

The Artios Home Companion Series

Unit 22: The 1950s: Happy Days

Teacher Overview

In American memory, the postwar 1950s have acquired an idyllic luster. Reruns of 1950s TV shows such as “Leave it to Beaver” and “Father Knows Best” leave today’s viewers with an impression of unadulterated family bliss. Many baby boomers look back nostalgically to these years that marked their early childhood experiences.

The president for many of these years was popular war hero Dwight Eisenhower. Ike, as he was nicknamed, referred to himself as “conservative when it comes to money and liberal when it comes to human beings,” in a philosophy he called “Dynamic Conservatism.” Cutting federal spending in 1954, he nevertheless expanded many New Deal programs, broadening Social Security coverage and raising the minimum wage. With the goal of maintaining pressure on the Soviet Union while reducing expenditure, he placed priority on nuclear weaponry while reducing other military funding. After the Soviets launched Sputnik in 1957, Eisenhower strove to catch up, establishing NASA the following year. He is also known for launching the Interstate Highway System, which created a roadway network that today spans nearly 50,000 miles.

Living in a Material World

A booming economy helped shape the blissful retrospective view of the 1950s. A rebuilding Europe was hungry for American goods, fueling the consumer-oriented sector of the American economy. Conveniences that had been toys for the upper classes such as fancy refrigerators, range-top ovens, convertible automobiles, and televisions became middle-class staples.

The pent-up demand for consumer goods unleashed after the Great Depression and World War II sustained itself through the 1950s. Homes became affordable to many apartment dwellers for the first time. Consequently, the population of the suburbs exploded. The huge youth market had a music all of its own called rock and roll, complete with pop icons such as Elvis Presley.

Happy Days — But Not for All

Of course, not everything was as rosy as it seemed. Beneath the pristine exterior, a small group of critics and nonconformists pointed out the flaws in a suburbia they believed had no soul, a government they believed was growing dangerously powerful, and a lifestyle they believed was fundamentally repressed. And much of America was still segregated.

Nevertheless, the notion of the 1950s as happy days lived on. Perhaps when measured against the Great Depression of the 1930s, the world war of the 1940s, the strife of the 1960s, and the malaise of the 1970s, the 1950s were indeed fabulous.

Vocabulary

Lesson 1:
conformity
suburbia

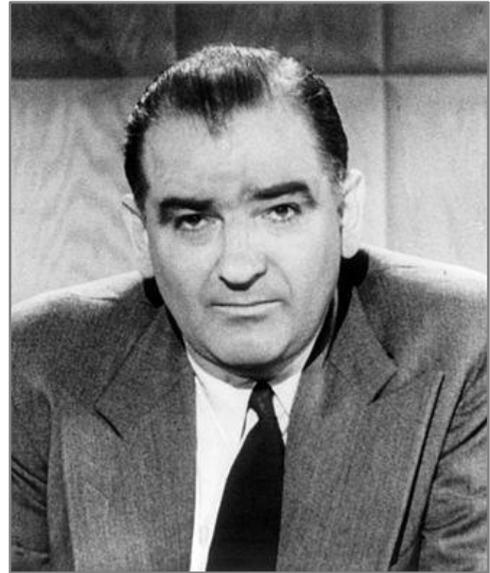
Lesson 2:
coaxial

Lesson 3:
none

Lesson 4:
proxy



Dwight D. “Ike” Eisenhower’s campaign slogan “I Like Ike” epitomized the cheerful spirit that defined American culture in the 1950s.



The actions of Senator Joseph McCarthy tarnished the relaxed attitude of the 1950s. His hunt for Communists working in the U.S. government went to extremes, earning him the censure of his Senate colleagues.

Reading and Assignments

In this unit, students will:

- Complete four lessons in which they will learn about **the 1950s**, journaling and answering discussion questions as they read.
- Define vocabulary words.
- Conduct research on **the plane piloted by Gary Powers that was shot down by the Soviets in 1960**.
- As an optional assignment, it would be interesting and fun for students to

create a notebook of popular and historic culture visuals from each of the four categories of articles for this unit: *Suburban Growth, Land of Television, America Rocks and Rolls, The Cold War Continues*.

- As an optional assignment, students may write a 2-3 page biographical essay on the life of **Dwight D. Eisenhower**.
- Visit www.ArtiosHCS.com for additional resources.

Leading Ideas

All philosophies, values, and belief systems should be viewed and judged in light of Scripture and not man’s wisdom.

Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the LORD and shun evil.

— Proverbs 3:7

See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the elemental spiritual forces of this world rather than on Christ.

— Colossians 2:8

Key People, Places, and Events

William Levitt
Ford
General Motors
Chrysler
The Interstate Highway Act
Edward Murrow
David Brinkley
Chet Huntley
Elvis Presley
Lucy and Desi Arnaz
Frank Sinatra
Perry Como
Alan Freed
National Aeronautical and Space Administration

Chuck Berry
Fats Domino
Little Richard
Buddy Holly
Jerry Lee Lewis
President Dwight D. Eisenhower
NATO
The Warsaw Pact
The Eisenhower Doctrine
Ho Chi Minh
The Central Intelligence Agency
Nikita Khrushchev
Eisenhower's "Open Skies" Plan
Sputnik

Lesson One

History Overview and Assignments Suburban Growth

During the 1950s, the American Dream became a reality for millions of Americans. Within their reach was the chance to have a house on their own land, a car, a dog, and children they could afford to feed and raise. Postwar affluence redefined the American Dream.



Convenience and color were two hallmarks of the 1950s kitchen. Pink refrigerators and new pre-sweetened cereals such as Sugar Pops were introduced to America early in the decade.

Reading and Assignments

- Review the discussion questions and vocabulary, then read the article: *Suburban Growth*.
- Narrate about today's reading using the appropriate notebook page. Be sure to answer the discussion questions and include key people, events, and dates within the narration.
- Define the vocabulary words in the context of the reading and put the word and its definition in the vocabulary section of your history notebook.
- As an optional assignment, it would be interesting and fun to create a notebook of popular and historic culture visuals from each of the four categories of articles for this unit: Suburban Growth, Land of Television, America Rocks and Rolls, The Cold War Continues.
- For additional resources visit www.ArtiosHCS.com.

Vocabulary

conformity suburbia

Key People, Places, and Events

The Interstate Highway Act Ford
William Levitt Chrysler
General Motors

Discussion Questions

1. What individual strongly promoted suburban growth?
2. How did Levitt apply the techniques of mass production to the construction of houses?
3. How did this boom in housing construction encourage the “keeping up with the Joneses” mentality?
4. What negative connotation did the Levittown developments have?
5. How did the move from the city to suburbia effect life in America?

U.S. History Online Textbook

source: ushistory.org

Suburban Growth

For many generations and decades, the American Dream had promised opportunity for prosperity. For many Americans living in the 1950s, the notion of prosperity remained just a dream. But for millions the American Dream became a reality. Within their reach was the chance to have a house on their own land, a car, a dog, and children they could afford to feed and raise.

Postwar affluence redefined the American Dream. Gone was the poverty born of the Great Depression, and the years of wartime sacrifice were over.

Automobiles once again rolled off the assembly lines of the Big Three: Ford, General Motors, and Chrysler. The Interstate Highway Act authorized the construction of thousands of miles of high-speed roads that made living farther from work a possibility.

Families that had delayed having additional children for years no longer waited, and the nation enjoyed a postwar baby boom.

Suburbia

The desire to leave decaying cities prompted many Americans to flee to suburbia. And no individual promoted suburban growth more than William Levitt.

Contracted by the federal government during the war to quickly build housing for military personnel, Levitt applied the techniques of mass production to construction. In 1947, he set out to erect the largest planned-living community in the

United States on farmland he had purchased on Long Island, New York. Levitt identified 27 different steps to build a house. Therefore, 27 different teams of builders were hired to construct the homes.



William Levitt revolutionized the way Americans live and ushered in an age of suburbia by providing inexpensive housing outside the city.

Each house had two bedrooms, one bathroom, and no basement. The kitchen was situated near the back of the house so mothers could keep an eye on their children in the backyard. Within one year, Levitt was building 36 houses per day. His assembly-line approach made the houses extremely affordable. At first, the homes were available only to veterans. Eventually, though, Levittown was open to others as well.



William Levitt offered five different versions of each type of home, but all had the same floor plan.

Keeping Up with the Joneses

With the ability to own a detached home, thousands of Americans soon surpassed the standard of living enjoyed by their parents. Nevertheless, the movement was not without its critics. Architects called Levitt's designs and emphasis on conformity an abomination.

