

## Did Americans live happily ever after, 1945–60?

### CHAPTER OVERVIEW

The end of the Second World War brought with it a host of questions about the future for America.

#### ■ IIA Domestic events in the presidencies of Truman (1945–52) and Eisenhower (1952–60)

Year	Domestic events
1945	Roosevelt dies in April Vice-President Truman sworn in as president
1946	Beginning of baby boom Republicans control Congress
1947	President's Committee on Civil Rights publishes <i>To Secure These Rights</i> Beginning of federal employee loyalty programme Taft-Hartley Act limits unions Levittown, New York built
1948	Beginning of desegregation of armed forces
1950	Rosenbergs charged with treason Beginning of Korean War
1951	First electronic digital computer, UNIVAC, on sale
1952	Eisenhower elected president
1953	Earl Warren appointed US chief justice McDonald's begins to expand
1954	<i>Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka</i> decision reverses 'separate but equal' ruling Senate condemns McCarthy Disneyland opens in Anaheim, California
1955	Montgomery bus boycott Salk polio vaccine developed
1956	Highway Act leads to building of inter-state highway system Elvis Presley releases his first single Eisenhower re-elected
1957	Little Rock, Arkansas school desegregation confrontations Martin Luther King elected leader of Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC)
1958	National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) founded Development of silicon microchip
1960	First civil rights sit-in at Greensboro, North Carolina Student Non-violent Co-ordinating Committee (SNCC) formed Kennedy elected president

*What kind of America will the troops return to and what changes will they bring with them?*

*How will industries adjust to the end of wartime production? Will there be new products and markets to maintain prosperity?*

*Will the Depression come back?*

*Will the social welfare measures of the New Deal continue?*

*Can Vice-President Harry Truman be strong enough to follow Roosevelt's dynamic presidency of fifteen years?*

This chapter will look at how Americans enjoyed the wealth and production that resulted from the Second World War victory. For many, being able to live 'happily ever after' was enough. They enjoyed affluent suburban living, including the delights of McDonald's and the entertainment of TV quiz shows and Westerns. This was a far cry from the chilly winds of the nuclear threat and from the lives of a significant minority who experienced: increasing urban poverty; the continuing failure to get equality for black Americans; and the beginning of new cultural challenges. To what extent were the years 1945–60 really the years of 'happy ever after'?

- A** The abundance of post-war USA – how did it change Americans' lives? (pp. 211–18)
- B** Did abundance improve life for Afro-Americans? (pp. 218–23)
- C** How did Americans cope with the threat of Armageddon? (pp. 223–25)
- D** How did the second Red Scare damage the USA? (pp. 226–29)
- E** Review: Did Americans live happily ever after, 1945–60? (pp. 229–31)

## The abundance of post-war USA – how did it change Americans' lives?

### ■ IIB 'Surely we'll be happy ever after?'

**With 7 per cent of the world's population the USA had:**

- ★ an average daily consumption of 3000 calories (50 per cent higher than in Western Europe)
- ★ an average per capita income of \$11,450

**★ 42 per cent of the world's income**  
**★ 57 per cent of its steel production**  
**★ 62 per cent of its oil**  
**★ 75 per cent of its gold supply**  
**★ 80 per cent of its cars**  
**★ 50 per cent of its manufacturing output**

**★ half the population visiting the cinema every week**  
**★ out of 38 million households 33 million owning a radio**

#### FOCUS ROUTE

- 1 Note the ways in which life for Americans visibly improved – in their homes, in employment, for families.
- 2 What problems remained despite increased affluence?
- 3 Why were some aspects of American life in the fifties criticised?
- 4 At the end of Section A list the **three** changes that you think were the most important for their long-term impact on the American way of life. Justify each choice in a short paragraph.

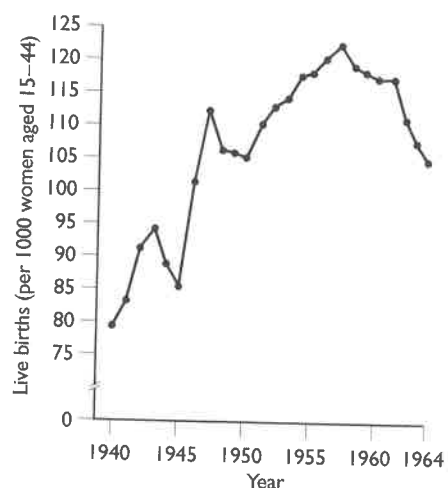
## ACTIVITY

What did Americans not have in 1945, that they *did* have in 1960? By 1960 these new commodities included: supermarkets, drive-in cinemas, four-lane highways, ballpoint pens, Polaroid cameras, transistors, LPs, dishwashers, McDonald's, power steering, residential air conditioning, ranch-style homes, detergents.

Before you study further, choose three of these.

- 1 Try to work out their likely practical benefit after the war.
- 2 Now examine their less obvious, long-term impact on society.

You can assess your thoughts at the end of Section A.



SOURCE 11.1 Birth rate, 1940-64

## DISCUSS

What opportunities would the baby boom create for entrepreneurs eager to make their fortunes?

SOURCE 11.2 Levittown, Long Island, New York

There was uncertainty in 1945 about what would happen next. An atmosphere of apprehension was inevitable given the cancelling of defence contracts, and unemployment for women war workers and those who had earned good wages in war-based industries. The returning 1.2 million servicemen needed work and homes. The government helped demobbed servicemen with the G.I. Bill of Rights. Its primary intent was to ease soldiers back into civilian life; but it was also concerned to protect the economy from a sudden influx of workers at the same time as defence contracts were ending. It was, in effect, indirect federal interference to keep the economy buoyant. So soldiers were able to get unemployment pay for a year and given preferential treatment for some jobs. The newly-created Veterans Administration ran hospitals for servicemen. Two of the most important aids were those of subsidies for college or training, and loans for house purchases. By 1949, veterans made up 40 per cent of college students, directly contributing to a better-educated national workforce.

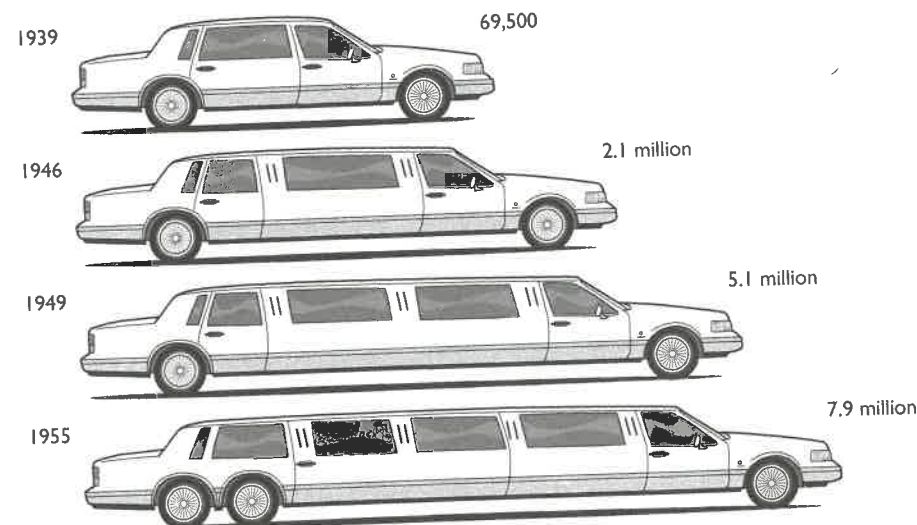
At 9.00 p.m. on the evening of the 1952 presidential election a prediction was made about the likely winner. Only seven per cent of the votes had been counted and people were still voting on the west coast. The prediction was that Eisenhower would win 438 electoral college votes. CBS-TV, who were paying for the prediction, thought that it was too generous to be true and in their programme gave Eisenhower a narrower margin of victory. Eisenhower won with 442 electoral votes - only four off the original prediction. This accurate prediction was made not by a person, but by UNIVAC - the first commercial computer system. The war had accelerated technological advances, including that of computing, medicine and communications.

