 1946, he exclaimed, “My God! I had no idea it was as terrible as that.” The horrified Truman responded by commissioning a report titled “To Secure These Rights.” Following the report’s recommendations, Truman in 1948 ended segregation in federal civil service and ordered “equality of treatment and opportunity” in the armed forces. The military brass at first protested that “the army is not a sociological laboratory,” but manpower shortages in Korea forced the integration of combat units, without the predicted loss of effectiveness. Yet Congress stubbornly resisted passing civil rights legislation, and Truman’s successor, Dwight Eisenhower, showed no real signs



of interest in the racial issue. Within the government that left only the judicial branch as an avenue of advancement for civil rights.

Breaking the path for civil rights progress was broad-jawed Chief Justice Earl Warren, former governor of California. Elevated to the supreme bench by Eisenhower, Warren shocked the president and other traditionalists with his active judicial intervention in previously taboo social issues. Publicly snubbed and privately scorned by President Eisenhower, Warren persisted in encouraging the Court to apply his straightforward populist principles. Critics assailed this “judicial activism,” and “Impeach Earl Warren” signs blossomed along the nation’s highways. But Warren’s defenders argued that the Court was rightly stepping up to confront important social issues—especially civil rights for African-Americans—because the Congress had abdicated its responsibilities by refusing to deal with them. When it came to fundamental rights, Warren’s allies claimed, “legislation by the judiciary” was better than no legislation at all.

The unanimous decision of the Warren Court in *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas* in May 1954 was epochal. In a forceful opinion, the learned justices ruled that segregation in the public schools was “inherently unequal” and thus unconstitutional. The uncompromising sweep of the deci-

sion startled conservatives like an exploding time bomb, for it reversed the Court’s earlier declaration of 1896 in *Plessy v. Ferguson* (see p. 511) that “separate but equal” facilities were allowable under the Constitution. That doctrine was now dead. Desegregation, the justices insisted, must go ahead with “all deliberate speed.”

The Border States generally made reasonable efforts to comply with this ruling, but in the Deep South die-hards organized “massive resistance” against the Court’s annulment of the sacred principle of “separate but equal.” More than a hundred southern congressional representatives and senators signed the “Declaration of Constitutional Principles” in 1956, pledging their unyielding resistance to desegregation. Several states diverted public funds to hastily created “private” schools, for there the integration order was more difficult to apply. Throughout the South white citizens’ councils, sometimes with fire and hemp, thwarted attempts to make integration a reality. Ten years after the Court’s momentous ruling, fewer than 2 percent of the eligible blacks in the Deep South were sitting in classrooms with whites. The southern translation of “all deliberate speed” was apparently deliberately slow.

### **Crisis at Little Rock**

*Joseph E. Lowery (b. 1923), a Methodist minister and civil rights activist in Mobile, Alabama, reflected on the powerful message of the 1955 Montgomery bus boycott for blacks:*

“You see, what the bus thing did was simply more than withholding patronage from the bus; it was restoring a sense of dignity to the patrons, as best expressed by an oft-quoted black woman in Montgomery who said, ‘Since I’ve been walking, my feet are tired, but my soul’s rested.’ . . . [P]rior to the bus boycotts, the determination of our freedom rested with the courts. With the bus boycott, we determined it. . . . The court could say what it liked, we weren’t gon’ ride—in the back of the bus. We’d walk.”

President Eisenhower was little inclined toward promoting integration. He shied away from employing his vast popularity and the prestige of his office to educate white Americans about the need for racial justice. His personal attitudes may have helped to restrain him. He had grown up in an all-white town and spent his career in a segregated army. He had advised against integration of the armed forces in 1948 and had criticized Truman’s call for a permanent Fair Employment Practices Commission. He complained that the Supreme Court’s decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* had upset “the customs and convictions of at least two generations of Americans,” and he steadfastly refused to issue a public statement endorsing the Court’s conclusions. “I do not believe,” he explained, “that prejudices, even palpably unjustifiable prejudices, will succumb to compulsion.”

But in September 1957, Ike was forced to act. Orval Faubus, the governor of Arkansas, mobilized

the National Guard to prevent nine black students from enrolling in Little Rock's Central High School. Confronted with a direct challenge to federal authority, Eisenhower sent troops to escort the children to their classes.

In the same year, Congress passed the first Civil Rights Act since Reconstruction days. Eisenhower characteristically reassured a southern senator that the legislation represented "the mildest civil rights

bill possible." It set up a permanent Civil Rights Commission to investigate violations of civil rights and authorized federal injunctions to protect voting rights.

Blacks meanwhile continued to take the civil rights movement into their own hands. Martin Luther King, Jr., formed the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) in 1957. It aimed to mobilize the vast power of the black churches on

behalf of black rights. This was an exceptionally shrewd strategy, because the churches were the largest and best-organized black institutions that had been allowed to flourish in a segregated society.

More spontaneous was the “sit-in” movement launched on February 1, 1960, by four black college freshmen in Greensboro, North Carolina. Without a detailed plan or institutional support, they demanded service at a whites-only Woolworth’s lunch counter. Observing that “fellows like you make our race look bad,” the black waitress refused to serve them. But they kept their seats and returned the next day with nineteen classmates. The following day, eighty-five students joined in; by the end of the week, a thousand. Like a prairie fire, the sit-in movement burned swiftly across the South, swelling into a wave of wade-ins, lie-ins, and pray-ins to compel equal treatment in restaurants, transportation, employment, housing, and voter registration. In April 1960 southern black students formed the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC, pronounced “snick”) to give more focus and force to these efforts. Young and impassioned, SNCC members would eventually lose patience with the more stately tactics of the SCLC and the even more deliberate legalisms of the NAACP.

## **Eisenhower Republicanism at Home**

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The balding, sixty-two-year-old General Eisenhower had entered the White House in 1953 pledging his administration to a philosophy of “dynamic conservatism.” “In all those things which deal with people, be liberal, be human,” he advised. But when it came to “people’s money, or their economy, or their form of government, be conservative.” This balanced, middle-of-the-road course harmonized with the depression-daunted and war-weary mood of the times. Some critics called Eisenhower’s presidency a case of “the bland leading the bland.”

Above all, Eisenhower strove to balance the federal budget and guard the Republic from what he called “creeping socialism.” The former supreme allied commander put the brakes on Truman’s enormous military buildup, though defense spending still soaked up some 10 percent of the GNP. True to his small-government philosophy, Eisenhower supported the transfer of control over offshore oil fields

from the federal government to the states. Ike also tried to curb the TVA by encouraging a private power company to build a generating plant to compete with the massive public utility spawned by the New Deal. Speaking of the TVA, Eisenhower reportedly said, “By God, if ever we could do it, before we leave here, I’d like to see us *sell* the whole thing, but I suppose we can’t go that far.” Eisenhower’s secretary of health, education, and welfare condemned the free distribution of the Salk antipolio vaccine as “socialized medicine.”

