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# Chapter 37 - The Eisenhower Era

## I. Affluence and Its Anxieties

1. The economy really sprouted during the 50s, and the invention of the transistor exploded the electronics field, especially in computers, helping such companies as International Business Machines (IBM) expand and prosper.
2. Aerospace industries progressed, as the Boeing company made the first passenger-jet airplane (adapted from the superbombers of the Strategic Air Command), the 707.
3. In 1956, “white-collar” workers outnumbered “blue collar” workers for the first time, meaning that the industrial era was passing on.
  - As this occurred, labor unions peaked in 1954 then started a steady decline.
  - Women appeared more and more in the workplace, despite the stereotypical role of women as housewives that was being portrayed on TV shows such as “Ozzie and Harriet” and “Leave It to Beaver.”
    - More than 40 million new jobs were created.
4. Women’s expansion into the workplace shocked some, but really wasn’t surprising if one observed the trends in history, and now, they were both housewives and workers.
  - Betty Friedan’s 1963 book *The Feminine Mystique* was a best-seller and a classic of modern feminine protest literature. She’s the godmother of the feminist movement.

## II. Consumer Culture in the Fifties

1. The fifties saw the first Diner’s Club cards, the opening of McDonald’s, the debut of Disneyland, and an explosion in the number of television stations in the country.
2. Advertisers used television to sell products while “televangelists” like Billy Graham, Oral Roberts, and Fulton J. Sheen used TV to preach the gospel and encourage religion.
3. Sports shifted west, as the Brooklyn Dodgers and New York Giants moved to Los Angeles and San Francisco, respectively, in 1958.
4. Elvis Presley, a white singer of the new “rock and roll” who made girls swoon with his fleshy face, pointing lips, and antic, sexually suggestive gyrations, that redefined popular music.
  - Elvis died from drugs in 1977, at age 42.

5. Traditionalists were shocked by Elvis's shockingly open sexuality, and Marilyn Monroe (in her Playboy magazine spread) continued in the redefinition of the new sensuous sexuality.
  - Critics, such as David Riesman in *The Lonely Crowd*, William H. Whyte, Jr. in *The Organization Man*, and Sloan Wilson in *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit*, lamented this new consumerist style.
  - Harvard economist John Kenneth Galbraith questioned the relation between private wealth and public good in *The Affluent Society*.
6. Daniel Bell found further such paradoxes, as did C. Wright Mills.

### **III. The Advent of Eisenhower**

1. In 1952, the Democrats chose Adlai E. Stevenson, the witty governor of Illinois, while Republicans rejected isolationist Robert A. Taft and instead chose World War II hero Dwight D. Eisenhower to run for president and anticommunist Richard M. Nixon to be his running mate.
2. Grandfatherly Eisenhower was a war hero and liked by everyone, so he left the rough part of campaigning to Nixon, who attacked Stevenson as soft against communists, corrupt, and weak in the Korean situation.
  - Nixon then almost got caught with a secretly financed "slush fund," but to save his political career, he delivered his famous and touching "Checkers Speech." In it, he denied wrongdoing and spoke of his family and specifically, his daughter's cute little cocker spaniel, Checkers. He was forgiven in the public arena and stayed on as V.P.
3. The "Checkers speech" showed the awesome power of television, since Nixon had pleaded on national TV, and even later, "Ike," as Eisenhower was called, agreed to go into studio and answer some brief "questions," which were later spliced in and edited to make it look like Eisenhower had answered questions from a live audience, when in fact he hadn't.
  - This showed the power that TV would have in the upcoming decades, allowing lone wolves to appeal directly to the American people instead of being influenced by party machines or leaders.
4. Ike won easily (442 to 89), and true to his campaign promise, he flew to Korea to help move along peace negotiations, yet failed. But seven months later, after Ike threatened to use nuclear weapons, an armistice was finally signed (but was later violated often).
5. In Korea, 54,000 Americans had died, and tens of billions of dollars had been wasted in the effort, but Americans took a little comfort in knowing that communism had been "contained."
6. Eisenhower had been an excellent commander and leader who was able to make cooperation possible between anyone, so he seemed to be a perfect leader for Americans weary of two decades of depression, war, and nuclear standoff.
  - He served that aspect of his job well, but he could have used his popularity to champion civil rights more than he actually did.

