# APUSH UNIT 8 REVIEW GUIDE (1945–1980)

For Students Preparing for the AP® United States History Exam

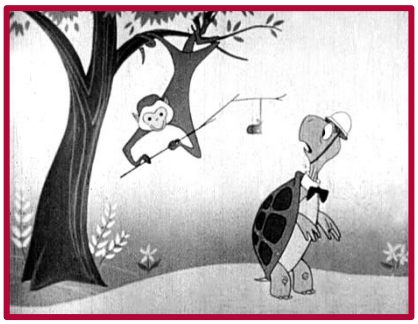
**10-17%**
of the APUSH exam

The eighth unit of the AP® United States History (APUSH) course focuses on the period from 1945 to 1980. Key topics include the Cold War, the Civil Rights Movement, Vietnam, and environmentalism.

**This unit is eligible to be assessed on every section of the exam (including the DBQ).**

## THE COLD WAR AND THE [SECOND] RED SCARE

After World War II, the United States and the Soviet Union emerged as rival **superpowers** competing for global influence. The Soviets began installing puppet governments in Eastern European satellite states. In the **Long Telegram**, George Kennan warned that the Soviets aimed to expand into Western Europe if allowed to do so. President Harry Truman committed the United States to a policy of **containment** (preventing the spread of Soviet communism). The **Marshall Plan** built goodwill in Western Europe by directing billions of dollars toward helping nations rebuild their war-torn economies. In 1949, the United States, Canada, and Western European allies created the **North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)**. The **Truman Doctrine** pledged U.S. military and economic support to Greece and Turkey, who were struggling against communist pressure.



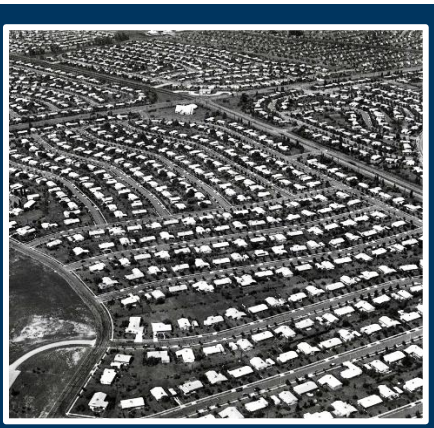
A still shot from ***Duck and Cover***, a video that was produced for schools in the 1950s to prepare children for nuclear conflict.

At home, Americans worried about communist infiltration of the U.S. government, resulting in the **Second Red Scare**. The **House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC)** investigated suspected communists, such as Alger Hiss, who worked in the State Department. Senator Joseph McCarthy made a name for himself by accusing people of being communists without evidence, a practice that came to be known as **McCarthyism**. After the Soviets successfully tested an atomic bomb, Americans feared nuclear war. Schoolchildren watched instructional videos, such as ***Duck and Cover***, that attempted to prepare them for the perils of nuclear war as well as anyone could.

## POSTWAR ECONOMY AND SOCIETY (1945–1980)

After World War II, the U.S. economy grew rapidly thanks to technological developments and expanded education opportunities. The **G.I. Bill** helped returning veterans attend college by helping pay tuition and living expenses. After graduating, these veterans got professional jobs, moved from cities to the suburbs, and sired large families, resulting in the **baby boom** (1946–1964). With the popularization of swimming pools and increased affordability of air conditioning, the **Sun Belt** (from the Carolinas to California) became a more attractive place to raise a family. The South attracted businesses due to the region's low taxes, limited regulations, and weak labor unions compared to the Northeast and Midwest.

In the 1950s, **televisions** became a standard item in American households, resulting in a more homogenous national culture, as households all over the country watched ***I Love Lucy*** and other popular programs. However, this cultural conformity was sometimes challenged by counterculture movements that included **Beat poetry** and **rock and roll** music.



An aerial photo of **Levittown, Pennsylvania**, a planned suburban community established outside of Philadelphia in the 1950s.

## THE EARLY CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT

The postwar era saw the first major challenges to racial segregation in the United States. President Truman desegregated the military by executive order in 1948. The Supreme Court's ***Brown v. Board*** (1954) decision ruled that segregation in public schools was unconstitutional, overturning *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896). **Rosa Parks**, a leader of Montgomery's chapter of the **NAACP**, became a national figure when she refused to give up her seat on a public bus to a white passenger, resulting in the **Montgomery Bus Boycott**. A young Baptist minister, **Martin Luther King Jr.**, was chosen to lead the year-long boycott. King used a nonviolent strategy of **civil disobedience** to successfully integrate Montgomery's bus system. Integration efforts met challenges across the South. President Eisenhower deployed U.S. Army troops to secure the admission of the **Little Rock Nine** into Little Rock Central High School.

A police officer fingerprinting Rosa Parks after she was arrested for organizing the Montgomery bus boycott.

