Introduction:

- When the United States dropped the atomic bombs on Japan in 1945 it quickly ended World War II but it also began the atomic age, a new and previously unimagined era. The bomb did bring an end to the Second World War but it as well launched the US and the world into an uncharted arena. For people living in the US in 1945, the announcements which would come that year were extraordinary and life changing. The War was over! And Americans began to imagine what a new and "normal" life might be like again. The US had bombed into one of the world's greatest super powers!

- Those who had been fighting in Europe or Asia wanted to get home as fast as they could, but some did have to say to manage Germany and Japan. For some women, working in wartime production, the wars end meant a long-absent husband or boyfriend would be returning home, they would quit work, and raise a family, but not all women envisioned this lifestyle after discovering what other possibilities life could offer. For other women, they wanted to continue to work and did not necessarily want to move back home (because a war time job had required them to move). As for government and national issues, the once alliance between the US and USSR were uneasy and made the postwar era of WWII one of the most difficult ever.

Part I: The United States in 1945

The United States in 1945

- Science, Medicine, Technology and the BOMB
  - During WWII, the wonder drugs of penicillin and others combated infections and resulted in a dramatic reduction of battlefield deaths. Soon medicines like these would change the civilian world as well.
    - By 1956, 80% of prescribed drugs had been invented after the beginning of WWII. Vaccines ended traditional childhood diseases like: whooping cough, diphtheria, mumps and measles. Then in 1955 a vaccine was found for the feared sickness of polio. People were growing taller and living longer thanks to advances in medicine, nutrition and hygiene.
  - In 1945, consumers were once again being introduced to new modern conveniences.
    - Freezers, dishwashers, automatic transmissions and ballpoint pens were all introduced.
    - Other technologies, which were developed before WWII but not produced during the war years, were now readily available again: washing machines to electric ranges
    - No automobiles for private use were produced in the US from 1942 to 1945, but by 1947 new models were replacing the old vehicles
    - While most households had radios in 1945, only a very few had televisions (black and white of course)
      - The television was invented in the early 1930s and introduced in 1939 but the production of TVs stopped in the war years where television factories instead made radar equipment.
      - The number of televisions quickly rose
  - Hanging over all the advances, however, was the <u>atomic bomb</u>
    - As Americans learned more and more about the bomb, they realized that it could end all of their improved health and newfound prosperity.
    - The bomb might be a new form of protection, since only the US had it but it was also a new threat.

- Some scientist proposed the voluntary sharing of the atomic technology to avoid an arms race, but President Truman decided that the safest course was for the US to retain the sole knowledge of the nuclear secrets.
- However, in 1949, the US was surprised to learn the USSR had successfully tested its own atomic bomb.
  - By this time, the WWII ally had actually become a potential enemy
- Suddenly, the US was no longer protected by its unique control of the bomb.
- Soon other countries had their own atomic bomb: Great Britain and France.
- Thus, the idea was debated on making a more powerful and deadly bomb.
  - The atomic bomb depended on nuclear fission (the splitting of an atom) but the scientist knew that theoretically an even more powerful explosion could arise from nuclear fusion (the merging of atoms)
  - There was much dispute on whether to build a more powerful bomb but when President Truman asked "Can the Russians do it?", the scientist, even those oppose to the creation of a hydrogen bomb, had to say yes, and thus the US began work on the hydrogen bomb.
    - The US tested its first hydrogen bomb in the Pacific in late of 1952, followed by the Russians in mid 1953.
    - The bombs the US and Russians had exploded were powerful beyond imagination. The US had completely destroyed and island, leaving a large hole in the ocean floor. The explosion's fireball went 5 miles into the sky and produced a mushroom cloud of 27 miles high and 8 miles wide
  - Now the US no longer had a monopoly on either the atomic or hydrogen bomb and fear swept through the nation.
- Returning Veterans, The Baby Boom and Suburban Homes
  - In August of 1945, as WWII ended, 12 million American men were in the military, two-thirds of those between the ages of 18 and 34. They had been through a brutal war and now they wanted to get home and get on with their lives.
  - Coming home from the war was joyous but also difficult. Soldiers and sailors, desperately tired of killing, the dying and the boredom of war, sometimes had a hard time adjusting to a world where life had gone on without them and in which civilians could never comprehend the horrors of war.
  - The divorce rate skyrocketed and the government began generous benefits to returning service men, the GI Bill.
  - As well many other changes occurred which will be covered in more detail in class:
    - Baby Boomers
    - Levittown
    - Suburbia
    - Interstate Highway System
- The Great Migration
  - While white Americans moved to the suburbs, a new generation of African-Americans moved from the South to the North. During WWII, the rate of migration exploded. By 1960, half of the nation's African-Americans lived in northern cities.