## Why was the baby boom important?

Many changes followed in response to the 'baby boom', the term used to describe the rapid increase in the birth rate after 1945. Houses and cars were two of the essentials needed as a result. House construction was expanded because of the G.I. Bill loans, and the Federal Housing Administration, which gave home loans for 90 per cent of a mortgage and a low interest rate of four per cent. Rather than build in overcrowded urban centres, house builders bought up farm land around cities and built massive suburbs.



Levittown (see Source 11.2) was one of the massive suburbs which set a model for imitation. There were homes for 80,000 families. Each building plot was a standard size (1.5m x 2.5m), as was the plan and appearance of the houses. The two-bedroom Cape Cod design was much favoured, costing \$7900, with all the rooms on the ground floor, plus an attic space. They had central heating, built-in bookcases and often a washing machine and fridge. Gradually amenities were added - village greens, playgrounds, bowling alleys, as well as schools and churches. Magazines offered advice to the suburban housewife about her role, 'For the sake of every member of the family, the family needs a head. That means Father, not Mother', and, 'Let's face it girls. That wonderful guy in your house - and in mine - is building your house, your happiness and the opportunities that will come to your children'.



SOURCE 11.3 Car sales figures, 1939-55

Car sales were another indicator of America's increasing wealth and they were nearly all American made; by General Motors, Ford, Chrysler. They needed petrol (or 'gas' in the USA) and highways. In 1919 Eisenhower, then a young army officer, took 62 days to travel 3000 miles across the USA. In 1945 he crossed Germany and was immensely impressed with Hitler's *autobahns* - the world's first motorways, without traffic lights or crossroads. As president, ten years later, he encouraged the passing of the Interstate Highway Act, which provided \$26 billion for the construction of a nationally-integrated system. The initial justification was to provide a civilian evacuation route in case of a nuclear attack, but, at the time, it became the biggest ever public works programme. Not only did it support the automobile culture, but it also had political importance. It reflected a new style of Republican government, which accepted a more extensive role for federal intervention; to protect the economy, and to maintain the social welfare changes of Roosevelt and Truman.

SOURCE 11.4 The Israeli journalist Hanoch Bartov lived in Los Angeles in the early 1960s and discovered how essential a car was (from O. and L. Handlin (eds.), *From the Outer World*, 1997, pp.293-96)

... in California, death was preferable to living without one ... The nearest supermarket was about half a kilometre south of our apartment, the regional primary school two kilometres east, and my son's kindergarten even farther away. A trip to the post office - an undertaking, to the bank - an ordeal, to work - an impossibility.

There was no public transport except hourly buses:

... gathering all the wretched of the earth, the poor and the needy, old ladies forbidden by their grandchildren to drive ... Because everyone has a car. A man invited me to his house, saying, 'We are neighbors, within ten minutes of each other'. After walking for an hour and a half I realized what he meant - 'ten minute drive within the speed limit'.



**SOURCE 11.5** Ray Kroc, the man who spread the golden arches around the world

And Bartov predicted the future:

*Because greater distances mean more commuting, and more commuting leads to more cars. More cars mean problems that push people even further away from the city, which chases after them.*

The rising birth rate created many other markets too. People needed more food, clothes, somewhere to sleep, things to play with. The sale of cans of baby food increased from 270 million in 1940 to 1.5 billion by 1955, and the sale of toys increased from \$84 million to \$1.25 billion over the same period.

Entrepreneurs made and sold bicycles (sales doubled), cowboy fancy dress costumes, space science toys, and produced giant, economy and super-economy packs of nappies for families to buy in their supermarkets. Babies became both consumers, and a source of new markets.

### How did consumerism change America?

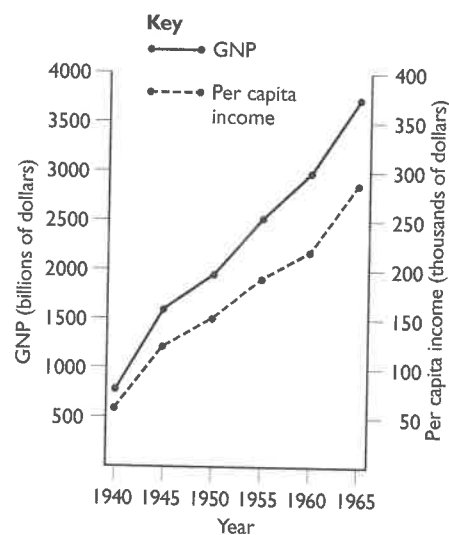
In October 1956 in Edina, Minnesota you could have had a unique shopping experience. Orchids, azaleas and magnolia bloomed and canaries greeted you as you walked in an air-conditioned space basking in 72°F. Welcome to the first indoor, climate-controlled, suburban, shopping mall. Victor Gruen, its originator, had experimented with similar ideas, but this was the first which defied the extremes of Midwest weather, and encouraged Americans to combine the pleasures of the car and shopping. It did, however, threaten the profitability of city centre shopping. Ironically, ten years later, Gruen was hired to revive the unprofitable city centre of Fort Worth in Texas.

The development of television also linked Americans into a homogeneity of experience, through entertainment. By 1950, 7 million sets had been sold and by 1956 there were 442 TV stations, though most were local ones. Advertising was their only source of revenue (unlike the British BBC system), and advertisers began to strongly influence the type of programmes shown. Mass audiences were more likely for quiz shows and comedies than for plays and discussions. The sense of general well-being raised expectations and gave pride, as well as a determination not to lose what had been gained.

If you could drive to work, to shop, to take the children to school, then you could also drive to eat. America's favourite hamburger should have been known as Kroc's - but it is known as McDonald's. Californian brothers Richard and Maurice McDonald set up a drive-in service in San Bernardino with a limited menu of inexpensive hamburgers, available at the sign of the golden arches. In 1954 Ray Kroc, a milkshake-machine salesman, saw how popular the business was and set up a deal with the brothers whereby he would franchise their idea. By 1961, there were 228 outlets. When Kroc died, in 1984, there were 7500 across the world. Again, cars, a family to feed and conformity meant profits for entrepreneurs.

Population increase and America's economic strength created a consumer society. Suburbs provided an environment of prosperity and fertility. Religious attendance soared in post-war America, providing spiritual comfort, but more importantly, community strength. It was another example of a godly America versus the atheistic Soviet Union, as was Congress' decision to put 'In God We Trust' on American coinage in 1955. The Cold War was not just a test of competing military strengths. It was a test of the freedom to be able to make money and spend it without government interference. In 1950s America the concept of 'freedom' stood for everything that the Soviet Union wasn't. In the USA you could buy what you wanted, live where you wanted, travel where you wanted, work where you wanted. You were not controlled by the state as people were in the Soviet Union. Suburbia was the ideal of private space, of personal mobility and ambition, and of the value of community for personal benefits, not those dictated by the state. Affluence and abundance were America's freedom. So, if you criticised affluence and its acquisition, you were criticising the system that made the USA unique.

However, there were critics of the changes to American life. Right-wing critics saw mass culture as encouraging sexual liberation, especially among the



**SOURCE 11.6** GNP per capita income, 1940-65



**SOURCE 11.7** The picture of abundance! The ideal American family of Du Pont (a chemicals manufacturing firm) worker Steve Czekalinski with a year's supply of food, in 1951. It would have cost about \$1300. Notice the amount of fresh food - a fridge would have been essential. You can easily imagine that no one with the ability to buy and enjoy this abundance would be willing to lose it

young, an increase in juvenile delinquency, and similar changes as the baby boomers reached adolescence. Left-wing critics disliked the conformity of modern mass culture so visible in television and the excesses of the consumer society. Cultural critics had three main targets - suburbia, the 'yes-man' and the housewife.

### Suburbia

Critics argued that the uniform pattern of US housing helped to create a conformist neighbourhood. John Keats in *The Crack in the Picture Window*, 1956, described such suburbs as 'conceived in error, nurtured in greed, corroding everything they touch'. He saw their inhabitants living monotonous, mediocre lives, always fearing financial insecurity because of the experiences of the Depression. Routines of travel and work demanded an ability to cope with monotony for the sake of security. Other critics asserted that suburbs emphasised the nuclear family of parents with two or three children, at the expense of different types of households, such as extended families. One group deliberately excluded were black Americans. 'Chocolate cities and vanilla suburbs' was one description of this new division. Most white Americans wanted people like themselves as next door neighbours.

