

## **Year 3:**

## **Unit 2**

# **"Peace, Progress, and Prosperity" - The 1950s and the Early Cold War (1945 - 1962): Introduction**

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### **Unit Purpose: Why This Unit?**

When World War II ended, the world was devastated by the violence. The Allied Powers led massive efforts to rebuild in the wake of this tragedy and despair. Allied forces became occupiers, taking control of Germany, Japan, and much of the territory both nations had formerly ruled. Efforts were made to permanently dismantle the war-making abilities of the former Axis nations: Factories were destroyed, and former leadership was removed or prosecuted. War crimes trials took place in Europe and Asia, leading to many executions and prison sentences. The United Nations Partition Plan for Palestine paved the way for Israel to declare its independence in 1948 and marked the start of the continuing Arab-Israeli conflict.

From the ashes of warfare, the United States and the Soviet Union emerged as rival "superpowers," their alliance lasting only as long as it took to defeat Hitler. Their contentious relationship began long before World War II, dating back to the Bolshevik Revolution and Lenin's Communist takeover and creation of the Soviet Union. After World War II, the alliance broke down as the Soviet Union expanded its sphere of influence and began to create a buffer zone of Communist countries to protect itself from the West. Churchill declared that "an iron curtain has fallen," and the West rushed to contain the spread of communism in Europe and around the world. As the United States worked to contain Soviet communism, the two nations fought proxy wars around the globe while building up their nuclear arsenals to prepare for confrontation. Americans grew terrified by the prospect of communism and nuclear war, leading to mass hysteria as well as societal attempts to maintain stability and prosperity in everyday life. This urge to maintain stability and promote prosperity at home resulted in a sense of national conformity that was reinforced by the rise of mass media. However, a counterculture emerged in response to this spirit of conformity. Americans who did not fit the societal norm as well as the rebellious younger generation sparked counterculture movements that would eventually explode in the 1960s.

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# Unit 2 Learning Goals

## Essential Question

If you are successful in this unit, your scholars will be able to answer the Unit 2 Essential Question: *To what extent did early Cold War policy establish “peace, progress, and prosperity” in the United States and around the world?*

## Big Ideas

The Big Ideas, outlined below, help answer the Unit 2 Essential Question and reflect the key ideas that scholars must master by the end of this unit. As you teach Unit 2, connect every lesson back to the Big Idea(s) that the lesson helps illustrate. The Unit 2 Big Ideas were adapted from the UCLA National History Standards United States Era 9 and the New York State Common Core Social Studies 9–12 Framework.

- **Big Idea 1: Following World War II, the fragile alliance between the United States and the Soviet Union fell apart, increasing tension between the two world superpowers and ultimately leading to the Cold War.**
  - The flawed peace resulting from World War II led to increased tension between the East and West, as both attempted to establish spheres of ideological influence in Europe.
  - After World War II, the United States and the Soviet Union emerged as the world’s new superpowers, which escalated their ideological rivalry and broke their fragile alliance.
  - In an effort to limit the spread of communism, the United States adopted a containment policy, which drove all foreign policy decisions for the decades to come.
  
- **Big Idea 2: The Cold War was characterized by ideological competition between the United States and the Soviet Union for power, superiority, and influence in the world.**
  - Initially an ideological war between communism and capitalism, the Cold War eventually broke out into a proxy war in Korea, between the Soviet Union, China, and North Korea against the United States and South Korea.
  - The competition between the Soviet Union and the United States in both space exploration and arms development, including a race to develop a nuclear arsenal, was a result of efforts by each country to prove its ideological superiority.
  - The arms race culminated with the Cuban Missile Crisis, in which the world stood on the brink of nuclear war. Crisis was averted, however, when both the United States and the Soviet Union reached a compromise.
  
- **Big Idea 3: The Cold War infiltrated all aspects of American life, creating mass hysteria about communist agents, which drove Americans to seek peace and stability amidst the chaos.**
  - Postwar Soviet espionage led to a fear of Communist infiltration of America, which led to the emergence of internal security and loyalty programs and investigations, like those conducted by the House Un-American Activities Committee, whose sole mission was to root out "communist subversives" in America.

- Senator Joseph McCarthy led a series of witch hunts for Americans suspected of being communists, leading to the mass hysteria known as the Red Scare. This hysteria, also called McCarthyism, led to the investigations of many Americans, resulting in the denial of their civil liberties.
- During and after World War II, the American economy boomed, leading to the rise of the middle class and a sense of heightened prosperity for many Americans. However, this economic boom further exacerbated segregation and the exclusion of Americans who did not fit the societal — white, middle class — norm.
- Popular culture and mass media reflected the American desire to feel a sense of normalcy and stability amidst the chaos of the early Cold War years but also led to a counterculture movement of Americans who either did not fit the “norm” or were rebelling against the restrictive conformity.