Eisenhower responded to the Mexican government’s worries that illegal Mexican immigration to the United States would undercut the *bracero* program of legally imported farmworkers inaugurated during World War II (see p. 833). In a massive roundup of illegal immigrants, dubbed Operation Wetback in reference to the migrants’ watery route across the Rio Grande, as many as 1 million Mexicans were apprehended and returned to Mexico in 1954.

In yet another of the rude and arbitrary reversals that long have afflicted the government's relations with Native Americans, Eisenhower also sought to cancel the tribal preservation policies of the "Indian New Deal," in place since 1934 (see p. 790). He proposed to "terminate" the tribes as legal entities and to revert to the assimilationist goals of the Dawes Severalty Act of 1887 (see p. 597). A few tribes, notably the Klamaths of Oregon, were induced to terminate themselves. In return for cash payments, the Klamaths relinquished all claims on their land and agreed to their legal dissolution as a tribe. But most Indians resisted termination, and the policy was abandoned in 1961.

Eisenhower knew that he could not unscramble all the eggs that had been fried by New Dealers and Fair Dealers for twenty long years. He pragmatically accepted and thereby legitimated many New Dealish programs, stitching them permanently into the

fabric of American society. As he told his brother, "Should any political party attempt to abolish Social Security, unemployment insurance, and eliminate labor and farm programs, you would not hear of that party again in our political history."

In some ways Eisenhower even did the New Deal one better. In a public works project that dwarfed anything the New Dealers had ever dreamed of, Ike backed the Interstate Highway Act of 1956, a \$27 billion plan to build forty-two thousand miles of sleek, fast motorways. Laying down these modern, multilane roads created countless construction jobs and speeded the suburbanization of America. The Highway Act offered juicy benefits to the trucking, automobile, oil, and travel industries, while at the same time robbing the railroads, especially passenger trains, of business. The act also exacerbated problems of air quality and energy consumption, and had especially disastrous consequences for cities, whose once-vibrant downtowns withered away while shopping malls flourished in the far-flung suburbs. One critic carped that the most charitable assumption about the Interstate

Highway Act was that Congress “didn’t have the faintest notion of what they were doing.”

Despite his good intentions, Eisenhower managed to balance the budget only three times in his eight years in office, and in 1959 he incurred the biggest peacetime deficit thus far in American history. Yet critics blamed his fiscal timidity for aggravating several business recessions during the decade, especially the sharp downturn of 1957–1958, which left more than 5 million workers jobless. Economic troubles helped to revive the Democrats, who regained control of both houses of Congress in 1954. Unemployment jitters also helped to spark the merger of the AF of L and the CIO in 1955, ending two decades of bitter division in the house of labor.

### **A New Look in Foreign Policy**

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Mere containment of communism was condemned in the 1952 Republican platform as “negative, futile, and immoral.” Incoming secretary of state John Foster Dulles—a pious churchgoer whose sanctimonious manner was lampooned by critics as “Dull, Duller, Dulles”—promised not merely to stem the red tide but to “roll back” its gains and “liberate captive peoples.” At the same time, the new administration promised to balance the budget by cutting military spending.

How were these two contradictory goals to be reached? Dulles answered with a “policy of boldness” in early 1954. Eisenhower would relegate the army and the navy to the back seat and build up an air fleet of superbombers (called the Strategic Air Command, or SAC) equipped with city-flattening nuclear bombs. These fearsome weapons would inflict “massive retaliation” on the Soviets or the Chinese if they got out of hand. The advantages of this new policy were thought to be its paralyzing nuclear impact and its cheaper price tag when compared with conventional forces—“more bang for the buck.” In 1955 Eisenhower actually threatened nuclear reprisal when Communist China shelled some small islands near the Nationalist Chinese stronghold of Taiwan.

At the same time, Eisenhower sought a thaw in the Cold War through negotiations with the new Soviet leaders who came to power after dictator

Joseph Stalin’s death in 1953. But the new Soviet premier, Nikita Khrushchev, rudely rejected Ike’s heartfelt proposals for peace at the Geneva summit conference in 1955. When Ike called for “open skies” over both the Soviet Union and the United States to prevent either side from miscalculating the other’s military intentions, Khrushchev replied, “This is a very transparent espionage device. . . . You could hardly expect us to take this seriously.” Eisenhower went home empty-handed.

In the end, the touted “new look” in foreign policy proved illusory. In 1956 the Hungarians rose up against their Soviet masters and appealed in vain to the United States for aid, while Moscow reasserted its domination with the unmistakable language of force. Embittered Hungarian freedom fighters naturally accused Uncle Sam of “welshing” when the chips were down. The truth was that America’s mighty nuclear sledgehammer was too heavy a weapon to wield in such a relatively minor crisis. The rigid futility of the “massive retaliation” doctrine was thus starkly exposed. To his dismay, Eisenhower also discovered that the aerial and atomic hardware necessary for “massive retaliation” was staggeringly expensive.

### **The Vietnam Nightmare**

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Europe, thanks to the Marshall Plan and NATO, seemed reasonably secure by the early 1950s, but East Asia was a different can of worms. Nationalist movements had sought for years to throw off the French colonial yoke in Indochina. The Vietnamese leader, goateed Ho Chi Minh, had tried to appeal personally to Woodrow Wilson in Paris as early as 1919 to support self-determination for the peoples of Southeast Asia. Franklin Roosevelt had likewise inspired hope among Asian nationalists.

Cold War events dampened the dreams of anti-colonial Asian peoples. Their leaders—including Ho Chi Minh—became increasingly communist while the United States became increasingly anti-communist. By 1954 American taxpayers were financing nearly 80 percent of the costs of a bottomless French colonial war in Indochina. The United States’ share amounted to about \$1 billion a year.

Despite this massive aid, French forces continued to crumble under Viet Minh guerrilla



The Far East, 1955–1956

pressure. In March 1954 a key French garrison was trapped hopelessly in the fortress of Dienbienphu at the northwestern corner of Vietnam. The new “policy of boldness” was now put to the test. Secretary Dulles, Vice President Nixon, and the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff favored intervention with American bombers to help bail out the beleaguered French. But Eisenhower, wary about another war in Asia so soon after Korea and correctly fearing British nonsupport, held back.

Dienbienphu fell to the nationalists, and a multinational conference at Geneva roughly halved Vietnam at the seventeenth parallel (see map). The victorious Ho Chi Minh in the north consented to this arrangement on the assurance that Vietnam-wide elections would be held within two years. In the south a pro-Western government under Ngo Dinh Diem was soon entrenched at Saigon. The Vietnamese never held the promised elections, primarily because the communists seemed certain to win, and Vietnam remained a dangerously divided country.

Eisenhower promised economic and military aid to the autocratic Diem regime, provided that it undertook certain social reforms. Change came at a

snail’s pace, but American aid continued, as communist guerrillas heated up their campaign against Diem. The Americans had evidently backed a losing horse but could see no easy way to call off their bet.