### The 'yes-man'

Critics argued that the corporate businesses that dominated the economy did not want individuals, but team workers willing to agree to the management's demands without asserting their opinion. David Reisman in *The Lonely Crowd*, 1950, argued that the American personality had been changed by affluence. Individualism was no longer required in an industrial capitalist system. Being liked and being able to influence others were more important. From being 'inner-directed', with a set of fixed values based on inherited traditions and Protestant ethics of work and thrift, workers had become 'other-directed'. What had happened to the idea of the solitary cowboy taking on the baddies single-handed? It may have ceased to be a reality in urban America, but it remained a popular myth and provided a staple theme for television and movie entertainment.

**SOURCE 11.8** *Little Boxes*, by Malvina Reynolds, 1962. This was a popular song at the time, critical of the sameness of suburbia

*Little boxes on the hillside, little boxes  
made of ticky tacky,  
Little boxes on the hillside, little boxes  
all the same.  
There's a green one and a pink one  
and a blue one and a yellow one,  
And they're all made out of ticky tacky  
and they all look just the same.*

**The suburban housewife**

The popular image was of a housewife available to meet the needs of husband and children, with an immaculate home and home-made cookies prepared in anticipation of receiving visitors. It denied that education and skills had any social worth for women. It was, in fact, a time when the number of women in the workforce increased; the demands of urban living often needed two incomes. The jobs tended to be limited – clerical or service related – and rates of pay differed between men and women for the same job. Some critics were already beginning to air the ideas that would be taken up by the feminist movement in the 1960s.

**SOURCE 11.9** Edith M. Stern, 'Women are Household Slaves', in M. Johnson, *Reading the American Past*, Vol. II, 2nd edn, 2002, pp.190-93

*A nauseating amount of bilge is constantly being spilled all over the public press about the easy, pampered existence of the American woman. Actually, the run of the mill, not gainfully employed female who is blessed with a husband and from two to four children lead a kind of life that theoretically became passé with the Emancipation Proclamation... Its hours – at least fourteen hours a day, seven days a week – make the well-known sun-up to sundown toil of sharecroppers appear, in comparison, like a union standard... But just as slaves were in the service of individual masters, not of the community or state or nation in general, so are housewives bound to the service of individual families... It is neither freedom nor democracy when such service is based on color or sex.*

*As long as the institution of housewifery in its present form persists, both ideologically and practically it blocks any true liberation of women. The vote, the opportunity for economic independence, and the right to smoke cigarettes are all equally superficial veneers over a deep-rooted, ages-old concept of keeping woman in her place. Unfortunately, however, housewives not only are unorganised, but also, doubtless because of the very nature of their brain-dribbling, spirit-stifling vacation, conservative. There is therefore little prospect of the Housewives' Rebellion.*

**SOURCE 11.10** 'The Baby Boom and the Age of Subdivision' by K. Crabgrass, in F. Binder and D. Reimers, *The Way We Live Now*, Vol. II, 4th edn, 2000, p.227

*The young families who joyously moved into the new homes of the suburbs were not terribly concerned about the problems of the inner-city housing market or the snobbish views of... social critics. They were concerned about their hopes and their dreams. They were looking for good schools, private space, and personal safety, and places like Levittown could provide those amenities on a scale and at a price that crowded city neighbourhoods, both in the Old World and in the New, could not match. The single-family tract house – post World War II style – whatever its aesthetic failings, offered growing families a private haven in a heartless world.*

**DISCUSS**

- 1 What can you learn about 1950s America from the kinds of culture described here and shown on p.217?
- 2 Which of the two cultures provides the more accurate portrayal of America in the fifties?
- 3 Do you think that such music, film and TV programmes really provide evidence for historians?

**ACTIVITY****How to live in the nostalgic 1950s**

Listen to Perry Como, Pat Boone and Rosemary Clooney.  
Watch films starring Doris Day and John Wayne, Westerns like *High Noon* and romantic adventures like *South Pacific* and *The African Queen*.  
Watch television shows like *I Love Lucy*.

**How to live in the rebellious 1950s**

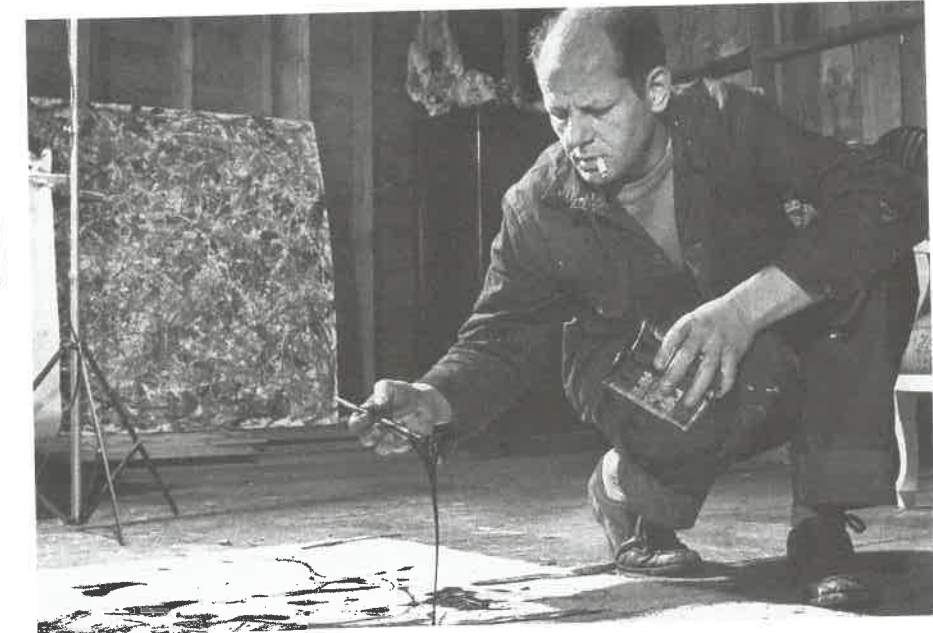
Look at the work of painters such as Jackson Pollock, who rejected the conventional representation of objects and used new techniques.  
Read writers such as Jack Kerouac, in *On the Road*, and poets such as Allen Ginsberg, who acted out in their lives the free-wheeling, casual style of their writing. Groups known as Beats or Beatniks became their followers.  
Watch film stars such as James Dean, in *Rebel without a Cause*, and Marlon Brando in *On the Waterfront*, both moody and physical in their appeal. Marilyn Monroe, in *Seven Year Itch* and *Some Like It Hot*, presented a challenge to the respectable all-American apple-pie ideal woman of Doris Day's films.  
Listen to the beginning of rock n' roll as the baby boomers became teenagers.

**DISCUSS**

Do you think that Section A demonstrates that Americans in the late forties and fifties were living 'happily ever after'?



**SOURCE 11.12** Marilyn Monroe was blonde, brash and the pin-up of millions



**SOURCE 11.13** Jackson Pollock, one of the 'abstract expressionists' at work on an 'action painting'



**SOURCE 11.14** Elvis Presley performing in front of an ecstatic crowd of teenage girls in 1956. It was not only the music – a mix of blues, folk and gospel – that made an impact, but also the tight trousers, slicked-back hair and the way he moved as he sang *Jailhouse Rock* and *Blue Suede Shoes*. No white singer had so blatantly used sex appeal as part of his act, and to such a young audience. His borrowing from black music traditions had the result of making them, and black singers such as Chuck Berry and Little Richard, popular too

## MAIN POINTS

Look back to your answers to the Activity on page 212. You may have considered such changes as:

- the cost of goods and who could, and would, want to buy them
- changes in eating habits
- house building in the suburbs and new areas of the USA such as the Sun Belt of the south-east (delightful in winter, but unbearable in summer without air conditioning)
- personal mobility for work and leisure
- the beginning of computers that no longer needed large rooms in which to house them.

