

A.P. U.S. HISTORY NOTES

Chapter 40: "The Eisenhower Era"

~ 1952 – 1960 ~

I. The Advent of Eisenhower

1. In 1952, the Democrats chose **Adlai E. Stevenson**, the witty governor of Illinois, while Republicans rejected isolationist **Robert A. Taft** and instead chose **World War II** hero **Dwight D. Eisenhower** to run for president and anticommunist **Richard M. Nixon** to be his running mate.
2. Grandfatherly Eisenhower was a war hero and liked by everyone, so he left the rough part of campaigning to Nixon, who attacked Stevenson as soft against Communists, corrupt, and weak in the Korean situation.
 - i. Nixon then almost got caught with a secretly financed "slush fund," but to save his political career, he delivered his famous, touching "**Checkers Speech**," in which he talked about his family and specifically mentioned his cocker spaniel.
3. The "Checkers speech" showed the awesome power of television, since Nixon had pleaded on national TV, and even later, "Ike," as Eisenhower was called, agreed to go into studio and answer some brief "questions," which were later spliced in and edited to make it look like Eisenhower had answered questions from a live audience, when he didn't.
 - i. This showed the power that TV would have in the upcoming decades, allowing lone wolves to appeal directly to the American people instead of being influenced by party machines or leaders.
4. Ike won easily (442 to 89), and true to his campaign promise, he flew to Korea to help move along peace negotiations...and failed...but seven months later, after Ike threatened to use nuclear weapons, an armistice was finally signed (but was later violated often).
5. 54,000 Americans had died, and tens of billions of dollars had been wasted in the effort, but American's took a little comfort in knowing that Communism had been "contained."

II. "Ike" Takes Command

1. Eisenhower had been an excellent commander and leader who was able to make cooperation possible between anyone, so he seemed to be a perfect leader for Americans weary of two decades of depression, war, and nuclear standoff.
 - i. He served that aspect of his job well, but he could have used his popularity to champion civil rights more than he actually did.
2. The success of brutal anticommunist "crusader" **Joseph R. McCarthy** was quite alarming, for after he had charged onto the national scene by charging that Secretary of State **Dean Acheson** was knowingly employing 205 Communist Party members (a claim he never proved, not even for one person), he ruthlessly sought to prosecute and persecute suspected Communists, often targeting innocent people and destroying families and lives.
 - i. Eisenhower privately loathed McCarthy, but the president did little to stop the anti-red, since it appeared that most Americans supported his actions, but his zeal led him to purge important Asian experts in the **State Department**, men who could have advised a better course of action in Vietnam.
 - a. He even denounced General **George Marshall**, former army chief of staff during World War II!
 - ii. Finally, in 1954, when he attacked the army, he went too far and was exposed for the liar and drunk that he was; three years later, he died unwept and unsung.

III. Desegregating the South

1. Blacks in the South were bound by the severe **Jim Crow laws**, and were segregated in every aspect of society, from schools to restrooms to restaurants and beyond.
 - i. Only about 20% of the eligible Blacks could vote, due to intimidation, discrimination, poll taxes, and other schemes meant to keep Black suffrage down.

2. Where the law proved sufficient to enforce such oppression, vigilante justice in the form of lynchings did the job, and the White murderers were rarely caught and convicted.
3. In his 1944 novel, *An American Dilemma*, Swedish scholar **Gunnar Myrdal** had exposed the hypocrisy of American life, noting how while “every man [was] created equal,” Blacks were certainly treated worse than Whites.
 - i. Even though **Jackie Robinson** had cracked the racial barrier by signing with the Brooklyn Dodgers in 1947, the nation’s conscience still paid little attention to the suffering of Blacks, thus prolonging their pain.
4. However, with organizations such as the **National Association for the Advancement of Colored People**, such rulings as the 1950 case of *Sweatt vs. Painter*, where the Supreme Court ruled that separate professional schools for Blacks failed to meet the test of equality, such protestors as **Rosa Parks**, who in December 1955, refused to give up a bus seat in the “Whites only” section, and pacifist leaders like **Martin Luther King, Jr.**, who believed in peaceful methods of civil rights protests, Blacks were making their suffering and discrimination known to the public.

