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Victory and Anxiety
World War and Cold War, 1945–1962

Figure 1.1 CHE BELLO! Residents of New York City's Little Italy neighborhood greeting the news of Japanese surrender in August 1945. The victory of the United States and its allies in World War II left the nation in a position of unparalleled global supremacy that defined its expectations for decades to come. (Source: Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington, DC, 20540, USA, http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.pnp/cph.3c35620)

Colony to Colonizer: American Rise to Globalism

Awesome

In recent decades, the word has been a slang expression of approval. "That was an awesome game." "Those are awesome shoes." "She's really an awesome person."[1] Rarely do those who use the term consider its literal meaning: that which inspires amazement, even fear, in its overwhelming power. "Awe" generally (including aw*ful* as well as awes*ome*) has often had religious connotations; Moses coming down from Mount Sinai with the Ten Commandments, or the earth-shaking grief of God as Jesus died on the cross: these were events that evoked awe for those who experienced them. Earthly phenomena can be awesome too. A volcanic eruption or a tornado is an awesome experience. So is the miracle of birth.

Here's something else that's awesome: US military power. With bases that circle the globe, soldiers who are the best equipped and trained in the world, and cutting-edge technology that is continually updated, the president of the United States can, at a moment's notice, wreak terrifying havoc on just about any location on this planet, and by having his orders executed at the touch of a button that directs a drone. And that doesn't even take into account bombs that are capable of destroying all life on earth, or any number of weapons systems of which most of us are blissfully ignorant. There are of course any number of practical inhibitions on the ability to exercise this power, and any number of ways determined enemies are currently plotting their ways around it (the technical term for this is "asymmetrical warfare"), something that has been accomplished with notable success in Vietnam, Afghanistan, and New York's World Trade Center, among other places in the last 75 years. But neither friend nor foe can doubt the immensity of the destructive power that the United States currently has at its disposal.

This awesome capacity, which has been used for good as well as evil, has been a fact of global life since World War II. Actually, in relative terms, English North Americans were powerful from their beginnings. Despite the tenuousness of colonial settlements on the eastern seaboard in the early decades of the seventeenth century, New Englanders were able to defeat Native peoples in the Pequot War of the 1630s, less than a decade after Massachusetts was founded. Colonial Virginians prevailed over the Powhatan Indians in 1622 and 1644, and English settlers generally prevailed in wars against Indians that stretched over the next century and half. There was no question that the British Empire was vastly more powerful than the colonists who went to war for their independence in 1776, and yet the Americans were able to win it anyway (with French, Spanish, and Dutch help). For most of the nineteenth century, US security was guaranteed by the British Navy, which effectively enforced the Monroe Doctrine of 1823 that warned European powers against reasserting themselves in the western hemisphere (that's because Britain had a shared interest in keeping rivals out). Such insulation allowed the nation to assert its dominion over the rest of the North American continent in wars with Mexico and various indigenous peoples. Even when the United States was wracked by a

fierce Civil War, England and France, though tempted, thought better of intervening to bolster their respective positions in North America. When the Civil War ended, the US Army was the largest on the face of the earth. Foreign governments sent military experts to observe that war closely: they understood that they were witnessing the future of armed conflict in innovations such as the Gatling gun (an early machine gun) and trench warfare.

After 1865, the US Army and Navy shriveled to the point of insignificance. Here's a paradox: for a nation of its size, the United States has been able to get away with an absurdly small military and *still* throw its weight around. Rarely has a nation been so fortunate in its enemies. When the United States finally did collide with a European power—Spain in 1898—it won decisively in a matter of months despite an embarrassingly clumsy mobilization. Victory in that war accelerated a trend toward acquiring overseas possessions that had begun with Alaska in 1867 and now extended to the Philippines. By the time of the outbreak of World War I in 1914, the United States had reached the point of becoming a prominent second-tier power, behind Britain and Germany.

Enjoying oceans of protection from Great Power politics, the American people reacted to World War I with deep skepticism about intervention, notwithstanding a profitable trading relationship with Europe that resulted in a vast transfer of wealth to US advantage. After hesitating early in the war, Germany resumed attacks on Atlantic shipping to prevent US aid to England and France. American public opinion changed dramatically, and the United States went to war in 1917. The German high command gambled that the Americans would not be able to mobilize fast enough to stop a last-chance German offensive against Paris. Though plausible, that bet was a losing one: American troops arrived in force in 1918, re-energizing allies who flattened the Germans in a matter of months. Once again, the nation benefited from the weakness of others, this time the financially and militarily devastated European empires. President Woodrow Wilson and his supporters hoped that the United States would now assume a position of global leadership. But the deep grooves of public opinion, suspicious of what this might entail, rejected the League of Nations and the vision of international engagement that it represented, and Congress voted accordingly. The nation turned inward again, in large measure because it could afford to, for another generation.

Wages of War: Triumph over Germany and Japan

World War II proved to be a turning point in the nation's relationship with the world. At first, it didn't seem it would be. Over the course of the 1930s, volatile European powers—the Germans now under Nazi rule; the Soviet Union under the Communist Joseph Stalin; the British and French avoiding conflict with either while trying to prop up their sagging empires—lurched toward disaster. Meanwhile, in the Pacific, the Japanese empire expanded across the Pacific, eating into northern and eastern China and threatening European interests, many of them petroleum-based,

in Southeast Asia. None of this was enough to budge American public opinion, which strongly supported the Neutrality Acts passed by Congress in the second half of the 1930s, designed to handcuff the desire of internationalists—notably President Franklin Delano Roosevelt—from acting on their concern that the Nazi and Japanese regimes represented a bona fide threat to the United States.

Yet, by 1939, when Germany invaded Poland and triggered World War II in Europe, even the most committed of the so-called isolationists recognized the value of bolstering US defenses. In the first 2 years of the new decade, the US government stepped up building up its military capacity—reinstituting the draft, for example—and spending money on weapons. It certainly helped that rearmament also helped stimulate an economy that had never fully recovered from the Great Depression of the 1930s. With some difficulty, President Roosevelt managed to sell Congress on a program known as Lend-Lease—military aid to US allies in the form of loans or the transfer of assets such as naval bases—because it seemed cheaper and easier to have American allies do most of the heavy lifting. Meanwhile, more high-minded advocates of internationalism advocated greater engagement, most famously *Time* magazine editor Henry Luce, who in a February 1941 article exhorted his fellow citizens to embrace the coming "American Century."[2]

The United States finally did enter World War II after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941, years after the other principal combatants had attacked each other in the Atlantic and the Pacific. There is of course much to be said about this. For our purposes, what's notable here is not simply that the United States prevailed in fighting across two oceans simultaneously, but the *way* it prevailed: by simply overwhelming its opponents with its sheer—yes, awesome—power. That power rested on a number of foundations. One of them was an impregnable geographic position (the Japanese managed to drop a total of four virtually harmless bombs into the woods of Oregon, the only ones ever to land on mainland soil during the war).[3] Another was the size and competence of its armed forces, mobilized from a wide cross-section of society, that was notably well-fed, literate, and confident.