Because little variety was expressed in the construction, homeowners struggled to keep their communities looking uniform. Residents had to pledge to mow their lawns on a weekly basis. The irrational need to "keep up with the Joneses" was born in the American suburb, and the Levittown

developments became known as symbols of racial segregation.



As suburbia grew, fast food restaurants began to pop up all over the country. Ray Kroc bought a single burger joint called McDonald's and paved the way for the fast food giant. Pictured above is Kroc's first new restaurant, which opened in 1955.

Despite such criticism, a generation of Americans loved the chance to avoid rent and the dirtiness of the city to live in their own homes on their own land. Soon, shopping centers and fast food restaurants added to the convenience of suburban life. Thousands and thousands migrated to suburbia.

America and the American Dream would never be the same.

Lesson Two

History Overview and Assignments

Land of Television

Television shaped American life more than any other phenomenon during this time. At the end of World War II, the television was a toy for only a few Americans. Just 10 years later, nearly two-thirds of American households had a television.



As the price of television sets dropped, the number of viewers grew. 1952 saw the arrival of the Viking Console, a Canadian set, which was popular all over North America.

Reading and Assignments

- Review the discussion questions and vocabulary, then read the article: *Land of Television*.
- Narrate about today's reading using the appropriate notebook page. Be sure to answer the discussion questions and include key people, events, and dates within the narration.
- Define the vocabulary word in the context of the reading and put the word and its definition in the vocabulary section of your history notebook.
- If you chose to do the optional assignment suggested in Lesson One, continue working on your notebook of popular and historic culture visuals by adding ones appropriate for *Land of Television*.
- Visit www.ArtiosHCS.com for additional resources.

Vocabulary

coaxial

Key People, Places, and Events

Edward Murrow
Elvis Presley

David Brinkley
Lucy and Desi Arnaz

Chet Huntley

Discussion Questions

1. What was the biggest-selling periodical of the 1950s?
2. How did television change politics?
3. What were some of the most popular television sitcoms during the 1950's?
4. What significant "controversial" topics did "I Love Lucy" deal with on television?

5. What subject was the American public fascinated with, and how was that fascination reflected in television programming during the 1950s?
6. What television genre was a combination of television and vaudeville? What were some of the most popular programs in this genre?
7. Name some interesting qualities of this genre.
8. What changes in advertising came as a result of television?
9. Name two television programs that were created to entertain American children during the 1950s.

Adapted for High School from the book:

U.S. History Online Textbook

source: ushistory.org

Land of Television

Perhaps no phenomenon shaped American life in the 1950s more than television. At the end of World War II, the television was a toy for only a few thousand wealthy Americans. Just 10 years later, nearly two-thirds of American households had a television.

The biggest-selling periodical of the decade was *TV Guide*. In a nation once marked by strong regional differences, network television programming blurred these distinctions and helped forge a national popular culture.

Television forever changed politics. The first president to be televised was Harry Truman. When Estes Kefauver prosecuted mob boss Frank Costello on television, the Tennessee senator became a national hero and a vice presidential candidate.

It did not take long for political advertisers to understand the power of the new medium. Dwight Eisenhower's campaign staff generated sound bites—short, powerful statements from a candidate—rather than air an entire speech. Richard Nixon, on the other hand, was hindered as much as helped by TV. His televised Checkers speech (Checkers was his

dog) successfully appealed to the public for support when financial scandals threatened to knock him from the Republican ticket. But in the 1960 televised presidential debates against John F. Kennedy, Nixon came off as sweaty and somewhat sinister.

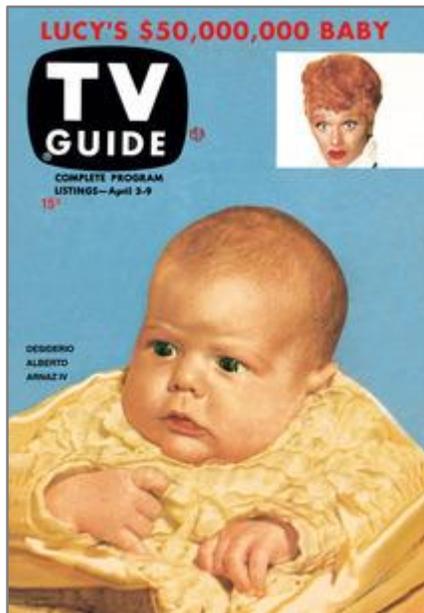


The first coast-to-coast color broadcast came on January 1, 1954, when NBC beamed the *Tournament of Roses Parade* across America.

