Chapter 24
Cold War and Hot War, 1945–1953

Learning Objectives:

After reading Chapter 24, you should be able to:

1. Detail the reaction Americans had to the death of President Franklin D. Roosevelt.
2. Explain the extent and impact of the global destruction of the Second World War.
3. Understand the significance of the power vacuums left by the defeats of Germany and Japan.
4. Discuss how women and minorities responded to the loss of their wartime gains.
5. Analyze the causes behind the increased class conflict that took place after the war.
6. Explain how and why the antifascist alliance dissolved.
7. Detail the policy of containment and what it meant for U.S. foreign policy.
8. Discuss how colonialism related to the emerging Cold War.
9. Comprehend how nuclear weapons changed international relations.
10. Detail the meaning of suburban family life for many white Americans.
11. Understand the limits of liberalism when faced with conservative resistance.
12. Discuss the growing climate of fear behind the hunt for “un-American activities.”
13. Analyze the United States role in the Chinese Civil War.
14. Discuss the making of the National Security state and the Korean War.

Time Line

1944
GI Bill passed

1945
Second World War ended with Allied victory
United Nations created

1947
National Security Act passed
Taft-Hartley Act passed

1948
Harry S. Truman won presidential election
1949
North Atlantic Treaty Organization formed
Chinese Communists came to power
Soviet Union exploded first nuclear device

1950
Korean War began

1953
Korean War ended

I. The Uncertainties of Victory

A. Global Destruction

60 million people died in World War II and all major combatant countries were in ruins except the United States. Having entered the war late and seen no real fighting on her soil, the U.S., with 6 percent of the world’s population, had half of the planet’s wealth. With all major trading partners having lost much of their purchasing power, Americans’ biggest fear was the return of the depression.

B. Vacuums of Power

The defeat of the fascist powers was also a defeat for their ideologies. Ideas of colonialism, militarism, and racism were rejected by most people around the world. Instead, into this newly created vacuum came socialists, communists, and other radicals. Europeans established welfare states to give their citizens a minimum standard of living and health care. In the colonial world, people organized to oust their foreign rulers and gain independence.

C. Postwar Reconversion

At home, Americans focused on reconverting a wartime economy into a peacetime one. 9 million Americans were discharged from the armed forces by mid-1946 and housing remained scarce. Congress made a major commitment to veterans with the Servicemen’s Readjustment Act of 1944, known as the G.I. Bill, which gave low-cost mortgages, free college tuition, and created veterans hospitals to provide lifetime medical care. The post-war transition was hard on working women, who found themselves pressured to leave the workforce to make room for returning men.
D. Contesting Racial Hierarchies

Like women, African Americans found themselves expected to return to the subservience of the past. Black veterans led the resistance to this idea and racists responded with a wave of lynchings and beatings, particularly in the South, where most African Americans still lived. The Supreme Court began to strike down laws supporting racial segregation, while popular culture became more integrated and Jackie Robinson became the first black player in major league baseball. Native Americans and Mexican Americans faced discrimination, particularly in the southwest, and fought for civil rights much as African Americans did.

E. Class Conflict

As in 1919, 1946 was a year of intense class conflict as 1.8 million workers went on strike. With the rising tension between the United States and the Soviet Union, the fear of leftist influence in the trade unions grew among businessmen. Using the supposed threat of the tiny Communist Party, business interests created a “red scare” to weaken or destroy the more militant unions and tame the rest. Republican victory in the 1946 congressional elections meant they had the power, along with conservative Southern Democrats, to pass the anti-union Taft-Hartley Bill which stripped unions of many of their rights.

II. The Quest for Security

A. Redefining National Security

The primary goal of U.S. leaders at the end of the war was to rebuild the world capitalist economy. American prosperity depended, they believed, on free trade. National security came to mean not defending the nation from invasion but the creation of a free-trading capitalist world order. The biggest threat to this goal came from the Soviet Union.

B. Conflict with the Soviet Union

The antifascist alliance between the Soviet Union and the United States quickly fell apart after the war, as each side suspected the other of wanting world dominance. Each nation drew different conclusions from World War II. The United States had become the only truly global power and demanded free trade and access to other nations’ markets. The Soviet Union, on the other hand, had been devastated by a war which killed over 20 million of her citizens and would not budge on questions of security.
C. The Policy of Containment

George Kennan put forward the idea of containing Soviet power so as to prevent any expansion of Soviet influence. Former British Prime Minister Winston Churchill coined the phrase “iron curtain” to describe Soviet control of Eastern Europe. As British power declined, the United States transformed into having a permanent military presence around the globe. This required larger tax expenditures than Americans were used to, so the Truman administration exaggerated a real problem in order to win popular support.

The U.S. provided $13 billion to fund western European recovery as part of what became known as the Marshall Plan. The western zones of occupied Germany were reunited in 1948 to create a new pro-capitalist nation and the creation of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in 1949 created a new military alliance led by the U.S. With the rising Cold War, previous plans to punish defeated war criminals were abandoned and every effort made to rebuild Germany and Japan as quickly as possible so that they might serve as counters to the Soviet Union.