## Key Terms

**The following people, places, and events are foundational to understanding the Big Ideas of this unit. As these words are introduced in each lesson, add them to your word wall and hold scholars accountable for using them in discussion and writing throughout the unit.**

- United Nations
- Nuremberg Trials
- Yalta Conference
- Israel
- Communism
- Capitalism
- Truman Doctrine
- Marshall Plan
- Containment
- NATO
- Korean War
- Mutually assured destruction (MAD)
- NASA
- Nuclear warfare
- Red Scare
- House on Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC)
- Civil liberties
- Mass consumerism
- John F. Kennedy
- Cuban Missile Crisis

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# Intellectual Preparation

**Class Materials** Once you have internalized the Big Ideas of the unit, to be successful you must study and internalize all scholar documents and materials before you teach the first lesson:

- All documents in the [Unit 2 Sourcebook](#)
- All scholar and teacher materials in the [Unit 2 Workbook](#)

**Additional Resources** The resources below provide additional historical background for the content covered in Unit 2:

- Browse the History Channel website’s Cold War resources.
- Read the essays “Postwar Politics and the Origins of the Cold War” and “The 1950s” on the Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History\* website.
- Watch “Crash Course History: The Cold War” on YouTube.

\*To access these readings and more free American History content and resources, create an account on the Gilder Lehrman Institute website.

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## Unit 2 Lesson Sequence

**Essential Question:** To what extent did early Cold War policy establish “peace, progress, and prosperity” in the United States and around the world?

The first five lessons set the stage for the lead-up to the early Cold War. Lesson 1 addresses the aftermath of World War II and explains why Europe lost power and influence in the world as a result of the war. By the end of Lesson 2, scholars will understand why both the United States and the Soviet Union gained more power and influence in the world after the war, as well as how that contributed to a breakdown in their relationship. Lessons 3 through 5 emphasize the actions both countries took to start the Cold War, and scholars will be able to evaluate who was more responsible for beginning the decades-long conflict. By the end of these lessons, scholars will understand why the alliance between the Soviet Union and the United States fell apart and should be prepared to grapple with the events of the Cold War.

**Lesson 1:** The Aftermath of World War II (Gallery Walk)

- **Central Question:** How did the international community respond to World War II?

**Lesson 2:** Rival Superpowers (Video Analysis)

- **Central Question:** Why did the United States and the Soviet Union emerge as rival superpowers after World War II?

**Lessons 3–5:** The Cold War (DBQ Writing)

- **Central Question:** Who was more responsible for beginning the Cold War: the United States or the Soviet Union?

Lessons 6 and 7 address the international and domestic consequences of engaging in the Cold War. By the end of Lesson 6, scholars will understand that the Korean War was a proxy war between the United States and the Soviet Union, in which the Cold War moved from an ideological conflict to a human conflict. Lesson 7 illustrates yet another dimension of the escalating international conflict, explaining the impact of the Cold War on science and technology. In this lesson, scholars will understand that, while this time period was one of huge advancements in space and weaponry, the consequences of these advancements were the escalation of tensions around the world and the growing threat of nuclear war. By the end of these lessons, scholars will understand the nature of the Soviet-American competition and power struggle and its consequences internationally.

**Lesson 6:** The Korean War (Source Analysis)

- **Central Question:** Why did the United States enter the Korean War?

**Lesson 7:** The Arms and Space Races (Jigsaw)

- **Central Question:** Why did the arms and space races escalate so quickly?

Lessons 8 through 11 address the domestic consequences of the early Cold War in the United States. The growing fear of communism and impending nuclear war changed the way Americans lived their lives. By the end of Lesson 8, scholars will understand how the Red Scare was a manifestation of the fear that Americans felt about communists infiltrating the United States, and how it consequently led to the denial of civil liberties to many Americans. Lessons 9 through 11 show how the fear and chaos of the early Cold War drove Americans to seek normalcy and stability in their everyday lives, which was reinforced by the rise of mass media and was made possible due to increased economic prosperity and the emergence of the middle class. By the end of Lesson 11, scholars will understand that while most Americans pursued societal conformity to achieve normalcy and stability, this did not apply to all Americans and inspired the rise of a counterculture.

**Lesson 8:** The Red Scare and Civil Liberties (Source Analysis)

- **Central Question:** How did the Red Scare limit the civil liberties of many Americans?

**Lesson 9:** American Society in the 1950s (Jigsaw)

- **Central Question:** To what extent did the economic prosperity of the 1950s improve the lives of all Americans?

**Lessons 10–11:** Advertising in American Society (PBL)

- **Central Question:** How did the rise of mass media and advertising affect American society?

Lessons 12 through 15 address the shifting nature of the Cold War conflict from the 1950s to the 1960s. After Lesson 12, scholars will understand the complicated legacy of John F. Kennedy, including how his leadership affected the course of the Cold War. This is most notably apparent during the Cuban Missile Crisis, which scholars will explore more in depth in Lessons 13 through 15. By the end of Lesson 15, scholars will be able to evaluate how the Cuban Missile Crisis reflected the world's worst fears about the danger of the arms race and how Kennedy and Khrushchev were able to negotiate to avoid nuclear disaster. As a result of these lessons, scholars will be able to fully explain the complex character of the early Cold War.

**Lesson 12:** President John F. Kennedy (Source Analysis)

- **Central Question:** How did President Kennedy's leadership affect American "peace, progress, and prosperity"?

**Lessons 13–15:** The Cuban Missile Crisis (DBQ Writing)

- **Central Question:** Why did the Soviets pull their missiles out of Cuba?