America Loves Lucy

Americans loved situation comedies—sitcoms. In the 1950s, “I Love Lucy” topped the ratings charts. The show broke new ground by including a Cuban-American character (Ricky Ricardo, played by bandleader Desi Arnaz) and dealing with Lucille Ball's pregnancy, though Lucy was

never filmed from the waist down while she was pregnant. Forty-four million Americans tuned in to welcome her newborn son to the show.



Lucille Ball's new baby brought 44 million viewers to the *I Love Lucy* show and graced the cover of the first national issue of *TV Guide* in 1953. *TV Guide* soon became the most popular periodical in the country.

Through shows such as "Leave it to Beaver", "The Donna Reed Show", and "Father Knows Best", television created an idyllic view of what family life should look like.

With rare exceptions (such as Desi Arnaz) members of minorities rarely appeared on television in the 1950s.

The Wild West

America's fascination with the Wild West was nothing new, but television brought western heroes into American homes and turned that fascination into a love affair. Cowboys and lawmen such as "Hopalong Cassidy", "Wyatt Earp", and "The Cisco Kid" galloped across televisions every night.

"The Roy Rogers Show" and "Rin Tin

Tin" brought the West to children on Saturday mornings, and "Davy Crockett" coonskin caps became popular fashion items. Long running horse operas, such as "Bonanza" and "Rawhide", attracted viewers week after week.

One western, "Gunsmoke", ran for twenty years—longer than any other prime-time drama in television history. At the decade's close, thirty westerns aired on prime time each week, and westerns occupied seven spots in the Nielsen Top-10 ratings system.



"The Lone Ranger" was one of the earliest TV westerns, making the jump from radio in 1941. "The Lone Ranger" and other Westerns geared toward children aired on Saturday mornings. Adult westerns, such as "Gunsmoke" and "Wyatt Earp", aired during prime-time.

Like "The Lone Ranger" or "Zorro", most programs of the early 1950s drew a clear line between the good guys and the bad guys. There was very little danger of injury or death, and good always triumphed in the end.

By the late '50s, though, the genre had become more complicated and the line between good and evil was blurred. America entered the more turbulent '60s with heroes such as the black-clad mercenary Paladin and the gambling Maverick brothers who would do anything to earn a buck.

Variety Shows: Vaudeville in American Living Rooms

Because most early television was live, the producers of major networks found their talent among people who already had experience with live performance: vaudeville. Television and vaudeville combined to create the form of entertainment known as the variety show. Variety shows were made up of short acts—musical numbers, comedy sketches, animal tricks, etc.—usually centered around an engaging host. Former vaudevillians Bob Hope, Milton Berle, and Ed Wynn all hosted popular programs. The influence of vaudeville on television was so strong that television critics called the shows “Vaudeo.”

Sid Caesar had two popular variety programs in '50s, “Your Show of Shows” and “Caesar’s Hour.” These shows featured the writing talents of Carl Reiner, Mel Brooks, Larry Gelbart, and Woody Allen. Nat “King” Cole became the first African American host of a television series when his variety show appeared in 1956.

But perhaps no variety program had a greater effect on American culture than The Ed Sullivan Show, which ran for 23 years beginning in 1948 and was for a while America’s most popular show. Combining highbrow and popular entertainment, Sullivan’s “really big show” became a major stop for both established performers and young, up-and-coming artists. Although Elvis Presley had appeared on other shows

in the past, it was his performance on “The Ed Sullivan Show” that grabbed the headlines. By securing rock-and-roll acts, Sullivan won the adolescent market, truly making the variety show a whole-family event.



Ed Sullivan’s variety show provided entertainment ranging from the rock and roll of the Rolling Stones to the goofy hijinks of trained animals.

Commercials: Selling Through the Screen

With more and more American families owning televisions, manufacturers now had a new way to sell their products, and the television commercial was born. By late 1948, over 900 companies had bought television broadcast time for advertising. By 1950, sponsors were leaving radio for television at an unstoppable rate.

Television sponsors ranged from greeting cards to automobiles, but perhaps the most advertised product was tobacco. *TV Guide* voted Lucky Strike’s “Be Happy, Go Lucky” ad commercial of the year for 1950, and Phillip Morris sponsored “I Love Lucy” for years, inserting cartoon cigarette packs in the show’s opening animation. Cartoon characters were common in '50s commercials, representing everything from light bulbs to beer. In 1950, Coca-Cola

launched its first television ad campaign using a combination of animation and celebrity endorsement.



