

AS3238/HY3238
The Political History of the U.S.

Week 9 (The Cold War Presidents)

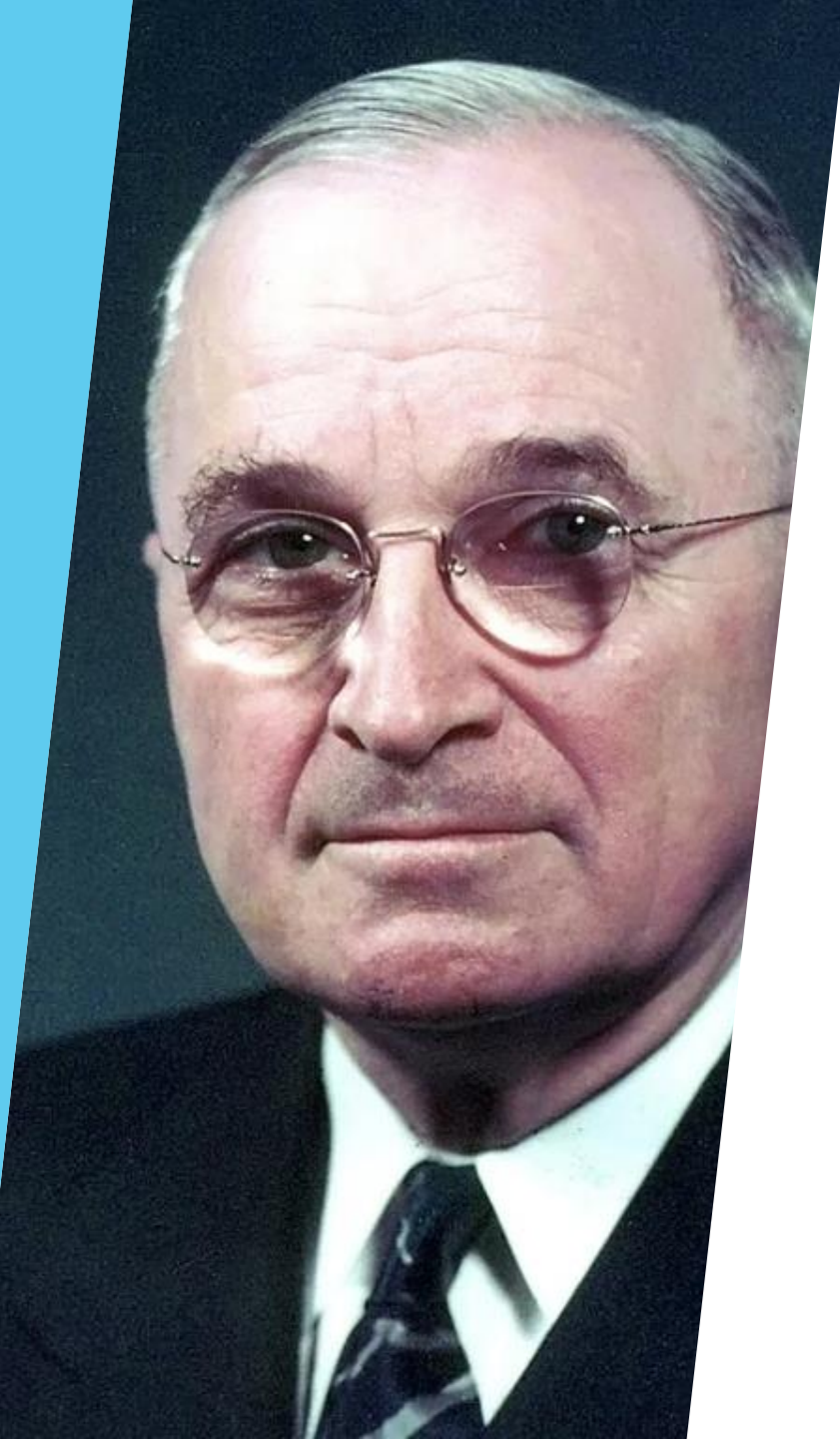
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Agenda for Today

- ▶ The Cold War and Truman
- ▶ The “Affluent Society”
- ▶ Eisenhower, the Cold War, and the Civil Rights Movement

How did US Presidents shape the Cold War and how did the Cold War shape US political culture?



Harry S. Truman (33rd President: 1945-53)

- ▶ A Democratic Senator from MO.
- ▶ Became VP (Jan 1945)
- ▶ Became P with the death of FDR (April 1945)
- ▶ Little experience in foreign affairs (e.g. hadn't been informed about the Manhattan Project).
- ▶ Was he a capable politician (e.g. the expansion of ND, desegregated the military) or did he escalate tensions with the Soviet Union?