It becomes difficult to untangle the usefulness of products, as they become commonplace, from their effects on lifestyles and expectations. As new goods and ways of organising your life become widespread, so they become embedded in normal lifestyles. They cease to be expectations, but become instead the accepted normalities of life.

1. Would Americans want to go back to the 'old days'?
2. Could you and your family live without television or computers or fast motorway routes?

## B Did abundance improve life for Afro-Americans?

### Did winning the war help the cause of civil rights?

Black American soldiers had fought (albeit in segregated units), for freedom from fascism and dictatorships. The experience had roused their desire to renew the fight for their freedom, which continued to be especially constrained in the South. Yet white resistance to black equality, especially in the South, continued. Sometimes it was brutal with instances of shootings and beatings, sometimes it was intimidatory, sometimes it was more subtle with the refusal of credit or the loss of jobs if black voters registered. Truman realised the implications - how could the USA, which claimed to fight for democratic global freedom, also blatantly deprive some of its citizens of their basic democratic freedom to vote, as happened in many Southern states? He set up the Committee of Civil Rights, whose report, *To Secure These Rights*, published in 1947, exposed inequality across the nation for black citizens. Truman related the problems to the post-war world that was rapidly becoming a Cold War world.

**SOURCE 11.15** From the report of the President's Committee on Civil Rights, *To Secure These Rights*, 1947

*Twice before in American history the nation has found it necessary to review the state of its civil rights ... It is our profound conviction that we have come to a time for a third re-examination of the situation, and a sustained drive ahead. Our reason for believing this are those of conscience, of self-interest, and of survival in a threatening world. Or to put it in another way, we have a moral reason, an economic reason, and an international reason for believing that the time for action is now ... Our foreign policy is designed to make the United States an enormous positive influence for peace and prosperity throughout the world ... But our domestic civil rights shortcomings are a serious obstacle ... The United States is not so strong, the final triumph of the democratic ideal is not so inevitable that we can ignore what the world thinks of us or our record.*

A programme of reforms was devised. The president ordered the integration of the military, which became effective during the Korean War. However, the momentum was not maintained and, after 1952, Eisenhower preferred to rely on gradual change rather than federal initiatives or laws.

## FOCUS ROUTE

Make notes on the following questions.

1. In what ways did civil rights improve for Afro-Americans after the Second World War?
2. How were Afro-Americans denied their civil rights in the post-war world?
3. How were black Americans fighting for their rights by 1960?
4. What progress had been made towards equal rights by 1960?

## How could black Americans protest?



## ACTIVITY

- Study, and solve, Puzzles One, Two, Three and Four, below.
1. What do they tell you about the practical impact of discrimination?
  2. What do they tell you about the emotional impact of discrimination?

## Puzzle One

Why did a British newspaper in 2003 devote a half-page report to the death of an elderly black woman living in Chicago?

**SOURCE 11.16** Newspaper report of the death of Mamie Till Mobley, mother of Emmett Till, from the *Guardian*, 23 January 2003

And so it was that about 10,000 Chicagoans attended services, jammed the airwaves and trooped past the open coffin of Mamie Till Mobley this weekend.

Mamie sent her 14-year-old son Emmett Till to Mississippi in August 1955 with a strict warning: "If you have to get on your knees and bow when a white person goes past, do it willingly." But Emmett was a prankster and unaccustomed to the racial mores of the South. He wolf whistled at a woman in a grocery, then said "Bye, baby" in the hamlet of Money Mississippi.

Less than a week later his body was pulled out of the Tallahatchie river with a bullet in the skull, an eye gouged out and the forehead crushed on one side.

[Mamie's] decision to leave the coffin open and delay the funeral by three days exposed the rest of America and the world to what was happening in Mississippi.

Coming a year after the supreme court outlawed school segregation and less than a month before Martin Luther King rose to prominence during the Montgomery bus boycott prompted by Rosa Parks, it galvanised public outrage.

"If you were indifferent, the Till murder at 14 made you interested," the black paper the *Chicago Defender* wrote recently. "If you were a routine onlooker, the murder turned you into a revolutionary; if you were moderate, the murder turned you militant."

**Puzzle Two**  
Why did Anne Moody hate both whites and blacks?

**SOURCE 11.17** From Anne Moody, *Coming of Age in Mississippi*, 1968 in C. Carson (ed.), *Eyes on the Prize*, 1991, p.43

*I was fifteen when I began to hate people. I hated the white men who murdered Emmett Till and I hated all the other whites who were responsible for the countless murders Mrs Rice [my homeroom teacher] had told me about and those I vaguely remembered from my childhood. But I also hated Negroes. I hated them for not standing up and doing something about the murders. In fact, I think I had stronger resentment toward Negroes for letting the whites kill them than toward the whites.*

**Puzzle Three**

What was the cost for a Southern black American in challenging the system?

**Puzzle Four**

What has this poem got to do with civil rights?

J. A. DeLaine was a black church minister in South Carolina in the 1950s. He supported the NAACP, admired the courage of the activists like lawyer Thurgood Marshall, and actively tried, like him, to improve black children's education in his state. The way he was treated is described in Source 11.18.

**SOURCE 11.18** R. Kluger, *Simple Justice*, 1975, p.1

*They fired him from the school at which he had taught devotedly for ten years. And they fired his wife and two of his sisters and a niece. And they threatened him with bodily harm. And they sued him on trumped up charges and convicted him in a kangaroo court and left him with a judgement that denied him credit from any bank. And they burned his house to the ground while the fire department stood around watching the flames consume the night. And they stoned the church at which he pastored. And fired shotguns at him out of the dark ... all of this ... because he was black and brave. And because others had followed when he had decided the time had come to lead.*

**SOURCE 11.19** Langston Hughes, 'Harlem', 1951

*What happens to a dream deferred?  
Does it dry up  
Like a raisin in the sun?  
Or fester like a sore -  
And then run?  
Does it stink like rotten meat?  
Or crust and sugar over -  
like a syrupy sweet?  
Maybe it just sags  
like a heavy load.  
Or does it explode?*

During the 1950s there were two major ways of challenging discrimination:

- by legal action against education restrictions, e.g. the Supreme Court decision in *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas* and desegregation at Little Rock, Alabama
- by community action, e.g. the Montgomery bus boycott.

**a) The Supreme Court decisions**

The NAACP had pursued education rights for black citizens since the 1930s. Having challenged and won equal treatment in law for university students, in the 1950s they turned to school desegregation. The case *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas* combined several cases of school segregation in the South, including the one that pastor DeLaine had been fighting. In 1896 the Supreme Court had ruled in the case *Plessy v. Ferguson*, which had permitted states to provide 'separate but equal' facilities, including for education. The resulting 'separate' facilities were rarely 'equal' for black people.

In May 1954, guided by the new Chief Justice Earl Warren, the Supreme Court overturned that ruling, stating, 'To separate Negro children ... solely because of their race generates a feeling of inferiority as to their status in the community that may affect their hearts and minds in ways unlikely ever to be undone ... We conclude that in the field of public education the doctrine of 'separate but equal' has no place. Separate educational facilities are inherently unequal.'

The decision was unequivocal. It also set the precedent for the desegregation of parks, beaches, public housing and transport. However, implementing the decision was often deliberately delayed, and Southern Congressmen protested at 'an abuse of judicial power'. The attempt by nine black students to enrol at the all-white Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas, in 1957, created a crisis that brought the army onto the streets. The Governor, Orval Faubus, used state troops to bar their entry. In the face of this defiance of a court order, Eisenhower was forced, much against his wishes, to order federal troops to the town to protect the students.

**Learning trouble spot****What to call non-white Americans?**

The poet Langston Hughes encountered this problem. He was not black - his father had Jewish and Scottish blood, and was dark brown, whilst his mother had olive skin. He was not, therefore, by strict definition a Negro - someone with no trace of 'white' blood. He describes himself as brown or coloured. The ancestors of black Americans were descended from slaves brought from Africa. You probably know the story of eighteenth-century slave-trading. Slaves were 'black'. Although there were other Americans, like Hughes, who were neither 'white' nor 'black', they were treated as non-whites and it became accepted to use the description of 'black' as a form of shorthand. The term 'Negro' was still acceptable in the 1960s, but was later replaced by 'black' or 'Afro-American'. The term 'nigger' has always been offensive.