IV. Seeds of the Civil Rights Revolution

1. After he heard about the 1946 lynchings of Black soldiers seeking rights for which they fought overseas, Truman immediately sought to improve Black rights by desegregating the armed forces, but Eisenhower failed to continue this trend by failing to pass laws.
 - i. Only the judicial branch was left to improve Black civil rights.
2. **Earl Warren**, appointed Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, shocked his conservative backers by actively assailing Black injustice and ruling in favor of African-Americans.
 - i. The 1954 landmark case of *Brown vs. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas*, reversed the previous 1896 ruling of *Plessy vs. Ferguson* by saying that “separate but equal” facilities were inherently unequal, thus ending segregation.
 - ii. However, while the Border States usually obeyed this new ruling, states in the Deep South did everything they could to delay it and disobey it, diverting funds to private schools, signing and “**Declaration of Constitutional Principles**” that promised not to desegregate, and physically preventing Blacks to integrate.
 - a. Ten years after the ruling, fewer than 2% of eligible Black students sat in the same classrooms as whites.

V. Crisis at Little Rock

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

VI. Eisenhower Republicanism at Home

1. Eisenhower came into the White House pledging a policy of “**dynamic conservatism**,” which stated that he would be liberal with people but conservative with their money.
2. Ike decreased government spending by decreasing military spending, trying to transfer control of offshore oil fields to the states, and trying to curb the TVA’s by setting up a private company to take their places.

- i. His secretary of health, education, and welfare condemned free distribution of the **Salk anti-polio vaccine**.
 - ii. Secretary of Agriculture **Ezra Taft Benson** tackled with agriculture issues, but despite government purchase of surplus grain, which it stored in giant silos costing Americans \$2 million a day, farmers didn't see prosperity.
 - 3. Eisenhower also cracked down on illegal Mexican immigration that cut down on the success of the **bracero program** by rounding up 1 million Mexicans and returning them to their native country in 1954.
 - i. With Indians, though, Ike proposed ending the FDR-style treatment toward Indians and reverting to a **Dawes Severalty Act**-style policy toward Native Americans, but due to protest and resistance, this was disbanded.
 - 4. However, Eisenhower kept many of the **New Deal** programs, since some, like **Social Security** and unemployment insurance, simply had to stay.
 - i. However, he did do some of the New Deal programs better, such as his backing of the **Interstate Highway Act**, which built 42,000 miles of interstate freeways.
 - 5. Still, Eisenhower only balanced the budget three times in his eight years of office, and in 1959, he incurred the biggest peacetime deficit in U.S. history.
 - i. Still, critics said that he was economically timid, blaming the president for the sharp economic downturn of 1957-58.
 - 6. Also, the **AF of L** merged with the **CIO** to end 20 years of bitter division in labor unions.
- VII. A New Look in Foreign Policy
 - 1. Secretary of State **John Foster Dulles** stated that the policy of containment was not enough and that the U.S. was going to push back Communism and liberate the peoples under it while toning down defense spending by building a fleet of superbombers called **Strategic Air Command**, which could drop massive nuclear bombs in any retaliation.
 - 2. Ike tried to thaw the **Cold War** by appealing for peace to new Soviet Premier **Nikita Khrushchev** at the 1955 **Geneva Conference**, but the Soviet leader rejected such proposals, along with one for "open skies."
 - 3. However, hypocritically, when the Hungarians revolted against the USSR and appealed to the US for help, America did nothing, earning the scorn of bitter freedom fighters.
- VIII. The Vietnam Nightmare
 - 1. In Vietnam, freedom fighter **Ho Chi Minh** had tried to encourage **Woodrow Wilson** to help the Vietnamese against the French, but as Ho Chi became increasingly Communist, the U.S. began to fight it.
 - 2. In March 1954, when the French became trapped at **Dienbienphu**, Eisenhower's aides wanted to bomb the **Viet Minh** guerilla forces, but Ike held back, fearing plunging the U.S. into another Asian war so soon after Korea, and after the Vietnamese won, Vietnam was split at the 17th parallel, supposedly temporarily.
 - i. Ho Chi Minh was supposed to allow free elections, but soon, Vietnam became clearly split between a Communist north and a pro-Western south.
 - 3. Secretary Dulles created the **Southeast Asian Treaty Organization** to emulate **NATO**, but this provided little help.
- IX. A False Lull in Europe
 - 1. In 1955, the USSR formed the **Warsaw Pact** to counteract NATO, but the Cold War *did* seem to be thawing a bit, as Eisenhower pressed for reduction of arms, and the Soviets were surprisingly cooperative, and Khrushchev publicly denounced Stalin's brutality.
 - 2. However, in 1956, when the Hungarians revolted against the USSR, the Soviets crushed them with brutality and massive bloodshed.
 - i. The U.S. did change some of its immigration laws to let 30,000 Hungarians into American as immigrants.
- X. Menaces in the Middle East

