

Period 8: 1945-1980

AP US History ■ Period 8

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What we will cover

- 1 The Cold War, 1945 to 1980
- 2 The Red Scare at Home
- 3 Prosperity and Its Discontents
- 4 The Civil Rights Movement
- 5 The Great Society and the Vietnam War
- 6 Society in Transition

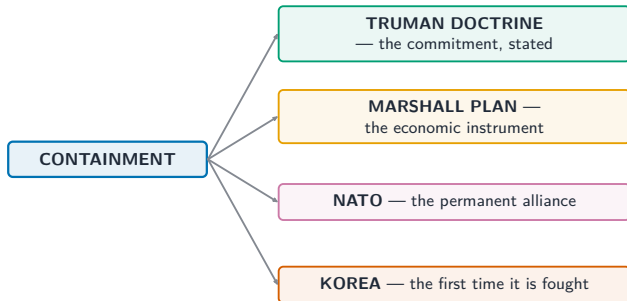


The Cold War, 1945 to 1980

Period 8 runs from 1945 to 1980. Two arguments dominate it: how far the United States should go to contain communism abroad, and how far the federal government should go to guarantee rights and welfare at home. They are connected, because both are arguments about the reach of national power.

American policy settled on **containment** – preventing the spread of communism rather than attempting to remove it – expressed through the **Truman Doctrine**, the **Marshall Plan**, and **NATO**.

Containment, and its instruments



The postwar economy grew strongly.

Federal spending on defence, highways, and the **GI Bill** supported home ownership and higher education, and the population moved to the **suburbs** and to the **Sun Belt**.

What containment committed the country to

the Korean War

a limited war fought under a UN mandate, and never formally ended

a permanent military

a standing peacetime establishment, unprecedented in American history

alliances

NATO and a network of treaties requiring a response anywhere

the arms race

nuclear stockpiles, and a doctrine of deterrence

unanticipated

these were **commitments the country had not expected** when containment was formulated

Containment was a strategy for Europe that was applied globally. The gap between the doctrine and its reach is the standard essay argument.



The Red Scare at Home

Fear of communism reshaped domestic politics. **Loyalty programmes**, congressional investigations, and **McCarthyism** targeted suspected communists in government, universities, unions, and the entertainment industry.

The examinable point is the **cost to civil liberties**: accusation often functioned as proof, and the fear narrowed the range of acceptable political debate for a decade.



Prosperity and Its Discontents

The postwar economy grew strongly. Federal spending on defence, highways, and the **GI Bill** supported home ownership and higher education, and the population moved to the **suburbs** and to the **Sun Belt** .

Culture changed with it: mass consumption, television, and a distinct **youth culture** with its own music and markets.

The boom, and who was outside it

THE BOOM

the **GI Bill** — education and mortgages
the **suburbs** and the **Sun Belt**
a youth culture with money of its own

AND WHO WAS OUTSIDE IT

poverty concentrated where
the boom did not reach
inner cities and rural regions left behind
benefits distributed unequally by race

The boom is the **context** for the 1960s, not a separate topic: the War on Poverty is aimed at the right-hand column

Prosperity was uneven, and the movement broadened

suburban growth

frequently closed to African Americans by law and by practice – restrictive covenants and redlining

the cities

lost tax base and jobs as the middle class left

poverty

persisted through the boom, and was rediscovered politically in the 1960s

the movement expanded

later activists raised economic inequality, housing and policing, and some rejected nonviolence

the 1970s

inflation, oil shocks and industrial decline ended the post-war boom

The civil rights movement's shift from legal segregation to economic and northern questions is what the period-8 comparison prompts usually turn on.

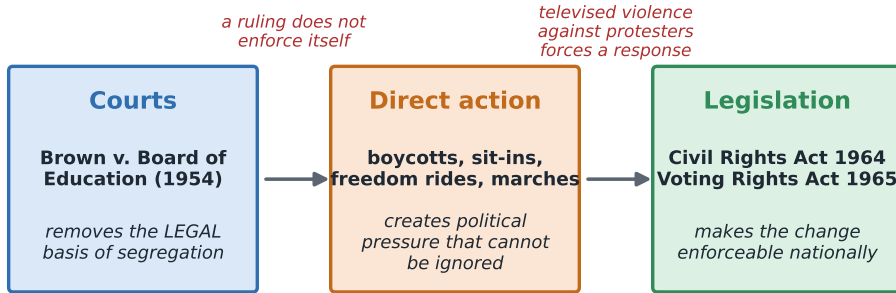


Three arenas, each converting pressure into the next

Early steps in the 1940s and 1950s worked mainly through the **courts** .

Legal strategy produced **Brown v. Board of Education** , which held segregated schooling unconstitutional and stripped away the legal basis of segregation.

Three arenas, each converting pressure into the, in detail



each stage creates the conditions for the next - that chain is the argument

federal action consistently FOLLOWED the pressure rather than leading it

Early steps in the 1940s and 1950s worked mainly through the **courts** .

