

Two Nations Live on the Edge

MAIN IDEA

During the 1950s, the United States and the Soviet Union came to the brink of nuclear war.

WHY IT MATTERS NOW

The Cold War continued into the following decades, affecting U.S. policies in Cuba, Central America, Southeast Asia, and the Middle East.

Terms & Names

- H-bomb
- Dwight D. Eisenhower
- John Foster Dulles
- brinkmanship
- Central Intelligence Agency (CIA)
- Warsaw Pact
- Eisenhower Doctrine
- Nikita Khrushchev
- Francis Gary Powers
- U-2 incident

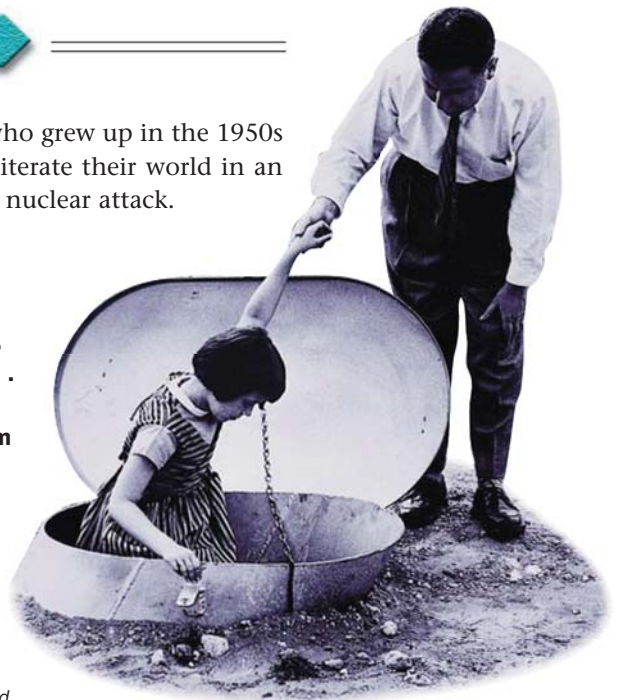
One American's Story

Writer Annie Dillard was one of thousands of children who grew up in the 1950s with the chilling knowledge that nuclear war could obliterate their world in an instant. Dillard recalls practicing what to do in case of a nuclear attack.

A PERSONAL VOICE ANNIE DILLARD

“At school we had air-raid drills. We took the drills seriously; surely Pittsburgh, which had the nation’s steel, coke, and aluminum, would be the enemy’s first target. . . . When the air-raid siren sounded, our teachers stopped talking and led us to the school basement. There the gym teachers lined us up against the cement walls and steel lockers, and showed us how to lean in and fold our arms over our heads. . . . The teachers stood in the middle of the room, not talking to each other. We tucked against the walls and lockers. . . . We folded our skinny arms over our heads, and raised to the enemy a clatter of gold scarab bracelets and gold bangle bracelets.”

—An American Childhood



▲ A father helps his daughter practice getting into a bomb shelter.

The fear of nuclear attack was a direct result of the Cold War. After the Soviet Union developed its atomic bomb, the two superpowers embarked on an arms race that enormously increased both the number and the destructive power of weapons.

Brinkmanship Rules U.S. Policy

Although air-raid drills were not common until the Eisenhower years (1953–1961), the nuclear arms race began during Truman’s presidency. When the Soviet Union exploded its first atomic bomb in 1949, President Truman had to make a terrible decision—whether to develop an even more horrifying weapon.