### **IV. The Rise and Fall of Joseph McCarthy**

1. In February 1950, Joseph R. McCarthy burst upon the scene, charging that there were scores of unknown communists in the State Department.
2. He couldn't prove it, and many American began to fear that this red chase was going too far; after all, how could there be freedom

of speech if saying communist ideas got one arrested?

3. The success of brutal anticommunist “crusader” Joseph R. McCarthy was quite alarming, for after he had sprung onto the national scene by charging that Secretary of State Dean Acheson was knowingly employing 205 Communist Party members (a claim he never proved, not even for one person), he ruthlessly sought to prosecute and persecute suspected communists, often targeting innocent people and destroying families and lives.
  - Eisenhower privately loathed McCarthy, but the president did little to stop the anti-red, since it appeared that most Americans supported his actions. But Ike’s zeal led him to purge important Asian experts in the State Department, men who could have advised a better course of action in Vietnam.
4. He even denounced General George Marshall, former army chief of staff during World War II.
5. Finally, in 1954, when he attacked the army, he’d gone too far and was exposed for the liar and drunk that he was; three years later, he died unwept and unsung.

## **V. Desegregating American Society**

1. Blacks in the South were bound by the severe Jim Crow laws that segregated every aspect of society, from schools to restrooms to restaurants and beyond.
  - Only about 20% of the eligible blacks could vote, due to intimidation, discrimination, poll taxes, and other schemes meant to keep black suffrage down.
2. Where the law proved sufficient to enforce such oppression, vigilante justice in the form of lynchings did the job, and the white murderers were rarely caught and convicted.
3. In his 1944 book, *An American Dilemma*, Swedish scholar Gunnar Myrdal exposed the hypocrisy of American life, noting how while “every man [was] created equal,” blacks were certainly treated worse than Whites. He pointed out how the U.S. had failed to achieve its “Double-V” goal during the war—victory overseas against dictatorships (and their racism) and victory at home against racism.
  - Even though Jackie Robinson had cracked the racial barrier by signing with the Brooklyn Dodgers in 1947, the nation’s conscience still paid little attention to the suffering of blacks, thus prolonging their pain.
4. However, with organizations such as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, and their rulings such as the 1950 case of *Sweatt v. Painter*, where the Supreme Court ruled that separate professional schools for blacks failed to meet the test of equality, such protestors as Rosa Parks, who in December 1955, refused to give up a bus seat in the “whites only” section, and pacifist leaders like Martin Luther King, Jr., who believed in peaceful methods of civil rights protests, blacks were making their suffering and discrimination known to the public.

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

1. After he heard about the 1946 lynchings of black soldiers seeking

rights for which they fought overseas, Truman immediately sought to improve black rights by desegregating the armed forces, but Eisenhower failed to continue this trend by failing to support laws.

- Only the judicial branch was left to improve black civil rights.
- 2. Earl Warren, appointed Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, shocked his conservative backers by actively assailing black injustice and ruling in favor of African-Americans.
- 3. The 1954 landmark case of *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas*, reversed the previous 1896 ruling of *Plessy v. Ferguson* when the Brown case said that “separate but equal” facilities were inherently unequal. Under the Brown case, schools were ordered integrated.
  - However, while the Border States usually obeyed this new ruling, states in the Deep South did everything they could to delay it and disobey it, diverting funds to private schools, signing a “Declaration of Constitutional Principles” that promised not to desegregate, and physically preventing blacks to integrate.
  - Ten years after the ruling, fewer than 2% of eligible black students sat in the same classrooms as whites.
  - Real integration of schools in the Deep South occurred around 1970.