## A False Lull in Europe

The United States had initially backed the French in Indochina in part to win French approval of a plan to rearm West Germany. Despite French fears, the Germans were finally welcomed into the NATO fold in 1955, with an expected contribution of half a million troops. In the same year, the Eastern European countries and the Soviets signed the Warsaw Pact, creating a red military counterweight to the newly bolstered NATO forces in the West.

Despite these hardening military lines, the Cold War seemed to be thawing a bit. Eisenhower earnestly endeavored to cage the nuclear demon by negotiating arms-control agreements with Moscow, and early signs were encouraging. In May 1955 the Soviets rather surprisingly agreed to end the occupation of Austria. A summit conference in July produced little progress on the burning issues, but it bred a conciliatory “spirit of Geneva” that caused a modest blush of optimism to pass over the face of the Western world. Hopes rose further the following year when Soviet Communist party boss Nikita Khrushchev, a burly ex-coal miner, publicly denounced the bloody excesses of Joseph Stalin, the dictator dead since 1953.

Violent events late in 1956 ended the post-Geneva lull. When the liberty-loving Hungarians struck for their freedom, they were ruthlessly overpowered by Soviet tanks. While the Western world looked on in horror, Budapest was turned into a slaughterhouse, and thousands of Hungarian refugees fled their country in panic for the Austrian border. The United States eventually altered its immigration laws to admit thirty thousand Hungarian fugitives.

## Menaces in the Middle East

Increasing fears of Soviet penetration into the oil-rich Middle East prompted Washington to take audacious action. The government of Iran, suppos-

edly influenced by the Kremlin, began to resist the power of the gigantic Western companies that controlled Iranian petroleum. In response, the American Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) engineered a coup in 1953 that installed the youthful shah of Iran, Mohammed Reza Pahlevi, as a kind of dictator. Though successful in the short run in securing Iranian oil for the West, the American intervention left a bitter legacy of resentment among many Iranians. More than two decades later, they took their revenge on the shah and his American allies (see p. 972).

The Suez crisis proved far messier than the swift stroke in Iran. President Nasser of Egypt, an ardent Arab nationalist, was seeking funds to build an immense dam on the upper Nile for urgently needed irrigation and power. America and Britain tentatively offered financial help, but when Nasser began to flirt openly with the communist camp, Secretary of State Dulles dramatically withdrew the dam offer. Nasser promptly regained face by nationalizing the Suez Canal, owned chiefly by British and French stockholders.

Nasser's action placed a razor's edge at the jugular vein of Western Europe's oil supply. Secretary Dulles labored strenuously to ward off armed intervention by the cornered European powers—as well

as by the Soviets, who threatened to match any Western invasion by pouring “volunteers” into Egypt and perhaps by launching nuclear attacks on Paris and London. But the United States' apprehensive French and British allies, deliberately keeping Washington in the dark and coordinating their blow with one from Israel, staged a joint assault on Egypt late in October 1956.

For a breathless week, the world teetered on the edge of the abyss. The French and British, however, had made a fatal miscalculation—that the United States would supply them with oil while their Middle Eastern supplies were disrupted, as an oil-rich Uncle Sam had done in the two world wars. But to their unpleasant surprise, a furious President Eisenhower resolved to let them “boil in their own oil” and refused to release emergency supplies. The oilless allies resentfully withdrew their troops, and for the first time in history, a United Nations police force was sent to maintain order.

The Suez crisis also marked the last time in history that the United States could brandish its “oil weapon.” As recently as 1940, the United States had produced two-thirds of the world's oil, while a scant 5 percent of the global supply flowed from the Middle East. But domestic American reserves had been rapidly depleted. In 1948 the United States had

become a net oil importer. Its days as an “oil power” clearly were numbered as the economic and strategic importance of the Middle East oil region grew dramatically.

The U.S. president and Congress proclaimed the Eisenhower Doctrine in 1957, pledging U.S. military and economic aid to Middle Eastern nations threatened by communist aggression. The real threat to U.S. interests in the Middle East, however, was not communism but nationalism, as Nasser’s wild popularity among the masses of all Arab countries demonstrated. The poor, sandy sheikdoms increasingly resolved to reap for themselves the lion’s share of the enormous oil wealth that Western companies pumped out of the scorching Middle Eastern deserts. In a move with portentous implications, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Iraq, and Iran joined with Venezuela in 1960 to form the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC). In the next two decades, OPEC’s stranglehold on the Western economies would tighten to a degree that even Nasser could not have imagined.

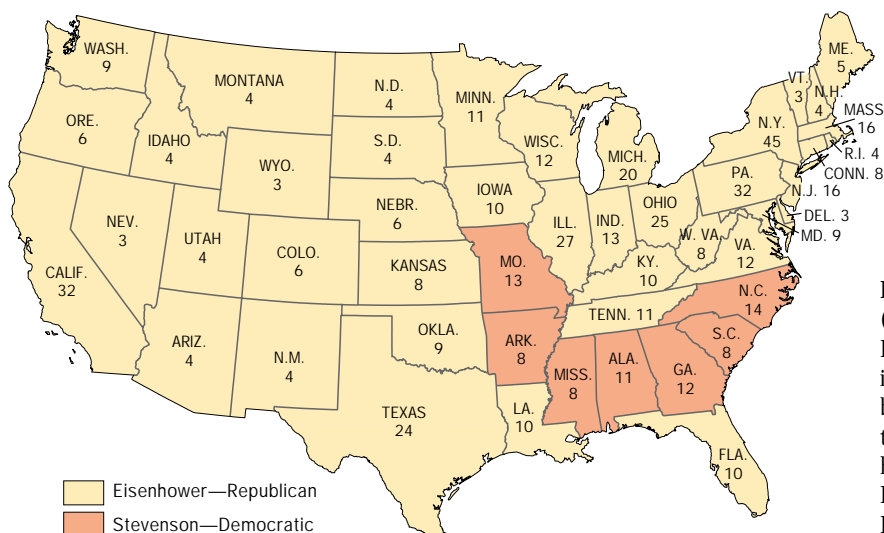
### Round Two for Ike

The election of 1956 was a replay of the 1952 contest, with President Eisenhower—no worse for wear after a heart attack in 1955 and major abdominal

surgery in 1956—pitted once more against Adlai Stevenson. Democrats were hard-pressed to find an issue with which to attack the genial general in a time of prosperity and peace, and the voters made it clear that they still liked Ike. Eisenhower piled up an enormous majority of 35,590,472 popular votes to Stevenson’s 26,022,752; in the electoral college, the count was even more unbalanced at 457 to 73. But despite the GOP national chairman’s boast that “any jockey would look good riding Ike,” in fact the general’s coattails this time were not so stiff or broad. He failed to win for his party either house of Congress—the first time since Zachary Taylor’s election in 1848 that a winning president had headed such a losing ticket.

In fragile health, Eisenhower began his second term as a part-time president. Critics charged that he kept his hands on his golf clubs, fly rod, and shotgun more often than on the levers of power. But in his last years in office, Ike rallied himself to do less golfing and more governing.

