CHAPTER 35

The Cold War Begins, 1945–1952

# focus questions

1. What were the reasons for the standoff between the United States and the Soviet Union?

2. What major issues needed to be resolved in the postwar years in Europe and Japan?

3. What role did each of the following play with regard to the Cold War: Berlin airlift, containment policy, Marshall Plan, Truman Doctrine, NATO, and the Korean War?

4. What domestic concerns were brought about as a result of the Cold War?

5. What were some of the reasons for the postwar anxieties and prosperity brought about after World War II?

# Chapter Themes

**Theme:** The end of World War II left the United States and the Soviet Union as the two dominant world powers, and they soon became locked in a Cold War confrontation. The Cold War spread from Europe to become a global ideological conflict between democracy and communism. Among its effects were a nasty hot war in Korea and a domestic crusade against disloyalty.

**Theme:** America emerged from World War II as the world’s strongest economic power and commenced a postwar economic boom that lasted for two decades. A bulging population migrated to the suburbs and Sunbelt, leaving the cities increasingly to minorities and the poor.

chapter summary

The Yalta agreement, near the end of World War II, left major issues undecided and created controversy over postwar relations with the Soviet Union. With feisty Truman in the White House, the two new superpowers soon found themselves at odds over Eastern Europe, Germany, and the Middle East.

The Truman Doctrine announced military aid and an ideological crusade against international communism. The Marshall Plan provided economic assistance to starving and communist-threatened Europe, which soon joined the United States in the NATO military alliance.

The Cold War and revelations of spying aroused deep fears of communist subversion at home that culminated in McCarthy’s witch-hunting. Fear of communist advances abroad and social change at home generated national and local assaults on many people perceived to be different. Issues of the Cold War and civil rights fractured the Democratic Party three ways in 1948, but a gutsy Truman campaign overcame the divisions to win a triumphant underdog victory.

The Communist Chinese won a civil war against the Nationalists. North Korea invaded South Korea, and the Americans and Chinese joined in fighting the seesaw war to a bloody stalemate. MacArthur’s insubordination and threats to expand the war to China led Truman to fire him.

In the immediate postwar years, there were widespread fears of a return to depression. But fueled by cheap energy, increased worker productivity, and government programs such as the GI Bill of Rights, the economy began a spectacular expansion that lasted from 1950 to 1970. This burst of affluence transformed American industry and society, and particularly drew more women into the workforce.

Footloose Americans migrated to the Sunbelts of the South and West, and to the growing suburbs, leaving the northeastern cities with poorer populations. Families grew rapidly, as the baby boom created a population bulge that would last for decades.

# developing the chapter: suggested lecture or discussion topics

* Explain the complex causes of the Cold War. The emphasis might be on the vacuum of power created by the destruction of Europe and the decline of Britain, as well as on the specific ideological and political battles over Poland, Germany, and Greece.

REFERENCES: Daniel Yergin, *Shattered Peace* (1977); Melvyn P. Leffler, *A Preponderance of Power: National Security, the Truman Administration, and the Cold War* (1992).

* Analyze the connection between the Cold War abroad and the hunt for subversion at home, perhaps focusing on the difference between the attacks on actual Soviet spies and the broader attack on all American Communists and the use of the Communist charge as a way to smear and suppress all sorts of people with unconventional views and lifestyles.

REFERENCES: Richard Fried, *Nightmare in Red* (1990); Ellen Schrecker, *Many Are the Crimes* (1998).

* Explain the changes in American economic development since World War II. The emphasis might be on America’s uncontested postwar economic domination and on the eventual weakening of the heavy-industrial base and the turn to other economic activities.

REFERENCE: John Patrick Diggins, *The Proud Decades: America in War and Peace, 1941–1960* (1988).

* Examine the rise of suburbs in relation to the changes in postwar economic, social, and racial life. Consider suburbia as an expression of both rising affluence and geographic mobility (especially in the South and West). Perhaps consider some of the critics and defenders of the suburbs in the 1950s.

REFERENCE: Kenneth Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier* (1986).

