**Guided Notes: The Cold War Era**

**Returning Home:**

After World War II, returning soldiers began to build their lives again. The job and housing markets were flooded with people ready to work and eager to put down roots. The government helped returning soldiers by passing the **G.I. Bill of Rights**. This **paid for the education of returning soldiers**, and gave them some money for a living allowance. More than 8 million veterans went to college under the G.I. Bill.

Finding a place to live was a bit tougher. Due to **urbanization**, cities were heavily **overcrowded**. Interracial tensions were high, as people fought over who was deserving of precious available space. Businessman **William Levitt** met the increasing demand for housing by creating suburban neighborhoods. Levitt used **assembly-line style to mass produce houses**. He first created Levittown in New York; then he branched out, creating more than 17,000 homes.

**Post War Economy:**

As defense industries began changing over to peacetime production, they reduced their workforce. Factories closed, and **thousands of workers, most women, were laid off**. With 10 million veterans flooding the workforce, they were often chosen over women for available jobs. Many women returned to jobs in more **traditional roles**, such as nursing, teaching, or office work.

Despite the slim down of defense industries, **the overall economy did not slow down**, as many had expected. Many people had put off major purchases, cut out certain foods, and avoided asking for pay-raises in support of the war effort. Now it was time to indulge. People bought cars, homes, and every luxury they could afford.

Since many unions promised not to negotiate for pay raises during the war, they were now expecting that workers be fairly compensated to keep pace with rising prices. There were **several strikes**, adding up to over 4 million workers stating their case that their pay should be improved.

African Americans were still experiencing high levels of **discrimination.** While Truman moved to **desegregate the military in 1948**, civilian life lacked equality, especially in the south. Truman also created the **Civil Rights Commission**. Although there is a very long way to go, Truman’s actions show the federal government was slowly starting to deal with racial problems in society.

In 1948, many didn’t believe Truman would be re-elected. However, he ran a campaign blasting the “do nothing” Congress for blocking his proposals. His smear campaign worked and he was elected for a second term. Back in office, he proposed the **Fair Deal**, which was an extension of FDR’s New Deal. It called for **new housing and employment projects** and an **end to racial discrimination in hiring**. Congress fought against Truman every step of the way, resulting in few measures getting passed.

**The Cold War:**

Even though the United States were Allied with the Soviet Union during the latter part of WWII, **distrust** between the two nations began to grow. At the center of the distrust was how **Eastern Europe was to be governed** **after WWII**. It was initially agreed upon that Joseph Stalin would **allow free elections** in Eastern European states freed from Nazi rule. However, Stalin decided that he was going to **install pro-Soviet governments** in set countries. Distrust was further fueled by fear. The United States and the Soviet Union each suspected the other of trying to **dominate world affairs**. Winston Churchill, Britain’s prime minister, said that there was an “**iron curtain**” dividing Europe. This proverbial curtain had those in the sphere of the communist Soviets on one side, and non-communist nations on the other.

After WWII, **Germany was temporarily divided into four parts**, each one controlled by one of the primary allies: Great Britain, France, the U.S., and the Soviet Union. **The U.S., Great Britain, and France decided to unite their respective zones,** creating West Germany. **Stalin feared this move** and decided to take action. Berlin**, the German capital, was within his sphere. It had been divided in half,** creating East Berlin and West Berlin. In 1948, **Stalin blocked ground access to Berlin**. Truman responded by approving a **huge airlift of food, fuel, and equipment into the city**. Known as the **Berlin Airlift**, For nearly a year, more than 270,000 flights carried supplies to Berlin. In 1949, Stalin stopped the blockade. However, Germany was still divided into two parts: **the democratic West and communist East**.

Truman’s main strategy of fighting the Cold War was through the policy of **containment:** using military and non-military strategy to stop the spread of communism. The **Truman Doctrine** promised aid **to any nation fighting to maintain democracy**. **The Marshall Plan**, instituted after WWII, aimed at preventing the spread of communism by **rebuilding the war-torn economies** in Europe. The $13 billion in aid was distributed to non-communist nations.

Alarm over the spread of communism in Eastern Europe led to the formation of the North **Atlantic Treaty Organization, or NATO** in 1949. NATO consisted of the U.S., Canada, and 10 Western European Nations. Eastern Europeans countered and united by forming the **Warsaw Pact** in 1955.