A key area in which the president bestirred himself was labor legislation. A drastic labor-reform bill in 1959 grew out of recurrent strikes in critical industries and scandalous revelations of gangsterism in unionist high echelons. In particular, fraud and brass-knuckle tactics tainted the Teamsters Union. The millionaire Teamster chief, “Dave” Beck, invoked the Fifth Amendment against self-incrimination 209 times before a Senate investigat-



**Presidential Election of 1956 (with electoral vote by state)** Eisenhower made even deeper inroads into the traditional bastion of Democratic strength, the once-solid South, than he had in 1952. Louisiana went Republican for the first time since Reconstruction days, in 1876.



ing committee in 1957 to avoid telling what he had done with \$320,000. He was later sentenced to prison for embezzlement. When his union defiantly elected the tough-fisted James R. Hoffa as his successor, the AF of L-CIO expelled the Teamsters. The Senate committee reported that in fifteen years, union officials had stolen or misappropriated some \$10 million. Hoffa later was jailed for jury tampering, served part of his sentence, and disappeared—evidently the victim of the gangsters whom he had apparently crossed.

Even labor's friends agreed that the house of labor needed a thorough housecleaning. Congress rallied to devise a tough labor-reform bill. Teamster boss Hoffa threatened to defeat for reelection congressional representatives who dared to vote for the proposed labor law. Eisenhower responded with a dramatic television appeal, and Congress in 1959

passed the Landrum-Griffin Act. It was designed to bring labor leaders to book for financial shenanigans and to prevent bullying tactics. Seizing the opportune moment, antilaborites also forced into the bill prohibitions against “secondary boycotts” and certain kinds of picketing.

## **The Race with the Soviets into Space**

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Soviet scientists astounded the world on October 4, 1957, by lofting into orbit around the globe a beep-beeping “baby moon” (*Sputnik I*) weighing 184 pounds. A month later they topped their own ace by sending aloft a larger satellite (*Sputnik II*) weighing 1,120 pounds and carrying a dog.

This amazing scientific breakthrough shattered American self-confidence. The Soviets had long been trying to convince the uncommitted nations that the shortcut to superior industrial production lay through communism, and the *Sputniks* gave credence to their claim. America had seemingly taken a back seat in scientific achievement. Envious “backward” nations laughed at America’s discomfiture, all the more so because the Soviets were occupying outer space while American troops were occupying the high school in Little Rock.

Military implications of these human-made satellites proved sobering. If the Soviets could fire heavy objects into outer space, they certainly could reach America with intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs). Old-soldier Eisenhower, adopting a father-knows-best attitude toward the Soviet “gimmick,” remarked that it should not cause “one iota” of concern. Others, chiefly Republicans, blamed the Truman administration for having spent more for supporting peanut propagation than for supporting a missile program. Agonizing soul-searching led to the conclusion that while the United States was well advanced on a broad scientific front, including color television, the Soviets had gone all out for rocketry. Experts testified that America’s manned bombers were still a powerful deterrent, but heroic efforts were needed if the alleged “missile gap” was not to widen.

“Rocket fever” swept the nation. Eisenhower established the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) and directed billions of

dollars to missile development. After humiliating and well-advertised failures—notably the Vanguard missile, which blew up on national television just a few feet above the ground in 1957—in February 1958 the United States managed to put into orbit a grapefruit-sized satellite weighing 2.5 pounds. By the end of the decade, several satellites had been launched, and the United States had successfully tested its own ICBMs.

The *Sputnik* success led to a critical comparison of the American educational system, which was already under fire as too easygoing, with that of the Soviet Union. A strong move now developed in the United States to replace “frills” with solid subjects—to substitute square roots for square dancing. Congress rejected demands for federal scholarships, but late in 1958 the National Defense and Education Act (NDEA) authorized \$887 million in loans to needy college students and in grants for the improvement of teaching the sciences and languages.

## **The Continuing Cold War**

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The fantastic race toward nuclear annihilation continued unabated. Humanity-minded scientists urged that nuclear tests be stopped before the atmosphere became so polluted as to produce generations of deformed mutants. The Soviets, after completing an intensive series of exceptionally “dirty” tests, proclaimed a suspension in March 1958 and urged the Western world to follow. Beginning in October 1958, Washington did halt both underground and atmospheric testing. But attempts to regularize such suspensions by proper inspection sank on the reef of mutual mistrust.

Thermonuclear suicide seemed nearer in July 1958, when both Egyptian and communist plottings threatened to engulf Western-oriented Lebanon. After its president had called for aid under the Eisenhower Doctrine, the United States boldly landed several thousand troops and helped restore order without taking a single life.

The burly Khrushchev, seeking new propaganda laurels, was eager to meet with Eisenhower and pave the way for a “summit conference” with Western leaders. Despite grave misgivings as to any tangible results, the president invited him to America

in 1959. Arriving in New York, Khrushchev appeared before the U.N. General Assembly and dramatically resurrected the ancient Soviet proposal of complete disarmament. But he offered no practical means of achieving this end.

A result of this tour was a meeting at Camp David, the presidential retreat in Maryland. Khrushchev emerged saying that his ultimatum for the evacuation of Berlin would be extended indefinitely. The relieved world gave prayerful but premature thanks for the “spirit of Camp David.”

The Camp David spirit quickly evaporated when the follow-up Paris “summit conference,” scheduled for May 1960, turned out to be an incredible fiasco. Both Moscow and Washington had publicly taken a firm stand on the burning Berlin issue, and neither could risk a public backdown. Then, on the eve of the conference, an American U-2 spy plane was shot down deep in the heart of Russia. After bungling bureaucratic denials in Washington, “honest Ike” took the unprecedented step of assuming personal responsibility. Khrushchev stormed

into Paris filling the air with invective, and the conference collapsed before it could get off the ground. The concord of Camp David was replaced with the grapes of wrath.

## **Cuba's Castroism Spells Communism**

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Latin Americans bitterly resented Uncle Sam's lavishing of billions of dollars on Europe, while doling out only millions to the poor relations to the south. They also chafed at Washington's continuing habit of intervening in Latin American affairs—as in a CIA-directed coup that ousted a leftist government in Guatemala in 1954. On the other hand, Washington continued to support—even decorate—bloody dictators who claimed to be combatting communists.

Most ominous of all was the communist beachhead in Cuba. The ironfisted dictator Fulgencio Batista had encouraged huge investments of American capital, and Washington in turn had given him some support. When black-bearded Dr. Fidel Castro engineered a revolution early in 1959, he denounced the Yankee imperialists and began to expropriate valuable American properties in pursuing a land-distribution program. Washington, finally losing patience, released Cuba from “imperialistic slavery” by cutting off the heavy U.S. imports of Cuban sugar. Castro retaliated with further wholesale confiscations of Yankee property and in effect made his left-wing dictatorship an economic and military satellite of Moscow. An exodus of anti-Castro Cubans headed for the United States, especially Florida. Nearly 1 million arrived between 1960 and 2000. Washington broke diplomatic relations with Cuba early in 1961.