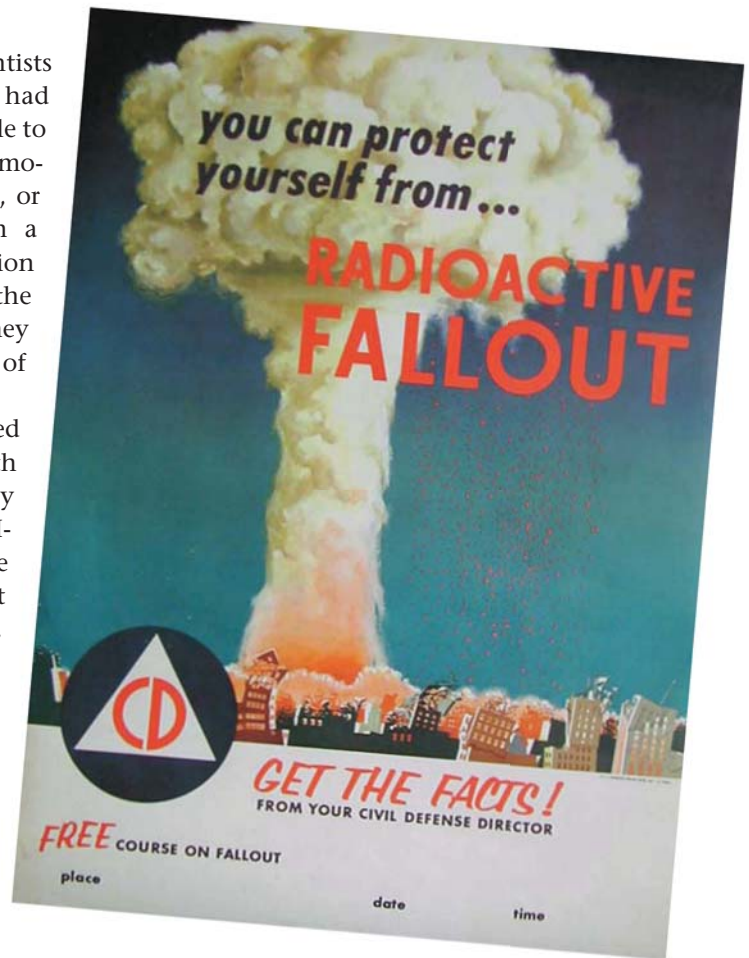
RACE FOR THE H-BOMB The scientists who developed the atomic bomb had suspected since 1942 that it was possible to create an even more destructive thermonuclear weapon—the hydrogen bomb, or **H-bomb**. They estimated that such a bomb would have the force of 1 million tons of TNT (67 times the power of the bomb dropped on Hiroshima). But they argued vehemently about the morality of creating such a destructive weapon.

Despite such concerns, the United States entered into a deadly race with the Soviet Union to see which country would be the first to produce an H-bomb. On November 1, 1952, the United States won the race when it exploded the first H-bomb. However, the American advantage lasted less than a year. In August 1953, the Soviets exploded their own thermonuclear weapon. **A**

THE POLICY OF BRINKMANSHIP

By the time both countries had the H-bomb, **Dwight D. Eisenhower** was president. His secretary of state, **John Foster Dulles**, was staunchly anti-Communist. For Dulles, the Cold War was a moral crusade against communism. Dulles proposed that the United States could prevent the spread of communism by promising to use all of its force, including nuclear weapons, against any aggressor nation. The willingness of the United States, under President Eisenhower, to go to the edge of all-out war became known as **brinkmanship**. Under this policy, the United States trimmed its army and navy and expanded its air force (which would deliver the bombs) and its buildup of nuclear weapons. The Soviet Union followed suit.

The threat of nuclear attack was unlike any the American people had ever faced. Even if only a few bombs reached their targets, millions of civilians would die. Schoolchildren like Annie Dillard practiced air-raid procedures, and some families built underground fallout shelters in their back yards. Fear of nuclear war became a constant in American life for the next 30 years.



▲ A dramatic civil defense poster shows the fear of nuclear attack.

MAIN IDEA

Analyzing Causes

A How did the U.S. and the Soviet Union start the arms race?

The Cold War Spreads Around the World

As the nation shifted to a dependence on nuclear arms, the Eisenhower administration began to rely heavily on the recently formed **Central Intelligence Agency (CIA)** for information. The CIA used spies to gather information abroad. The CIA also began to carry out covert, or secret, operations to weaken or overthrow governments unfriendly to the United States.

COVERT ACTIONS IN THE MIDDLE EAST AND LATIN AMERICA One of the CIA's first covert actions took place in the Middle East. In 1951, Iran's prime minister, Mohammed Mossadegh, nationalized Iran's oil fields; that is, he placed the formerly private industries (owned mostly by Great Britain) under Iranian control. To protest, the British stopped buying Iranian oil. As the Iranian economy

Background

From ancient times until 1935, Iran was known as Persia. Persia once ruled a great empire that stretched from the Mediterranean Sea to India's Indus River.



flattered, the United States feared that Mossadegh might turn to the Soviets for help. In 1953, the CIA gave several million dollars to anti-Mossadegh supporters. The CIA wanted the pro-American Shah of Iran, who had recently been forced to flee, to return to power. The plan worked. The Shah returned to power and turned over control of Iranian oil fields to Western companies.