The Civil Rights Movement

Early steps in the 1940s and 1950s worked mainly through the **courts** . Legal strategy produced **Brown v. Board of Education** , which held segregated schooling unconstitutional and stripped away the legal basis of segregation.

Court victories did not enforce themselves, so the movement turned to **direct action** : the Montgomery bus boycott, sit-ins, freedom rides, and mass marches, organised through churches and student groups and grounded in **nonviolent protest** .



The Great Society and the Vietnam War

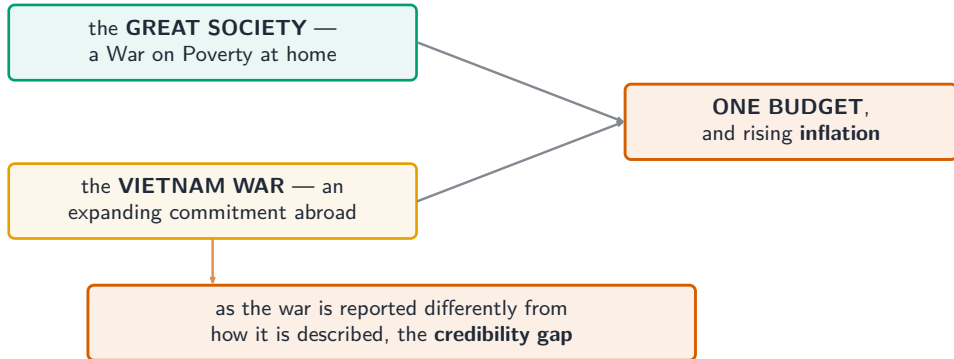
The **Great Society** extended federal responsibility furthest since the New Deal: Medicare and Medicaid, federal aid to education, and the **War on Poverty** .

Defeat abroad and disillusion at home weakened confidence in federal power just as its domestic role peaked.

The Great Society and Vietnam

- The **women's movement** pressed for legal equality and workplace access; the **Equal Rights Amendment** failed ratification.
- **Environmental** concern grew into federal action on air, water, and endangered species between 1968 and 1980.

The Great Society and Vietnam, in detail



The Great Society and Vietnam drew on one budget in the same years



Society in Transition

The later part of the period is defined by movements and by limits.

- The **women's movement** pressed for legal equality and workplace access; the **Equal Rights Amendment** failed ratification.
- **Environmental** concern grew into federal action on air, water, and endangered species between 1968 and 1980.
- **Immigration** law was reformed in 1965, changing the origins of new arrivals.
- **Conservatism** organised in response to all of it, on taxes, social change, and the size of government – the movement Period 9 opens with.

Three movements, and a race

Black power

Black power argued for self-determination, community control and pride, where the earlier movement had argued for integration.

The antiwar movement

The **antiwar movement** grew from campuses to the mainstream as the draft, the casualties and the credibility gap widened.

The space race

The **space race** carried the Cold War into a contest of prestige – and paid for a generation of science education.

What connects them

All three question who speaks for the nation, and on whose authority.

Continuity and change: the sixties movements inherit the fifties' methods and reject its patience.



Continuity and Change in Period 8

The period's reasoning skill is **continuity and change**.

Rights expanded enormously in law; economic inequality and residential segregation persisted, and both statements belong in a strong answer.

Worked example – a contribution, with its limit

2023 long essay: *“Evaluate the extent to which the growth of civil rights activism contributed to changes in government action”* in the twentieth century.

- **Scoring:** *“Civil rights activism contributed to a great extent to changes in government action: litigation produced *Brown v. Board of Education*, and sustained direct action created the pressure behind the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965 – although federal action followed rather than led it.”*
- The prompt asks about a **contribution**: activism is the cause, the government changes the effect.

“Followed rather than led” is the qualification, and it is where the sophistication point lives.

Exam tips

- Define **containment** precisely – preventing spread, not rollback – and use it to explain Korea and Vietnam as consequences.
- For the Red Scare, the mark is in the **cost to civil liberties**, not in a narrative of accusations.
- Present civil rights as **courts → direct action → legislation**, each stage creating the next.
- Say what the **Great Society** actually did (Medicare, Medicaid, education aid) rather than calling it "reforms".
- Vietnam's domestic effect – **division and the credibility gap** – matters as much as the military outcome.
- On continuity-and-change prompts, pair legal gains with persistent **economic and residential inequality**.



Period 8 – key takeaways

1

Containment

prevent spread, not rollback –
Korea and Vietnam

2

Red Scare

the cost is to civil liberties

3

Civil rights

courts → direct action →
legislation

4

Vietnam

division and the credibility gap at
home

Check yourself

- 1 Define containment in one clause.
- 2 Give the civil-rights sequence.
- 3 Name two Great Society programmes.
- 4 What is the domestic effect of Vietnam?

Answers: prevent spread, not rollback ▪ courts → action → law ▪ Medicare, Medicaid, education aid ▪ division and the credibility gap