# for further interest: additional class topics

* Examine the significance of divided Germany and the captive nations of Eastern Europe in the Cold War.
* Analyze one or more of the key subversion cases—for example, the Hiss or Rosenberg cases. Consider how they became decades-long symbols of Cold War divisiveness.
* Discuss the frustrations of Korea as a limited and stalemated war. Special emphasis could be placed on the firing of MacArthur.
* Conduct a class debate on topics such as America Should Seek Peace with the Soviet Union and Communist Subversives Threaten America. Primary source readings will come from the following book: *Opposing Viewpoints in American History—Volume II: From Reconstruction to the Present*, San Diego, CA: Greenhaven Press, 1996. Another good source of debate topics is Larry Madaras and James M. SoRelle, *Taking Sides—Clashing Views on Controversial Issues in American History, Volume II: Reconstruction to the Present*, Connecticut: McGraw-Hill, 2000.
* Show students the following video: *The Century—America’s Time* (ABC Video in association with The History Channel), *Volume III: 1946–1952: Best Years*. “Exhausted but victorious, American GIs return home to a changed nation. The enormous task of rebuilding Europe falls to the only capable country—the U.S. But after four grueling years of battle, would we be up to the job? ”
* Have the students read Hannah Arendt’s “Ideology and Terror” (1953) in David A. Hollinger and Charles Capper’s (Editors), *The American Intellectual Tradition: Volume II—1865 to the Present*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2001.
* Have the students read selections from Erik H. Erikson’s *Childhood and Society* (1950) in David A. Hollinger and Charles Capper’s (Editors), *The American Intellectual Tradition: Volume II—1865 to the Present*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2001.
* Have the students examine America’s involvement during the Cold War by reading selections from Ernest R. May, *American Cold War Strategy—Interpreting NSC 68* (1993).
* Focus on the Army-McCarthy hearings and the decline, at last, of “low-blow Joe.”
* Have the students explore the issues surrounding McCarthyism by reading selections from Ellen W. Schrecker, *The Age of McCarthyism—A Brief History with Documents* (2002).
* Have students watch the movie *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1956). In what ways can this be seen as a critique of McCarthyism and the notion of Big Brother? The movie is unrated.
* Contrast the economic, social, and cultural life of a typical family of the 1940s and 1950s and a similar family of the 1990s and early 2000s.

# character sketches

## Benjamin Spock (1903–1998)

Spock is the pediatrician whose child-rearing guide, *Baby and Child Care*,has been used by millions of American parents.

A 1929 graduate of Columbia Medical School, Spock became a well-known New York pediatrician for such people as Margaret Mead. He wrote *Baby and Child Care* while serving in the navy during World War II. The book has sold over 25 million copies—the best-selling original title ever published in the United States.

Although the book was criticized as permissive, it was actually a moderate reaction against the rigid feeding schedules and strict discipline imposed by child-care experts of the 1920s and 1930s.

Spock became an active opponent of the Vietnam War in the 1960s. He was indicted and convicted for encouraging draft resistance, but the conviction was overturned on appeal in 1969. In 1972, he ran as the presidential candidate of the small People’s Party. Even in his radical political activities, his image was that of a kindly, grandfatherly gentleman.

**Quote:** “I may as well let the cat out of the bag as far as my opinion goes and say that strictness or permissiveness is not the real issue. Good-hearted parents who aren’t afraid to be firm when necessary can get good results with either strictness or moderate permissiveness.” (*Baby and Child Care,* 1946)

REFERENCE: Thomas Maier, *Dr. Spock: An American Life* (1998).

## Harry S Truman (1884–1972)

Truman was the Missouri haberdasher and machine politician who came to be regarded as one of the great American presidents.

The *S* in the middle of Truman’s name did not stand for anything. Both of his grandfathers had *S* names, so his parents just gave Harry the letter rather than choose either one.

Being very nearsighted, even as a boy, Truman spent much time playing the piano and reading history. His hero in American history was Andrew Jackson.

Truman worked on the family farm and at many odd jobs before becoming a popular artillery officer in World War I—an experience that remained one of the highlights of his life. The men’s clothing store he started in 1919 failed two years later, and he then began his career in machine politics. Judge Truman controlled a large patronage army but was never involved in corruption.

His quick temper and blunt-spoken ways were legendary. He often wrote angry letters to critics but only occasionally mailed them.

**Quote:** “The Republicans work for the benefit of the few bloodsuckers who have offices in Wall Street. This is a crusade of the people against the special interests, a crusade to keep the country from going to the dogs. You back me up and we’ll win that crusade.” (Campaign speech, 1948)

REFERENCE: David McCulloch, *Truman* (1992).

## George Kennan (1904–2005)

Kennan was the American diplomat and ambassador to Russia who is credited with formulating the containment policy but later became a critic of many American Cold War policies, including Vietnam.