Scholarly Debates over the Origins of the Cold War

- ▶ A direct result of Soviet expansionism (~the 1950s)
- ▶ The US was to blame for the Cold War (e.g. Truman's provocative policies, the American belief in the necessity of capitalist expansion and/or spreading democratic ideals) (~the 1960s)
- ▶ Both sides were responsible (the 1970s~)
- ▶ A “global” Cold War (the 21c)

The Shaping of the Cold War

- ▶ Ideology: the Truman Doctrine (March 1947, the President's official embrace of the Cold War), “containment” became the foundation of US foreign policy for the next 40 years
- ▶ Economy: the Marshall Plan (June 1947, defined economic and political instability as breeding grounds for communism, divided Europe economically)
- ▶ Military: the establishment of NATO (1949) & the Warsaw Pact (1955), the “hot” wars in Asia (the Korean & Vietnam wars)



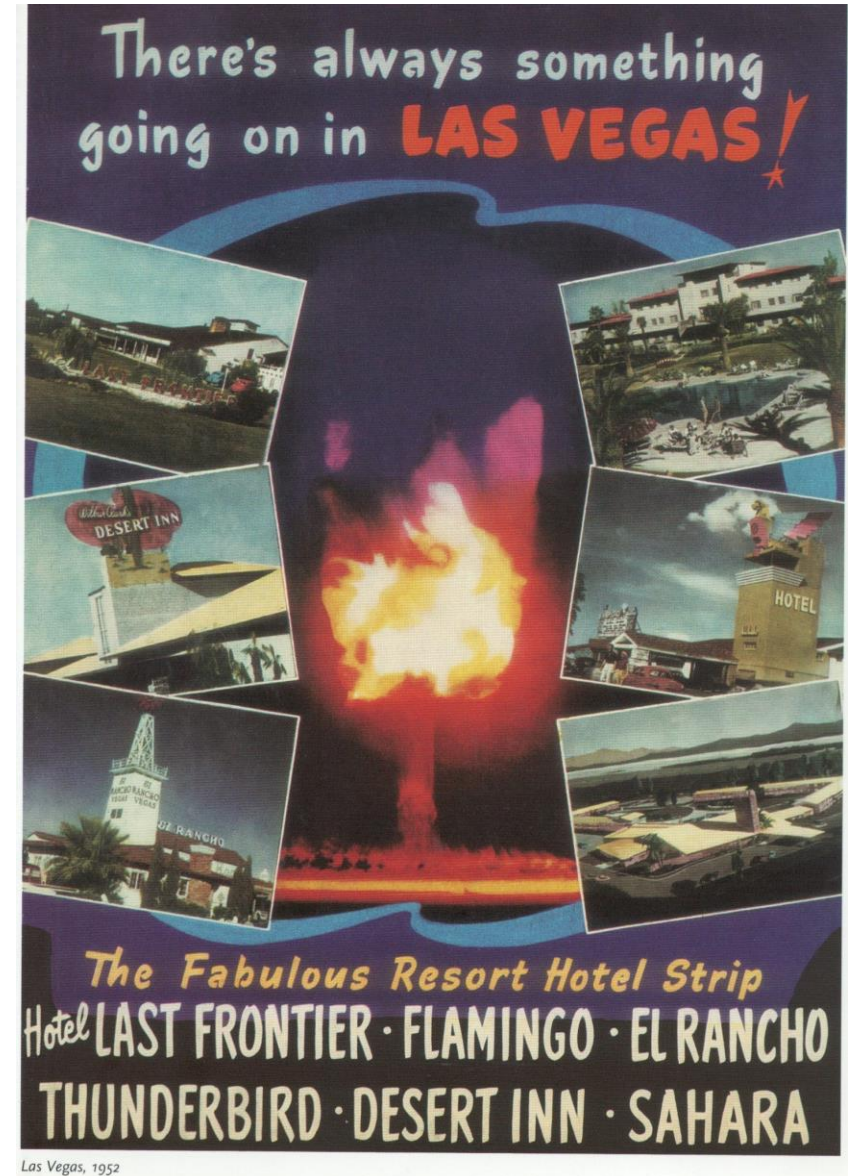
The Cold War and American Society

- ▶ The anticommunist crusade: Truman's loyalty review system (1947), the House Un-American Activities Committee hearings, McCarthyism (→the uses of anticommunism for battles unrelated to the CW)
- ▶ The national security state: the National Security Act (1947, created the Department of Defense, the National Security Council [based in the White House), the Central Intelligence Agency [conducted covert operations]), "national security" as justification for classifying information, nuclear weapons
→The expansion of presidential power in the name of the Cold War/national security

