

## Period 8: 1945–1980

After World War II, the United States grappled with prosperity and unfamiliar international responsibilities, while struggling to live up to its ideals.

Key Concept

**PRIORITIZED BY COLLEGES FOR CREDIT**

**TEACHER-SELECTED**  
examples of individuals,  
groups, and movements to  
investigate the Key Concept

**TEACHER-SELECTED**  
primary and secondary sources  
for students to examine the  
Key Concept in depth

Focus of AP  
Exam questions:

**Key Concept 8.1:** The United States responded to an uncertain and unstable postwar world by asserting and attempting to defend a position of global leadership, with far-reaching domestic and international consequences.

Thematic Learning Objectives

**WOR-4:** Explain how the U.S. involvement in global conflicts in the 20th century set the stage for domestic social changes

**WOR-7:** Analyze the goals of U.S. policymakers in major international conflicts, such as the Spanish-American War, World Wars I and II, and the Cold War, and explain how U.S. involvement in these conflicts has altered the U.S. role in world affairs

**WOR-8:** Explain how U.S. military and economic involvement in the developing world and issues such as terrorism and economic globalization have changed U.S. foreign policy goals since the middle of the 20th century

I. After World War II, the United States sought to stem the growth of Communist military power and ideological influence, create a stable global economy, and build an international security system.

A) The United States developed a foreign policy based on collective security and a multilateral economic framework that bolstered non-Communist nations.

B) The United States sought to "contain" Soviet-dominated communism through a variety of measures, including military engagements in Korea and Vietnam.

C) The Cold War fluctuated between periods of direct and indirect military confrontation and periods of mutual coexistence (or *détente*).

**Key Concept**

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II. As the United States focused on containing communism, it faced increasingly complex foreign policy issues, including decolonization, shifting international alignments and regional conflicts, and global economic and environmental changes.

A) Postwar decolonization and the emergence of powerful nationalist movements in Asia, Africa, and the Middle East led both sides in the Cold War to seek allies among new nations, many of which remained nonaligned.

B) Cold War competition extended to Latin America, where the U.S. supported non-Communist regimes with varying levels of commitment to democracy.

C) Ideological, military, and economic concerns shaped U.S. involvement in the Middle East, with several oil crises in the region eventually sparking attempts at creating a national energy policy.

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**Focus of AP Exam questions:**

**Thematic Learning Objectives**

**ENV-5:** Explain how and why debates about and policies concerning the use of natural resources and the environment more generally have changed since the late 19th century

**WOR-3:** Explain how the growing interconnection of the U.S. with worldwide economic, labor, and migration systems affected U.S. society since the late 19th century

**WOR-7:** Analyze the goals of U.S. policymakers in major international conflicts, such as the Spanish-American War, World Wars I and II, and the Cold War, and explain how U.S. involvement in these conflicts has altered the U.S. role in world affairs

**WOR-8:** Explain how U.S. military and economic involvement in the developing world and issues such as terrorism and economic globalization have changed U.S. foreign policy goals since the middle of the 20th century

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III. Cold War policies led to continued public debates over the power of the federal government, acceptable means for pursuing international and domestic goals, and the proper balance between liberty and order.

A) Americans debated policies and methods designed to root out Communists within the United States even as both parties tended to support the broader Cold War strategy of containing communism.

B) Although the Korean conflict produced some minor domestic opposition, the Vietnam War saw the rise of sizable, passionate, and sometimes violent antiwar protests that became more numerous as the war escalated.

C) Americans debated the merits of a large nuclear arsenal, the “military-industrial complex,” and the appropriate power of the executive branch in conducting foreign and military policy.

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Focus of AP Exam questions:

**Thematic Learning Objectives**

**ID-3:** Analyze how U.S. involvement in international crises such as the Spanish American War, World Wars I and II, the Great Depression, and the Cold War influenced public debates about American national identity in the 20th century

**POL-7:** Analyze how debates over civil rights and civil liberties have influenced political life from the early 20th century through the early 21st century

**WOR-4:** Explain how the U.S. involvement in global conflicts in the 20th century set the stage for domestic social changes

**CUL-5:** Analyze ways that philosophical, moral, and scientific ideas were used to defend and challenge the dominant economic and social order in the 19th and 20th centuries

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**Key Concept**

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**Key Concept 8.2:** Liberalism, based on anticommunism abroad and a firm belief in the efficacy of governmental and especially federal power to achieve social goals at home, reached its apex in the mid-1960s and generated a variety of political and cultural responses.

- I. Seeking to fulfill Reconstruction-era promises, civil rights activists and political leaders achieved some legal and political successes in ending segregation, although progress toward equality was slow and halting.
  - A) Following World War II, civil rights activists utilized a variety of strategies — legal challenges, direct action, and nonviolent protest tactics — to combat racial discrimination.
  - B) Decision-makers in each of the three branches of the federal government used measures including desegregation of the armed services, *Brown v. Board of Education*, and the Civil Rights Act of 1964 to promote greater racial justice.

- C) Continuing white resistance slowed efforts at desegregation, sparking a series of social and political crises across the nation, while tensions among civil rights activists over tactical and philosophical issues increased after 1965.

**Focus of AP Exam questions:**

**Thematic Learning Objectives**

**ID-8:** Explain how civil rights activism in the 20th century affected the growth of African American and other identity-based political and social movements

**POL-3:** Explain how activist groups and reform movements, such as antebellum reformers, civil rights activists, and social conservatives, have caused changes to state institutions and U.S. society

**POL-4:** Analyze how and why the New Deal, the Great Society, and the modern conservative movement all sought to change the federal government's role in U.S. political, social, and economic life

**POL-7:** Analyze how debates over civil rights and civil liberties have influenced political life from the early 20th century through the early 21st century

**Key Concept**

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II. Stirred by a growing awareness of inequalities in American society and by the African American civil rights movement, activists also addressed issues of identity and social justice, such as gender/sexuality and ethnicity.