There was a distantly related nineteenth-century George Kennan whose career eerily paralleled that of the twentieth-century Kennan. Both were born on the same day, and both became leading American Russia scholars and diplomats of their time.

Kennan served as a U.S. diplomat in Germany and Riga, Latvia, before World War II. He became a scholarly expert on Russia, and his telegrams to Washington, based partly on his close observations of Stalin and the Russians, set out the basic principles of containment even before he wrote his “X” article in *Foreign Affairs.*

Kennan’s brief term as ambassador to the Soviet Union in 1952 was cut short when the Soviet government expelled him, supposedly for critical remarks he had made about the communist rulers. Kennan later objected to the militarization of American foreign policy and ironically became, in the 1960s and 1970s, probably the most influential critic of the American Cold War policies he is credited with initiating.

**Quote:** “There is nothing—I repeat nothing—in the history of the Soviet regime which could justify us in assuming that the men who are now in power in Russia, or even those who have chances of assuming power within the foreseeable future, would hesitate for a moment to apply this power against us if by so doing they thought it would materially improve their power position in the world.” (Telegram to Washington, 1945)

REFERENCES: George F. Kennan, *Memoirs, 1925–1950* (1967); David Meyers, *George Kennan and the Dilemmas of U.S. Foreign Policy* (1998); a collection of all of Kennan’s published articles in Foreign Affairs (<http://www.foreignaffairs.org/background/kennan>, last accessed August 2008).

## Thomas Dewey (1902–1971)

Dewey was the losing Republican presidential candidate in 1944 and 1948.

Originally a student of music, Dewey tried for an opera-singing career in Chicago. In 1931, he became the youngest ever U.S. attorney, and in 1935, he became a special prosecutor for racketeering, going after such notorious gangsters as Dutch Schultz and Lucky Luciano. His career as a relentless prosecutor formed the basis for several Hollywood movies.

Dewey grew his mustache to please his wife, who liked it, but his advisers constantly urged him to shave it off, saying it made him look sinister. Although he was lively and pungent in private, Dewey was obsessed with maintaining a proper public image. He never allowed himself to be photographed except in a tie and vest.

He long remained a power in Republican politics and helped engineer the nominations of Dwight Eisenhower and Richard Nixon.

**Quote:** “I do not know about the accommodations at the White House for the family.… There is of course no rush about it.” (Letter, fall 1948)

REFERENCE: Richard Norton Smith, *Thomas E. Dewey and His Times* (1982).

## Joseph McCarthy (1908–1957)

McCarthy was the demagogic Wisconsin senator whose name has entered the dictionary as a synonym for exaggerated and irresponsible attacks on others’ reputations.

He began his career as a small-time Wisconsin judge before serving as an intelligence officer in World War II. McCarthy never saw military action and resigned before the war was over, but he later fabricated the story that, as “tail-gunner Joe,” he had been wounded in air battles.

Before he launched his anticommunist crusade, McCarthy was primarily known in the Senate for his personal rudeness and for backing the soft-drink industry. McCarthy’s speeches attacking alleged communists in government were nothing new, but his constant claim to have evidence (which somehow never appeared) kept him always on the offensive. McCarthy was loud, vulgar, boisterous, and self-promoting. He lied so constantly and grandly that no one knew when he was telling the truth, perhaps not even himself.

**Quote:** “[General Marshall] is part of a conspiracy so immense and in infamy so black as to dwarf any previous such venture in the history of man.… [There is] a pattern which finds his decisions maintained with great stubbornness and skill, always and invariably serving the world policy of the Kremlin.” (1951)

REFERENCES: Arthur Herman, *Joseph McCarthy* (1999); Richard Rovere, *Senator Joe McCarthy* (1959).

# questions for class discussion

1. Was the primary threat from the Soviet Union military or ideological—that is, was the danger that the Soviet army would invade Western Europe or that more and more people in Europe and elsewhere would be attracted to communist ideas? (See boxed quotes on pages 823, 825, 831, and 840.)

2. Were there any legitimate concerns behind the red-hunting anticommunism of the late 1940s and early 1950s? How were McCarthy and others able to turn the search for spies and subversives into an assault on freethinkers, adulterers, homosexuals, and others deemed different in some way? (See boxed quote on page 837.)

3. Was Truman right to fire MacArthur when and how he did? What would have happened if MacArthur had gotten his way and expanded the conflict with the Chinese?