**SOURCE 11.20** '2-4-6-8, we ain't gonna integrate'. One of the taunts at Elizabeth Eckford as she and eight other black students tried to enrol at Little Rock's Central High School, Arkansas on 9 September 1957. Eight of the students completed their course, but troops remained there for a year; the first federal troops used, since Reconstruction, to protect the rights of blacks



Education officials in other states opposed to desegregation found more devious ways of avoiding true integration, making a mockery of court decisions and diminishing the importance of the law. The conflict did lead to the Civil Rights Act of 1957, the first such legislation since Reconstruction. It set up a Commission on Civil Rights, but had little practical impact on discrimination.

**b) The Montgomery bus boycott**

Tired after a long day at work, Rosa Parks took a seat on her usual bus home in Montgomery. When the bus filled, the driver demanded, as was the practice, that black passengers give up their seat to standing white passengers. Rosa Parks refused. The driver insisted. Rosa Parks refused again. So the driver called the police, she was removed from the bus and arrested. It was December

**SOURCE 11.21** Rosa Parks sitting on a bus in 1956, after the boycott ended



1955. She was an NAACP activist and an ordinary citizen - the ideal person that the NAACP could use to represent the unfairness of discrimination. Over the following weekend, officials organised a massive boycott of the bus system by 50,000 black supporters in the city. They walked to work or formed car pools. The bus boycott lasted for 381 days. At the end of that long year the buses were totally desegregated as a result of court orders. The boycott had illustrated that:

- The black community were willing to forego personal comfort to assert their rights.
- Mass action could be effective, and white intolerance could be successfully challenged. As one elderly lady is reputed to have said to a reporter offering her a lift as she walked home, 'No, my feet is tired, but my soul is rested'.

**ACTIVITY**

- 1 What problems can King foresee might challenge black bus travellers (Source 11.22)?
- 2 What principles of behaviour are being demanded?

**LEARNING POINT!**

What is the difference between desegregation and integration?

**SOURCE 11.22** An extract from Martin Luther King Jr.'s advice to black Montgomery citizens returning to travelling on buses after the boycott (from M. L. King, Jr. *Stride Toward Freedom: The Montgomery Story*, 1958). King was already establishing himself as a leader in the civil rights movement

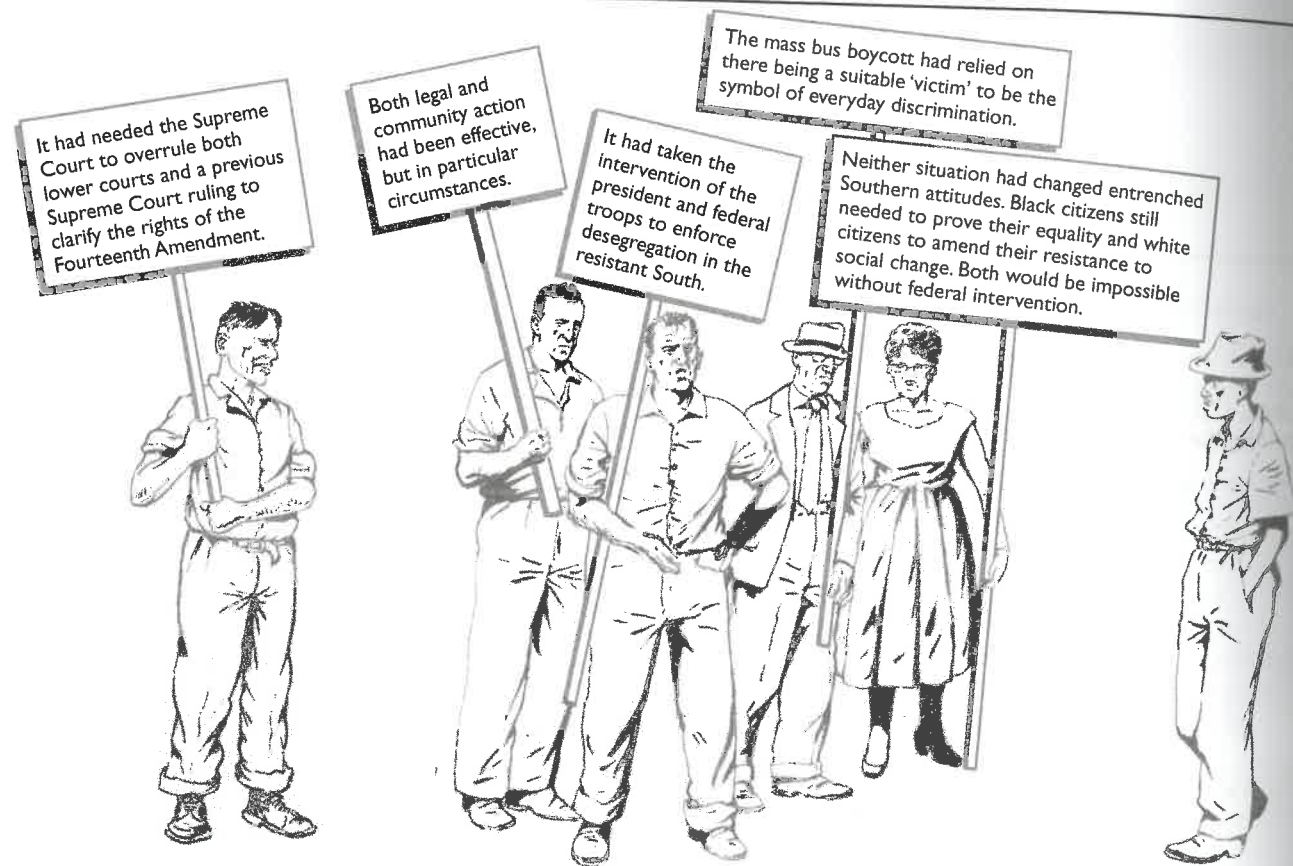
- 1 Not all white people are opposed to integrated buses ...
- 2 The whole bus is now for the use of all people. Take a vacant seat.
- 3 Pray for guidance and commit yourself to complete non-violence in word and action as you enter the bus.
- 4 ... In all things observe ordinary rules of courtesy and good behaviour.
- 5 Remember that this is not a victory for Negroes alone, but for all Montgomery and the South. Do not boast! Do not brag!
- 6 Be quiet but friendly; proud but not arrogant; joyous, but not boisterous.

And specifically, on the bus:

*If cursed, do not curse back. If pushed, do not push back. If struck do not strike back, but evidence love and goodwill at all times.*

King was disappointed that his fellow white church leaders did not offer guidance to their community about appropriate ways to behave. Most of them claimed that they did not dare get involved in such a controversial issue.

**■ IIC Were the protests of the 1950s effective?**



Did black Americans have equality of rights by 1960? Federal intervention in education was important. Grassroots protest by ordinary black citizens was important. But in practical and legally enforced terms black Americans, especially Southern blacks, still did not have equality of rights by 1960. But the stakes had been raised, so that the new administration, after the election of 1960, would find it harder to ignore demands, and harder to stall on effective action. The movement that had started in Montgomery had a momentum that would be difficult to stop. It had raised black pride, demonstrated that peaceful mass action was possible and effective, and, so importantly, had produced an eloquent leader.

**SOURCE 11.23** Martin Luther King Jr. addressing a crowd in Montgomery during the bus boycott. Martin Luther King Jr. addressed a crowd of 5000 predominantly black Montgomery citizens at Holt Street Baptist Church, on the first night of the boycott, setting the tone for the civil rights fight for the next ten years



**SOURCE 11.24** Martin Luther King, 5 December 1955 (quoted in C. Carson, *Eyes on the Prize*, 1991, pp.49-50)

*There comes a time when people get tired of being pushed out of the glittering sunlight of life's July and left standing amidst the piercing chill of an Alpine November ... we are not here advocating violence ... we are Christian people ... The only weapon that we have in our hands this evening is the weapon of protest ... And if we are united, we can get many of the things that we not only desire but which we justly deserve ... We are not afraid of what we are doing, because we are doing it within the law ... We, the disinherited of this land, we who have been oppressed so long are tired of going through the long night of captivity. And we are reaching out for the daybreak of freedom and justice and equality ... when the history books are written in the future, somebody will have to say 'There lived a race of people, black people, ... who had the moral courage to stand up for their rights ... they injected a new meaning into the veins of history and of civilization.'*

**C How did Americans cope with the threat of Armageddon?**

**FOCUS ROUTE**

- 1 How did Americans deal with the threat of nuclear war in a practical way?
- 2 What effects did this perceived threat to the American way of life have on society?

