

Before we start: Please also see a second video for week three that emphasizes the usefulness of some of the week's readings and the importance of keeping certain issues in mind.

Now for this week's overview:

The 1950s are "known" for being the years of Happy Days—with bland families, bland politics, bland people, bland culture: jell-o, bobby sox, stationwagons.

They were, in reality, quite different. They were some of the most tense years of the Cold War; they were some of the bloodiest in American military history. Cultural, social, gender, and racial changes were not waiting until the 1960s; they were everywhere.

The "long" 1950s began in the late 1940s with the presidency of Harry Truman. His administration was marked by post-World War II challenges that affected almost every aspect of American life. It also had to define the country's response to the threat of communism, the Soviet Union, and nuclear power.

Always protected by oceans on two sides, the United States' postwar focus was on the clear Soviet threat in Europe, but in 1950 the distance from Asia no longer ensured that that continent could be of secondary importance.

The North Korean attack on American supported South Korea led to three years of war . . . war which took the lives of approximately 40,000 Americans (and hundreds of thousands Koreans).

The American people turned to a new man to deal with the country's problems and to end the war in Korea: a military hero of World War II—Dwight Eisenhower. His campaign for the presidency in 1952 faced early problems with allegations against his young running mate, Senator Richard Nixon—one of the first communist hunters. Nixon's televised Checkers' speech saved his place on the ticket and contributed to a change of party leadership and eight years of Republican administration.

Cold War concerns continued, highlighted in the late 1950s by the shooting down of an American spy plane over the Soviet Union. The son of the captured pilot,

Francis Gary Powers, became the founder of the Cold War Museum in Lorton, Virginia.

But there was more to the fifties although almost everything seemed to tie in one way or another to the foreign threats facing the country. Rock 'n Roll, for example, was “jungle music” used by communists to undermine the United States from within. American society was being destroyed through its children who turned away from decent music and dance . . . although they never really did.

However, the teen population was becoming its own demographic as demonstrated by a young southern singer who seemed to many adults to be the ultimate of vulgar sexuality and dangerous racial intermixing. Elvis Presley was not the first to raise concerns . . . in music, films, comic books.

Despite fears, teenagers tended to follow traditions and expectations—few were true “rebels”—but they also had new opportunities thanks to automobiles, expendable money, and peers. Many white teens might follow sedate dress styles, but others—Beatniks—suggested that the future might bring more challenges.

Television—in 90 percent of American homes by 1960—targeted a wide range of viewers, becoming to many not a source of high culture but a “vast wasteland” of quiz shows, situation comedies, and violence.

The 1960s began with an election which epitomized new technology and with a new president who seemed to epitomize a new era.

But the new president—John Kennedy—quickly found himself dealing with carry-over threats from the Cold War: the Cuban Revolution and the American attempt to end it (the Bay of Pigs invasion) and the presence of Soviet weapons only ninety miles from the US (the Cuban Missile Crisis).

The tension in Cuba and in Berlin over the wall constructed by the Soviets to prevent Eastern Europeans from fleeing to the West was not eased by the space race—with the Soviets in the early lead with 1957's *Sputnik* and with the first man

in space—but was eased by the 1963 Limited Nuclear Test Ban Treaty that prohibited testing in the atmosphere, in space, and under water.

Now, three points to end with:

First, much of what this course covers overlaps. Don't treat any week as if its events and developments were not related to ones covered in other weeks.

Second, because students are not writing responses in a timely manner to be of use to the class, weeks 3, 4, and 5 have a new rule: at least one response must be posted by 11:59 p.m. THURSDAY. The other must be posted by NOON Sunday. I appreciate how these changes might be easy to forget, so make notes to remind you.

Third, you have many project options. Try ones to challenge you in terms of research, thinking, and composition . . . and in terms of your use of internet sources.

The projects are designed to force you to think and plan carefully, to phrase carefully, to choose examples carefully, and edit carefully. If you do these things—particularly the initial planning—you can accomplish more in a two-page paper than you have probably done in longer papers. Be precise, be concise—and plan. If you don't know where you are going, you will be round-about, repetitive, general . . . and wordy. A key, of course, is a useful THESIS STATEMENT and TOPIC SENTENCES.