## VII. Eisenhower Republicanism at Home

1. Eisenhower came into the White House pledging a policy of “dynamic conservatism,” which stated that he would be liberal with people, but conservative with their money.
2. Ike decreased government spending by decreasing military spending, trying to transfer control of offshore oil fields to the states, and trying to curb the TVA by setting up a private company to take its place.
  - His secretary of health, education, and welfare condemned free distribution of the Salk anti-polio vaccine as being socialist.
  - Secretary of Agriculture Ezra Taft Benson tackled agriculture issues, but despite the government’s purchase of surplus grain which it stored in giant silos costing Americans \$2 million a day, farmers didn’t see prosperity.
3. Eisenhower also cracked down on illegal Mexican immigration that cut down on the success of the bracero program, by rounding up 1 million Mexicans and returning them to their native country in 1954.
  - With Indians, though, Ike proposed ending the lenient FDR-style treatment toward Indians and reverting to a Dawes Severalty Act-style policy toward Native Americans. But due to protest and resistance, this was disbanded.
4. However, Eisenhower kept many of the New Deal programs, since some, like Social Security and unemployment insurance, simply had to stay in the public’s mind.
  - However, he did do some of the New Deal programs better, such as his backing of the Interstate Highway Act, which built 42,000 miles of interstate freeways.
5. Still, Eisenhower only balanced the budget three times in his eight years of office, and in 1959, he incurred the biggest peacetime deficit in U.S. history up to that point.
  - Still, critics said that he was economically timid, blaming the president for the sharp

economic downturn of 1957-58.

6. Also, the AF of L merged with the CIO to end 20 years of bitter division in labor unions.
7. When it came to civil rights, Eisenhower had a lukewarm record at best, and was slow to move.
  - Eisenhower refused to issue a statement acknowledging the Supreme Court's ruling on integration, and he even privately complained about this new end to segregation, but in September 1957, when Orval Faubus, the governor of Arkansas, mobilized the National Guard to prevent nine black students from enrolling in Little Rock's Central High School, Ike sent federal troops to escort the children to their classes.
    - That year, Congress passed the first Civil Rights Act since the Reconstruction days, an act that set up a permanent Civil Rights Commission to investigate violations of civil rights and authorized federal injunctions to protect voting rights.
  - Meanwhile, Martin Luther King, Jr. formed the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, which aimed to mobilize the vast power of black churches on behalf of black rights—a shrewd strategy, since churches were a huge source of leadership in the black community.
  - On February 1, 1960, four black college freshmen launched a “sit-in” movement in Greensboro, North Carolina, demanding service at a whites-only Woolworth's lunch counter, thus sparking the sit-in movement.
  - In April 1960, southern black students formed the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee, or SNCC, to give more focus and force to their civil rights efforts.

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

1. Secretary of State John Foster Dulles stated that the policy of containment was not enough and that the U.S. was going to push back communism and liberate the peoples under it. This became known as “rollback.” All-the-while he advocated toning down defense spending by building a fleet of superbombers called Strategic Air Command, which could drop massive nuclear bombs in any retaliation.
  - Eisenhower had a “new look” on a policy of Massive Retaliation. Massive Retaliation was the building up of our forces in the sky to scare the enemys. We created the Strategic Air Command (SAC). This was an airfleet of superbombers equipped with city-flattening nuclear bombs. These fearsome weapons would inflict “Massive Retaliation” on the enemy, and were also a great bang for the buck.
2. Ike tried to thaw the Cold War by appealing for peace to new Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev at the 1955 Geneva Conference, but the Soviet leader rejected such proposals, along with one for “open skies.”
3. However, hypocritically, when the Hungarians revolted against the U.S.S.R. and appealed to the U.S. for help, America did nothing, earning the scorn of bitter freedom fighters.

## **IX. The Vietnam Nightmare**

1. In Vietnam, revolutionary Ho Chi Minh had tried to encourage Woodrow Wilson to help the Vietnamese against the French and gained some support from Wilson, but as Ho became increasingly communist, the

U.S. began to oppose him.

2. In March 1954, when the French became trapped at Dienbienphu, Eisenhower's aides wanted to bomb the Viet Minh guerilla forces, but Ike held back, fearing plunging the U.S. into another Asian war so soon after Korea. After the Vietnamese won at Dienbienphu, Vietnam was split at the 17th parallel, supposedly temporarily.
  - Ho Chi Minh was supposed to allow free elections, but soon, Vietnam became clearly split between a communist north and a pro-Western south.
  - Dienbienphu marks the start of American interest in Vietnam.
  - Secretary Dulles created the Southeast Asian Treaty Organization (SEATO) to emulate NATO, but this provided little help.