The detonation of atomic bombs above Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945 had brought a new weapon of awesome power to the world. Atomic bombs killed in two ways:

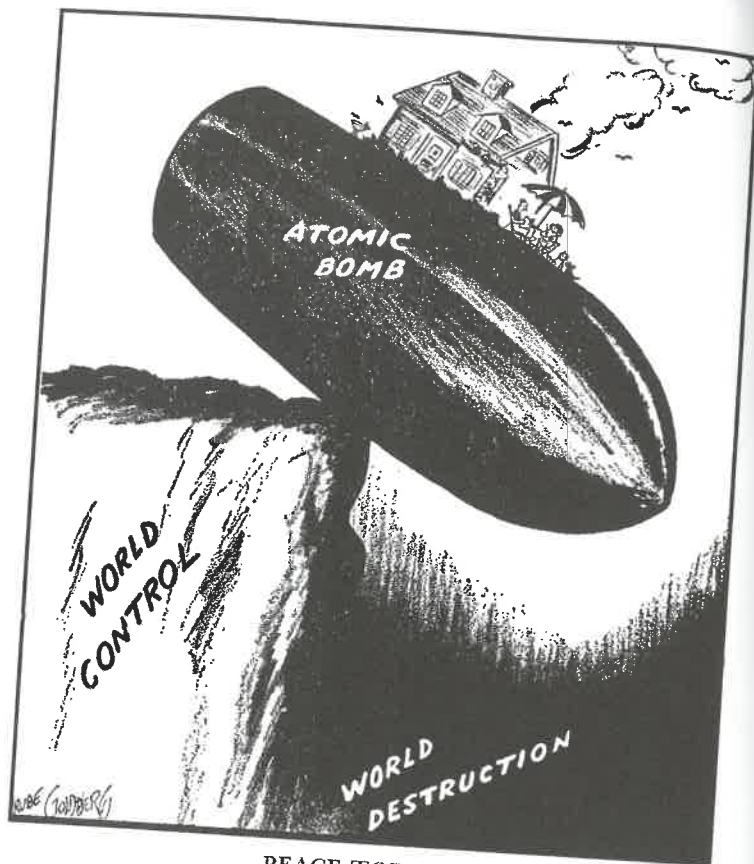
- the sheer magnitude of the blast and subsequent fire-storm
- nuclear fallout resulting in radiation sickness.

**ARMAGEDDON**

The scene of supreme conflict between nations, as portrayed in the Book of Revelation in the Bible.

## ACTIVITY

- 1 What image of American family life is presented in Source 11.25?
- 2 Who or what could offer 'World Control'?
- 3 What was 'World Destruction'?



PEACE TODAY

When the Soviet Union tested its own A-bomb in 1949, it was clear that an arms race was underway (see p.189). The USA tested its first hydrogen bomb (H-bomb) on the Pacific atoll of Eniwetok, in 1952, causing the island to completely disappear, leaving a hole 1.6km long and 53m deep. Its fireball was 8km high (nearly the height of Everest) and its mushroom cloud was 40km tall and 1931km wide. When the Soviets exploded their own bomb only nine months later, it raised suspicions of spying and fears of superior Soviet scientific knowledge.

Although a Soviet attack was very unlikely, it did not stop preparations for civil defence. Protection against a fire-storm was impossible, so attention focused on fallout shelters to protect from radiation poisoning. Homes and public buildings had shelters, and children regularly practised 'duck and cover' drills in schools. The effects of the fallout were little understood.

**SOURCE 11.26** 'We wanted to help out what little we could'. Living in Utah, downwind of the Nevada test site (where 126 atomic bombs were tested in the atmosphere between 1951 and 1963) Isaac Nelson wanted to demonstrate his patriotism by watching the first one (quoted in C. Gallagher, *American Ground Zero*, 1993, pp.133-35)

... we were chattering like chipmunks, so excited! Pretty soon, why the whole sky just flared up in an orange-red flash, and it was so brilliant that you could easily see the trees ten miles across the valley ... Later on in the day, you'd see these fallout clouds drifting down ... it was definitely different from any rain cloud, kind of pinkish-tan color ... everyone would go out and ooh and aah just like a bunch of hicks. We was never warned that there was any danger involved in going out and being under these fallout clouds all the time I lived here ...

After a similar explosion in 1955 which Isaac's wife watched, her skin turned dark red and she became ill with headaches, nausea and diarrhoea. Within a month her hair started to fall out and she later developed a brain tumour. She never recovered from the effects of radiation poisoning and died in 1965 aged 41.

## ACTIVITY

Study Sources 11.27 and 11.29. What do these sources suggest about how much Americans knew about the realities of nuclear weapons?

**SOURCE 11.28** From the song *We Will Go Together When We Go* (from the album *An Evening Wasted With Tom Lehrer*), issued in 1959

And we will all go together when we go.  
That a comforting fact that is to know.

Universal bereavement,  
An inspiring achievement,  
Yes, we will all go together when we go.

We will all go together when we go.  
All suffused with an incandescent glow.

No one will have the endurance  
To collect on his insurance,  
Lloyd's of London will be loaded when they go.

And we will all bake together when we bake.

There'll be nobody present at the wake.  
With complete participation  
In that grand incineration,  
Nearly three billion hunks of well-done steak.

## DISCUSS

How were prosperity and daily comfort linked to the level of anxiety?

## Survival Secrets for Atomic Attacks

## ALWAYS PUT FIRST THINGS FIRST

## Try to Get Shielded



If you have time, get down in a basement or subway. Should you unexpectedly be caught out-of-doors, seek shelter alongside a building, or jump in any handy ditch or gutter.

## Drop Flat on Ground or Floor



To keep from being tossed about and to lessen the chances of being struck by falling and flying objects, flatten out at the base of a wall, or at the bottom of a bank.

## Bury Your Face in Your Arms



When you drop flat, hide your eyes in the crook of your elbow. That will protect your face from flash burns, prevent temporary blindness and keep flying objects out of your eyes.

## NEVER LOSE YOUR HEAD

**SOURCE 11.27** *How to Respond to a Nuclear Attack*, 1950, published by the Civil Defense Agency

**SOURCE 11.29** Louis Severance's fallout shelter, in Michigan in 1960, for a family of four. It cost him \$1000 to build and had a 25cm reinforced concrete ceiling



Not everyone took the threats seriously. At the end of the fifties the satirist Tom Lehrer wrote songs that were both cynical and critical. They were not popular entertainment, but spread via universities and small clubs to a wider audience. His 'survival hymn' (Source 11.28) was his response to the nuclear threat (think of the tune *She'll be coming round the mountain when she comes*).



**FOCUS ROUTE**

As you work through Section D make notes to answer the following questions.

- 1 How was the second Red Scare created and maintained?
- 2 Which aspects of American society were damaged?
- 3 Was there long-term damage to American ideals?

## D How did the second Red Scare damage the USA?


### What was the Red Scare?

Anti-communist and anti-radical feelings were not new in the USA. There had been the Red Scare of 1919-20 as the First World War ended and fear grew of the global spread of the Russian Revolution (see page 73). After 1945 there was still fear of a Soviet worldwide conspiracy and so, just as the military containment policy was devised against Soviet land expansion, it was believed that communist attempts to spread its influence amongst Americans had to be contained. The result was a hunt for spies and traitors, which was taken to extremes with the witch hunt tactics of Senator Joseph McCarthy, aided by the House Committee on Un-American Activities (HUAC).