In 1955, the adorable cartoon characters Snap, Crackle, and Pop leapt around and sang about the joys of eating Rice Krispies. Advertisements were an integral part of television viewing then just as they are today.

By 1954, television commercials were the leading advertising medium in America. The life of the American consumer would never be the same.

The New News

Most Americans still got their news from newspapers in the 1950s, but the foundations for the modern television newscast were established as early as 1951 with Edward R. Murrow's "See it Now", the first coast-to-coast live show. Many consider Murrow's 1953 "Person to Person" interview with Joseph McCarthy to be a major step toward McCarthy's downfall.

While Murrow reported on CBS, David Brinkley and Chet Huntley were revolutionizing news broadcasting with the "NBC Nightly News". Brinkley and Huntley were the first anchormen to report from two cities simultaneously, and Brinkley's simple

declarative sentences became the basis for television news writing for several decades.



Edward R. Murrow's incisive journalism exposed the folly behind Senator McCarthy's rabid attacks on so called Communists, effectively ruining McCarthy's career.

Two major developments in the 1950s that set up television as the news medium of the future were the establishment of coaxial cable linking the East and West coasts, which enabled footage to be moved electronically instead of physically, and the invention of videotape, which allowed the use of prerecorded footage (such as studio interviews).

"But when television is bad, nothing is worse. I invite you to sit down in front of your television set when your station goes on the air and stay there without a book, magazine, newspaper, profit-and-loss sheet or rating book to distract you—and keep your eyes glued to that set until the station signs off. I can assure you that you will observe a vast wasteland. You will see a procession of game shows, violence, audience participation shows, formula comedies about

totally unbelievable families, blood and thunder, mayhem, violence, sadism, murder, western bad men, western good men, private eyes, gangsters, more violence and cartoons. And, endlessly, commercials—many screaming, cajoling and offending. And most of all, boredom.”

– Newton Minow, Chairman of the FCC and 1950s television viewer (1961)

Children’s Programming

Understanding that the population of children was in greater numbers than in previous generations, television producers developed a host of children’s programs. Shows such as “The Mickey Mouse Club” and “Howdy Doody” entertained millions of American tykes.

During the 1950s few households owned more than one television, so viewing

became a shared family event. Even the American diet was transformed with the advent of the TV dinner, first introduced in 1954.



“The Howdy Doody Show”, the first children’s program to run five days a week, helped the young NBC network grow exponentially during the 1950s.

Lesson Three

History Overview and Assignments

America Rocks and Rolls

The affluence of the 1950s gave young people money to spend on transistor radios, records, and phonographs. Record companies cashed in on the craze, marketing recorded music to an eager market. Rock and Roll was everything the suburban 1950s were not.



The prosperity of the '50s allowed teenagers to spend money on records by their favorite bands and singers.

Reading and Assignments

- Review the discussion questions then read the article: *America Rocks and Rolls*.
- Narrate about today's reading using the appropriate notebook page. Be sure to answer the discussion questions and include key people, events, and dates within the narration.
- If you chose to do the optional assignment suggested in lesson one, continue working on your notebook of popular and historic culture visuals by adding ones appropriate for "America Rocks and Rolls."
- Be sure to visit www.ArtiosHCS.com for additional resources.

Key People, Places, and Events

Frank Sinatra
Alan Freed
Fats Domino
Buddy Holly

Perry Como
Chuck Berry
Little Richard
Jerry Lee Lewis

Discussion Questions

1. Who first coined the term "rock and roll"?
2. Whom did Sam Phillips, a Memphis record producer, find that met the need to capture the African American sound by a white artist?
3. Who were some of the early African American rock and roll artists?

Adapted for High School from the book:

U.S. History Online Textbook

source: ushistory.org

America Rocks and Rolls

Rock and roll was everything the suburban 1950s were not. While parents of the decade were listening to Frank Sinatra, Perry Como, and big bands, their children were moving to a new beat.

This generation of youth was much larger than any in recent memory, and the affluence of the era gave them money to spend on transistor radios, records, and phonographs. Record companies cashed in on the craze, marketing recorded music to an eager market.

The Roots of Rock

The roots of rock and roll lay in African American blues and gospel. As the Great Migration brought many African Americans to the cities of the north, the sounds of rhythm and blues attracted suburban teens. Due to segregation and racist attitudes, however, none of the greatest artists of the genre could get much airplay early on.