## **X. Cold War Crises in Europe and the Middle East**

1. In 1955, the USSR formed the Warsaw Pact to counteract NATO, but the Cold War did seem to be thawing a bit, as Eisenhower pressed for reduction of arms, and the Soviets were surprisingly cooperative, and Khrushchev publicly denounced Stalin's brutality.
  - However, in 1956, when the Hungarians revolted against the USSR, the Soviets crushed them with brutality and massive bloodshed.
  - The U.S. did change some of its immigration laws to let 30,000 Hungarians into America as immigrants.
2. In 1953, to protect oil supplies in the Middle East, the CIA engineered a coup in Iran that installed the youthful shah Mohammed Reza Pahlevi, as ruler of the nation, protecting the oil for the time being, but earning the wrath of Arabs that would be repaid in the 70s.
3. The Suez crisis was far messier: President Gamal Abdel Nasser, of Egypt, needed money to build a dam in the upper Nile and flirted openly with the Soviet side as well as the U.S. and Britain, and upon seeing this blatant communist association, Secretary of State Dulles dramatically withdrew his offer, thus forcing Nasser to nationalize the dam.
  - Late in October 1956, Britain, France, and Israel suddenly attacked Egypt, thinking that the U.S. would supply them with needed oil, as had been the case in WWII, but Eisenhower did not, and the attackers had to withdraw.
  - The Suez crisis marked the last time the U.S. could brandish its "oil weapon."
4. In 1960, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Iraq, Iran, and Venezuela joined to form the cartel Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries, or OPEC.

## **XI. Round Two for "Ike"**

1. In 1956, Eisenhower again ran against Stevenson and won easily by a landslide.
2. The GOP called itself the "party of peace" while the Democrats assaulted Ike's health, since he had had a heart attack in 1955 and a major abdominal operation in '56.
  - However, the Democrats did win the House and Senate.
3. After Secretary of State Dulles died of cancer in 1959 and presidential assistant Sherman Adams was forced to leave under a cloud of scandal due to bribery charges, Eisenhower, without his two most trusted and most helpful aides, was forced to govern more and golf less.
4. A drastic labor-reform bill in 1959 grew from recurrent strikes in critical industries.
5. Teamster chief "Dave" Beck was sent to prison for embezzlement, and his successor, James R. Hoffa's appointment got

the Teamsters expelled out of the AF of L-CIO.

- Hoffa was later jailed for jury tampering and then disappeared in prison, allegedly murdered by some gangsters that he had crossed.
- 6. The 1959 Landrum-Griffin Act was designed to bring labor leaders to book for financial shenanigans and prevent bullying tactics.
  - Anti-laborites forced into the bill bans against “secondary boycotts” and certain types of picketing.
- 7. A “space-race” began in 1957.
  - On October 4, 1957, the Russians launched Sputnik I into space, and a month later, they sent Sputnik II into orbit as well, thus totally demoralizing Americans, because this seemed to prove communist superiority in the sciences at least.
    - Plus, the Soviets might fire missiles at the U.S. from space.
  - Critics charged that Truman had not spent enough money on missile programs while America had used its science for other things, like television.
  - Four months after Sputnik I, the U.S. sent its own satellite (weighing only 2.5 lbs) into space, but the apparent U.S. lack of technology sent concerns over U.S. education, since American children seemed to be learning less advanced information than Soviet kids.

\*The 1958 National Defense and Education Act (NDEA) gave \$887 million in loans to needy college students and grants for the improvement of schools.

## **XII. The Continuing Cold War**

1. Humanity-minded scientists called for an end to atmospheric nuclear testing, lest future generations be deformed and mutated.
  - Beginning October 1958, Washington did halt “dirty” testing, as did the U.S.S.R., but attempts to regularize such suspensions were unsuccessful.
2. However, in 1959, Khrushchev was invited by Ike to America for talks, and when he arrived in New York, he immediately spoke of disarmament, but gave no means of how to do it.
  - Later, at Camp David, talks did show upward signs, as the Soviet premier said that his ultimatum for the evacuation of Berlin would be extended indefinitely.
3. However, at the Paris conference, Khrushchev came in angry that the U.S. had flown a U-2 spy plane over Soviet territory (in this U-2 incident, the plane had been shot down and Eisenhower embarrassingly took personal responsibility), and tensions immediately tightened again.