A) Activists began to question society's assumptions about gender and to call for social and economic equality for women and for gays and lesbians.

B) Latinos, American Indians, and Asian Americans began to demand social and economic equality and a redress of past injustices.

C) Despite the perception of overall affluence in postwar America, advocates raised awareness of the prevalence and persistence of poverty as a national problem, sparking efforts to address this issue.

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Focus of AP Exam questions:

**Thematic Learning Objectives**

**POL-3:** Explain how activist groups and reform movements, such as antebellum reformers, civil rights activists, and social conservatives, have caused changes to state institutions and U.S. society

**ID-8:** Explain how civil rights activism in the 20th century affected the growth of African American and other identity-based political and social movements

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III. As many liberal principles came to dominate postwar politics and court decisions, liberalism came under attack from the left as well as from resurgent conservative movements.

A) Liberalism reached its zenith with Lyndon Johnson's Great Society efforts to use federal power to end racial discrimination, eliminate poverty, and address other social issues while attacking communism abroad.

B) Liberal ideals were realized in Supreme Court decisions that expanded democracy and individual freedoms, Great Society social programs and policies, and the power of the federal government, yet these unintentionally helped energize a new conservative movement that mobilized to defend traditional visions of morality and the proper role of state authority.

C) Groups on the left also assailed liberals, claiming they did too little to transform the racial and economic status quo at home and pursued immoral policies abroad.

Focus of AP  
 Exam questions:

**Thematic Learning Objectives**

**POL-2:** Explain how and why major party systems and political alignments arose and have changed from the early Republic through the end of the 20th century

**POL-5:** Analyze how arguments over the meaning and interpretation of the Constitution have affected U.S. politics since 1787

**POL-7:** Analyze how debates over civil rights and civil liberties have influenced political life from the early 20th century through the early 21st century

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Focus of AP  
Exam questions:

**Key Concept 8.3:** Postwar economic, demographic, and technological changes had a far-reaching impact on American society, politics, and the environment.

- I. Rapid economic and social changes in American society fostered a sense of optimism in the postwar years, as well as underlying concerns about how these changes were affecting American values.
- A) A burgeoning private sector, continued federal spending, the baby boom, and technological developments helped spur economic growth, middle-class suburbanization, social mobility, a rapid expansion of higher education, and the rise of the “Sun Belt” as a political and economic force.
- B) These economic and social changes, in addition to the anxiety engendered by the Cold War, led to an increasingly homogeneous mass culture, as well as challenges to conformity by artists, intellectuals, and rebellious youth.
- C) Conservatives, fearing juvenile delinquency, urban unrest, and challenges to the traditional family, increasingly promoted their own values and ideology.

Thematic Learning Objectives

**WXT-3:** Explain how changes in transportation, technology, and the integration of the U.S. economy into world markets have influenced U.S. society since the Gilded Age

**WXT-5:** Explain how and why different labor systems have developed, persisted, and changed since 1800 and how events such as the Civil War and industrialization shaped U.S. society and workers’ lives

**CUL-5:** Analyze ways that philosophical, moral, and scientific ideas were used to defend and challenge the dominant economic and social order in the 19th and 20th centuries

**CUL-6:** Analyze the role of culture and the arts in 19th- and 20th-century movements for social and political change



Key Concept

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- II. As federal programs expanded and economic growth reshaped American society, many sought greater access to prosperity even as critics began to question the burgeoning use of natural resources.
  - A) Internal migrants as well as migrants from around the world sought access to the economic boom and other benefits of the United States, especially after the passage of new immigration laws in 1965.

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Focus of AP Exam questions:

**Thematic Learning Objectives**

**ID-6:** Analyze how migration patterns to, and migration within, the United States have influenced the growth of racial and ethnic identities and conflicts over ethnic assimilation and distinctiveness

**PEO-3:** Analyze the causes and effects of major internal migration patterns such as urbanization, suburbanization, westward movement, and the Great Migration in the 19th and 20th centuries

**PEO-7:** Explain how and why debates over immigration to the United States have changed since the turn of the 20th century

- B) Responding to the abuse of natural resources and the alarming environmental problems, activists and legislators began to call for conservation measures and a fight against pollution.

**Key Concept**

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III. New demographic and social issues led to significant political and moral debates that sharply divided the nation.

A) Although the image of the traditional nuclear family dominated popular perceptions in the postwar era, the family structure of Americans was undergoing profound changes as the number of working women increased and many social attitudes changed.

B) Young people who participated in the counterculture of the 1960s rejected many of the social, economic, and political values of their parents' generation, initiated a sexual revolution, and introduced greater informality into U.S. culture.

C) Conservatives and liberals clashed over many new social issues, the power of the presidency and the federal government, and movements for greater individual rights.

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Focus of AP Exam questions:

**Thematic Learning Objectives**

**ID-7:** Analyze how changes in class identity and gender roles have related to economic, social, and cultural transformations since the late 19th century

**POL-5:** Analyze how arguments over the meaning and interpretation of the Constitution have affected U.S. politics since 1787

**CUL-6:** Analyze the role of culture and the arts in 19th- and 20th-century movements for social and political change

**CUL-7:** Explain how and why “modern” cultural values and popular culture have grown since the early 20th century and how they have affected American politics and society