Americans talked seriously of invoking the Monroe Doctrine before the Soviets set up a communist base only ninety miles from their shores. Khrushchev angrily proclaimed that the Monroe Doctrine was dead and indicated that he would shower missiles upon the United States if it attacked his good friend Castro.

The Cuban revolution, which Castro sought to “export” to his neighbors, brought other significant responses. At San Jose, Costa Rica, in August 1960, the United States induced the Organization of American States to condemn (unenthusiastically)

communist infiltration into the Americas. President Eisenhower, whom Castro dubbed “the senile White House golfer,” hastily proposed a long-deferred “Marshall Plan” for Latin America. Congress responded to his recommendation with an initial authorization of \$500 million. The Latin Americans had Castro to thank for attention that many of them regarded as too little and too late.

## **Kennedy Challenges Nixon for the Presidency**

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As Republicans approached the presidential campaign of 1960, Vice President Nixon was their heir apparent. To many he was a gifted party leader, to others a ruthless opportunist. The “old” Nixon had been a no-holds-barred campaigner, especially in assailing Democrats and left-wingers. The “new” Nixon was represented as a mature, seasoned statesman. More in the limelight than any earlier vice president, he had shouldered heavy responsibilities and had traveled globally as a “troubleshooter” in various capacities. He had vigorously defended American democracy in a famous “kitchen debate” with Khrushchev in Moscow in 1959. His supporters, flourishing a telling photograph of this finger-pointing episode, claimed that he alone knew how to “stand up to” the Soviets.

Nixon was nominated unanimously on the first ballot in Chicago. His running mate was the patrician Henry Cabot Lodge, Jr., of Massachusetts (grandson of Woodrow Wilson's arch-foe), who had served conspicuously for seven years as the U.S. representative to the United Nations.

By contrast, the Democratic race for the presidential nomination started as a free-for-all. John F. Kennedy—a tall, youthful, tooth-flashing millionaire senator from Massachusetts—won impressive victories in the primaries. He then scored a first-ballot triumph in Los Angeles over his closest rival, Senator Lyndon B. Johnson, the Senate majority leader from Texas. A disappointed South was not completely appeased when Johnson accepted second place on the ticket in an eleventh-hour marriage of convenience. Kennedy's challenging acceptance speech called upon the American people for sacrifices to achieve their potential greatness, which he hailed as the New Frontier.

*Candidate John F. Kennedy (1917–1963), in a speech to a Houston group of Protestant ministers (September 12, 1960), declared,*

“I believe in an America where the separation of church and state is absolute—where no Catholic prelate would tell the President, should he be a Catholic, how to act, and no Protestant minister would tell his parishioners for whom to vote . . . and where no man is denied public office because his religion differs from the President who might appoint him or the people who might elect him.”

## The Presidential Issues of 1960

Bigotry inevitably showed its snarling face. Senator Kennedy was a Roman Catholic, the first to be nominated since Al Smith's ill-starred campaign in 1928. Smear artists revived the ancient charges about the Pope's controlling the White House. Kennedy pointed to his fourteen years of service in Congress, denied that he would be swayed by Rome, and asked if some 40 million Catholic Americans were to be condemned to second-class citizenship from birth.

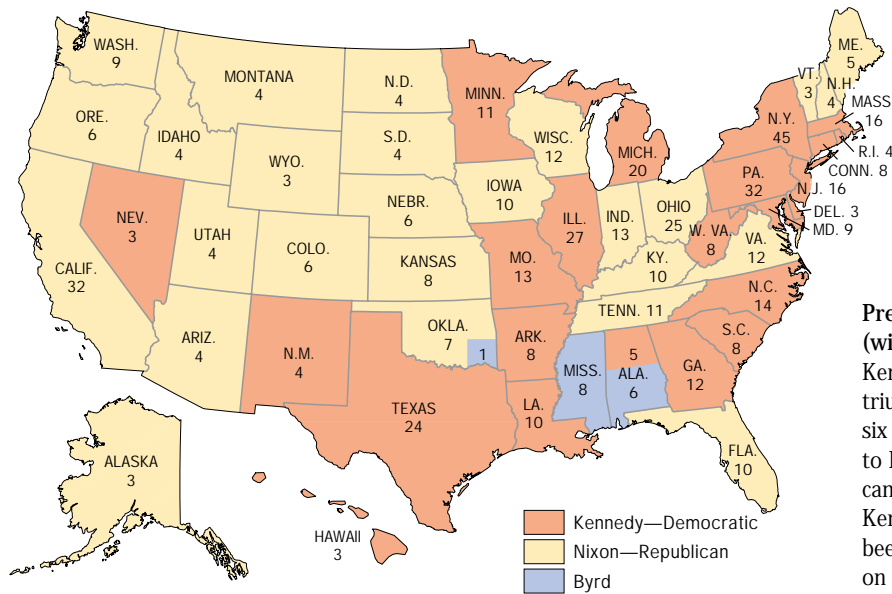
Kennedy's Catholicism aroused misgivings in the Protestant, Bible Belt South, which was ordinarily Democratic. “I fear Catholicism more than I fear communism,” declaimed one Baptist minister in North Carolina. But the religious issue largely canceled itself out. If many southern Democrats stayed away from the polls because of Kennedy's Catholicism, northern Democrats in unusually large numbers supported Kennedy because of the bitter attacks on their Catholic faith.

Kennedy charged that the Soviets, with their nuclear bombs and circling *Sputniks*, had gained on America in prestige and power. Nixon, forced to defend the dying administration, insisted that the nation's prestige had not slipped, although Kennedy was causing it to do so by his unpatriotic talk.

Television may well have tipped the scales. Nixon agreed to meet Kennedy in four so-called debates. The contestants crossed words in millions of living rooms before audiences estimated at 60 million or more. Nobody “won” the debates. But Kennedy at least held his own and did not suffer by comparison with the more “experienced” Nixon. The debates demonstrated the importance of image in a television age. Many viewers found Kennedy's glamour and vitality far more appealing than Nixon's tired and pallid appearance.

Kennedy squeezed through by the rather comfortable margin of 303 electoral votes to 219,\* but with the breathtakingly close popular margin of only 118,574 votes out of over 68 million cast. Like Franklin Roosevelt, Kennedy ran well in the large industrial centers, where he had strong support from workers, Catholics, and African-Americans. (He had solicitously telephoned the pregnant Coretta King, whose husband, Martin Luther King, Jr., was then imprisoned in Georgia for a sit-in.)

\*Six Democratic electors in Alabama, all eight unpledged Democratic electors in Mississippi, and one Republican elector in Oklahoma voted for Senator Harry F. Byrd.



**Presidential Election of 1960 (with electoral vote by state)**  
Kennedy owed his hairbreadth triumph to his victories in twenty-six of the forty largest cities—and to Lyndon Johnson's strenuous campaigning in the South, where Kennedy's Catholicism may have been a hotter issue than his stand on civil rights.

Although losing a few seats, the Democrats swept both houses of Congress by wide margins. John Fitzgerald Kennedy—the youngest man to date and the first Catholic to be elected president—was free to set out for his New Frontier, provided that the die-hard conservatives in his party would join the wagon train.