1. In 1953, to protect oil supplies in the Middle East, the CIA engineered a coup in Iran that installed the youthful shah, **Mohammed Reza Pahlevi**, as ruler of the nation, protecting the oil for the time being but earning the wrath of Arabs that would be repaid in the 70s.
 2. The **Suez crisis** was far messier: President **Gamal Abdel Nasser**, of Egypt, needed money to build a dam in the upper Nile and flirted openly with the Soviet side as well as the U.S. and Britain, and upon seeing this blatant Communist association, Secretary of State Dulles dramatically withdrew his offer, thus forcing Nasser to nationalize the dam.
 - i. Late in October 1956, Britain, France, and Israel suddenly attacked Egypt, thinking that the U.S. would supply them with needed oil, as had been the case in WWII, but Eisenhower did not, and the attackers had to withdraw.
 - ii. The Suez crisis marked the last time the U.S. could brandish its “oil weapon.”
 3. In 1960, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Iraq, Iran, and Venezuela joined to form the **Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries**, or **OPEC**.
- XI. The Voters Still Like “Ike” in 1956
1. In 1956, Eisenhower again ran against Stevenson and won easily by a landslide.
 2. The GOP called itself the “party of peace” while the Democrats assaulted Ike’s health, since he had had a heart attack in 1955 and a major abdominal operation in ’56.
 - i. However, the Democrats did win the House and Senate.
- XII. Round Two for “Ike”
1. After Secretary of State Dulles died of cancer in 1959 and presidential assistant **Sherman Adams** was forced to leave under a cloud of scandal due to bribery charges, Eisenhower, without his two most trusted and most helpful aides, was forced to govern more.
 2. A drastic labor-reform bill in 1959 grew from recurrent strikes in critical industries.
 3. Teamster chief “**Dave**” **Beck** was sent to prison for embezzlement, and his successor, **James R. Hoffa**’s appointment got the Teamsters expelled out of the **AF of L-CIO**.
 - i. Hoffa was later jailed for jury tampering and then disappeared in prison, allegedly murdered by some gangsters that he had crossed.
 4. The 1959 **Landrum-Griffin Acct** was designed to bring labor leaders to book for financial shenanigans and prevent bullying tactics.
 - i. Anti-laborites forced into the bill bans against “secondary boycotts” and certain types of picketing.
- XIII. The Race with the Soviets to Space
1. On October 4, 1957, the Russians launched **Sputnik I** into space, and a month later, they sent **Sputnik II** out of the Earth as well, thus totally demoralizing Americans, because this seemed to prove Communist superiority.
 - i. Plus, the Soviets might fire missiles at the U.S. from space.
 2. Critics charged that Truman had not spent enough money on missile programs while America had used its science for other things, like television.
 3. Four months after **Sputnik I**, the U.S. sent its own satellite (weighing only 2.5 lbs) into space, but the apparent U.S. lack of technology sent concerns over U.S. education, since American children seemed to be learning less advanced information than Soviet kids.
 - i. The 1958 **National Defense and Education Act** (NDEA) gave \$887 million in loans to needy college students and grants for the improvement of schools.
- XIV. The Continuing Cold War
1. Humanity-minded scientists called for an end to atmospheric nuclear testing, lest future generations be deformed and mutated.
 - i. Beginning October 1958, Washington did halt “dirty” testing, as did the USSR, but attempts to regularize such suspensions were unsuccessful.
 2. However, in 1959, Khrushchev was invited by Ike to America for talks, and when he arrived in New York, he immediately talked about disarmament but gave no means of how to do it.
 - i. Later, at **Camp David**, talks did show upward signs, as the Soviet premier said that his ultimatum for the evacuation of Berlin would be extended indefinitely.