The most decisive aspect of US power, however, was an economic base that staggered its opponents. Germany and Japan could boast of considerable productive prowess, all the more impressive for an ability to function under tremendous pressure from encroaching enemies. And German as well as Japanese soldiers were typically at least the equal of any the United States sent into battle. (Many observers consider the army with which Germany invaded Soviet Union, an ally it turned on in 1941, the finest the world has ever seen.) But neither the Japanese nor the Germans could withstand the seemingly bottomless ability of the United States to supply not only itself, but its allies, with whatever it took to win. By 1943, most informed leaders of both Germany and Japan knew they were doomed simply because they could not compete with the seemingly bottomless US capacity for war-making.

Numbers alone tell a vivid story. For example, the United States absorbed what initially seemed like a crippling blow at Pearl Harbor, where hundreds of

aircraft were damaged in a single day. And yet, within months, American contractors were building more planes every *day* than were lost in that attack, which had been planned for many years.[4] A Liberty ship, used to carry cargo, took 355 days to build in 1941. Within a year, production time was cut to 56 days, and in one case a mere 2 weeks. (The construction quality was not as good, but US capacity was great enough for such assets to be considered disposable, an observation that was made of other kinds of US war production, such as tanks.[5]) The impact of this power may well have been even more dramatic in its impact on US allies. There is little question that the Soviets bore the brunt of the Nazi war machine, and that Soviet blood was indispensable to eventual victory. But the Soviets could not have prevailed without the 13 million pairs of boots, 5 million tons of food, 2,000 locomotives, 11,000 freight carriages, and 540,000 tons of rails—more than the Soviets laid between 1928 and 1939—that Americans provided, among other supplies, in 4 years of Lend-Lease, to say nothing of what it provided to Britain, China, and other allies. In 1939, the United States was a negligible factor in the international arms market; by 1944, it was producing 40% of the world's weapons. And by 1947, the nation was producing almost half of the manufactured goods in the world.[6]

War sometimes destroys economies. In the case of the United States, however, World War II proved wondrous, with a glow that lasted decades. Stanford University historian David Kennedy has aptly summarized its transformative power:

> At the end of the Depression decade [1939], nearly half of all white families and almost 90 percent of black families still lived in poverty. One in seven workers remained unemployed. By war's end unemployment was negligible. In the ensuing quarter century the American economy would create some 20 million new jobs, more than half of them filled by women. Within less than a generation of the war's end, the middle class, defined as families with annual incomes between three and ten thousand dollars, more than doubled. By 1960 the middle class included almost two-thirds of all Americans, most of whom owned their own homes, unprecedented achievements for any modern society.[7]

This is not to say that World War II can account for all of this, or that it had a positive economic outcome for everyone, or that its rewards were evenly distributed. Prosperity may have alleviated evils such as racism, for example, but it hardly eradicated them in a society where discrimination had always been a fact of life, and would remain a fact of life. During the war, millions of African Americans left the rural, segregated South to find jobs in Northern cities. They found those jobs—and they found ongoing segregation, sometimes repressive enough to spark violence in cities such as Detroit and St. Louis, which experienced bloody race riots. Perhaps even more than the actual opportunities generated by the war, it was the rising sense of expectations that marked the war years in domestic life.

Indeed, it was precisely this sense of hope that led African Americans and other minorities to fight, not only to defeat Hitler and the nightmarish vision he represented, but also to resist Hitlers at home. Foreigners also understood the

appeal of the American way of life, and that its realization was directly correlated with one's proximity to America itself. It's no wonder that defeated German soldiers vastly preferred to surrender to Americans than the Soviets, not only as a matter of survival prospects, but also as a matter of what life was likely to be like after the war. Nowhere was the coming economic divide more obvious than in territories partitioned between the two major powers at the end of the conflict. The comparison between a Soviet-dominated East Germany and US-dominated West Germany, or a Soviet-controlled North Korea and a US-controlled South Korea, proved to be object lessons in what communism and capitalism had to offer. It was no contest.

American international economic dominance was codified at the Bretton Woods Conference of 1944. It was at this gathering of 44 allied nations in a New Hampshire hotel that the parameters of a United States–centric global economic order was established, one that included the General Agreement of Tariffs and Trade (GATT), the World Bank, and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). The dollar in effect became the international currency, replacing the British pound sterling. While the world economy has changed substantially since that time, and the relative position of the United States has slipped significantly, world markets still play by these American-made rules.

But the greatest demonstration of American might in World War II was technological. It was a single act, performed on August 6, 1945: the dropping of the atomic bomb. If this was not awesome, nothing on earth ever was. While some critics argued it was too terrible a weapon to be deployed even against a hated enemy, there was relatively little domestic opposition to its use at Hiroshima, and, when surrender was not immediately forthcoming, at Nagasaki 3 days later. Military planners were acutely aware that less than 5% of Japanese soldiers had ever surrendered in battle, and that the planned invasion of Japan would involve millions of soldiers and hundreds of thousands of casualties. Though his decision was criticized at the time and ever since—almost 100,000 people died instantly at Hiroshima—President Harry Truman, who took office upon the death of Roosevelt that spring, never doubted his responsibility to end the war as quickly and decisively as he could.[8]

The atomic bomb was only the most visible, and terrifying, manifestation of US technological might during and following World War II. But it was during the latter part of the war that the American government began developing another technology that would also have a dramatic impact on the shape of the postwar world: computers. To a significant degree, the US innovation in this field was related to policy surrounding the bomb.[9]

For most of US history, the word "computers" did not refer to things; they referred to people, many of them women, who did the math of everyday commercial life—managing payrolls, budgets, and the like. They were assisted by a series of tools such as the slide rule, commonplace before the invention of calculators. The 1924 creation of International Business Machines (IBM) under the leadership of executive Thomas J. Watson became one of the greatest success stories of corporate capitalism. Over the course of the next generation, IBM led

the way in the development of increasingly elaborate devices that could perform ever more complex calculations. These early computers were often enormous pieces of engineering, with lots of sensitive moving parts that occupied large rooms and required delicate management.

It was during World War II, however, that a decisive new chapter in the history began, and here the US government, not private corporations, proved pivotal. Computers were vital to the processes of code-making and breaking, as well as for performing ballistics calculations for artillery. Wartime use of computer technology was an important part of the Manhattan Project, from which the atomic bomb emerged. But it was the implications of atomic warfare even more than the bombs themselves that proved particularly significant for the future. Of particular concern was the ability to act decisively and responsibly in the event of a future nuclear war. In 1946, the US government created the Research and Development (RAND) Corporation, which grappled with such problems. It was followed in 1958 by the Advanced Research Projects Agency, or ARPA. (The agency was renamed the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency, or DARPA, in 1969.) So it was that the US government's quest to maintain its newly acquired military supremacy laid down the tracks for what would become one of the most powerful tools of every civilian life in the twenty-first century: the Internet.

But all this was too far into the future to be perceived in anything but the dimmest of ways. In 1945, virtually all Americans were entirely focused on victory over Germany (in May) and Japan (in August). The end of the war was met with widespread ecstasy in the United States, symbolized by Albert Eisenstaedt's famous photograph of two young strangers, a sailor and a nurse, kissing in New York's Times Square. But—and this is one of the great paradoxes of the war—its end was at least as sobering as it was celebratory. That's not only because of the terrible human cost paid by the some 400,000 combat and other deaths sustained in the war, and the loved ones they left behind.[10] It's also because the *way* the war ended was unmistakably ominous; it took no great feat of imagination to think that atomic weapons would only get more powerful, and that the enemies of the United States would soon acquire them, as indeed they did. And those enemies asserted themselves more quickly than most Americans anticipated.