**Homegrown Fear:**

With communism spreading overseas, many Americans were concerned that communism would come to America. Many Americans were accused of sending military secrets to soviets. There were convictions, and executions. In 1947, Truman ordered 4 million government workers to undergo **loyalty checks**. Loyalty boards actually forced several thousand government workers to resign. The **House Un American Committee (HUAC)** began targeting the movie industry. Many actors and directors were black-listed, and their careers were ruined. **Joseph McCarthy** increased widespread fear by accusing thousands of people of having communist ties. He claimed to have a list of 205 State Department officials who belonged to the Communist Party. This led to a **manhunt and several thousand false accusations** of communism. In 1954, the Senate held a nationally televised hearing where McCarthy claimed the military was coddling communists. Joseph Welch, the lawyer for the army, stood up to him. McCarthy was quickly shamed for his reckless conduct and eventually faded from public view.

After Eisenhower replaced Truman as president, he had to decide how he would formulate his Cold war Policy. Unlike his predecessor, he favored a more aggressive stance against communism. He openly stated that the United States would go to the brink of war to combat communism, a policy known as **brinkmanship**.

It is noteworthy that during the Cold War, many people were convinced that a third world war could happen at any time. As such, the building of **bomb shelters** became quite popular. Many stored supplies and prepared bunkers for long term living in the event of an attack. In fact, there is still a functioning and fully stocked bunker that can hold Congress in the event of a nuclear war.

**Arms Race:**

With the consistent threat of war looming overhead, both the United States and the Soviet Union beefed up their arsenal of weapons. The goal was of course quantity, but also quality: to develop a weapon with the most destructive power. In 1949, The Soviet Union developed the **atomic bomb.** In 1952, the United States developed the **hydrogen bomb**, or h-bomb. The atomic bomb causes energy through fission, or the splitting of atoms. The h-bomb gets its explosive power from nuclear fusion. It is **500X more powerful** than the atomic bomb. Many modern bombs are made with **enriched uranium**. This has the potential to create an even more powerful and damaging blast. Consequently, the fall out of such a weapon would be extensive and long lasting. Feeding the arms race fury, the United States spent **$5.5 trillion** on nuclear weapons from 1940-1996.

In addition to the arms race, the superpowers began a **space race**. The Soviet Union stunned the world by launching **Sputnik**, the world’s first space satellite. American scientists scrambled to catch up. Congress responded to Soviet success by setting aside billions of dollars for space research. Were it not for the Soviet satellite, we many have not landed on the moon in 1969.

**U2 Incident**:

Eisenhower was hoping to alleviate cold war tensions by a series of face-to-face talks with the Soviets. A few weeks prior to the first meeting, an **American U-2 spy plane was shot down**. Eisenhower denied that the aircraft was spying until he learned that the pilot had been captured alive. Khrushchev, the Russian premier, demanded an apology. When Eisenhower refused, the talks collapsed.

**Responding to Communist Threats**:

In 1961, President John F. Kennedy organized the invasion of Cuba, hoping to topple Fidel Castro, since he was considered a communist threat. An army of Cuban exiles, trained by the United States in South America, invaded Cuba. Cuban troops easily defeated the invasion, which humiliated the United States. **The Bay of Pigs Invasion**, as it came to be known, was one of the biggest failures of the Kennedy administration.

The **Cuban Missile Crisis** was arguably one of Kennedy’s most serious confrontations with the Soviet Union. In October 1962, both Cuban leader Fidel Castro, and new Russian leader Nikita Khrushchev believed the U.S. planned another attack on Cuba. Soon, the U.S. learned that the Soviets had put **several nuclear missiles in Cuba** that were capable of reaching multiple targets throughout the country. Kennedy and his committee of advisors struggled with how they should handle this. At first, many thought a military solution was the most viable. However, it was decided that we should enforce a **naval blockade of Cuba.** This asserted our force, but allowed for a solution without violence. The Soviets and Cubans were able to work out an agreement with the United States, and **a treaty was signed against the use of nuclear weapons**.

Kennedy also had to contend with Soviet tensions in Germany. Many in East Germany were fleeing to West Berlin to escape Communism. The Soviet’s wanted to block western access to Berlin, but Kennedy insisted that West Berlin retain their independence. In August of 1961, the Soviet Union and East Germany built the **Berlin Wall**, a heavily guarded barrier dividing free West Berlin from Communist East Berlin and East Germany. This further became a symbol to highlight the division between communism and democracy.

**Korean War:**

After WWII. Korea was divided at the 38th parallel. Aided by the **Soviet Union**, a **Communist government** came to power in North Korea, led by **Kim Il Sung**. The **United States** helped set up a **non-communist government in South Korea**. In June of 1950, **North Korea invaded the South**. President Truman saw this as a **threat to his containment policy**, and immediately **asked the UN to stop the advance**. Being that Stalin pulled Soviet advisors out of the UN, he had little say in how the rest of the world handled his aggressive behavior. The UN supplied soldiers from 16 nations, led by the United States. This conflict became known as the **Korean War**.