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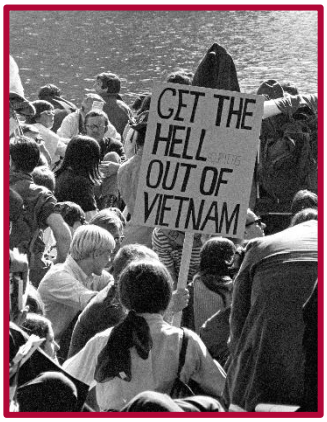
## THE GREAT SOCIETY AND THE VIETNAM ERA

In 1960, Americans elected John F. Kennedy, a young **liberal** confident in government's ability to solve problems. After the Kennedy assassination, Lyndon Johnson declared war on poverty and steered his **Great Society** legislation through Congress. Great Society programs included **Medicare** (health insurance for seniors) and **Medicaid** (health insurance for people in poverty). It also included civil rights legislation, such as the landmark **Civil Rights Act of 1964**, which banned segregation in public spaces and discrimination in employment, and the **Voting Rights Act of 1965**, which provided for federal oversight of elections in states (mostly in the South) with a history of voter suppression. Although Martin Luther King Jr. helped secure the passage of civil rights legislation, young activists became impatient with the pace of progress, leading to the rise of the **Black Power** movement.



An anti-war protester holds a sign that reads "GET THE HELLicopters OUT OF VIETNAM" at a protest at the Pentagon in 1967.

The resolution of the **Cuban Missile Crisis** without a nuclear war made Americans hopeful about peace. However, American policymakers grew increasingly concerned about the spread of communism in Vietnam. What began with Kennedy sending advisors grew to a full-scale military commitment after the **Gulf of Tonkin incident**. Americans initially supported Johnson's efforts, but support faded as young Americans embraced **counterculture** and protested the war and the draft. The **Tet Offensive**, though an American military victory, turned public opinion against the war. Johnson became too unpopular to seek re-election. Richard Nixon, Johnson's Republican successor, withdrew American forces from Vietnam and pursued ***détente*** (easing tensions) with the Soviet Union. While Nixon's policies were popular, confidence in government was further eroded when he resigned due to his role in the **Watergate scandal**.

## UNIT TIMELINE

- **1948** Harry Truman orders the integration of the U.S. military.
- **1949** The North Atlantic Treaty is signed, creating NATO.
- **1954** The Supreme Court overturns segregation in *Brown v. Board*.
- **1962** Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* is published.
- The Cuban Missile Crisis is resolved without nuclear war.
- **1963** Martin Luther King Jr. delivers the "I Have a Dream" speech.
- **1964** The Civil Rights Act of 1964 is passed.
- **1970** Richard Nixon creates the Environmental Protection Agency.
- **1974** Richard Nixon resigns due to his role in the Watergate scandal.
- **1980** Ronald Reagan is elected president on a conservative platform.

## NATURAL RESOURCES AND THE ENVIRONMENTAL MOVEMENT

America's love affair with the automobile in the 1950s came at the price of growing dependence on foreign oil. The Middle East's growing prominence as an oil-producing region turned it into a theater of the Cold War. The **Eisenhower Doctrine**, which pledged assistance to Middle Eastern governments resisting communist aggression, showed the U.S. government's determination to maintain influence in the region.

During the 1960s, Americans became increasingly aware of the impact that new technologies were having on the environment. Rachel Carson's book, ***Silent Spring***, exposed the harmful effects of DDT and other pesticides that were used on the food supply. The U.S. military's use of **Agent Orange** to destroy jungles in Vietnam resulted in birth defects in Vietnamese children and permanent disabilities for Vietnam veterans. Popular pressure to protect the environment resulted in government action. In 1970, President Richard Nixon ordered the creation of the **Environmental Protection Agency**, and Congress passed the **Clean Air Act**.

## THE RISE OF THE CONSERVATIVE MOVEMENT

By the end of the 1960s, many Americans were losing faith in the government's ability to solve problems. The Great Society had an expensive price tag, and Americans were concerned about high taxes combined with rising inflation and unemployment. The growth of evangelical Christian churches led to an increased number of **conservatives** who believed that the nation had lost its moral compass. Jerry Falwell founded the **Moral Majority** in order to organize conservatives into a powerful Republican voting bloc. **Phyllis Schlafly**, a conservative activist, led a successful campaign to defeat the **Equal Rights Amendment** (ERA).

Phyllis Schlafly opposed the Equal Rights Amendment.

President Jimmy Carter, an evangelical Christian from Georgia, connected with Americans' desire for moral leadership after Watergate. His human rights foreign policy had its shining moment in the **Camp David Accords**, which established peaceful relations between Israel and Egypt. However, Carter looked weak during the **Iran Hostage Crisis**, when dozens of American citizens were taken hostage and held for the remainder of his presidency. In 1980, Carter was defeated by Ronald Reagan, a conservative who promised Americans a more muscular foreign policy.

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