First Frost: Dawn of the Cold War

Certainly, many Americans did see trouble coming even before the war had ended. Relations between the United States and the Soviet Union had never been very good. The Communist-led Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) was explicitly dedicated to the overthrow of capitalism not only in Russia, but in the rest of the world as well, and the US government was part of a coalition that had unsuccessfully tried to aid the enemies of the Soviets in the civil war that followed the Russian Revolution of 1917. The American government refused to recognize the legitimacy of the Soviets until 1933, and ties were lukewarm at best before the Germans violated the Nazi–Soviet pact of

1939 by invading 2 years later. For a brief period in the early 1940s, the United States and USSR cooperated effectively, but there were mutual suspicions even when relations were strongest. Stalin believed that the repeated delays in what became the D-Day landing in Europe in 1944 were designed to bleed his countrymen dry; American policymakers worried that Stalin intended to impose his will on Eastern Europe, as he did, ruthlessly, in the aftermath of the war. The acrimony between the two nations was more than a matter of traditional Great Power competition; it was also rooted in ideology. Though the Soviets' stated intention to spread revolution around the globe was more posturing than reality, it set up a series of satellite states governed by a set of doctrinaire communist parties, stretching from Korea to Poland. A combination of legitimate security concerns, a historic tendency toward expansion, and an increasingly paranoid dictator made the USSR difficult to manage, much less control.

Tensions were increasingly obvious when Roosevelt, Stalin and the British prime minister Winston Churchill met in the Soviet seaside town of Yalta in 1944. The strain was even greater in the following year at a meeting convened to make more postwar plans in the German town of Potsdam, where Harry Truman, who acceded to the presidency following the death of Roosevelt in April 1945, took a harder line with Stalin. (Truman did not reveal that he had the atomic bomb ready to go, but Stalin's spies had already informed him.) As the Soviets moved with increasing decisiveness to solidify their grip on Eastern Europe in early 1946, Churchill famously proclaimed that an "Iron Curtain" was now dividing the two sides in what came to be known as the Cold War.

In the second half of the 1940s, the Americans and Soviets played a carefully calibrated game of chicken in which they staked out as much literal or figurative territory as they could without precipitating armed conflict. When it looked like communists might come to power in Greece and Turkey in 1947, the Truman administration gave aid to their enemies to keep this from happening. In 1948, the Soviets demonstrated their displeasure with the Americans by closing the highway leading to the old German capital of Berlin, which had sectors of control assigned to both the United States and Soviets, but which was located deep in the heart of Soviet-controlled East Germany. Truman responded to the road closure with an 11-month-long airlift to keep the city supplied; the Soviets reopened the road in 1949.

Besides such reactive measures, the American government was also formulating a broader anticommunist strategy known as "containment," a term coined by US diplomat George Kennan in a 5,000-word message transmitted from Moscow in 1946 that came to be known as the Long Telegram. Kennan argued that much of Soviet aggression was less a function of communist ideology than an expression of centuries of Russian expansionism, a problem best dealt with by selectively applying pressure at key geographic points in order to discourage the Soviets from their instinctive desire to control more territory. Although his ideas would prove to be highly influential, Kennan was among those who came to regret the way the United States practiced containment in the decades that followed, because it tended to lead the United States to back regimes, however

abhorrent, that took anticommunist positions. This approach would reap bitter rewards in Vietnam, for example.

But not all US policy was mindless in this regard; indeed, the Truman administration met the Soviet challenge with notable enlightened self-interest as well. Responding to reports of severe privation in Europe—and concerned that it would lead some Europeans to embrace radical solutions—a massive international aid program, the Marshall Plan, named after former World War II commander and then-current secretary of state George Marshall, was announced in 1948. The Marshall Plan helped Western Europe get back on its feet, and in so doing helped re-establish a market for American goods. The Soviets and their allies were invited to participate, but Stalin, sensing a trap, refused to allow it.

Truman further bolstered the US position by creating a series of military alliances around the globe, most notably the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in 1949. The Marshall Plan and NATO were termed the "two halves of the walnut" in American foreign policy in the Cold War era. He also authorized a re-expansion of the military outlined in a famous 1950 National Security Council report known as NSC-68, an important blueprint of US strategy. Even though the American military infrastructure shrank after the war ended, it was clear that the United States would not demilitarize in the way it had after previous wars. The national defense budget for 1947 was a hefty $13 billion higher than the last prewar budget of 1940.[11]

Stalin had resources of his own, among them an immense army that he kept poised on the perimeter of the Soviet empire. The most important postwar military asset he acquired was the atomic bomb, ending the US monopoly in 1949. While the United States would generally have more powerful and sophisticated weapons at any given time in the next 40 years, the Soviets would acquire sufficient nuclear power to assure a state of deterrence known as mutually assured destruction (MAD).

It was MAD more than any other factor that prevented the Cold War from ever becoming a hot one. Instead, the two sides asserted their interests through a series of proxy fights, overthrowing governments they considered hostile to their interests. As indicated, this had already started before the Soviets acquired nuclear bomb technology, in the form of US interventions in Greece and Turkey, as well as Soviet interventions in Poland and Czechoslovakia during the late 1940s. But MAD both raised the stakes and engendered caution. So when the Americans intervened in Guatemala to put a friendlier regime in power in 1954, for or the Soviets acted similarly in Hungary in 1956, each side implicitly recognized the other's sphere of influence, hesitating to resist too strongly for fear of triggering a nuclear catastrophe.

Along with the loss of nuclear monopoly, the other serious blow that the United States sustained in 1949 was the communist takeover of China. Again, this was a foreseeable turn of events. China had been wracked by civil war since the 1920s, and the bloody contest of wills waged by the Nationalists led by Chiang Kai-Shek and Communists led by Mao Zedong was suspended, not ended, when Japan invaded in 1931. Once the Japanese were expelled in 1945,

the two sides resumed fighting. The United States supported the Chiang regime, which it knew was corrupt but hoped to reform, yet was unable to broker a deal between Chiang and Mao, who drove the Nationalists onto the island of Taiwan (which the United States improbably insisted until 1972 was the location of the legitimate Chinese government).

So it was that, by 1950, the United States was confronted with *two* major communist adversaries. The severity of this challenge became apparent that year, when Stalin gave his blessing for North Korea to invade South Korea. Caught off guard, the United States scrambled to put together a force in the name of the recently formed United Nations, winning approval for a multinational force to prevent the unification of Korea under communist influence. (The Americans were able to do this because the Soviets, who normally would have vetoed such a move, had temporarily boycotted the UN over its refusal to recognize the communist Chinese regime.) The UN counterattack that followed was successful—a little *too* successful. When the army under the command of American general Douglas MacArthur approached the Chinese border with North Korea, a huge Chinese force overran UN forces and pushed them all the way back down again. By mid-1951, a rough equilibrium was established near the location of the original partition at the end of World War II. But it would take 2 years of wrangling over the fate of prisoners of war before a truce was finally declared. It has remained in place—which is to say that the United States technically remains at war with North Korea—to this day. The Korean War was unpopular with the American public, which, while never expressing strong opposition to it (the way it would in Vietnam), tended to view the conflict as remote and fruitless, one that grimly clarified the high price of the Cold War and the burden that the nation shouldered as a self-appointed global policeman.

