

Year 9 HT 6 – The USA in the 1950s and 1960s

The time period of USA in the 1950s and 1960s were marked by significant social, economic, and political changes that had a profound impact on the US and the rest of the world. The United States in the 1950s and 1960s experienced significant social and political changes. This era is often referred to as the "Civil Rights Movement" as it was marked by the fight for racial equality and the expansion of civil rights. During this time, African Americans and other minority groups faced discrimination and segregation, especially in the southern states. However, there were many individuals and groups who fought for justice and equality. Leaders like Martin Luther King Jr. and Rosa Parks emerged as key figures in the struggle for civil rights. The movement gained momentum, and landmark events such as the Montgomery Bus Boycott, the March on Washington, and the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965 helped bring about significant changes. The 1950s and 1960s also witnessed the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union, leading to an arms race and heightened political tensions. Additionally, this era saw advancements in technology and the space race, as the United States sought to explore outer space and put a man on the moon. The 1950s and 1960s were a transformative period in American history, marked by struggles for equality, societal changes, and scientific achievements that continue to shape the nation today.

Around the world, the dominant power struggle of the Cold War influenced much of the global political climate, with many countries adopting socialist or communist ideologies as alternatives to the capitalist system. Key events include:

- The Korean War (1950-1953) - an armed conflict between North and South Korea supported by the UN, US, and China.
- The Cuban Revolution (1953-1959) - the overthrow of the Cuban government by Fidel Castro's socialist forces, which led to the establishment of a communist regime.
- The Space Race (1955-1975) - a competition between the USA and Soviet Union to explore space, with the USSR launching the first artificial satellite, Sputnik 1, in 1957.
- The Vietnam War (1955-1975) - a divisive conflict between North and South Vietnam supported by communist and capitalist superpowers respectively, which led to significant protests and anti-war movements in the US and elsewhere.
- The Civil Rights Movement (1954-1968) - a series of campaigns and movements for racial and socio-economic equality in the US, led by figures such as Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X.

Other key events include:

- The Treaty of Rome (1957) - founding the European Economic Community, now known as the European Union.
- The Assassination of John F. Kennedy (1963) - the killing of the US President, which shocked the world and led to significant changes in US politics.
- The Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) - a political and social movement in China led by Mao Zedong aimed at purging capitalist and traditional values from Chinese society.
- The Prague Spring (1968) - a period of liberalisation in Czechoslovakia which was forcibly ended by Soviet intervention.

Further reading:

Fiction:

"The Lions of Little Rock" by Kristin Levine - This novel tells the story of two friends in Little Rock, Arkansas, during the Civil Rights Movement, and explores themes of segregation and friendship

Non fiction:

"Sit-In: How Four Friends Stood Up by Sitting Down" by Andrea Davis Pinkney - This book tells the story of four Black college students who staged a sit-in at a segregated Woolworth's lunch counter in Greensboro, North Carolina, in 1960.