Not long after the war began, **China became involved**. Recently, the Civil War in China ended, and the communist party, led by Mao Zedong, defeated the nationalists led by Chain Kai-shek. Many Americans were shocked at the fall of the Nationalists, and this added to their fear of the spread of communism. Initially, North Korean troops back South Koreans into a small corner of the South Korean peninsula near the city of Pusan. General Douglas MacArthur led UN troops and had them set up behind North Korean lines, causing them to be surrounded. North Korea retreated across the 38th parallel, and the UN pushed them deep into their own territory, almost to the Chinese border. **China saw the UN forces as a threat**, and warned that any further UN advance would prompt them to get involved. MacArthur ignored that warning. On November 21, 1950, hundreds of thousands of Chinese troops flooded North Korea. By early 1951, there was once again a deadlock around the 38th parallel. MacArthur wanted permission to put a naval blockade around China, and then begin bombing them. President Truman refused, fearing that this conflict could easily lead to a much larger war. General MacArthur disagreed and publicly blasted the president for his decision. Since the president is also the commander in chief, or his boss, **MacArthur was fired**, and ordered to return to the United States.

Truman began peace talks in 1951, and they continued through 1952, and the election of a new president: Dwight D. Eisenhower. Eisenhower, a highly successful WWII general, promised a swift end to the conflict. While **Eisenhower publicly compromised** with North Korean and Chinese leaders, he made sure to inform them privately that **he had no qualms about using nuclear weapons** should a peace agreement be violated**. The two Koreas still remain split at the 38th parallel**, with the **Demilitarized Zone (DMZ**) separating the two nations. Many Americans were upset that the results of the war were indecisive.

**Economic Prosperity in the 1950’s:**

During the Eisenhower administration, **Social Security** was expanded, and the **Department of Health, Education, and Welfare** was created. Eisenhower also **increased the minimum wage** for workers, and spearheaded the building of **the Interstate Highway system**. The Highway Act spent **$32 billion to build more than 46,000 miles of highway**. The ease of transport fueled the expansion of the suburbs. Families left crowded apartments for larger, single family homes. Shopping centers, movie theaters, and restaurants sprouted up throughout the suburbs, and car sales increased greatly.

During the 1950’s, the U.S. population grew by almost 30 million people. This was largely because of the **baby boom:** a sharp increase in the birth rate after WWII. During the late 1940’s there were 330 babies born every hour… one every 10 seconds. The increase in population further fueled the growth of suburban culture.

This led to the rise of **consumerism**. Many came to believe that the American **dream was the ability to buy new products to increase the comfort of living**. Television and magazine ads featured new appliances and modern conveniences such as washing machines, vacuum cleaners, televisions, and record players.

An interesting trend in living patterns also developed during the 1950’s. While the exodus from cities to suburbs took place all over the country, many also moved to the south and to the west, or the **sunbelt.** This was spawned by the popularization of **air conditioning** in homes and businesses. In 1970, California surpasses New York as the most populous state.

Another trend that happened with the move to the suburbs is **urban decay**. As many Americans headed for the suburbs, shops and businesses moved with them. Fewer people remained in the city to pay taxes for services such as garbage collection, firefighting, and road repair. Without proper maintenance, cities soon became a shell of their former glory. **Unfortunately those most often affected by urban decay were African Americans and Latinos**.

**Cultural Trends:**

One of the biggest trends during the 1950’s is the advent of **Rock’N’Roll. Elvis Presley** had teenagers going wild for his edgy music and style of dancing. Other popular musicians include Jerry Lee Lewis, Fats, Domino, Little Richard, Buddy Holly, and Chuck Berry.

While Hollywood produced many movies and musicals, the popularization of the television caused movie ticket sales to plummet. **In 1950, 10% of families owned a TV. By 1960, 90% of families owned a TV**. Children enjoyed shows such as Lassie, the Lone Ranger, the Howdy Doody Show, and the Mickey Mouse Club. At this time we also see the advent of the **sitcom**. I Love Lucy and Leave it to Beaver were increasingly popular. Both did have stereotypes of women consistently wearing dresses and maintaining a spotless home, as this was part of the ideal American family at the time.

The 1950’s is not without **counterculture.** Many feared that there was an overwhelming push to **conform** to a specific beliefs and ideals of the majority. Roles for women and African Americans were particularly called into question. Those who felt that most of society was shallow and conforming to the norm were known as “**beatniks**.” They filled coffee shops and shared their negative opinions about the “square” society they live in.