Seeing Red: The Cold War at Home

It would be hard to overstate just how frustrated many Americans were with the state of the world by the early 1950s. The nation had banded together and won a gargantuan battle against Germany and Japan, only to confront a new set of enemies that seemed equally dangerous. To make matters worse, the Soviet acquisition of the atomic bomb (by 1964, China joined the club, which by then included England and France) meant that the world could end at any moment. How could this state of affairs have come to pass? And who was to blame? Angry citizens—and the politicians who sought to tap that anger—looked hard for culprits. Perhaps not surprisingly, they found enemies within.

Although it might sometimes seem so, empires never speak with one voice. At times of crisis—such as the onset of financial calamity, for example, or the outbreak of a war—consensus may exist for a leader to focus the energies of a people in a particular direction. That certainly happened in a number of countries in the case of the Great Depression and World War II. But such unity is the exception rather than the rule. There are always alternating currents at work, even if they

fall short of sparking civil war. This is true even in dictatorships; factions always compete for a leader's attention or jockey for position to literally or figuratively inherit a throne. In a nation such as the United States, alternative visions for society have long been organized and legitimated through political parties that compete for the electorate's support. Those parties, and the politicians who lead them, may use any number of tactics to win votes. Some are principled; some are not. Most often they're a blend of the two.

One of the more dramatic internal disputes on foreign policy in the early Cold War era took place between Truman and MacArthur, the general who had accepted the surrender of the Japanese, governed occupied Japan, and who led the UN forces in Korea. Truman and MacArthur disagreed on a number of points, principal among them the danger of Chinese intervention in the conflict (MacArthur underestimated it). Truman ultimately relieved MacArthur of his command, a deeply unpopular decision that led to talk of MacArthur for president. But the legacy of their conflict was a reaffirmation of civilian control of the military, a deeply ingrained value in American political culture, but also one that strengthened the imperial power of the presidency.

Other conflicts were not so easy to resolve. By the early 1950s, a significant number of Americans were convinced that the communists could never have achieved such gains abroad without significant assistance from foreign agents and traitors operating within the United States. This was not an irrational idea; Stalin and other communist leaders had repeatedly asserted their intention to create worldwide revolution, even if that was usually more bluster than reality. There really *was* a Communist Party in the United States (albeit one riddled with American informers).

Actually, fears of domestic communist subversion long predated World War II. The Red Scare, a major crackdown involving harassment, arrests, and expulsion of communists and other radicals, followed in the wake of World War I. From the 1920s until the 1970s, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) was headed by the reactionary J. Edgar Hoover, who often showed more interest in prosecuting political radicalism than organized crime. In 1938, Congress created the House Committee on Un-American Activities (HUAC), chaired by Texas Congressman Martin Dies (it was also known as the Dies Committee), to investigate subversive activities by fascists or communists. Once the United States and the Soviet Union became allies against Nazi Germany, hostility toward communism receded somewhat, though it never entirely disappeared.

With the advent of the Cold War, however, domestic anticommunism feelings intensified again. Beginning in the late 1940s, the Truman administration began requiring loyalty oaths to be taken by federal employees—the FBI, which handled this work, almost doubled in size[12]—and a number of professional organizations required background checks for their members. In 1947, HUAC generated national headlines when it began investigating political affiliations in the film industry, demanding that actors, writers, and other filmmakers reveal whether or not they had ever been communists, and to name any others they knew to have been. The so-called Hollywood Ten refused to cooperate with the

investigation, and were cited for contempt by Congress, making it impossible for them to find work in the industry (a few screenwriters later escaped such "blacklisting" by writing under false names).

The actual number of people who lost their jobs in these investigations—called witch-hunts by their detractors, and memorialized most vividly by playwright Arthur Miller,[13] whose 1953 play *The Crucible* turned the 1692 Salem Witch Trials into an allegory of the investigations—was not especially large. In New York City, for example 321 schoolteachers and 58 college professors were fired, a tiny fraction of the work force.[14] But fear over accusations, whether true, false, or misleading, generated enormous anxiety and resonated outward far more than these figures would suggest.

Again, part of what made all of this complicated is that, while fears of communist subversion were very often exaggerated, they were never quite total nonsense. In 1950, a highly placed State Department official, Alger Hiss, was caught lying about his former communist ties in a case prosecuted by future president Richard Nixon, who became a national figure as a result of it. One of the most controversial legal cases of the early 1950s was the trial, conviction, and 1953 execution of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg, who were accused of passing atomic secrets to the Soviets during World War II. Their guilt was long in question, though that of Julius has since been established, while that of his wife appears likely. Whether or not they deserved to be executed is another question.

In this climate, anyone who advocated policies that remotely resembled those of the Soviets—or who had anything but the harshest of words for the Soviets—was often considered suspicious. Actually, this dynamic was in place long before the Cold War; it was one reason why Democratic Party officials demanded that Roosevelt replace his third-term vice president, Henry Wallace, with the more anti-Soviet Truman in 1944. Wallace remained active and relatively well-disposed toward the Soviets for the rest of the decade, though he and his supporters came to be seen as increasingly irrelevant (at best).

Some members of the opposition Republican Party saw political opportunity in casting suspicions on government officials—even when reasons for doing so where dubious if not outright lies. Among the most notorious was US senator Joseph McCarthy of Wisconsin. McCarthy, first elected in 1946, had made little national impact before a famous speech he delivered in Wheeling, West Virginia, to mark Lincoln's birthday in 1950. The tone of the speech was as notable as its content. Back in 1944, McCarthy explained:

> … there was within the Soviet orbit 180 million people. Lined up on the anti-totalitarian side there were in the world at that time roughly 1.625 billion people. Today, only six years later, there are 800 million people under the absolute domination of Soviet Russia—an increase of over 400 percent. On our side, the figure has shrunk to around 500 million. In other words, in less than six years the odds have changed from 9 to 1 in our favor to 8 to 5 against us. This indicates the swiftness of the tempo of communist victories and American defeats in the Cold War. As one of our outstanding historical figures once said, "When a great democracy is destroyed, it will not be because of enemies from without but rather because of enemies from within."

Seemingly impressive statistics aside, there are multiple problems with this statement, among them the mangled "quotation" from Abraham Lincoln (ironically, McCarthy appears to be alluding to an 1837 speech Lincoln gave about the dangers of demagoguery) to the misleading measure of power by population alone. But reasoning like this, such as it was, had a visceral appeal to a great many people. So did McCarthy's assertion that he had evidence of 205 communists in the State Department. McCarthy subsequently changed the number (57, 81, 10), but as far as his supporters were concerned, what difference did it make? If there was even *one* communist (and could you really doubt not only the possibility, but the *likelihood* of that?), the man had a point.

This fear of subversion from within was powerful because it resonated with other anxieties in postwar life. Among the most important of these was sexual. Fear and persecution of homosexuals had been widespread in the first half of the twentieth century, but it took on a new intensity in the 1950s, particularly with reference to McCarthyism, a phenomenon that historians have dubbed "the lavender scare." "The homosexual is likely to seek his own kind because the pressures are such that he feels uncomfortable unless he is with his own kind," a US Senate report stated in 1950. "Under these circumstances, if a homosexual attains a position in government where he can influence the hiring of personnel, it is almost inevitable that he will attempt to place other homosexuals in government jobs."[15] (Ironically, McCarthy's prominent aide Roy Cohn was a closeted gay man, as reputedly was McCarthy himself.) Same-sex identity was considered a form of mental illness, and it was widely assumed that a gay person could be easily blackmailed, since revealing such an identity was assumed to be a fate worse than death. This in turn justified even greater bias against such people.