As the Cold War developed it was inevitable that tensions were felt in the USA. National security became linked to loyalty, which in turn became linked to demonstrative anti-communism. These became useful tools in political arguments. Unlike Britain, the USA had not had a national, politically neutral administration in the Second World War - Democrats had dominated government since 1933. They included those with left-wing views and, during the war, the government had allied with the USSR. This made it possible for Republicans to make accusations of political bias against those who had worked with the Soviet Union, even though it was part of their war-time job.

As the tensions increased over Berlin in 1947, and Korea in 1950, Truman had to struggle to prove that he could be an eagle abroad and a liberal at home. His opponents were very willing to interpret his desire to continue the liberal social welfare policies of Roosevelt as un-American and suspiciously left-wing. Truman's Fair Deal plan of 1949 included increasing the minimum wage, broadening social security and federal aid to education. He did get some improvements in the latter two, but progress was slow because of political opposition.

### IID How did the Red Scare develop?

1930s	1940s	1950s
<p>1937 House Committee on Un-American Activities (HUAC) set up to look at allegations of fascist or communist influences in trade unions and agencies of the New Deal.</p> 	<p>1940 The Smith Act or Alien Registration Act. It was now illegal for anyone to aid, teach or advocate the overthrow of the government. All alien residents had to register their political beliefs.</p> <p>1947 The Federal Employee Loyalty Program was set up by executive order. Of the 6 million government employees who were checked, 14,000 had further FBI checks and 2000 were dismissed. The government's actions made other organisations - universities, churches, political groups and local governments - start their own investigations to root out communists.</p> <p>HUAC hearings on communist infiltration of Hollywood - those interviewed had to tell of their own political views and those of their friends. If they refused, as the Hollywood Ten and actresses such as Lillian Hellmann did, they could be held in contempt of Congress and jailed. An unofficial 'blacklist' was created and those named were refused work in the entertainment industry for as long as ten years.</p>	<p>1950 The McCarran Internal Security Act - this required members of communist organisations to register with the government and it prohibited their employment and travel.</p> <p>Arrest of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg for conspiracy to commit espionage by recruiting a spy in the wartime Manhattan Project at Los Alamos.</p> <p>The Korean War appeared to prove that fears of the Soviet Union's expansionist policy were real.</p> <p>Senator McCarthy's list - this list comprised 205 state department officials who McCarthy claimed were communists. The names were never revealed and the number was reduced to 57 when he made a speech about it in Congress. It was enough, however, to start a four-year period of virulent anti-communist accusations.</p> <p>Alger Hiss - a former state department official, was found guilty of perjury after two years of investigations by Nixon, the HUAC, and McCarthy, found that he had passed classified documents to a communist.</p>

**ACTIVITY**

Why does Lillian Hellman (Source 11.30) object to the requests of the HUAC?

**ACTIVITY**

What is the meaning, and the reality of:  
 a) blacklisting  
 b) guilt by association?

**SOURCE 11.30** Congressional record of the House Committee on Un-American Activities, *Hearings Regarding Communist Infiltration of the Hollywood Motion-Picture Industry*, 82nd Congress, 21 May 1952

*But there is one principle that I do understand: I am not willing, now or in the future, to bring bad trouble to people who, in my past association with them, were completely innocent of any talk or any action that was disloyal or subversive. I do not like subversion or disloyalty in any form and if I had ever seen any I would have considered it my duty to have reported it to the proper authorities. But to hurt innocent people whom I knew many years ago in order to save myself is, to me, inhuman and indecent and dishonorable. I cannot and will not cut my conscience to fit this year's fashions, even though I long ago came to the conclusion that I was not a political person and could have no comfortable place in any political group.*

*I was raised in an old-fashioned American tradition and there were certain homely things that were taught to me: to try to tell the truth, not to bear false witness, not to harm my neighbour, to be loyal to my country, and so on ...*

*I am prepared to waive the privilege against self-incrimination and to tell you anything you wish to know about my views or actions if your Committee will agree to refrain from asking me to name other people. If the Committee is unwilling to give me this assurance, I will be forced to plead the privilege of the Fifth Amendment at the hearing.*

### Why were the HUAC and Senator McCarthy so powerful?

This is the **end** of the story:

- no list of communist subversives in government was published
- not one Soviet spy was uncovered by the HUAC or McCarthy (except possibly for Alger Hiss)
- there were no prosecutions for treason.

So how could one man, with the aid of a Senate committee, persecute and intimidate with exaggerated and unproven evidence, find no valid evidence and yet create the atmosphere of a witch hunt for four years?

**SOURCE 11.31** McCarthy with his inseparable aide, Ray Cohn on the left, and on the right a former FBI agent, Don Surine, who acted as an investigator for him. McCarthy gained the nickname the Redbaiter



**ACTIVITY**

- 1 Using Sources 11.32-11.38 copy and complete this chart identifying other reasons for the extent of McCarthy's power.
- 2 What damage do the writers think he did to America?

**Reasons for the extent of McCarthy's power**

The political climate meant that any accusation or implication of 'being soft' on communism was feared, especially by Democrats.

Congress claimed its right to protect the constitution and the institutions of government.

McCarthy chose easy targets, like those doing jobs involving links with communists such as the China section of the State Department, or those easily linked with left-wing/socialist/radical ideas such as trade unions and civil rights groups.

**SOURCE 11.33** Former President Harry S. Truman in the *New York Times*, 17 November 1953

... McCarthyism ... It is the corruption of truth, the abandonment of the due process of law. It is the use of the big lie and the unfounded accusation against any citizen in the name of Americanism or security. It is the rise to power of the demagogue who lives on untruth; it is the spreading of fear and the destruction of faith in every level of society.

**SOURCE 11.36** M. Norton, et al. (eds.), *A People and a Nation*, 6th edn, 2001, p.796

... both Truman and Eisenhower overreacted to the alleged threat of communist subversion in government. The alarmist rhetoric heightened public anxiety, and their loyalty programs ruined innocent people's lives and careers.

**SOURCE 11.32** E. Schrecker, *The Age of McCarthyism: A Brief History With Documents*, 1995

McCarthy attracted attention precisely because of his outrageousness. He knew how to manipulate the press, taking advantage of its hunger for copy and releasing sensational accusations just in time for the evening deadlines. The blatant disregard for the accuracy of his charges that distinguished him from other politicians made McCarthy notorious and frightening. Liberals loathed him and many moderates found him distasteful as well. The leaders of the Republican party, however, recognised that McCarthy could be of use. His extravagant charges amplified their own allegations that the Truman administration had lost China to the communists ... [McCarthy] had no reservations about whom he targeted, he even implied that General George Marshall, the highly respected Secretary of Defense, had been a traitor. ... McCarthyism's main impact may well have been in what did not happen rather than in what did - the social reforms that were never adopted, the diplomatic initiatives that were not pursued, the workers who were not organized into unions, the books that were not written, and the movies that were not filmed.

**SOURCE 11.34** Actor Lee J. Cobb, who was blacklisted, but who then agreed a deal with the HUAC (from an interview by Victor Navasky)

When the facilities of the government of the United States are drawn on an individual it can be terrifying. The blacklist is just the opening gambit - being deprived of work. Your passport is confiscated. That's minor. But not being able to move without being tailed is something else. After a certain point it grows to implied as well as articulated threats, and people succumb. My wife did, and she was institutionalized [needed care in a mental health hospital]. In 1953 the HUAC did a deal with me. I was pretty much worn down. I had no money. I couldn't borrow any. I had the expenses of taking care of my children. Why am I subjecting my loved ones to this? If it's worth dying for, and I am just as idealistic as the next fellow. But I decided it wasn't worth dying for, and if the gesture was the way of getting out of the penitentiary I'd do it. I had to be employable again.

**SOURCE 11.35** A. MacLeish, *The Conquest of America*, 1949

Never in the history of the world was one people as completely dominated, intellectually and morally, by another as the people of the United States by the people of Russia in the four years from 1946 through 1949 ... all this took place not in a time of national weakness or decay, but precisely at the moment when the United States, having engineered a tremendous triumph and fought its way to a brilliant victory in the greatest of all wars, had reached the highest point of world power ever achieved by a single state.