### An Old General Fades Away

President Eisenhower continued to enjoy extraordinary popularity to the final curtain. Despite Democratic jibes about “eight years of golfing and goofing,” of “putting and puttering,” Eisenhower was universally admired and respected for his dignity, decency, sincerity, goodwill, and moderation.

Pessimists had predicted that Eisenhower would be a seriously crippled “lame duck” during his second term, owing to the barrier against reelection erected by the Twenty-second Amendment, ratified in 1951. (See the Appendix.) In truth, he displayed more vigor, more political know-how, and more aggressive leadership during his last two years as president than ever before. For an unprecedented six years, from 1955 to 1961, Congress remained in Democratic hands, yet Eisenhower exerted unusual control over the legislative branch. He wielded the

veto 169 times, and only twice was his nay overridden by the required two-thirds vote.

America was fabulously prosperous in the Eisenhower years, despite pockets of poverty and unemployment, recurrent recessions, and perennial farm problems. “Old Glory” could now proudly display fifty stars. Alaska attained statehood in 1959, as did Hawaii. Alaska, though gigantic, was thinly populated and noncontiguous, but these objections were overcome in a Democratic Congress that expected Alaska to vote Democratic. Hawaii had ample population (largely of Asian descent), advanced democratic institutions, and more acreage than the mainland states of Rhode Island, Delaware, or Connecticut.

Though a crusading general, Eisenhower as president mounted no moral crusade for civil rights. This was perhaps his greatest failing. Yet he was no bigot, and he had done far more than grin away problems and tread water. As a Republican president, he had further woven the reforms of the Democratic New Deal and Fair Deal into the fabric of national life. As a former general, he had exercised wise restraint in his use of military power and had soberly guided foreign policy away from countless threats to peace. The old soldier left office crestfallen at his failure to end the arms race with the Soviets. Yet he had ended one war and avoided all others. As the decades lengthened, appreciation of him grew.

*After campaigning with promises to reduce the defense budget, President Dwight Eisenhower (1890–1969) presided over unprecedented increases in military spending. In his Farewell Address on January 17, 1961, he sagely but ironically warned against the menace his own policies had nurtured:*

“This conjunction of an immense military establishment and a large arms industry is new in the American experience. . . . In the councils of government, we must guard against the acquisition of unwarranted influence, whether sought or unsought, by the military-industrial complex.”

## **Changing Economic Patterns**

The continuing post–World War II economic boom wrought wondrous changes in American society in the 1950s. Prosperity triggered a fabulous surge in home construction, as a nation of renters became a nation of homeowners. One of every four homes standing in America in 1960 had been built during the 1950s, and 83 percent of those new homes were in suburbia.

More than ever, science and technology drove economic growth. The invention of the transistor in 1948 sparked a revolution in electronics, and especially in computers. The first electronic computers assembled in the 1940s were massive machines with hundreds of miles of wiring and thousands of fickle cathode ray tubes. Transistors and, later, printed circuits on silicon wafers made possible dramatic miniaturization and phenomenal computational speed. Computer giant International Business Machines (IBM) expanded robustly, becoming *the* prototype of the “high-tech” corporation in the dawning “information age.” Eventually, personal computers and even inexpensive pocket calculators contained more computing power than room-size early models. Computers transformed age-old business practices like billing and inventory control and opened genuine new frontiers in areas

like airline scheduling, high-speed printing, and telecommunications.

Aerospace industries also grew fantastically in the 1950s, thanks both to Eisenhower’s aggressive buildup of the Strategic Air Command and to a robustly expanding passenger airline business—and to the connections between military and civilian aircraft production. In 1957 the Seattle-based Boeing Company brought out the first large passenger jet, the “707.” Its design owed much to the previous development of SAC’s long-range strategic bomber, the B-52. Two years later Boeing delivered the first presidential jet, a specially modified 707. “Air Force One” dazzled President Eisenhower with its speed and comfort.

The nature of the work force was also changing. A sort of quiet revolution was marked in 1956 when “white-collar” workers for the first time outnumbered “blue-collar” workers, signaling the passage from an industrial to a postindustrial era. Keeping pace with that fundamental transformation, organized labor withered along with the smokestack industries that had been its sustenance. Union membership as a percentage of the labor force

**Occupational Distribution of Workingwomen, 1900–1998\***

	1900	1920	1940	1960	1980	1998
Total white-collar workers <sup>†</sup>	17.8%	38.8%	44.9%	52.5%	65.6%	73.8%
Clerical workers	4.0	18.7	21.5	28.7	30.5	38.9
Manual workers	27.8	23.8	21.6	18.0	14.8	9.7
Farm workers	18.9	13.5	4.0	1.8	1.0	1.0
Service workers <sup>‡</sup>	35.5	23.9	29.4	21.9	18.1	15.4

\*Major categories; percentage of all women workers, age fourteen and older, in each category.

<sup>†</sup>Includes clerical, sales, professional, and technical workers, managers and officials.

<sup>‡</sup>Includes domestic servants.

(Sources: *Historical Statistics of the United States* and *Statistical Abstract of the United States*, relevant years.)

peaked at about 35 percent in 1954 and then went into steady decline. Some observers concluded that the union movement had played out its historic role of empowering workers and ensuring economic justice, and that unions would eventually disappear altogether in the postindustrial era.

The surge in white-collar employment opened special opportunities for women. When World War II ended, most women, including those who had worked in war plants, returned to highly conventional female roles as wives and mothers—the remarkably prolific mothers of the huge “baby-boom” generation. A “cult of domesticity” emerged in popular culture to celebrate those eternal feminine functions. When 1950s television programs like “Ozzie and Harriet” or “Leave It to Beaver” depicted idyllic suburban families with a working husband, two children, and a wife who did not work outside the home, they did so without irony; much of middle-class America really did live that way. But as the 1950s progressed, another quiet revolution was gaining momentum that was destined to transform women’s roles and even the character of the American family.

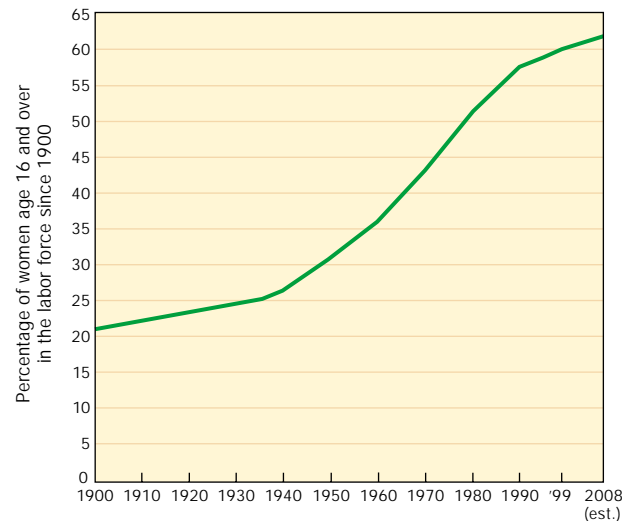
Of some 40 million new jobs created in the three decades after 1950, more than 30 million were in clerical and service work. Women filled the huge majority of these new positions. They were the principal employment beneficiaries of the postwar era, creating an extensive “pink-collar ghetto” of occupations that were dominated by women.