- o Migration of Latino people was happening at the same time. Many Puerto Ricans began moving to the US mainland. The Mexican background also grew rapidly after WWII. During WWII, the US allowed many Mexican farm workers temporary entrance into the US to work in the agricultural fields that other Americans had left for war industries or the military.
- The United Nations
    - o While Americans were moving around the country, the rest of the planet was also in transition. Even before WWII ended, a series of international gatherings reshaped the political and economic climate of the coming postwar world.
    - o The United Nations would permit all of the nations of the world to debate issues but could not enforce resolutions.

Part II: The Cold War Begins

When Allies Turn Against One Another

- The end of World War II raised two major issues:
    - o The survival of the combatants, with the exception of the USA, because they had been immensely destroyed since the war was fought on their home soil
    - o The shaping of the new world and new political alliances
- The Cold War (because there was no actual combat as there is in a "hot war" like WWII) had very high tensions between the two new major powers of the world: USA and Soviet Union.
- Though the USA and Soviet Union were allies during WWII the war's end had exposed the countries' many ideological differences and they became enemies.
- Soon the world found Europe divided into two sections: Western Democratic Europe and Eastern Communist Europe.
    - o The imaginary line that was drawn between the two sides was called the Iron Curtain.

President Truman and His Years As President

- Following WWII, the Soviet Union refused to recognize Poland's conservative government in exile (in England because of Nazi Germany during the war). So, a communist government took over Poland as well as neighboring countries like Hungary and Czechoslovakia.
    - o The USA and Soviet Union both used propaganda following WWII to make it seem like the other country was trying to take over the world for its own purposes.
- President Harry Truman reacted. When Greece and Turkey were threatened to be taken over by communist insurgents and England could no longer prop them up President Truman stepped in
    - o Truman stated: "I believe it must be the policy of the US to support free peoples who are resisting attempted subjugation by armed minorities or outside pressures", hence created the Truman Doctrine. Truman was making it clear that containing communism would be at the bedrock of the US's foreign policy.
    - o This doctrine would turn into the policy of Containment
        - ▪ Stating the US would not instigate a war with the Soviet Union but it would come to the defense of countries in danger of Soviet takeover. The policy aimed to prevent the spread of communism and encouraged the Soviets to abandon their aggressive strategies.
- Following the Truman Doctrine, Truman announced plans for massive economic aid to western Europe. Marshall Plan, would send more than $12 billion to Europe to help rebuild its cities and economy and in return for that money, the countries were expected to become American Allies.

- Stalin saw the Truman Doctrine and the Marshall Plan as a direct assault. The result was a divided Germany and a divided Berlin. The Soviets saw Berlin as a useful pressure point in the Cold War. By closing off western access to the city, they could challenge the Truman Doctrine and the Marshall Plan.
- When they blocked all rail and highway access to Berlin in the spring of 1948, Truman decided to support the city within airlift. In and weeks that followed, the <u>Berlin Airlift</u> sent hundreds of US planes every day to the airport in the western sector of Berlin. This city was well supplied and West Berlin with stood siege.
  - Nevertheless, by the beginning of 1949, the iron curtain was more firmly in place than ever, and the Cold War, which is been developing since 1945, was a reality.
- Just as the crisis in Berlin was coming to an end, do US Senate ratified American membership in The North Atlantic Treaty Organization, <u>NATO</u>.
  - Under NATO each member agreed to treat an attack on anyone from any source as an attack on all. The NATO treaty was the first time in history that United States agree to such a peacetime partnership.