Over the course of the next 4 years, a political phenomenon that came to be known as McCarthyism dominated US politics. McCarthy made ever more outrageous attacks on suspected communists, culminating in a highly implausible assertion that the US Army was riddled with them. A shrewd attorney for the army, Joseph Welch, rehearsed and delivered a stinging attack on McCarthy in a hearing broadcast on the new medium of television. "Have you no decency, sir?" he asked in understated outrage. This marked the beginning of the end for McCarthy, who was censured by his colleagues in 1954 and succumbed to alcoholism 2 years later. But the memory of his tactics, and an occasional tendency to resort to them, have remained features of American politics ever since.

Anxiety about the state of the postwar world was not limited to political or legal discourse. In terms of its public impact, the most important document about life in the nuclear age was John Hersey's "Hiroshima," an account of the atom bomb's impact on that city first published in *The New Yorker* in August 1946. (The article took up the entire issue of that magazine; it was published later that year in book form.) In spare language, Hersey traced the lives of six people, graphically describing the terrible impact of the explosion. ("The eyebrows of some were burned off and skin hung from their faces and hands. Others, because of pain, held their arms up as if carrying something. Some were vomiting as they walked.")[16] For the most part, however, popular culture of the time

addressed postwar international questions in oblique or symbolic ways. Attempts to address them directly, as in the 1949 film *I Married a Communist*, tended to fall flat, artistically as well as commercially. Far more successful was the 1954 film *On the Waterfront*, starring Marlon Brando as an ex-boxer who reluctantly concludes he must blow the whistle on corrupt friends (a plot line that was widely assumed to mean naming communists). Director Elia Kazan cooperated with HUAC and was vilified by segments of the film community for the rest of his life.

One of the more telling indicators of popular sentiment was a genre of film that achieved new prominence in these years: science fiction movies. The 1954 film *Them!*, for example, tells the story of gigantic irradiated ants that terrorize Alamogordo, New Mexico. The setting is no accident: Alamogordo was the site of nuclear testing in the 1940s. The 1956 film *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, in which "pods" replicate the residents of a California town, replacing them in unnervingly emotionless form, was more thematically complex, but widely regarded as an allegory of communist brainwashing.[17]

There was also an important religious dimension to the Cold War. By the 1950s, the great wave of immigration earlier in the century had subsided, and the forces of assimilation promoted both inter-ethnic marriages—in the aftermath of the Holocaust, one heard less talk of the Italian or Polish "race," for example—and religious tolerance. In 1955, theologian Will Herberg published *Protestant–Catholic–Jew*, a sociological study arguing that a pluralistic (if somewhat diluted) religious culture characterized the American society of the 1950s. But the crucial backdrop for this pluralism—the indispensable enemy that made it possible—was, in the common phrase of the time, "godless communism." It was in the 1950s that the phrase "In God We Trust" began appearing on US coins, and the phrase "under God" was added to the pledge of allegiance recited by American schoolchildren. Even those who did not consider themselves especially religious still found themselves saturated in such a sensibility, as reflected in President Eisenhower's unintentionally hilarious 1952 affirmation of religious commitment: "Our form of government has no sense unless it is founded in a deeply felt religious faith, and I don't care what it is." One of the greatest evangelical preachers in American history, Billy Graham, rose to prominence in the 1950s with a striking blend of piety, patriotism, and a penchant for sidestepping party politics (he would minister to a half-century of US presidents from both parties).

To some degree, the intensity surrounding the Cold War abated a bit in the mid-1950s, partly the result of Eisenhower's leadership. The former commander of allied forces in Europe during World War II, Eisenhower—or "Ike," as he was affectionately known—was courted by Democrats and Republicans alike as a presidential candidate in 1952. Eisenhower chose the latter, but he also made it clear that he planned to govern as a centrist with little interest in rolling back the major reforms of FDR's New Deal.

At times, Eisenhower also struck a moderate stance in foreign policy; his campaign pledge to "go to Korea" if elected was popular with voters, and his credibility as a military leader made it possible to make conciliatory gestures without seeming weak, an important factor in the truce that was reached in

1953. He had little to say about McCarthyism, correctly calculating that McCarthy would self-immolate. In 1955, Eisenhower also participated in the first of a series of presidential "summit" conferences with his counterpart in the Soviet Union, Nikita Khrushchev, who ascended to power after Stalin's death and who denounced some of Stalin's excesses. The Eisenhower/Khrushchev conference, held in Geneva, Switzerland, did not achieve all that much in terms of nuclear disarmament, in part because Eisenhower insisted on the United States' right to conduct surveillance flights over the Soviet Union and to have on-site inspection of military installations. Still, the "Spirit of Geneva" raised some hopes that the Cold War was moderating.

Playing with Dominoes: Cold War Hot Spots

In most other ways, however, the Cold War seemed as cold as ever. Indeed, just as he inherited aspects of his predecessors' approaches in domestic policy, so too did Eisenhower take his cue from Truman's foreign policy, though he did make a linguistic innovation. Asked by a reporter in 1954 about the United States' strategic position in Indochina—a region that included Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia, all of which were wracked by civil war—Eisenhower explained why the United States could not stand idly by while communist insurgencies sought control of those governments. "You have broader considerations that would follow under what you would call the 'falling domino' principle. You have a row of dominoes set up, you knock over the first one, and what will happen to the last one is the certainty that it will go over very quickly."[18] In a sense, Eisenhower was simply paraphrasing what had been known as "the Truman Doctrine"—that the United States would aid any government trying to fend off communists. But it was Ike who coined the term "Domino Theory," a metaphor that would shape US foreign policy for a generation with fateful consequences.

President Eisenhower may have been a typical American in his conception of US foreign policy, but there were some aspects of it that he conducted in a distinctive way. His secretary of state, John Foster Dulles, was a hardline Cold Warrior who frightened some of his contemporaries in his willingness to push the Soviets and Chinese to the brink. The cost-conscious Eisenhower tried to limit the growth of conventional forces; as a result, his so-called New Look policy viewed atomic weapons as both economical and practical instruments of foreign policy.

It was also on Eisenhower's watch that the United States made fateful decisions to intervene in the domestic affairs of other governments. Truman had tried to *prevent* communists from coming to power in Turkey and Greece; Eisenhower was the first postwar president to succeed in *overthrowing* regimes he feared might go that way. The first such case was Iran, where the prominent Iranian politician Mohammed Mossaddeq was appointed premier in 1951. By this point, Iran was a major international oil exporter, and Great Britain well as the United States had important financial interests there. When Mossaddeq

indicated that he wished to nationalize the petroleum business and expel foreigners, the CIA and Britain's MI6 intelligence agency engineered his overthrow in 1953, restoring a monarchy that itself had been overthrown a decade earlier. The new young king, Shah Reza Pahlevi, became a staunch anticommunist, a stalwart US ally, and an oppressive ruler over his own people for the next quarter-century (until *he* was overthrown, a story we'll get to later).

The CIA also played an important role in the overthrow of the democratically elected government of Guatemala in 1954. Here, the issue was land reform, which in effect meant redistributing economic resources to poor people and, again, reducing the power of foreign business interests—notably the United Fruit Company, a US-based corporation. The government of Prime Minister Jacobo Arbenz had concerned the Truman administration as early as 1950, which secretly armed his opponents. But Arbenz loyalists discovered the plot and prevented its realization. Eisenhower put the CIA to work, setting the stage for a 1954 armed invasion that resulted in the overthrow of Arbenz in favor of Carlos Castillo Armas, who, similar to the Shah, redirected Guatemalan politics and foreign policy until his assassination in 1957. Guatemala, like other Latin American nations, would undergo decades of internal instability rooted, though never entirely, in Cold War issues.