Exploding employment opportunities for women in the 1950s unleashed a groundswell of

social and psychological shocks that mounted to tidal-wave proportions in the decades that followed. From one perspective, women’s surge into the workplace was nothing new at all, but only a return to the days when the United States was an agricultural nation, and men and women alike toiled on the family farm. But the urban age was not the agricultural age, and women’s new dual role as *both* workers *and* homemakers raised urgent questions about family life and about traditional definitions of gender differences.

Women in the Labor Force, 1900–2008 (est.)

(Sources: *Historical Statistics of the United States* and *Statistical Abstract of the United States*, relevant years.)



Feminist Betty Friedan gave focus and fuel to women's feelings in 1963 when she published *The Feminine Mystique*, a runaway best-seller and a classic of feminist protest literature that launched the modern women's movement. Friedan spoke in rousing accents to millions of able, educated

women who applauded her indictment of the stifling boredom of suburban housewifery. Many of those women were already working for wages, but they were also struggling against the guilt and frustration of leading an "unfeminine" life as defined by the postwar "cult of domesticity."



## Consumer Culture in the Fifties

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The 1950s witnessed a huge expansion of the middle class and the blossoming of a consumer culture. Diner's Club introduced the plastic credit card in 1950, and four years later the first McDonald's hamburger stand opened in San Bernardino, California. Also in 1955, Disneyland opened its doors in Anaheim, California. These innovations—easy credit, high-volume “fast-food” production, and new forms of recreation—were harbingers of an emerging new lifestyle of leisure and affluence that was in full flower by the decade's end.

Crucial to the development of that lifestyle was the rapid rise of the new technology of television. Only 6 TV stations were broadcasting in 1946; a decade later 442 stations were operating. TV sets were rich people's novelties in the 1940s, but 7 million sets were sold in 1951. By 1960 virtually every American home had one, in a stunning display of the speed with which new technologies can pervade and

transform modern societies. Attendance at movies sank as the entertainment industry changed its focus from the silver screen to the picture tube. By the mid-1950s, advertisers annually spent \$10 billion to hawk their wares on television, while critics fumed that the wildly popular new mass medium was degrading the public's aesthetic, social, moral, political, and educational standards. To the question, “Why is television called a medium?” pundits replied, “Because it's never rare or well done.”

Even religion capitalized on the powerful new electronic pulpit. “Televangelists” like the Baptist Billy Graham, the Pentecostal Holiness preacher Oral Roberts, and the Roman Catholic Fulton J. Sheen took to the airwaves to spread the Christian gospel. Television also catalyzed the commercialization of professional sports, as viewing audiences that once numbered in the stadium-capacity thousands could now be counted in the couch-potato millions.

Sports also reflected the shift in population toward the West and South. In 1958 baseball's New

York Giants moved to San Francisco and the Brooklyn Dodgers abandoned Flatbush for Los Angeles. Those moves touched off a new westward movement of sports franchises. Shifting population and spreading affluence led eventually to substantial expansion of the major baseball leagues and the principal football and basketball leagues as well.

Popular music was dramatically transformed in the fifties. The chief revolutionary was Elvis Presley, a white singer born in 1935 in Tupelo, Mississippi. Fusing black rhythm and blues with white bluegrass and country styles, Elvis created a new musical idiom known forever after as rock and roll. Rock was “crossover” music, carrying its heavy beat and driving rhythms across the cultural divide that separated black and white musical traditions. Listening and dancing to it became a kind of religious rite for the millions of baby boomers coming of age in the 1950s, and Presley—with his fleshy face, pouting lips, and antic, sexually suggestive gyrations—was its high priest. Bloated by fame, fortune, and drugs, he died in 1977 at the age of forty-two.

Traditionalists were repelled by Presley, and they found much more to upset them in the affluent fifties. Movie star Marilyn Monroe, with her ingenuous smile and mandolin-curved hips, helped to

popularize—and commercialize—new standards of sensuous sexuality. So did *Playboy* magazine, first published in 1955. As the decade closed, Americans were well on their way to becoming free-spending consumers of mass-produced, standardized products, which were advertised on the electronic medium of television and often sold for their alleged sexual allure.

Many critics lamented the implications of this new consumerist lifestyle. Harvard sociologist David Riesman portrayed the postwar generation as a pack of conformists in *The Lonely Crowd* (1950), as did William H. Whyte, Jr., in *The Organization Man*. Novelist Sloan Wilson explored a similar theme in *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit* (1955). Harvard economist John Kenneth Galbraith questioned the relation between private wealth and the public good in a series of books beginning with *The Affluent Society* (1958). The postwar explosion of prosperity, Galbraith claimed, had produced a troublesome combination of private opulence amid public squalor. Americans had televisions in their homes but garbage in their streets. They ate rich food but breathed foul air. Galbraith’s call for social spending to match private purchasing proved highly influential in the 1960s. Sociologist Daniel Bell, in *The*

*Coming of Post-Industrial Society* (1973) and *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism* (1976), found even deeper paradoxes of prosperity. The hedonistic “consumer ethic” of modern capitalism, he argued, might undermine the older “work ethic” and thus destroy capitalism’s very productive capacity. Collusion at the highest levels of the “military-industrial complex” was the subject of *The Power Elite* (1956), an influential piece of modern muckraking by radical sociologist C. Wright Mills, who became a hero to “New Left” student activists in the 1960s.

### **The Life of the Mind in Postwar America**

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America’s affluence in the heady post–World War II decades was matched by a mother lode of literary gems. In fiction writing some of the prewar realists continued to ply their trade, notably Ernest Hemingway in *The Old Man and the Sea* (1952). A Nobel laureate in 1954, Hemingway was dead by his own duck gun in 1961. John Steinbeck, another prewar writer who persisted in graphic portrayals of American society, such as *East of Eden* (1952) and *Travels with Charley* (1962), received the Nobel Prize for literature in 1962, the seventh American to be so honored.

Curiously, World War II did not inspire the same kind of literary outpouring that World War I had. Searing realism, the trademark style of war writers in the 1920s, characterized the earliest novels that portrayed soldierly life in World War II, such as Norman Mailer’s *The Naked and the Dead* (1948) and James Jones’s *From Here to Eternity* (1951). But as time passed, realistic writing fell from favor. Authors tended increasingly to write about the war in fantastic and even psychedelic prose. Joseph Heller’s *Catch-22* (1961) dealt with the improbable antics and anguish of American airmen in the wartime Mediterranean. A savage satire, it made readers hurt when they laughed. The supercharged imagination of Kurt Vonnegut, Jr., poured forth works of puzzling complexity in sometimes impenetrably inventive prose, including the dark comedy war tale *Slaughterhouse Five* (1969).