3. However, at the **Paris conference**, Khrushchev came in angry that the U.S. had flown a spy plane over Soviet territory (the plane had been shot down and Eisenhower had taken personal responsibility), and tensions immediately tightened again.
- XV. Cuba's Castroism Spells Communism
1. Latin American nations resented the United States' giving billions of dollars to Europe compared to millions to Latin America, and the U.S.'s constant intervention (Guatemala, 1954), as well as its support of cold dictators who claimed to be fighting communism.
 2. In 1959, in Cuba, **Fidel Castro** overthrew U.S.-supported **Fulgencio Batista**, promptly denounced the Yankee imperialists, and began to take U.S. properties for a land-distribution program, and when the U.S. cut off heavy U.S. imports of Cuban sugar, Castro confiscated more American property.
 - i. In 1961 America broke diplomatic relations with Cuba.
 3. Khrushchev threatened to launch missiles at the U.S. if it attacked Cuba; meanwhile, America induced the **Organization of American States** to condemn communism in the Americas.
 - i. Finally, Eisenhower proposed a "Marshall Plan" for Latin America, which gave \$500 million to the area, but many Latin American felt that it was too little too late.
- XVI. Kennedy Challenges Nixon for the Presidency
1. The Republicans chose Richard Nixon, gifted party leader to some, ruthless opportunist to others, in 1960 with **Henry Cabot Lodge Jr.** as his running mate; while **John F. Kennedy** surprisingly won for the Democrats and had **Lyndon B. Johnson** as his running mate.
- XVII. The Presidential Issues of 1960
1. Kennedy was attacked because he was the first Catholic presidential candidate ever, but defended himself and encouraged Catholics to vote for him, and if he lost votes from the South due to his religion, he got them back from the North due to the bitter Catholics there.
 - i. In four nationally televised debates, JFK held his own and looked more charismatic, perhaps helping him to win the election by a comfortable margin, becoming the youngest president elected (but not served) ever.
- XVIII. An Old General Fades Away
1. Eisenhower had his critics, but he was appreciated more and more for ending one war and keeping the U.S. out of others.
 2. Even though the 1951-passed **22nd Amendment** had limited him to two terms as president, Ike displayed more vigor and controlled Congress more during his second term.
 3. In 1959, Alaska and Hawaii became the 49th and 50th states to join the Union.
 4. Perhaps Eisenhower's greatest weakness was his ignorance of social problems of the time, preferring to smile them away rather than deal with them, even though he was no bigot.
- XIX. Changing Economic Patterns
1. The economy really sprouted during the 50s, and the invention of the **transistor** exploded the electronics field, especially in computers, helping such companies as **International Business Machines** (IBM) expand and prosper.
 2. Aerospace industries progressed, as the **Boeing** company made the first passenger-jet airplane (adapted from the superbombers of the Strategic Air Command), the 707.
 3. In 1956, "white-collar" workers outnumbered "blue collar" workers for the first time, meaning that the industrial era was passing on.
 - i. As this occurred, labor unions also labored, since most of their members were industrial workers.
 - ii. Women appeared more and more in the workplace, despite the stereotypical role of women as housewives that was being portrayed on TV shows such as "**Ozzie and Harriet**" and "**Leave It to Beaver.**"
 - a. More than 40 million new jobs were created.
 4. Women's expansion into the workplace shocked some, but really wasn't surprising if one observed the trends in history, and now, they were both housewives and workers.
 - i. **Betty Friedan's** 1963 book *The Feminine Mystique* was a best-seller and a classic of modern feminine protest literature.