4. Which development caused the greatest change in American society in the immediate postwar years: increased affluence, the migration to the suburbs, the entry of women into the workforce, or the baby boom?

# CONTENDING VOICES: GEORGE KENNAN VS. HENRY WALLACE

# Questions for Class Discussion

1. How did Kennan interpret the motives behind Soviet foreign policy? From this analysis, what policy recommendations would Kennan be expected to propose or support?

2. How did Wallace interpret the motives behind Soviet foreign policy? From this analysis, what policy recommendations would Wallace be expected to propose or support?

**makers of america: SCIENTISTS AND ENGINEERS**

**Questions for Class Discussion**

1. Explore the post-WWII development of “Big Science” and “Big Technology.” How did these developments reflect the legacy of the Manhattan Project? What role did the Cold War play in the growth of “Big Science” and “Big Technology”?

2. Explore how “Big Science” and “Big Technology” have affected the American economy as well as the American standard of living since World War II?

**Suggested Student Exercises**

* Find out how many students in your class are pursuing majors that could lead them to careers in “Big Science” and “Big Technology.” Do your students reflect the data contained in Figure 35.1?
* The introduction to Part 6 described the post-1970s as an “era of mounting economic inequality” that “also saw widening social inclusion” (page 819). Have your students evaluate the data contained in Figure 35.1 in light of this statement. You might also provide additional data on the relative earning power of different careers.
* Conduct a class discussion on the positive and negatives outcomes of the Information Technology Revolution since the 1990s.

# makers of america: the suburbanites

## Questions for Class Discussion

1. To what extent was the migration to suburbia a flight from the city and its problems, and to what extent was it a flight to a vision of a new pastoral way of life?

2. Were the new problems that accompanied the early growth of suburbia, for example, traffic congestion, pollution, racial segregation, and the confinement of women to domestic roles, a result of the suburban migration itself, or would they have come to the fore even if most postwar Americans had continued to live in central cities?

## Suggested Student Exercises

* Examine the maps of four or five major metropolitan areas of the United States to discover the geographic relations of central cities to suburbs. Looking at maps over the course of several decades (for example, from 1950, 1965, 1980, and 1995), examine the growth of suburban settlement patterns, and consider their relation to patterns of railroads, highways, and mass transit in areas where it has a prominent role (for example, Washington, D.C., Chicago, Atlanta, San Francisco).
* Select a dozen or more major American corporations, and determine the location of their corporate headquarters in relation to central cities and suburbs. Consider the extent to which the traditional pattern of “live in the suburbs, work in the city” has been altered in some metropolitan areas, and to what extent it remains in place.

# varying viewpoints

## Expanding the View

* Walter LaFeber, *America, Russia, and the Cold War, 1945–1984* (1985).

A view of the United States as primarily responsible for the Cold War:

“Having failed to budge the Russians in face-to-face negotiations, even when backed by atomic bombs, the State Department next tried to buckle Stalin’s iron fence with economic pressures.… More important, it made American officials ponder the awful possibility that Stalin’s ambitions included not only strategic positions in Eastern Europe, but the imposition of Communist regimes upon Asia and the Middle East. Stating the Soviet dictator’s alternatives in this way no doubt badly distorts his true policies.… Stalin’s thrusts after 1944 were rooted more in the Soviets’ desire to secure certain specific strategic bases, raw materials, and above all, to break up what Stalin considered to be the growing Western encirclement of Russia.… However, American officials saw little reason to worry about such distinctions.”

* John Lewis Gaddis, The United States and the Origins of the Cold War (1972).

A view of the Cold War as caused primarily by Soviet aggression:

“If one must assign responsibility for the Cold War, the most meaningful way to proceed is to ask which side had the greater opportunity to accommodate itself, at least in part, to the other’s position, given the range of alternatives as they appeared at the time. Revisionists have argued that American policy-makers possessed greater freedom of action, but their view ignores the constraints imposed by domestic policies.… The Russian dictator was immune from pressures of Congress, public opinion, or the press.… This is not to say that Stalin wanted a Cold War.… But his absolute powers did give him more chances to surmount the internal restraints on his policy than were available to his democratic counterparts in the West.”

# Questions for Class Discussion

1. How does each of these historians see American and Soviet motives in the Cold War?

2. On what basis does each assign primary responsibility for initiating Cold War conflicts?

3. How would each of these historians likely interpret the confrontation over Greece and the Truman Doctrine?