However morally dubious, US interventions in Iran and Guatemala achieved their objectives, at least in the short term. In other cases, however, the Eisenhower administration made moves that, however understandable or even necessary they may have seemed at the time, caused long-term problems. A good example was Vietnam. A French colony since the mid-nineteenth century and occupied by the Japanese during World War II, the Vietnamese waged a long struggle for independence that culminated in a victory over the French at the Battle of Dien Bien Phu in 1954. Because the US government was afraid of communist influence, the Truman and Eisenhower administrations provided money and weapons to the French. After the war, the country was subdivided, much like Korea, into two sections. A 1956 conference was planned to organize elections to decide the future of Vietnam, but when it became clear that the communists under the North Vietnamese leader Ho Chi Minh would prevail, the Eisenhower administration refused to participate, giving its backing to the strongly anticommunist Ngo Dinh Diem of South Vietnam, who would prove to be an unsteady ally before his assassination in 1963. From the 1950s until the 1970s, Vietnam would become one of the most frustrating problems in US foreign policy.

But few Americans were paying attention to Vietnam in the early postwar era. Far more obvious were some embarrassing moments with the Soviet Union. In 1957, the USSR launched Sputnik, the first satellite launched into the earth's orbit, demonstrating what was widely perceived as Soviet technological superiority in what came to be known as the Space Race. Sputnik was followed by further Soviet demonstrations of technological prowess (e.g. sending a dog into space) and American flubs (the first US rocket launch a couple months later went down in flames). Besides the possible military implications—did this mean

the Soviets could fire atomic weapons directly into the United States?—Sputnik generated an enormous amount of handwringing about the apparently poor state of American education, particularly in science and technology. "Why Johnny can't read" became a buzz-phrase of the time; the infusion of federal aid into education that followed was one of a number of ways in which domestic welfare programs were implemented, and justified, as military measures (more on this in Chapter 2).[19] This was just one more indication of the way events abroad shaped Americans' perceptions of themselves at home.

In fact, Soviet technological superiority was more illusory than real. The Eisenhower administration knew this—knew far more about the Soviets than it was willing to say—because of a key technological asset of its own: the U-2 spy plane, which could fly undetected at high altitudes and take photographs that could be enlarged to the point where it would be possible to read a newspaper headline shot from 10 miles above the earth. Such reconnaissance made it clear that the Soviets were not nearly as dangerous as they appeared, something the US Defense Department and its many commercial suppliers did not want to become common knowledge, lest it become more difficult to persuade the American public that further military investment was necessary, leading to the loss of their lucrative contracts.[20] Despite a belief in its invulnerability to detection, U-2 pilot Francis Gary Powers was shot down over the Soviet Union in May 1960. After the Eisenhower administration disavowed any suggestion that the missing aircraft was on a spying mission, Khrushchev responded by putting Powers on television with the wreckage of the plane and its cameras. He also cancelled a planned summit meeting between himself and the US president. Eisenhower was caught in a lie, which hurt his prestige abroad. On the other hand, Ike was much less obsessed with losing face than many of his Cold War peers.[21]

Cold War Showdown: Cuba

The final (partial) Eisenhower fiasco, one that carried into the ensuing Kennedy administration, occurred in Cuba. Ever since the Spanish–American War, Cuba had been an unofficial US colony. A major US naval base was established at Guantanamo Bay, and Americans largely controlled the Cuban government, often insisting on corrupt rulers who would do its bidding (this included organized crime figures who helped make Cuba a favored tourist destination). But, in 1959, change finally came to Cuba when a revolution led by the charismatic Fidel Castro took over the country. Castro's politics were initially unclear, but when it became increasingly obvious that he was tilting toward the Soviet Union, which eagerly extended aid, the Eisenhower administration decided that Castro—who governed an island a mere 90 miles from the US mainland—must go. An invasion to be led primarily by mercenary Cuban refugees was planned for the spring of 1961. Eisenhower left office before it came to fruition, but the newly elected John F. Kennedy decided to proceed—sort of. When the Cuban exiles landed at the Bay of Pigs in April 1961, Kennedy decided not to include air support, which would

make US fingerprints on the operation all too obvious. But withholding that support allowed Castro's Cubans to crush the invasion, further enhancing his image as a dragon slayer. Kennedy accepted the blame for the bungled operation, which was a public relations as well as a military disaster. But he remained committed—some would say obsessed—with Castro, authorizing dozens of unsuccessful assassination plots against him in 1961–1963.[22]

Similar to Eisenhower, Kennedy was a World War II veteran (Eisenhower had been the commander of US armed forces in Europe; Kennedy had been a junior naval officer in the Pacific, decorated for his valor in combat), but they had differing styles in foreign policy. While Eisenhower played the role of a wise, even avuncular figure, Kennedy's persona was based on masculine vitality, even swagger. On his way out of office, Eisenhower gave a famous farewell speech in which he warned his fellow Americans against the danger of what he called "the military–industrial complex," whose economic and political influence had the potential to subvert the democratic process. Kennedy, by contrast, tended to strike the pose of the hardline Cold Warrior with a firm technocratic grip on that military–industrial complex. In his famous 1961 inaugural address, he pledged to "let every nation know, whether it wishes us well or ill, that we shall pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardship, support any friend, oppose any foe, in order to assure the survival and the success of liberty." One example of his commitment to this vision was the creation of the so-called Green Berets, special forces trained for undercover operations. Another was waging a secret CIA war in Laos against a communist insurgency there, one that would continue into the 1970s.

Kennedy was capable of restraint. The status of Berlin was a constant irritant in Cold War relations, and one that became especially problematic for the Soviets, given the tendency of the residents of East Berlin (and other Soviet bloc nations) to defect to Western Europe through West Berlin. When, in exasperation over this and other aspects of US conduct, Khrushchev authorized the construction of a concrete wall to separate the two sides of the city, Kennedy resisted calls to respond militarily, recognizing the Soviets' right to close their zone. But he did give a celebrated speech in the city 2 years later, famously proclaiming "I am a Berliner" and responding to the prospect of Soviet aggression by saying, "Let them come to Berlin."

But it was Cuba that remained the primary front in the Cold War during the Kennedy years. The Bay of Pigs proved to be the prologue for a much more serious confrontation—the most serious one of all.

By some reckonings, the roots of the crisis were in Vienna, where Kennedy and Khrushchev met in June 1961. Kennedy, who spent much of his adult life in pain and far more time than he ever disclosed on painkillers, was substantially medicated in his discussions with Khrushchev,[23] which apparently contributed to the Soviet premier's perception that the American president was a lightweight—and in any case contributed to his sense of frustration with the United States, as negotiations between the two powers on Berlin and other matters made little progress. (Indeed, it was in the aftermath of the conference that the Berlin Wall was erected.) Later that year, Khrushchev began sending increasing

numbers of military personnel to Cuba. He also began sending missiles capable of carrying atomic weapons to the US mainland. When American U-2 flights began documenting these developments in late 1962, the stage was set for the Cuban Missile Crisis.

