

HIST212
Unit 7 Assessment: “The Cold War”
Guide to Responding

1. President Harry Truman outlined the concept of containment in his 1947 address to Congress to request military and economic assistance to Greece and Turkey to combat dangerous, armed groups in these countries, who, through terror and intimidation, plotted to establish totalitarian, communist regimes. Truman was concerned with the aggression of the Soviet Union, which had set up communist, “satellite” regimes in areas of Eastern Europe in those countries occupied by the Soviet Red Army after World War II. Truman feared that the devastation of World War II in the rest of Europe created unstable conditions which would enable communists, with the aid of the Soviet Union, to seize power in these areas as well. After the victory of the communists in China in 1949, Truman was also concerned with the expansion of communism in Asia. To contain the spread of communism, the Marshall Plan in 1947 provided economic assistance to Western Europe to rebuild after the destruction of World War II, so that these countries could enjoy a good stable economy. In 1949, The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) was founded by the United States, Canada, and nations in Western Europe as a military alliance to counter the large Soviet army stationed in Central Europe. In Asia, Truman dispatched U.S. troops to South Korea in 1950 with a mandate from the United Nations to defend South Korea from a military invasion by communist North Korea, an ally of the Soviet Union, and communist “Red” China. Truman also hoped to deter Soviet aggression by maintaining American superiority in respect to its nuclear arsenal. After the Soviet Union successfully tested an atom bomb in 1949, Truman in 1950 ordered work to begin on building an even more powerful hydrogen bomb.

2. In the 1950s, Americans were largely united in their opposition to communism and their hopes to enjoy the fruits of security and economic prosperity after two decades of hardship and sacrifice during the Great Depression and World War II. Many Americans viewed communism as an attack against their traditional religious and democratic values. At the beginning of the Cold War, America experienced a second “Red Scare,” as many Americans were convinced that communists had infiltrated the government and cultural institutions such as the motion picture industry with the goal of facilitating a communist takeover. In the early 1950s, Wisconsin Senator Joseph McCarthy became a hero and champion to many Americans with his crusade to expose suspected communists in the government and military. The 1950s was also an age of conformity, as many Americans acquired a host of new and improved consumer goods ranging from automobiles to various electrical appliances. Postwar economic growth enabled the ranks of the American middle class to grow to include around 60% of the population. Technical advances boosted productivity in American factories and allowed more Americans to purchase consumer goods at a lower cost. The advent of television in the 1950s promoted the sale of consumer goods and a consumer culture. White American families in large numbers left the cities and moved to “suburbs” connected to cities

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through the large-scale construction of roads and highways in this period and the dramatic increase in the number of automobiles. New methods of mass production in housing, pioneered by entrepreneurs such as William Levitt, enabled rising middle class families to purchase single family homes in the suburbs at a lower cost. Popular television shows in this era celebrated the typical American two-parent family with a stay-at-home mother, living in the suburbs. In politics, Americans also preferred consensus over partisanship as reflected in the popularity of the bipartisan president, Dwight D. Eisenhower (1953-1961). President Eisenhower, a Republican, was anticommunist and advocated a strong national defense through increasing the nation's nuclear arsenal. He satisfied Republicans by curbing domestic spending and a seeking a balanced federal budget, while placating Democrats by refusing to repeal or shrink popular New Deal programs such as Social Security.