The Nevada Test Site and Tourism in Las Vegas

Video clip:

<https://www.smithsonianmag.com/videos/how-1950s-las-vegas-sold-atomic-bomb-tests-as/>





The Rise of a Mass Consumer Society

- ▶ The “golden age” of US capitalism: US GNP more than doubled (1946-60), 60% of Americans enjoyed a middle-class living by 1960, the average wage of manufacturing workers doubled (1950-73) & rose faster than high-income Americans=lessening economic inequality
- ▶ Main engines of economic growth: residential construction and consumer goods spending
 - suburbanization & home ownership (the development of inexpensive mass-construction techniques, government-backed low-interest loans)
 - new household appliances (TV, dishwashers, etc), cars, freeways, shopping centers, motels, drive-in restaurants/theaters





Consumption=American freedom



The “Kitchen Debate”

- ▶ A series of conversations between US Vice President Richard Nixon and Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev at the American National Exposition in Moscow (1959)
- ▶ N’s presentation of American freedom that centered on economic abundance and consumer choice (but note the role of women here)

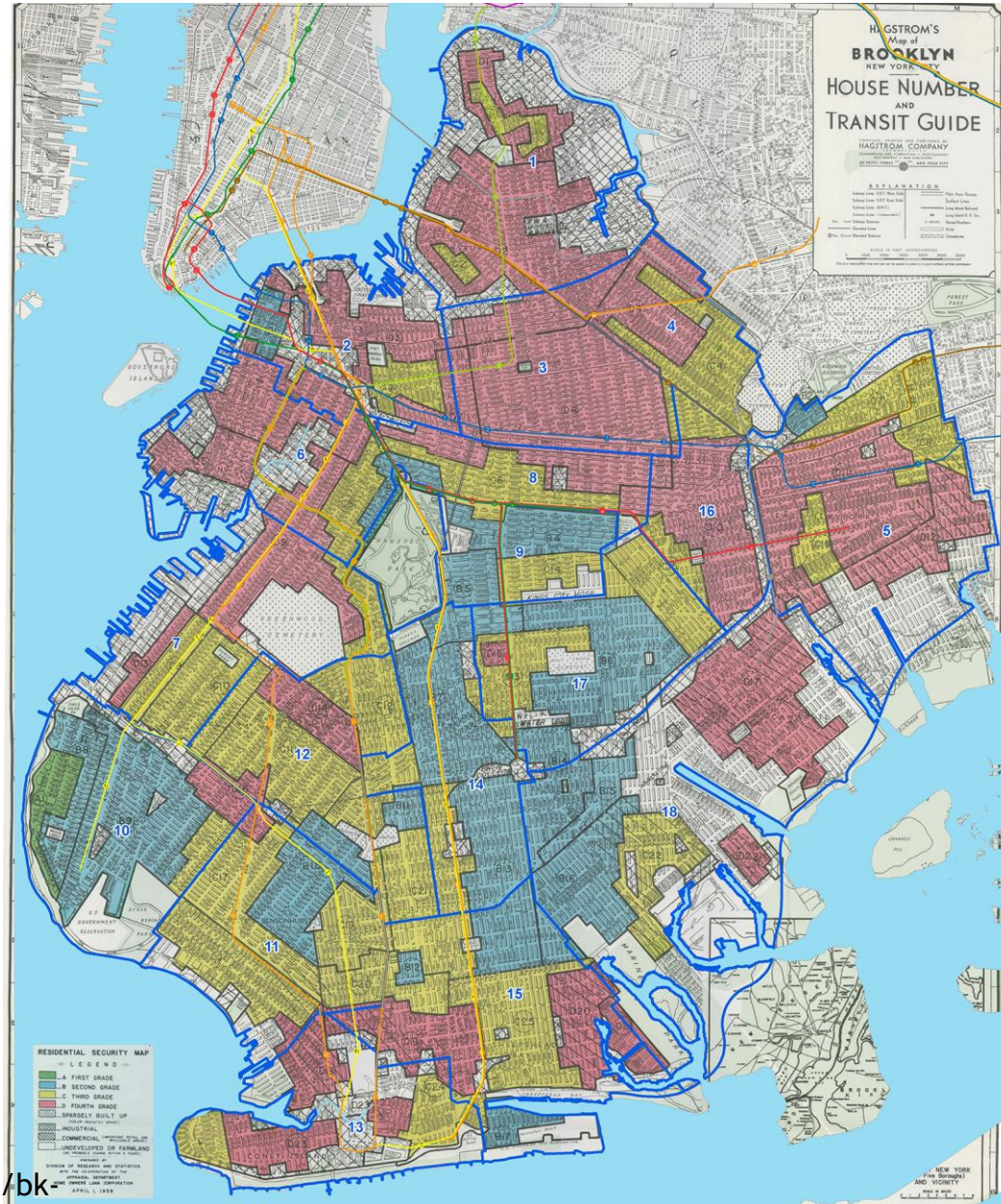


- ▶ More women were employed, but worked part-time to support middle-class living; breadwinner=male; the mass media portrayed marriage as the most important goal of American women
- ▶ “The independent woman” was a “contradiction in terms.” (*Modern Women*, 1947)