XX. Consumer Culture in the Fifties

1. The fifties saw the first **Diner's Club** cards, the opening of **McDonald's**, the debut of **Disneyland**, and an explosion in the number of television stations in the country.
2. Advertisers used television to sell products while "televangelists" like **Billy Graham**, **Oral Roberts**, and **Fulton J. Sheen** used TV to preach the gospel and encourage religion.
3. Sports shifted west, as the Brooklyn Dodgers and New York Giants moved to Los Angeles and San Francisco, respectively, in 1958.
4. Elvis Presley, a white singer of the new "rock and roll" who made girls swoon with his fleshy face, pointing lips, and antic, sexually suggestive gyrations, redefined popular music.
 - i. Elvis died from drugs in 1977, at age 42.
5. Traditionalists were shocked by Elvis's shockingly open sexuality, and **Marilyn Monroe** (in her *Playboy* magazine spread) continued in the redefinition of the new sensuous sexuality.
 - i. Critics, such as **David Riesman** in *The Lonely Crowd*, **William H. Whyte, Jr.** in *The Organization Man*, and **Sloan Wilson** in *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit*, lamented this new consumerist style.
 - ii. Harvard economist **John Kenneth Galbraith** questioned the relation between private wealth and public good in *The Affluent Society*.
 - a. **Daniel Bell** found further such paradoxes, as did **C. Wright Mills**.

XXI. The Life of the Mind in Postwar America

1. **Ernest Hemingway's** *The Old Man and the Sea* and **John Steinbeck's** *East of Eden* and *Travels with Charlie* showed that prewar writers could still be successful, but new writers, who, except for **Norman Mailer's** *The Naked and the Dead* and **James Jones's** *From Here to Eternity*, spurned realism, were successful as well.
2. **Joseph Heller's** *Catch-22* and **Kurt Vonnegut, Jr.'s** *Slaughterhouse-Five* crackled with fantastic and psychedelic prose, satiring the suffering of the war.
3. Authors and books that explored problems created by the new mobility and affluence of American life: **John Updike's** *Rabbit, Run* and *Couples*; **John Cheever's** *The Wapshot Chronicle* and *The Wapshot Scandal*; **Louis Auchincloss's** books, **Gore Vidal's** *Myra Breckinridge*.
4. The poetry of **Ezra Pound**, **Wallace Stevens**, **William Carlos Williams**, **Theodore Roethke**, **Robert Lowell** (*For the Union Dead*), **Sylvia Plath** (*Ariel* and *The Bell-Jar*), **Anne Sexton**, and **John Berryman** reflected the twisted emotions of the war, but some poets were troubled in their own minds as well, often committing suicide or living miserable lives.
5. **Tennessee Williams's** *A Streetcar Named Desire* and *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* were two plays that searched for American values, as were **Arthur Miller's** *Death of a Salesman* and *The Crucible*.
6. **Lorraine Hansberry's** *A Raisin in the Sun* portrayed African-American life while **Edward Albee's** *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* revealed the underside of middle class life.
7. Books by black authors such as **Richard Wright**, **Ralph Ellison**, and **James Baldwin** made best-seller's lists; Black playwrights like **LeRoi Jones** made powerful plays (*The Dutchman*).
8. The South had literary artists like **William Faulkner**, **Walker Percy**, and **Eudora Welty**.
9. Jewish authors also had famous books, such as **J.D. Salinger's** *Catcher in the Rye*.