Kennedy responded to the Soviet challenge by assembling an executive committee ("Ex-Comm"), which solicited opinions and weighed options over a 2-week period in October 1962. At one end of the spectrum was the option of doing nothing—the Soviets already had the capacity to launch missiles into the United States, after all—but this was rejected primarily because of the *perception* of weakness that would follow from Soviet Union's completion of its missile installation. At the other end was a full-bore invasion of the island, rejected because of the likelihood that it would result in World War III in the form of nuclear annihilation. Airstrikes were also considered and rejected. Kennedy ultimately decided on a blockade of Soviet supply ships to Cuba—the less threatening term "quarantine" was used—and after a very tense moment of confrontation, the Soviets turned back. But this did nothing about what was already in progress on the island, tension that was intensified still further when a US spy plane was shot down, something both sides decided not to disclose for fear of taking the crisis beyond the point of no return.

Amid this moment of high drama, Khrushchev transmitted two diplomatic cables to Kennedy. The first was conciliatory, offering to remove the missiles and permit inspections. The second, which arrived as the Ex-Comm was still analyzing the first, struck a more bellicose tone. After much deliberation, Kennedy decided to ignore the second and respond publicly to the first. At the same time, he delegated his brother, Attorney General Robert Kennedy, to secretly propose to the Soviet ambassador in Washington an option raised in the second cable, and one the administration had been considering all along: an offer to remove largely obsolete US missiles based in Turkey as a gesture of reciprocation, something that Kennedy said could not be done unilaterally but which he pledged to do in cooperation with NATO allies. (The missiles would be replaced by ones based on submarines, a key tactical advantage in mobility that the United States would enjoy for the rest of the Cold War.) Ultimately, this became the formula for a resolution of the crisis. Khrushchev, whose impetuous behavior was largely responsible for the confrontation, lost face in the eyes of his allies— Castro was furious with him—and weakened his position at home; he would be replaced by Leonid Brezhnev the following year. Kennedy, who was at least as lucky as he was skillful, crowed. "I cut his balls off," he said in his private mode of macho bravado.[24]

Although the Cold War would last for another 27 years, the Cuban Missile Crisis was a turning point in the struggle. In its aftermath, both sides realized they had narrowly averted a catastrophe and took steps to limit future escalation. One was the installation of the so-called telephone "hotlines," so that the two leaders could speak to each other directly in the event of a crisis. Another was the signing of the 1963 Nuclear Test Ban treaty, which prohibited underground atomic detonations, an important component of weapons testing. While the arms race would continue, an

important precedent had been set, principally in terms of establishing ongoing dia-logue as a plausible approach to superpower relations, which would result in more substantial arms control agreements in the 1970s and 1980s.

For most Americans in the 1960s, the outcome of the Cuban Missile Crisis was an affirmation of American global supremacy: when push came to shove, the United States won (again). Many interpreted the outcome as an affirmation of Kennedy in particular; after the bungled Bay of Pigs, it appeared he had grown in office, applying a carefully calibrated combination of firmness and flexibility in his approach—a combination that George Kennan had called for in formulating his own approach to the Cold War. In the decades to come, the United States would struggle to strike this balance in places such as Vietnam, Laos, Indonesia, Bolivia, and Chile. Its record would prove mixed at best.

But most Americans weren't really aware of what went on in these places. And this, in a sense, is actually an affirmation of US foreign policy. Empires don't simply afford security to their citizens: they afford them the luxury of not having to care about what happens beyond their borders. While there were certainly principled voices that raised objections or articulated high standards of international conduct, most Americans were content to let their leaders act as they saw fit in foreign policy, as long their actions did not blatantly violate stated national ideals, damage the nation's collective self-image, or threaten tranquility at home. Americans sometimes liked to think of themselves as different or better than previous great powers in this regard. But they were fairly typical imperial-ists in this regard.

What made the second half of the twentieth century different is that the shadow of nuclear war made it impossible to feel entirely secure. By the early 1960s, however, there were indications that Americans were willing to grapple with their fears more directly than they had in the previous decade. The 1959 Hollywood film *On the Beach*, based on a novel of the same name by British writer Nevil Shute, depicted a group of Australians awaiting the arrival of fatal radiation in the aftermath of a nuclear holocaust. *Fail Safe*, a 1962 novel by Eugene Burdick and Harvey Wheeler, and made into a 1964 film of the same name, dramatized how miscalculation by Americans and Soviets could result in the destruction of entire cities. But the most striking statement on the sub-ject was a film released earlier that year: Stanley Kubrick's *Dr. Strangelove, or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb*, a black comedy about Armageddon that featured Peter Sellers in a trio of roles, most notably that of the title character, a former Nazi who explains the logic (if that's what it is) of nuclear war. Somewhat improbably, *Dr. Strangelove* proved to be the most successful and durable of these films, its grim message paradoxically evoking (perhaps fatalistic) laughter.[25]

Indeed, it may well be that the powerlessness of any given individual in the face of the nuclear threat—a powerlessness that paralleled the inevitable mortality of each individual life—engendered a desire simply not to think about it too much. However inevitable a nuclear war may have seemed, the risk seemed relatively low on any given day (except during the Cuban Missile Crisis). In the

meantime, the road appeared to be open for Americans to savor the fruits from the victory in World War II, and to pursue—on an entirely new scale—the alluring promise of the American Dream.

CULTURE WATCH:
The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit (1955/1956)

The stereotypical image of post–World War II life in the United States centered on a nuclear family—husband, wife, children—nestled happily in a suburban house in which dad works in an office, mom works at home, and the kids are all right. This was the archetype conveyed in many television shows of the postwar years. The reality, as we now know, was often more complicated. But a great many Americans at the time understood that the reality was often more complicated back then, too. The success of *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit*, a highly popular novel and movie that has faded in collective memory, makes that clear.

Actually, there was a rich sociological discourse in the United States about work and family life in the 1950s, much of which expressed concern about its perceived soullessness. Works of scholarship such as David Riesman, Nathan Glazer, and Reuel Denney's *The Lonely Crowd* (1950) and William Whyte's *The Organization Man* (1956) depicted an American landscape of conformity and domestic isolation, alarm bells that were insistent precisely because corporate capitalism and suburbanization
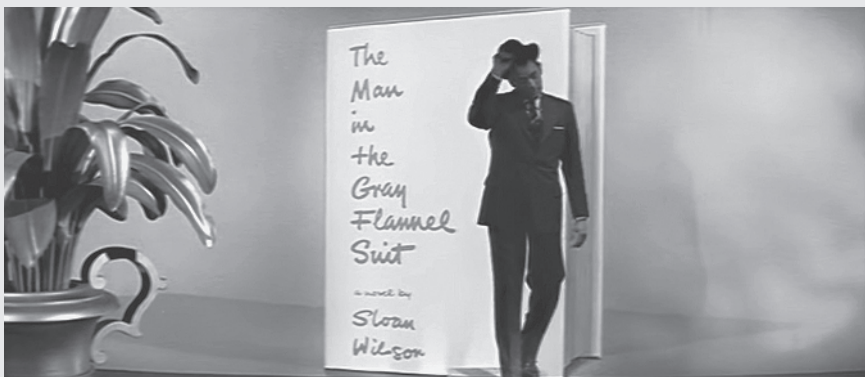
Figure 1.2 OFF THE PAGE: Gregory Peck walks off the cover of the celebrated 1955 novel *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit* to address the audience in the trailer for the film, released the following year. The story follows the struggle of Tom Rath (played by Peck), his wife Betsy (Jennifer Jones), and their family's effort to establish a sense of stability in the corporate and suburban worlds of the 1950s (1956, directed by Nunnally Johnson, and produced by Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation).

seemed like such powerful, even unstoppable, forces. It was in this milieu that novelist Sloan Wilson published *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit* in 1955, which was made into a major Hollywood movie starring Gregory Peck the following year.