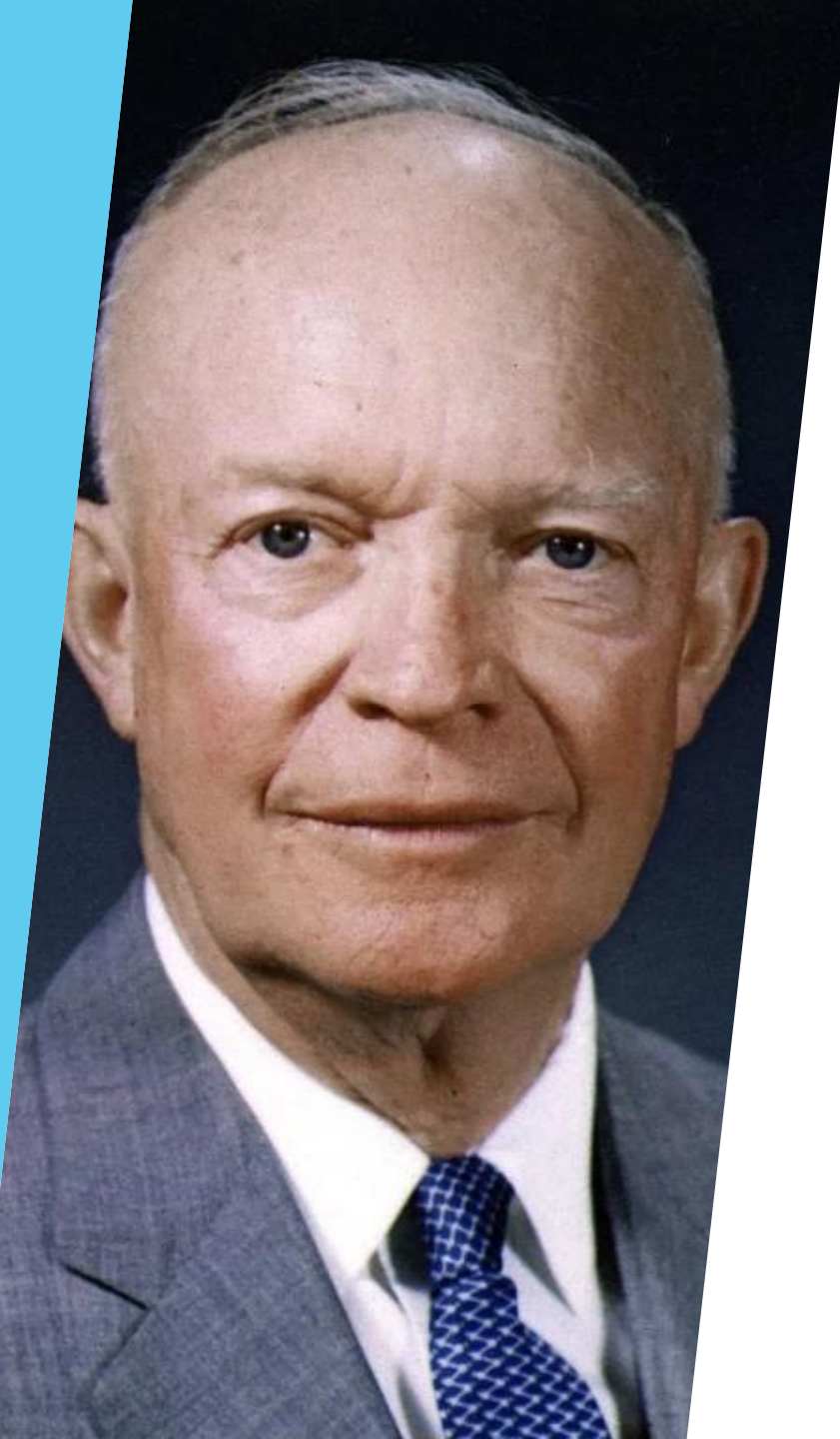
Residential Segregation

- ▶ Suburban neighborhoods= overwhelmingly white & racially segregated (in the 1990s, 90% of white suburban residents still lived in communities with non-white populations of less than 1%)
- ▶ Discriminatory practices by real-estate developers, banks, suburban residents + gov policies