Disc jockey Alan Freed began a rhythm-and-blues show on a Cleveland radio station. Soon the audience grew and grew, and Freed coined the term “rock and roll.”

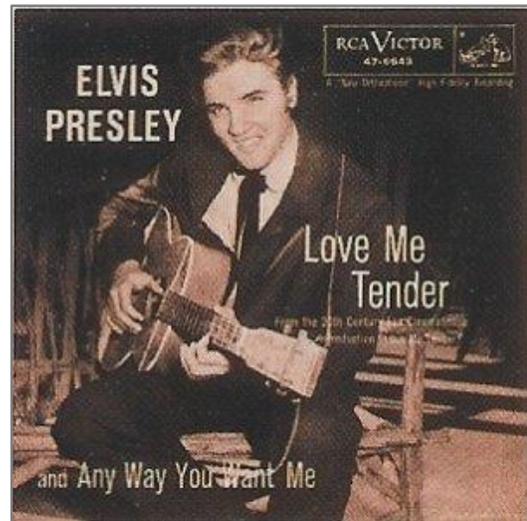
Early attempts by white artists to cover R&B songs resulted in weaker renditions that bled the heart and soul out of the originals. Record producers saw the market potential and began to search for a white artist who could capture the African American sound.

Sam Phillips, a Memphis record producer, found the answer in Elvis Presley. With a deep southern sound, pouty lips, and

gyrating hips, Elvis took an old style and made it his own.



Alan Freed, the Cleveland disc jockey credited with coining the phrase “rock and roll,” was the master of ceremonies at many of the first rock concerts, including his 1955 “Easter Jubilee.”



Elvis Presley brought rock-and-roll music to the masses during the 1950s with hits such as “Love Me Tender” and “Heartbreak Hotel.”

From Memphis, the sound spread to other cities, and demand for Elvis records skyrocketed. Within two years, Elvis was the most popular name in the entertainment business.

After the door to rock and roll acceptance was opened, African American performers such as Chuck Berry, Fats Domino, and Little Richard began to enjoy broad success, as well. White performers such as Buddy Holly and Jerry Lee Lewis also found artistic freedom and commercial success.



Antoine "Fats" Domino Jr.

Because rock and roll came to symbolize rebellion from traditional values, the new styles of music and dance were banned from many radio stations and hundreds of schools.



Buddy Holly & The Crickets release "Maybe Baby" this day in 1958.

But the masses spoke louder. When Elvis appeared on TV's "The Ed Sullivan Show", the show's ratings soared.



Chuck Berry's songs about girls and cars hit a nerve with American teens and sent his star rising high in the early days of rock and roll.

The commercial possibilities were limitless. As a generation of young adults finished military service, bought houses in suburbia, and longed for stability and conformity, their children seemed to take prosperity for granted. They wanted to release the tensions that bubbled beneath the smooth surface of postwar America.

Above all, they wanted to shake, rattle, and roll,



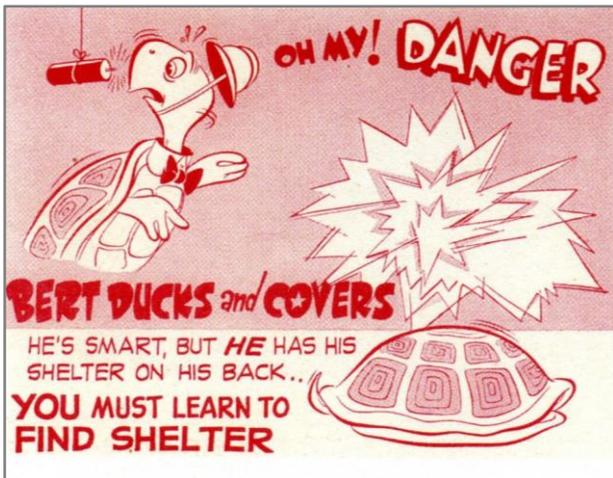
Jerry Lee Lewis

Lesson Four

History Overview and Assignments

The Cold War Continues

The president for many of these years was popular war hero Dwight Eisenhower. Ike, as he was nicknamed, referred to himself as “conservative when it comes to money and liberal when it comes to human beings,” in a philosophy he called “Dynamic Conservatism.” With the goal of maintaining pressure on the Soviet Union while reducing expenditure, he placed priority on nuclear weaponry while reducing other military funding. After the Soviets launched Sputnik in 1957, Eisenhower strove to catch up, establishing NASA the following year.