The Cold War At Home
- As America's trying to make sense of the Cold War, this Soviet manufacture of an atomic bomb, and the Communist takeover in China, some Congress and beyond look for internal enemies. Many politicians were worried about maintaining the security of the United States, but some in Congress stop political gain by fueling a new Red Scare similar to the one that had followed World War I.
- Industries created lists of those tainted by these charges, called <u>blacklist</u>, which prevented the accused from working.
  - The <u>Rosenbergs</u>, were investigated in 1950 and charged with being Soviet spies and with passing on the atomic secrets of the Soviets in 1951. Julius Rosenberg was a wartime engineer who accessed the highly secretive data. The Rosenbergs, always maintained in their innocence, but were executed in 1953.
  - It was clear in the atmosphere of 1950 and 1951, it was virtually impossible for the Rosenbergs to receive a fair trial.
- Right after the Rosenberg's investigation began, Wisconsin's Senator Joseph McCarthy gave a speech in which he claimed to have a list of active Communist Party members who worked for the federal government.
  - <u>Joseph McCarthy</u> was the first elected official to try and make political gains by stirring up the fear of communism. He had been searching for a new political issue on which to build his reelection campaign for and he thought he had found it in 1950 with the reaction may gave to his speech about Communist Party members working in the government.
  - McCarthy was far more interested in his own fame and actually finding communist. His Senate colleagues new he was a pathological liar and that he had lied about his military service. Nevertheless, few were willing to challenge McCarthy while the country was caught up in the fear of communism.
  - McCarthy never did name and the names on his list and the numbers kept shifting in different speeches, but he ruined careers and frightened many into silence.
  - McCarthy's attacks became known as <u>McCarthyism</u>.

- The Korean War
  - On June 25, 1950, to the surprise of US leaders, the army of North Korea attacked South Korea. Korea was part of the world to which US planners had paid very little attention, but it was the place where the Cold War turned very hot.
  - More information regarding the Korean War will be covered in class.

Part III: Eisenhower's America and America's World

President Eisenhower and His Years as President

- Dwight D. Eisenhower, or better known as Ike, was the famous leader of the Normandy Invasions from WWII and a very popular individual in the US during the early 1950s. Ike did not believe in returning to the 1920s-style of isolationism and since many did not have the memory of the Great Depression and the 1950s were surprisingly novel for many Americans Ike won the presidential election.
- Eisenhower arrived in the White House prepared to impose conservative values on the federal government. He also sought to balance the budget, cut federal spending and ease government regulation of business.
  - He was able to balance the federal budget three times in his eight years as president.
- Eisenhower used a policy of Brinksmanship, the practice of pushing dangerous events to the brink of disaster in order to achieve the most advantageous outcome. This required a buildup of nuclear weapons and made cuts for the military budget difficult for him to do.
  - He did reduce some military spending by reducing troops and buying powerful weapon systems
  - Eisenhower also depended on the CIA. The CIA was created during WWII to spy on the Axis countries and then disbanded by President Truman following the wars end, however Eisenhower received congressional authorization to re-create the CIA. The CIA was used this time to spy on countries in which the US feared might become communist.
- Eisenhower had hoped that the death of Joseph Stalin in 1953 might improve the American Soviet relations and initially the new Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev offered hope but the positive relationship did not last long. The Soviets advanced in nuclear arms and exploded their first H bomb only one year after the US had, causing the Arms Race.

A small Satellite and a Big Impact

- On October 4, 1957, the Soviet Union launched Sputnik, a space satellite. Although Sputnik was small, about the size of a large beach ball and weighed only 84 pounds, it was the first orbiting satellite ever leached into space.
- A month later, a much larger Sputnik II was launched, which carried a dog, Laika, as well as scientific and medical instruments. While the Soviet Union celebrated, Americans panicked. The Soviets were clearly winning the "Space Race," critics said.
- Because of US spy flights over the Soviets Union, Eisenhower knew that although the Soviets might launch a satellite, the US was far ahead in missile development.   However, he could not say without admitting to the spying, which he did not want to do.
  - Eisenhower was discovered spying on the Soviets during the U2 incident. This was when a spy plane was shot down as it flew 1,300 miles inside Russia.   Nikita Khrushchev announced the United States has found the spy plane and the captain. For the next two years Khrushchev and Eisenhower had a little friendly coexistence.

- In 1958, the administration proposes the creation of the <u>National Aeronautics and Space Agency (NASA)</u> and before long, NASA scientists and engineers had lunch the first US satellite and soon close the gap with the Soviet Union.

Conclusion:

- The world in which World War II created change nearly every aspect of military and civilian life. The experience of World War II would have a profound effect on American culture in the decade that followed the war. And the post war era, the living patterns of Americans changed drastically. The economic gains achieved during the war continued throughout the post war period and the end of World War II brought new attempts at international cooperation. While enjoying the remarkable prosperity of the postwar era, more and more Americans became deeply concerned about the Soviet Union and the spread of communism. Americans would witness their policy of containment to be tested and continued to fear the possibly of nuclear destruction.