A Divided Society

- ▶ A white suburbanite quoted in *Life*: “He [a prospective African American neighbor]’s probably a nice guy, but every time I see him, I see \$2,000 drop off the value of my house.”
- ▶ Racial discrimination reinforced & highlighted by the rise of mass consumer society: residential segregation both *de jure* and *de facto* (urban ghettos vs suburban affluence), discrimination in education & jobs. → half of all African American families still lived in poverty



Dwight D. Eisenhower (34th President: 1953-61)

- ▶ The commanding general of the US Armed Forces in Europe during WWII (→bipartisan appeal), Columbia University President, commander of the NATO
- ▶ Ran for President as a Republican in 1952, became the first Republican president in 20 years

The Eisenhower Presidency

- ▶ Fiscally conservative: Ike's was a cabinet dominated by wealthy businessmen. "What is good for the country is good for General Motors, and vice versa" (Charles Wilson, Defense Secretary & former GM president)
- ▶ Reduced gov spending=John Foster Dulles' "massive retaliation"=reduction of spending in conventional weapons & rise in the number of nuclear warheads)
- ▶ Recognized that the Soviets were reasonable and could be dealt with through conventional diplomatic means
- ▶ Wanted to get rid of the bad image of the Republican Party=kept ND policies & expanded them (e.g. agricultural workers became eligible for SS in 1955) ; did not reduce the size and scope of the federal gov (accepted the idea that the gov played a major role in the economy)

Why the Civil Rights Movement Emerged

- ▶ The legacy of WWII
- ▶ The growth of an urban black middle class
- ▶ TV (the visualization of economic inequality & racial discrimination, the broadcasting of demonstrations and protests)
- ▶ The Cold War

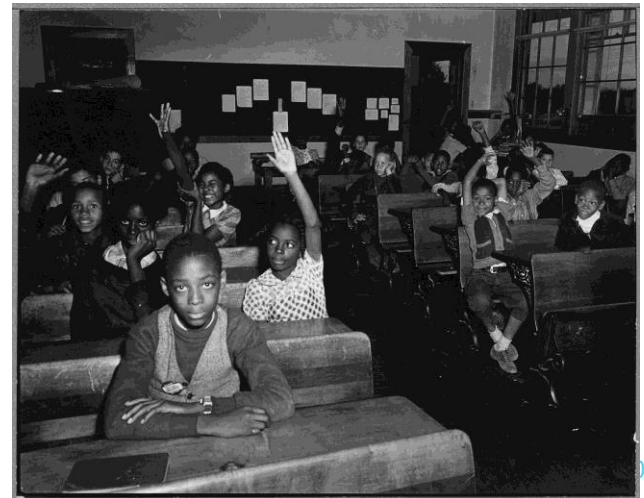


The Civil Rights Movement in the 1950s

► Legal phase: *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas* (1954)

→ US Supreme Court: segregation in public education violated the “equal protection of the laws guaranteed by the Fourteenth Amendment” and was “inherently unequal.”

→ Only addressed segregation in public schooling, did not address de facto segregation in the north, did not order immediate desegregation (only called for hearings about how to desegregate schooling), but had symbolic significance



- ▶ Mass phase: The Montgomery Bus Boycott (AL, 1955-56)
 - Rosa Parks refused to surrender her seat on a city bus, got arrested, sparked a yearlong boycott of public transportation by African American locals (why was this strategy effective?)
 - November 1956: the Supreme Court ruled segregation in public transportation unconstitutional.
 - A turning point in the civil rights movement: the rise of Martin Luther King Jr., established the civil rights movement as a nonviolent movement, gained support from northern liberals, attracted international attention.



“Massive Resistance” and the Cold War

- ▶ Little Rock, AR, 1957: white resistance to the enrollment of African American students in Little Rock Central High School, the Governor’s use of the National Guard in support of the white residents
- ▶ Eisenhower’s dispatch of federal troops: Cold War concerns
- ▶ By the end of the 1950s, fewer than 2% of black students in the old Confederacy states attended desegregated schools.



Conclusion

- ▶ US Presidents shaped the Cold War; the Cold Wars shaped the US Presidency and the role/ power of the federal government.
- ▶ Postwar affluence and the Cold War were closely linked; economic prosperity became synonymous with American freedom and superiority, while the Cold War shaped the civil rights movement (by creating and limiting opportunities for reform: see the Dudziak reading).