## **XIII. Cuba’s Castroism Spells Communism**

1. Latin American nations resented the United States’ giving billions of dollars to Europe compared to millions to Latin America, as well as the U.S.’s constant intervention (Guatemala, 1954), as well as its support of cold dictators who claimed to be fighting communism.
2. In 1959, in Cuba, Fidel Castro overthrew U.S.-supported Fulgencio Batista, promptly denounced the Yankee imperialists, and began to take U.S. properties for a land-distribution program. When the U.S. cut off heavy U.S. imports of Cuban sugar, Castro confiscated more American

property.

- In 1961, America broke diplomatic relations with Cuba.

3. Khrushchev threatened to launch missiles at the U.S. if it attacked Cuba; meanwhile, America induced the Organization of American States to condemn communism in the Americas.

- Finally, Eisenhower proposed a "Marshall Plan" for Latin America, which gave \$500 million to the area, but many Latin Americans felt that it was too little, too late.

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

1. The Republicans chose Richard Nixon, gifted party leader to some, ruthless opportunist to others, in 1960 with Henry Cabot Lodge Jr. as his running mate; while John F. Kennedy surprisingly won for the Democrats and had Lyndon B. Johnson as his running mate.
2. Kennedy was attacked because he was a Catholic presidential candidate, but defended himself and encouraged Catholics to vote for him. As it turned out, if he lost votes from the South due to his religion, he got them back from the North due to the staunch Catholics there.
  - In four nationally televised debates, JFK held his own and looked more charismatic, perhaps helping him to win the election by a comfortable margin, becoming the youngest president elected (TR was younger after McKinley was assassinated).

#### **XV. An Old General Fades Away**

1. Eisenhower had his critics, but he was appreciated more and more for ending one war and keeping the U.S. out of others.
2. Even though the 1951-passed 22nd Amendment had limited him to two terms as president, Ike displayed more vigor and controlled Congress during his second term than his first.
3. In 1959, Alaska and Hawaii became the 49th and 50th states to join the Union.
4. Perhaps Eisenhower's greatest weakness was his ignorance of social problems of the time, preferring to smile them away rather than deal with them, even though he was no bigot.

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

1. Ernest Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea* and John Steinbeck's *East of Eden* and *Travels with Charlie* showed that prewar writers could still be successful, but new writers, who, except for Norman Mailer's *The Naked and the Dead* and James Jones's *From Here to Eternity*, spurned realism, were successful as well.
2. Joseph Heller's *Catch-22* and Kurt Vonnegut, Jr.'s *Slaughter-House Five* crackled with fantastic and psychedelic prose, satirizing the suffering of the war.
3. Authors and books that explored problems created by the new mobility and affluence of American life: John Updike's *Rabbit, Run* and *Couples*; John Cheever's *The Wapshot Chronicle* and *The Wapshot Scandal*; Louis Auchincloss's books, and Gore Vidal's *Myra Breckinridge*.
4. The poetry of Ezra Pound, Wallace Stevens, William Carlos Williams,



Theodore Roethke, Robert Lowell (For the Union Dead), Sylvia Plath (Ariel and The Bell-Jar), Anne Sexton, and John Berryman reflected the twisted emotions of the war, but some poets were troubled in their own minds as well, often committing suicide or living miserable lives.

5. Tennessee Williams's *A Streetcar Named Desire* and *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* were two plays that searched for American values, as were Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman* and *The Crucible*.
6. Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun* portrayed African-American life while Edward Albee's *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* revealed the underside of middle class life.
7. Books by black authors such as Richard Wright (*Black Boy*), Ralph Ellison (*Invisible Man*), and James Baldwin made best-seller's lists; Black playwrights like LeRoi Jones made powerful plays (*The Dutchman*).
8. The South had literary artists like William Faulkner (*The Sound and the Fury*, *Light in August*), Walker Percy, and Eudora Welty.
9. Jewish authors also had famous books, such as J.D. Salinger's *Catcher in the Rye*.

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