

Period 8: 1945-1980

AP United States History

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.

The **Cold War** 冷战 began as wartime cooperation collapsed into rivalry with the Soviet Union. American policy settled on **containment** 遏制 - preventing the spread of communism rather than attempting to remove it - expressed through the **Truman Doctrine** 杜鲁门主义, the **Marshall Plan** 马歇尔计划, and **NATO** 北约.

Containment then produced commitments the country had not anticipated: the **Korean War** 朝鲜战争, a permanent peacetime military establishment, an **arms race** 军备竞赛, and the **space race** 太空竞赛.

The Red Scare at Home

Fear of communism reshaped domestic politics. **Loyalty programmes** 忠诚审查, congressional investigations, and **McCarthyism** 麦卡锡主义 targeted suspected communists in government, universities, unions, and the entertainment industry.

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

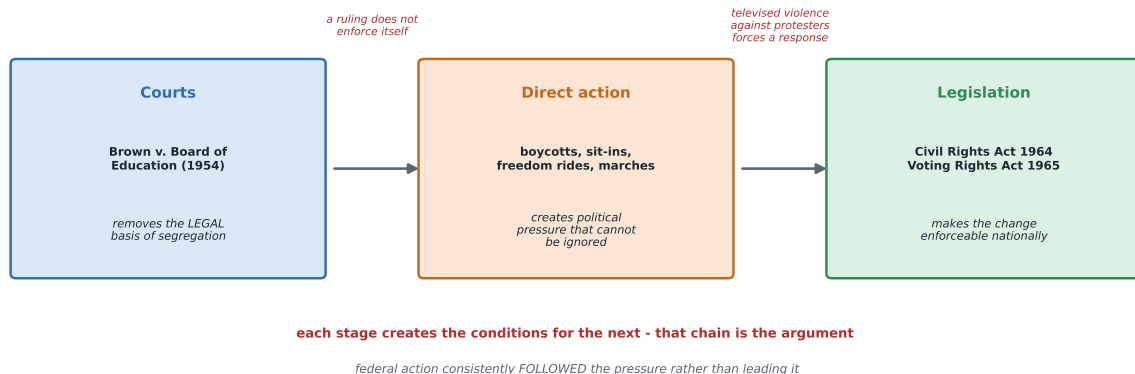
Prosperity and Its Discontents

The postwar economy grew strongly. Federal spending on defence, highways, and the **GI Bill** 退伍军人权利法 supported home ownership and higher education, and the population moved to the **suburbs** 郊区 and to the **Sun Belt** 阳光地带.

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

Prosperity was uneven. Suburban growth was frequently closed to African Americans by law and practice, cities lost tax base and jobs, and **poverty** 贫困 persisted in ways the decade's self-image obscured - which is what later reform movements responded to.

The Civil Rights Movement



Litigation, direct action and legislation were not alternatives: each one created the conditions for the next

Early steps in the 1940s and 1950s worked mainly through the **courts** 法院. Legal strategy produced **Brown v. Board of Education** 布朗诉教育委员会案, 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** 直接行动: the Montgomery bus boycott, sit-ins, freedom rides, and mass marches, organised through churches and student groups and grounded in **nonviolent protest** 非暴力抗议.

Sustained pressure and televised violence against protesters produced **legislation** 立法: the **Civil Rights Act of 1964** 1964 年民权法 and the **Voting Rights Act of 1965** 1965 年选举权法.

The movement then **expanded** 扩展: later activists raised questions of economic inequality, housing, and policing, and some rejected nonviolence and integration in favour of **Black Power** 黑人力. Its example also shaped movements by women, Latinos, American Indians, and others.

The Great Society and the Vietnam War

The **Great Society** 伟大社会 extended federal responsibility furthest since the New Deal: Medicare and Medicaid, federal aid to education, and the **War on Poverty** 向贫困宣战.

The **Vietnam War** 越南战争 grew out of containment and consumed the same presidency. Escalation without decisive results produced a large **antiwar movement** 反战运动, deep political division, and a **credibility gap** 信任鸿沟 between government statements and reported reality. Defeat abroad and disillusion at home weakened confidence in federal power just as its domestic role peaked.

Society in Transition

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

- The **women's movement** 妇女运动 pressed for legal equality and workplace access; the **Equal Rights Amendment** 平等权利修正案 failed ratification.
- **Environmental** 环境保护 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** 保守主义 organised in response to all of it, on taxes, social change, and the size of government - the movement Period 9 opens with.

Economic trouble sharpened everything: **inflation** 通货膨胀, oil shocks, and industrial decline ended the postwar boom.

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 real AP exam question). The 2023 exam set the long essay *"Evaluate the extent to which the growth of civil rights activism contributed to changes in government action"* in the twentieth century. A strong thesis makes activism the **cause** and names the government changes: *"Civil rights activism contributed to a great extent to changes in government action, as litigation produced *Brown v. Board of Education* and sustained direct action created the political pressure behind the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965, although federal action consistently followed rather than led that pressure."* Notice the shape: the prompt asks about a **contribution**, so the essay must trace the link from activism to policy, not describe the movement on its own.

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**.