**SOURCE 11.37** W. Chafe and H. Sitkoff (eds.), *A History of Our Time*, 4th edn, 1999, pp.3-4

... he carried to a new height the hysteria gripping the nation. McCarthy had no such list. Most of his charges were fabrications. He never uncovered a single communist spy. His investigations and exposés did not lead to the successful prosecution of a single person for treasonous or disloyal acts. Yet, the very brashness of his accusations, the abrasiveness of his insinuations, the exaggerated big lie and red smear enabled McCarthy to hold centre stage for four years ...

**SOURCE 11.38** The journalist Walter Lippman in the *Washington Post*, 1 March 1954

McCarthy's influence has grown as the president [Eisenhower] has appeased him. His power will cease to grow and diminish when he is resisted, and it has been shown to our people that those to whom we look for leadership and to preserve our institutions are not afraid of him.

## DISCUSS

Look again at Source 11.35.

- What is the author saying? What does this tell you about the post-war American national character?
- Using your background knowledge why do you think this is such a perceptive assessment of the development of the Cold War?
- Is the USA today being dominated by the idea of terrorism, as it was by communism in the post-Second World War years?

## TALK

In the 1950s it was 'politically correct' to be anti-communist. It was unacceptable if you wanted to work in government, represent or entertain your country to be a communist, regardless of whether or not your political beliefs affected your actions.

- Does 'political correctness' have any value?
- Is 'political correctness' a right- or left-wing phenomenon, or either?
- Is 'political correctness' a hidden way of enforcing behaviour?

**SOURCE 11.39** W. Chafe, *The Unfinished Journey*, 4th edn, 1999, pp.109-10

For American foreign policy the rhetoric of moralism led to rigidity, a loss of flexibility, and the elimination of any possibility of honest debate and criticism about the Cold War ... Because of the anti-communist crusade, domestic dissent was stifled, civil liberties were compromised, and advocates of social reform risked being pilloried as agents of a foreign state.

## How did the Red Scare end?

Although Eisenhower disliked McCarthy he took no direct action to stop his activities, fearing a split within the Republican Party. Some journalists protested at McCarthy's behaviour, notably Ed Murrow, with some success, on his TV programme, *See It Now*. However, in late 1953 one of McCarthy's close associates, David Schine, was called up for army duty. Attempts to withdraw him from the draft by McCarthy failed; so McCarthy decided to investigate possible communist influence in army security. In challenging the army and with such bad manners he had gone too far. In the televised Senate hearings, which took place in April 1954 and lasted 36 days, McCarthy's bullying, hectoring and un-substantiated accusations were exposed to a now-critical national audience. The Senate responded by censuring him for unbecoming conduct and he very quickly ceased to have any political importance. He died from alcohol-related illness in 1957.

## ACTIVITY

Was the second Red Scare a 'shameful saga of overreaction and intolerance' or a necessary Cold War tool?

- Write a paragraph each to explain these two interpretations of the Red Scare of 1947-54.
- Write a third paragraph in which, with appropriate evidence, you make a personal assessment of the two interpretations.

## ACTIVITY

### Personal research

Read Arthur Miller's play *The Crucible*, written in 1953, about the seventeenth-century Salem witchcraft trials, but also seen as a symbol of the McCarthy actions against supposed communist sympathisers. In 1956 Miller was called before the HUAC and in 1957 he was held in contempt of Congress for refusing to name names. This was over-turned in 1958.

## E Review: Did Americans live happily ever after, 1945-60?

The Cold War was a clash of ideologies, which translated into armed conflict across the world. The Truman Doctrine, the Marshall Plan and the formation of NATO were the USA's challenges to the perceived communist threat abroad. At home, the administration challenged perceived communist forces through loyalty programmes and the search for subversives. The Cold War also made Americans want to demonstrate the value of their capitalist system. From 1945 to 1960 the economic strength of the nation meant that most Americans had an improving standard of living. No one wanted to risk losing it. Yet, the desire to keep life sweet meant there was a reluctance to realise that many Americans were suffering from urban and rural poverty, were under-educated and had their civil rights deliberately ignored. In the fifties the poor were 'invisible', partly because they were not pictured in mass entertainment. Documentary programmes about poverty did not appeal to television advertisers. Groups such as black Americans, Native Americans and Mexican migrant workers did not enjoy the benefits of a 'free' America. Yet protests were slight. It seemed as if the country was having a breathing space, a transition, after the turmoil of Depression and war, before taking action on the problems that needed to be resolved.

**SOURCE 11.40** M. Norton, et al. (eds.), *A People and a Nation*, 6th edn, 2001, p.788

*Post-war America was not only prosperous, but also proud and boastful ... the American people were in the grip of 'victory culture' – that is, the belief that unending triumph was the nation's birthright and destiny. From the classroom, the pulpit and the town hall, as well as from popular culture avenues came the self-congratulatory rhetoric about American's invincibility ... Americans believed that their nation was the greatest in the world, not only the most powerful but the most righteous.*

**SOURCE 11.41** W. Chafe, *The Unfinished Journey*, 4th edn, 1999, pp.140–41

*Yet, if Eisenhower is to be given credit for the political know-how and shrewdness of his administration, he must also bear the responsibility for having ignored or suppressed profound social problems that eventually would come home to imperil the country. The economy sputtered at a growth rate of only 2.5 per cent during his administration, and despite advice to the contrary, Eisenhower refused to initiate tax cuts in the midst of two recessions. His failure on the issue of civil rights ... would ensure a decade of conflict after he left office. Although in many respects he seemed the ideal president for his time, providing a symbol for serene benevolence after an era of upheaval, he failed – ultimately – to provide constructive leadership, choosing to hoard his political capital rather than spend it on behalf of critically needed moral and social departures. As with so much else during the 1950s, the appearance of comfort and complacency obscured contradictions and tensions that would inevitably surface and explode.*

### ACTIVITY

- 1 What points is each of the writers of Sources 11.39–41 making about the period?
- 2 Which points do you agree with? What evidence would you refer to in order to support your views?

### ACTIVITY

- 1 You are the host of a television talk show about the fifties in the USA. Who would you want to invite onto your show? Choose two 'heroes' and two 'villains'. They could be politicians, entertainers, inventors, individuals who are clever, unpleasant or brave, or you could choose 'the man or woman in the street'. What questions would you ask them? What puzzles you about that period?
- 2 Select appropriate music and three photographs which symbolise the period. Now discuss your selections in a group. Does your group think that you have presented an accurate representation of the period?

**Note 1:** Thinking about the questions to ask helps you to identify what you do, and do not, know or understand.

**Note 2:** Deciding on a 'hero or villain' helps you to decide what you think is important about people's behaviour.

### ACTIVITY

Write a four-paragraph answer to the following essay question:

'Abundance united the USA in the early Cold War years.' To what extent do you agree with this statement?

Think about the three parts of the title – abundance, the Cold War, and unity. Make brief notes on each of these to guide your answer (what were they and how were they demonstrated).

Make notes to show the inter-relationship between the three topics (a diagram might be helpful).

Structure your essay by answering these questions:

**Paragraph 1** – How and why was the USA an abundant nation in this period?

**Paragraph 2** – What were the developments in the Cold War that particularly affected the domestic population?

**Paragraph 3** – In what ways was the nation united in this period (consider social, economic and political factors, as well as attitudes and interests)?

**Paragraph 4** – Did the desire to keep abundance make people more determined to fight the Cold War and maintain national unity? Does this desire explain anti-communism, conformity and national pride?

- 1 The post-war era was one of increasing affluence for an increasing number of Americans.
- 2 Affluence changed lifestyles and created a common pattern based on suburban life, cars, television and consumer goods.
- 3 The baby boom generated new businesses as well as emphasising traditional family values.
- 4 The aggressive foreign policy towards communism was reflected in domestic policies.
- 5 The Red Scare of 1947–54 found little evidence of communist influence in the USA.
- 6 The Red Scare damaged individual careers and reputations, and threatened free speech and the right of dissent.
- 7 The threat of nuclear war, though exaggerated, increased demands for security.
- 8 Ordinary black Americans began to protest at their unequal treatment in education and leisure facilities.
- 9 It was clear that such protests, by black Americans, had limited success without federal government support.
- 10 Urban and rural poverty were growing and would have to be tackled.