Peck plays Tom Rath, a mid-level Manhattan executive with a wife (Jennifer Jones) and three kids in suburban Westport, Connecticut. Though the family has a relatively high standard of living, a sense of malaise afflicts the Raths. They're stretched financially, and the proceeds from a family will they've been counting on have proven disappointing. Rath's wife Betsy nudges her husband to be more aggressive in seeking a higher-paying job. But she's also concerned more generally that her husband has lost his way ever since he returned from World War II, where he served on both the European and Pacific fronts. As she says in one particularly brutal line in the movie, "You've lost all guts and all of a sudden I'm ashamed."

Tom Rath, as it turns out, is a man with secrets. We seem him suffering from what we would now call post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in flashbacks that show him having particularly brutal experiences, which include stabbing a wounded German soldier to death. We also learn that, though he was married at the time, he had an affair with an Italian woman whom he discovers bore him a son. Such experiences engender a faint sense of estrangement from his children by his wife, who appear to routinely ignore or disobey him (one comic subtheme involves a nanny who is far more terrifying to them than their father ever is).

Despite these challenges, a significant opportunity comes Tom's way when he lands a job with a publicity firm led by a renowned businessman Ralph Hopkins (played by Fredric March in the film). Tom is now making more money, and the Raths are able to move into the large house his grandmother bequeathed him, though there are legal problems with her estate. Tom reminds Hopkins of the son he lost in the war, and tries to mentor him. But office politics makes this difficult, and it becomes clear as the story proceeds that Hopkins has paid a high personal price for his professional success. Tom gradually realizes that he's going to have to be honest with himself—and Betsy—if he's ever really going to get his life back in order. And that will involve reckoning with difficult truths.

For decades after its publication/release, the phrase "man in the gray flannel suit" became a catchphrase, shorthand for the combination of postwar affluence and ennui that seemed pervasive in the second half of the twentieth century. The advent of feminism, the decline of traditional corporate capitalism, and the growing diversity of the US population, even in the suburbs, have made the story seem dated. But American couples, and American families, continue to struggle in their quest to balance their personal and professional lives and to put past challenges behind them. Gray flannel will never entirely go out of fashion.

Suggested Further Reading

The transition from relative isolation to international engagement is a subject that has been widely discussed by historians. Among the most important works are Stephen Ambrose, *Rise to Globalism: American Foreign Policy Since 1938*, 9th ed. with Douglas Brinkley (1971; New York: Penguin, 2010); Michael Sherry, *In the Shadow of War: The United States Since the 1930s* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995); and Christopher McKnight Nichols, *Promise and Peril: America at the Dawn of the Global Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011).

The transformation of the nation's economy and culture is discussed extensively in James Sparrow, *Warfare State: World War II Americans and the Age of Big Government* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011). John Morton Blum captures the domestic side in *V Was For Victory: Politics and American Culture During World War II* (New York: Harcourt, Brace Jovanovich, 1976).

Though he has critics who find his perspective too conservative, the current preeminent historian of the Cold War is John Lewis Gaddis. See *Strategies of Containment: A Critical Appraisal of American National Security Policy During the Cold War* (1982; New York: Oxford University Press, 2005). Gaddis has also written an elegant brief overview, *The Cold War: A New History* (New York: Penguin, 2005).

For an excellent one-volume treatment of McCarthyism, see Robert Griffith, *The Politics of Fear: Joseph R. McCarthy and the Senate* (1970; Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1987). See also Ellen Shrecker, *Many Are the Crimes: McCarthyism in America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999). Shrecker has also edited a useful anthology, *The Age of McCarthyism: A Brief History with Documents* (1994; New York: Bedford, 2002).

Notes

1 It appears "awesome" as slang has origins in the California surfer culture of the 1960s. Two decades later, it appears to have migrated into a decidedly different sub-culture, appearing in *The Preppy Handbook*, edited by Lisa Birnbach (New York: Workman Publishing, 1980), 218.
2 The text of Luce's piece can be found at http://www.informationclearinghouse. info/article6139.htm (November 5, 2014).
3 David M. Kennedy, *Freedom From Fear: The American People in Depression and War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 746.
4 John Patrick Diggins, *The Proud Decades: America in War and Peace* (New York: Norton, 1991), 5; Godfrey Hodgson, *American in Our Time: From World War II to Nixon, What Happened and Why* (New York: Doubleday, 1976), 19.
5 Blum, 113.
6 John Keegan, *The Second World War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 218–219.
7 Kennedy, 857.
8 Diggins, 48–49.
9 The information in the following paragraphs tracing the emergence of computer technology comes from Jim Cullen, *A Short History of the Modern Media* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2014), 243–245.

10   Joshua B. Freeman, *American Empire: The Rise of a Global Power/The Democratic Revolution at Home, 1945–2000* (New York: Penguin, 2012), 50.

11   Alan Wolfe, *America's Impasse: The Rise and Fall of the Politics of Growth* (Boston: South End Press, 1981), 14.

12   Freeman, 92.

13   Miller, who was called before HUAC, answered questions about his own past, but refused for furnish information about others.

14   Diggins, 166.

15   *Employment of Homosexuals and Other Perverts in Government Interim Report* (1950) in *The United States Since 1945: A Documentary Reader*, edited by Robert P. Ingalls and David K. Johnson (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2009), 39.

16   John Hersey, *Hiroshima* (1946; New York: Vintage, 1989), 29.

17   Peter Biskind, *Seeing Is Believing: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Fifties* (New York: Pantheon, 1983), esp. 137–144; Stuart Samuels, "The Age of Conspiracy and Conformity: Invasion of the Body Snatchers," in *American History/American Film: Interpreting the Hollywood Image*, edited by John E. O'Connor and Martin A. Jackson (New York: Ungar/Continuum, 1988), 203–217.

18   Dwight Eisenhower, Press Conference, April 7, 1954 in Ingalls & Johnson, 88–89.

19   Information cited in last paragraph and the next one draws on Freeman, 165.

20   To some extent, this strategy backfired in 1960, when Democratic presidential candidate John Kennedy claimed that a "missile gap" had opened up to the disadvantage of the United States on Eisenhower's watch. Eisenhower fumed at this characterization, but did not feel it was politic to challenge it, much to chagrin of Republican candidate Richard Nixon.

21   Garry Wills, *Nixon Agonistes: The Crisis of the Self-Made Man* (1970; Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2002), 134.

22   James Patterson, *Grand Expectations: The United States, 1945–1974* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 498.

23   Richard Reeves, *President Kennedy: Portrait of Power* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994), 158ff.

24   Patterson, 504; Michael Beschloss, *The Crisis Years: Kennedy and Khrushchev, 1960–1963* (New York: HarperCollins, 1991), 542–544.

25   Rick Perlstein usefully contextualizes *Dr. Strangelove* in *Before the Storm: Barry Goldwater and the Making of the American Consensus* (2001; New York: Nation Books, 2009), 284–286.