D. Colonialism and the Cold War

The world’s non-white majority lived under European colonial rule and their struggles for national independence were reviving. With European rule on the way out, the Truman administration sought to transfer power to local pro-western elites. Revolutions were to be opposed at all costs and, if the Europeans would not leave, like the French in Vietnam, the U.S. would back the colonists against the independence forces. The U.S. support for the new nation of Israel would be the beginning of an enduring conflict with Arab nations in the region.

E. The Impact of Nuclear Weapons

The use of nuclear weapons against Japan started a period of insecurity in which people worried that the destruction of the planet could happen at any time and without warning. Fallout from tests of atomic bombs led to greatly increased cancer rates among those exposed, even while the government reassured citizens that the fallout was harmless. Science fiction began to depict a future in which civilization had been destroyed by nuclear weapons.

III. A Cold War Society

A. Family Lives

After the war, many white Americans moved to the suburbs where life encouraged a sharpening of gender roles. Men went to work as women were expected to concentrate on a nearly full-time job of unpaid housework. Economic reality forced most black women to do double duty as both unpaid housewives and working for white families as domestics. Children moved more firmly to the center of American family life as the baby boom which began in 1946 continued to 1964. The
sexual double standard remained in place as women’s virtue was tied to virginity in a way that men’s was not. Abortion was illegal and birth control often only available to married women and only in certain states.

B. The Growth of the South and the West

Before the war, the urban North had been the center of culture, industry, and finance but government expenditures during the war helped to change this. With both military bases and new industrial plants established for the war effort, the South, the Southwest, and California grew rapidly after the war. Migrants from Mexico continued to find work in California agriculture. Automobiles and air conditioners were two changes which stimulated the growth of the Sunbelt, as the government built highways instead of railroads or public transportation. Air conditioning helped make the South less uncomfortable and more inviting to Northerners.

C. Harry Truman and the Limits of Liberal Reform

Boxed in by conservative Republican opponents, President Harry Truman was unsuccessful in introducing a system of national health care. Truman, did, however, order the desegregation of the armed forces and federal civil service. While this earned him the thanks of black voters, it caused white Southerners to walk out of the 1948 Democratic convention and nominate Strom Thurmond as the “Dixiecrat” candidate for president. Meanwhile disappointed left Democrats moved to back former Vice President Henry Wallace, who ran on the Progressive Party label. Despite the predictions of victory for Republican Thomas E. Dewey, Truman managed to win an upset victory and was returned to the White House.

D. The Cold War at Home

Although liberals and moderates embraced anti-communism, this proved to be no protection against “red baiting”, mostly conservative Republicans, who accused liberal Democrats of sympathizing with or even spying for the Soviet Union. All foreign policy setbacks were blamed on traitors within. President Truman helped start the “red scare” when in 1947 he had a federal employee loyalty program established. By “red baiting” Henry Wallace and the Progressive Party, Truman helped set the tone of what later became called “McCarthyism,” after the Republican Senator from Wisconsin who made the most outrageous charges against liberals. With Republicans able to accuse their Democratic opponents of disloyalty, even with no proof, the Republican electoral victory of 1952 was secured.

E. Who is a Loyal American?

The Cold War established a new definition of who was a loyal American. Homeowners were assumed to be loyal, while homosexuals were perverts. Religious people, even formerly excluded Catholics and Jews, were considered loyal while others were not. Some gains were made for civil rights within the limits of the Cold War, while radical activists like W.E.B. DuBois and singer
Paul Robeson refused to make concessions and were duly demonized. Native Americans were promised much but given little, while immigrants received mixed messages. The ban on Asians becoming citizens was lifted but were kept discriminatory immigration quotas.

IV. The United States and Asia

A. The Chinese Civil War

Despite restrictions on Chinese immigration, the United States had long shown a great interest in China. Missionaries saw it as a place to gain converts while businessmen eyed the Chinese market, home to one-fifth the world’s population. During World War II, the U.S. had been allied with China against Japan. So, when Mao Zedong and the Chinese Communist Party took power in October of 1949, Americans were shocked. How could such a large nation become communist without the military intervention of the Soviet Union? Would the rest of Asia follow? China became a major issue in American politics, with Republican rhetoric asking the question “Who lost China?”

B. The Creation of the National Security State

In the weeks before the Chinese revolution took power, the Soviet Union had tested its first atomic bomb. In response, President Truman began to create a National Security state which would oppose revolutions or radical change everywhere on the planet. The Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) was to handle spying, while the National Security Council (NSC) coordinated foreign policy information. As scores of communities became dependent on military spending, a kind of military welfare state emerged.

C. At War in Korea

The Korean War began on June 25, 1950. Divided by the United States and the Soviet Union at the end of the Second World War, North Korea had a dictatorial pro-Soviet regime, while South Korea was not much more democratic but was pro-American. Even before the start of the war, some 100,000 Koreans lost their lives as leftist rebellions took place and were brutally suppressed in the South.