Cartoons of the unflappable Bert the Turtle warned American children everywhere during the Cold War to “duck and cover” in the event of a nuclear blast. Although these measures would have proved useless, schools vigorously pursued “duck and cover” drills in which children clambered beneath their desks.

Vocabulary

proxy

Key People, Places, and Events

President Dwight D. Eisenhower

The Eisenhower Doctrine

Nikita Khrushchev

National Aeronautical and Space Administration (NASA)

NATO

Ho Chi Minh

Sputnik

The Warsaw Pact

The Central Intelligence Agency

Eisenhower’s “Open Skies” Plan

Reading and Assignments

- Review the discussion questions and vocabulary, then read the article: *The Cold War Continues*.
- Narrate about today’s reading using the appropriate notebook page. Be sure to answer the discussion questions and include key people, events, and dates within the narration.
- Define the vocabulary word in the context of the reading and put the word and its definition in the vocabulary section of your history notebook.
- If you chose to do the optional assignment suggested in lesson one, continue working on your notebook of popular and historic culture visuals by adding ones appropriate for *The Cold War Continues*.
- Visit www.ArtiosHCS.com for additional resources.

Discussion Questions

1. In response to the formation of NATO, the Communist countries of Eastern Europe formed what alliance?
2. Describe the capture and conviction of Ethel and Julius Rosenberg for passing nuclear secrets to the Soviet Union.
3. What was the content and purpose of the Eisenhower Doctrine?
4. Who took power in Cuba in January 1959?
5. What was the reaction of the United States to the USSR putting *Sputnik* into orbit in 1957?

Adapted for High School from the book:

U.S. History Online Textbook

source: ushistory.org

The Cold War Continues

The end of the Korean War in 1953 by no means brought an end to global hostilities.

After World War II, America, France, and Britain had joined together their occupied zones in West Germany to build a new government there in reaction to the Soviet threat. The Soviet Union responded by blockading West Berlin, which was divided from Communist East Berlin. President Truman forced the Soviets to terminate their blockade of the city by launching the massive Berlin Airlift in May of 1949 to bring in provisions. Meanwhile, ten Western European nations joined with the United States and Canada to form the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in April. In response, the Communist countries of Eastern Europe formed their own alliance, called the Warsaw Pact, in 1955.

As the British and French empires slowly yielded to independence movements around the globe, a new Third World emerged, made up of former colonial territories. This became the major battleground of the Cold War as the democratic and communistic countries

rivalled to bring new nations into their respective orbits, known as the First World and the Second World. Across the Third World, the two superpowers—the United States and the Soviet Union—squared off through proxy armies.

One 1950s Cold War catalyst of fear was the capture and conviction of Ethel and Julius Rosenberg for passing nuclear secrets to the Soviet Union. Judge Irving Kaufman sentenced the couple to death. The trial and sentencing were controversial, partly due to charges of anti-Semitism, but a series of decoded Soviet cable communications released in 1995 confirmed that Julius Rosenberg acted as a courier and recruiter for the Soviets. The Rosenbergs were the only American citizens sentenced to death for espionage during the Cold War. The following is an excerpt from their sentence, delivered on April 5, 1951:

“Citizens of this country who betray their fellow-countrymen can be under none of the delusions about the benignity of Soviet power that they might have been

prior to World War II. The nature of Russian terrorism is now self-evident.

I consider your crime worse than murder. Plain, deliberate, contemplated murder is dwarfed in magnitude by comparison with the crime you have committed. In committing the act of murder, the criminal kills only his victim. The immediate family is brought to grief, and when justice is meted out the chapter is closed. But in your case, I believe your conduct in putting into the hands of the Russians the A-bomb years before our best scientists predicted Russia would perfect the bomb has already caused, in my opinion, the Communist aggression in Korea, with the resultant casualties exceeding 50,000 and who knows but that millions more of innocent people may pay the price of your treason. Indeed, by your betrayal you undoubtedly have altered the course of history to the disadvantage of our country.”

The Eisenhower Doctrine

The United States’ recognition of Israel as an independent nation in 1948 created a strong new ally, but created many enemies as well. Arab nations, enraged by American support for the new Jewish state, found supportive ears in the Soviet Union.