The dilemmas created by the new mobility and affluence of American life were explored by Pennsylvania-born John Updike in books like *Rabbit, Run* (1960) and *Couples* (1968), and by Massachusetts-bred John Cheever in *The Wapshot Chronicle* (1957) and *The Wapshot Scandal* (1964). Louis Auchincloss

wrote elegantly about upper-class New Yorkers. Gore Vidal penned a series of intriguing historical novels, as well as several impish and always iconoclastic works, including *Myra Breckinridge* (1968), about a reincarnated transsexual. Together, these writers constituted the rear guard of an older, WASP (white Angle-Saxon Protestant) elite that had long dominated American writing.

Poetry also flowered in the postwar era, though poets were often highly critical, even deeply despairing, about the character of American life. Older poets were still active, including cantankerous Ezra Pound, jailed after the war in a U.S. Army detention center near Pisa, Italy, for alleged collaboration with the Fascists. Connecticut insurance executive Wallace Stevens and New Jersey pediatrician William Carlos Williams continued after 1945 to pursue second careers as prolific poets of world-class stature. But younger poets were coming to the fore during the postwar period. Pacific northwestern Theodore Roethke wrote lyrically about the

land until his death by drowning in Puget Sound in 1963. Robert Lowell, descended from a long line of patrician New Englanders, sought to apply the wisdom of the Puritan past to the perplexing present in allegorical poems like *For the Union Dead* (1964). Troubled Sylvia Plath crafted the moving verses of *Ariel* (published posthumously in 1966) and a disturbing novel, *The Bell Jar* (1963), but her career was cut short when she took her own life in 1963. Anne Sexton produced brooding autobiographical poems until her death by apparent suicide in 1974. Another brilliant poet of the period, John Berryman, ended it all in 1972 by leaping from a Minneapolis bridge onto the frozen bank of the Mississippi River. Writing poetry seemed to be a dangerous pursuit in modern America. The life of the poet, it was said, began in sadness and ended in madness.

Playwrights were also active. Tennessee Williams wrote a series of searing dramas about psychological misfits struggling to hold themselves together amid the disintegrating forces of modern life. Noteworthy were *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1947) and *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (1955). Arthur Miller brought to the stage searching probes of American values, notably *Death of a Salesman*

(1949) and *The Crucible* (1953), which treated the Salem witch trials as a dark parable warning against the dangers of McCarthyism. Lorraine Hansberry offered an affecting portrait of African-American life in *A Raisin in the Sun* (1959). In the 1960s Edward Albee exposed the rapacious underside of middle-class life in *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* (1962).

Books by black authors also made the best-seller lists, beginning with Richard Wright's chilling portrait of a black Chicago killer in *Native Son* (1940). Ralph Ellison depicted the black individual's quest for personal identity in *Invisible Man* (1952), one of the most haunting novels of the postwar era. James Baldwin won plaudits as a novelist and essayist, particularly for his sensitive reflections on the racial question in *The Fire Next Time* (1963). Black nationalist LeRoi Jones, who changed his name to Imamu Amiri Baraka, crafted powerful plays like *Dutchman* (1964).

The South boasted a literary renaissance, led by veteran Mississippi author William Faulkner, who was a Nobel recipient in 1950. Fellow Mississippians Walker Percy and Eudora Welty grasped the falling torch from the failing Faulkner, who died in 1962. Tennessean Robert Penn Warren immortalized

Louisiana politico Huey Long in *All the King's Men* (1946). Flannery O'Connor wrote perceptively of her native Georgia, and Virginian William Styron confronted the harsh history of his home state in a controversial fictional representation of an 1831 slave rebellion, *The Confessions of Nat Turner* (1967).

Especially bountiful was the harvest of books by Jewish novelists. Some critics quipped that a knowledge of Yiddish was becoming necessary to understand much of the dialogue presented in modern American novels. J. D. Salinger painted an unforgettable portrait of a sensitive, upper-class, Anglo-Saxon adolescent in *Catcher in the Rye* (1951), but other Jewish writers found their favorite subject matter in the experience of lower- and middle-class Jewish immigrants. Bernard Malamud rendered a touching portrait of a family of New York Jewish storekeepers in *The Assistant* (1957). Malamud also explored the mythic qualities of the culture of base-

ball in *The Natural* (1952). Philip Roth wrote comically about young New Jersey suburbanites in *Good-bye, Columbus* (1959) and penned an uproarious account of a sexually obsessed middle-aged New Yorker in *Portnoy's Complaint* (1969). Chicagoan Saul Bellow contributed masterful sketches of Jewish urban and literary life in landmark books like *The Adventures of Augie March* (1953) and *Herzog* (1962). Bellow became the eighth American Nobel laureate for literature in 1977. Isaac Bashevis Singer immigrated to America from Poland in the 1930s and continued to write in Yiddish. He won the Nobel Prize for literature in 1978. E. L. Doctorow employed Old Testament themes in his fictional account of atomic spies Julius and Ethel Rosenberg, *The Book of Daniel* (1971), and later he imaginatively recast other modern historical materials in books like *Ragtime* (1975), *World's Fair* (1985), and *Billy Bathgate* (1989).

## Chronology

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| <p><b>1952</b> Eisenhower defeats Stevenson for presidency<br/>Hemingway publishes <i>The Old Man and the Sea</i></p>   | <p><b>1957</b> Little Rock school desegregation crisis<br/>Civil Rights Act passed<br/>Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) formed<br/>Eisenhower Doctrine<br/>Soviet Union launches <i>Sputnik</i> satellites</p> |
| <p><b>1953</b> CIA-engineered coup installs shah of Iran</p>  | <p><b>1958</b> U.S. troops sent to Lebanon<br/>NDEA authorizes loans and grants for science and language education<br/>Galbraith publishes <i>The Affluent Society</i></p>  |
| <p><b>1954</b> French defeated in Vietnam<br/>Army-McCarthy hearings<br/><i>Brown v. Board of Education</i><br/>SEATO formed<br/>First McDonald's hamburger stand opens<br/>CIA-sponsored coup in Guatemala</p>                                     | <p><b>1958-</b></p>   |
| <p><b>1955</b> Montgomery bus boycott by blacks begins; emergence of Martin Luther King, Jr.<br/>Geneva summit meeting<br/>Warsaw Pact signed<br/>AF of L merges with CIO<br/>Tennessee Williams's <i>Cat on a Hot Tin Roof</i> first performed</p> | <p><b>1959</b> Berlin crisis</p> <p><b>1959</b> Castro leads Cuban revolution<br/>Landrum-Griffin Act<br/>Alaska and Hawaii attain statehood</p>  |
| <p><b>1956</b> Soviets crush Hungarian revolt<br/>Suez crisis<br/>Eisenhower defeats Stevenson for presidency<br/>Mills publishes <i>The Power Elite</i></p>  | <p><b>1960</b> Sit-in movement for civil rights begins<br/>U-2 incident sabotages Paris summit<br/>OPEC formed<br/>Kennedy defeats Nixon for presidency</p>   |

For further reading, see page A26 of the Appendix. For web resources, go to <http://college.hmco.com>.