The fighting raged until 1953, with 37,000 American dead as well as three million Koreans and almost a million Chinese. American military superiority had prevailed and the policy of containment had succeeded but at a great cost.
Identification

*Explain the significance of each of the following:*

1. Cold War:

2. Ho Chi Minh:

3. GI Bill:

4. Jackie Robinson:

5. Taft-Hartley Act (1947):

6. Policy of containment:

7. Marshall Plan:

8. North Atlantic Treaty Organization:


10. House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC):

11. Paul Robeson:

12. Army-McCarthy Hearings:


15. General Douglas MacArthur:

16. League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC):

17. Atomic Energy Commission:

18. Senator Joseph McCarthy:

19. Iron Curtain:


**Multiple Choice Questions:**

1. The only major combatant to emerge from the war in better shape than before was the
   A. Soviet Union.
   B. United States.
   C. France
   D. British Empire.
   E. Republic of China.

2. After the war, western Europeans established
   A. welfare states to provide a minimum standard of living for their citizens.
   B. right-wing governments to encourage the growth of capitalism.
   C. governments which openly defended white supremacy.
   D. all of the above.
   E. none of the above
3. The GI Bill passed in 1944 was to
   A. pay for college tuition for U.S. veterans.
   B. provide lifetime medical care for veterans.
   C. offer low-cost mortgages to veterans.
   D. all of the above.
   E. none of the above.

4. Jackie Robinson was notable for
   A. winning a gold medal at the Berlin Olympics.
   B. being the first African American to play in major league baseball.
   C. his role in the landmark Brown v. the Board of Education decision.
   D. winning the Congressional Medal of Honor in Korea.
   E. none of the above.

5. The CIO’s “Operation Dixie” was defeated because
   A. it refused to allow African Americans into trade unions.
   B. of a skillful appeal by business to racist sentiments among white workers.
   C. it was revealed two weeks beforehand to President Roosevelt.
   D. of the opposition of the NAACP.
   E. none of the above.

6. The policy of containment is best understood as
   A. an attempt by the Soviet Union to isolate their capitalist rivals.
   B. a result of Winston Churchill’s 1945 election landslide.
   C. being mainly limited to the problems of Latin America.
   D. limiting terrorists to isolated regions of Asia.
   E. none of the above.

7. In the colonial world, the Truman administration sought to
   A. support self-determination even at the cost of U.S. interests.
   B. have a gradual transfer of power to pro-western local elites.
   C. defend the British Empire, even if it meant war in India.
   D. drive the Soviet Union out of southern Africa.
   E. none of the above.

8. The Atomic Energy Commission assured people in the 1940s that fallout was
   A. limited to Soviet “dirty” bombs.
   B. not a serious hazard.
   C. to be avoided at all costs, as it caused cancer and other illnesses.
   D. all of the above.
   E. none of the above.
9. Suburban life encouraged middle-class women to
   A. work outside the home so as to make mortgage payments.
   B. consider themselves the equals of men.
   C. find fulfillment in marriage and motherhood.
   D. avoid marriage, since it interfered with career advancement.
   E. none of the above.

10. The growth of the Sunbelt was particularly stimulated by
    A. cars and air conditioning.
    B. expansion of the national railroad system after 1944.
    C. new forms of public transportation like subways.
    D. B and C only.
    E. none of the above.

11. The “red scare” known as McCarthyism saw conservative Republicans
    A. attacked as members of the Communist Party.
    B. accuse racists of being agents of the Soviet Union.
    C. call for dialogue with the U.S.S.R.
    D. red-bait liberal Democrats as being communist sympathizers.
    E. all of the above.

12. Who of the following was attacked for opposing the Cold War?
    A. Henry Wallace
    B. Paul Robeson
    C. W.E.B. DuBois
    D. all of the above
    E. none of the above

13. In China, the victory of the Communists in 1949
    A. was seen as a good thing by Democrats.
    B. appalled Americans.
    C. delighted President Truman.
    D. was mainly ignored by a United States worried about Latin America.
    E. none of the above.

14. South Korean leader Syngman Rhee was
    A. a former resident of the United States.
    B. unpopular with many, if not most, South Koreans.
    C. the leader of an authoritarian capitalist regime.
    D. responsible for suppressing leftist uprisings in South Korea.
    E. all of the above.
15. Which of the following was NOT a result of the Korean War?
   A. Three million Koreans on both sides died.
   B. The United States lost 37,000 dead.
   C. The Soviet Union lost 85,000 dead.
   D. Korea remained divided.
   E. China lost almost a million soldiers.

**MAP QUESTION:**

After looking at Map 24.4, discuss the significance of the fighting during the Korean War. Was China justified in her fears when U.S. forces reached her border? Why or why not?

**CONNECTING HISTORY**

Evaluate the responsibility of both the Soviet Union and the United States for the Cold War. Which deserves the greater blame? Why?

**INTERPRETING HISTORY**

Analyze the U.S. objectives and programs for National Security. If the United States was so much stronger economically and militarily, why was the U.S. so afraid of the Soviet Union?

**Answers to Multiple Choice Questions**

1. B  
2. A  
3. D  
4. B  
5. B  
6. E  
7. B  
8. B  
9. C  
10. A  
11. D  
12. D  
13. B  
14. E  
15. C