When Egyptian president Gamal Abdel Nasser sought to strengthen ties with the Soviet bloc, the United States withdrew its pledge to help Nasser construct the all-important Aswan Dam. Nasser responded by nationalizing the Suez Canal, an action

that compelled British, French, and Israeli armies to invade Egypt.



Egyptian president Gamal Abder Nasser’s 1956 nationalization of the Suez Canal crippled the ability of Great Britain and France to trade internationally. As a result, the two countries allied with Israel to attack Egypt.

The Western alliance was threatened as President Dwight Eisenhower called upon Britain and France to show restraint. With Soviet influence growing in the oil-rich region, President Ike issued the Eisenhower Doctrine, which pledged American support to any governments fighting Communist insurgencies in the Middle East. Making good on that promise, he sent over 5,000 Marines to Lebanon to forestall an anti-Western takeover.

Asia provided more challenges for American containment policy. China was flexing its muscles on Taiwan by threatening the takeover of the Taiwanese islands of Quemoy and Matsu. United States Secretary of State John Foster Dulles chose to follow a strategy of brinkmanship. He told China that any aggressive actions toward the islands would be met by force from the United States.

In a grown-up version of the children’s game of chicken, Dulles hoped to avoid war by threatening war. The Chinese shelled the

islands to save face, but no takeover occurred.

To the south, Communist revolutionary Ho Chi Minh successfully defeated the French colonial army to create the new nation of Vietnam. American commitment to the containment of communism led to a protracted involvement that would become the Vietnam War.

The CIA

In the aftermath of World War II, the United States created a new weapon to assist in fighting the Cold War: the Central Intelligence Agency. In addition to gathering information on Soviet plans and maneuvers, the CIA also involved itself in covert operations designed to prevent Communist dictators from rising to power.



The CIA was formed after World War II to monitor the potential threat of Communist countries.

The first such instance occurred in Iran, when Iranian Prime Minister Mohammed Mossadegh nationalized the Iranian oil industry, which had been controlled by British-owned petroleum companies. Fearing Soviet influence in the powerful oil nation, the CIA worked with Britain to drive

off Mossadegh and return the American-backed Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi to power.

When Jacobo Árbenz came to power in Guatemala, he promised to relieve the nation's impoverished farmers by seizing land held by the American-owned corporations such as the United Fruit Company and redistributing it to the peasants. With the support of American air power, a CIA-backed band of mercenaries overthrew Árbenz (citing claims that he had forged political alliances with Communists) and established a military dictatorship.

Throughout Latin America, the United States was viewed as a brutal defender of thuggish autocrats at the expense of popularly elected leaders. Fidel Castro capitalized on this sentiment by overthrowing U.S.-backed dictator Fulgencio Batista from power in Cuba in January 1959.



The mushroom cloud above was photographed in a 1956 nuclear test known as Operation Plumbbob. The possibility of nuclear war loomed over terrified Americans in the 1950s

Policy of Mass Retaliation

Relations remained icy between the United States and the Soviet Union. Relying on the knowledge that the United States had

a much larger nuclear arsenal than the Soviet Union, Eisenhower and Dulles announced a policy of massive retaliation. Any attack by the Soviets on the United States or its allies would be met with nuclear force.



Beginning on July 4, 1956, U-2 spy planes infiltrated Soviet airspace to take photos and determine the number of bomber planes possessed by the USSR. The secret flights lasted until 1960, when a U-2 plane was shot down.

The Soviet crackdown on the Hungarian Uprising of 1956 further strained relations. In an effort to reduce tensions, Eisenhower offered an “Open Skies” proposal to Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev. Planes from each nation would be permitted to fly over the other to inspect nuclear sites. But Khrushchev declined the offer. A summit conference between Eisenhower and

Khrushchev was canceled in 1960 when the Soviets shot down an American U-2 spy plane piloted by Gary Powers.

When the USSR put *Sputnik*, the first artificial Earth satellite¹, into orbit in 1957, panic struck the American heartland. Thousands rushed to Sears and Roebuck to purchase bomb shelter kits, and Congress responded by creating the National Aeronautical and Space Administration and by appropriating funds for science education.

Not even outer space was safe from Cold War hostility.



This stamp commemorates Laika, the dog that was sent into space on the second Soviet satellite, *Sputnik II*, in November 1957. The launch of the first *Sputnik* earlier that year triggered a massive American effort to catch up to Soviet space technology, culminating in 1969 with the U.S. mission to the moon.

1. Such objects are sometimes called artificial satellites to distinguish them from natural satellites such as the Moon.