In 1954, the CIA also took covert actions in Guatemala, a Central American country just south of Mexico. Eisenhower believed that Guatemala's government had Communist sympathies because it had given more than 200,000 acres of American-owned land to peasants. In response, the CIA trained an army, which invaded Guatemala. The Guatemalan army refused to defend the president, and he resigned. The army's leader then became dictator of the country. **B**

THE WARSAW PACT In spite of the growing tension between the superpowers, U.S.-Soviet relations seemed to thaw following the death of Joseph Stalin in 1953. The Soviets recognized West Germany and concluded peace treaties with Austria and Japan. However, in 1955, when West Germany was allowed to rearm and join NATO, the Soviet Union grew fearful. It formed its own military alliance, known as the **Warsaw Pact**. The Warsaw Pact linked the Soviet Union with seven Eastern European countries.


A SUMMIT IN GENEVA In July 1955, Eisenhower traveled to Geneva, Switzerland, to meet with Soviet leaders. There Eisenhower put forth an "open skies" proposal. The United States and the Soviet Union would allow flights over each other's territory to guard against surprise nuclear attacks. Although the Soviet Union rejected this proposal, the world hailed the "spirit of Geneva" as a step toward peace.

MAIN IDEA

Summarizing

B What was the role of the CIA in the Cold War?

THE SUEZ WAR In 1955, the same year in which the Geneva Summit took place, Great Britain and the United States agreed to help Egypt finance construction of a dam at Aswan on the Nile River. However, Gamal Abdel-Nasser, Egypt's head of government, tried to play the Soviets and the Americans against each other, by improving relations with each one in order to get more aid. In 1956, after learning that Nasser was making deals with the Soviets, Dulles withdrew his offer of a loan. Angered, Nasser responded by nationalizing the Suez Canal, the Egyptian waterway that was owned by France and Great Britain. The French and the British were outraged.

Egyptian control of the canal also affected Israel. Nasser refused to let ships bound for Israel pass through the canal, even though the canal was supposed to be open to all nations. Israel responded by sending troops. So did Great Britain and France. The three countries seized the Mediterranean end of the canal. The UN quickly stepped in to stop the fighting. It persuaded Great Britain, France, and Israel to withdraw. However, it allowed Egypt to keep control of the canal. 

THE EISENHOWER DOCTRINE The Soviet Union's prestige in the Middle East rose because of its support for Egypt. To counterbalance this development, President Eisenhower issued a warning in January 1957. This warning, known as the **Eisenhower Doctrine**, said that the United States would defend the Middle East against an attack by any communist country. In March, Congress officially approved the doctrine.

THE HUNGARIAN UPRISING Even as fighting was raging in the Middle East, a revolt began in Hungary. Dominated by the Soviet Union since the end of World War II, the Hungarian people rose in revolt in 1956. They called for a democratic government.


Imre Nagy, the most popular and liberal Hungarian Communist leader, formed a new government. He promised free elections, denounced the Warsaw Pact, and demanded that all Soviet troops leave Hungary.

The Soviet response was swift and brutal. In November 1956, Soviet tanks rolled into Hungary and killed approximately 30,000 Hungarians. Armed with only pistols and bottles, thousands of Hungarian freedom fighters threw up barricades in the streets and fought the invaders to no avail. The Soviets overthrew the Nagy government and replaced it with pro-Soviet leaders. Nagy himself was executed. Some 200,000 Hungarians fled to the west.

Although the Truman Doctrine had promised to support free peoples who resisted communism, the United States did nothing to help Hungary break free of Soviet control. Many

MAIN IDEA

Analyzing Effects

 What were the results of the Suez War?

WORLD STAGE



ISRAEL

On May 14, 1948, the United Nations created the nation of Israel by partitioning Palestine into two states, one Jewish and one Arab. Thousands of Jews had immigrated to Palestine from Europe before and during World War II, and Israel became the “promised land” they had known since biblical times. The creation of Israel was one of the few issues upon which the United States and the Soviet Union agreed, as the world reacted uniformly to the horror that had befallen the Jews in the Holocaust.

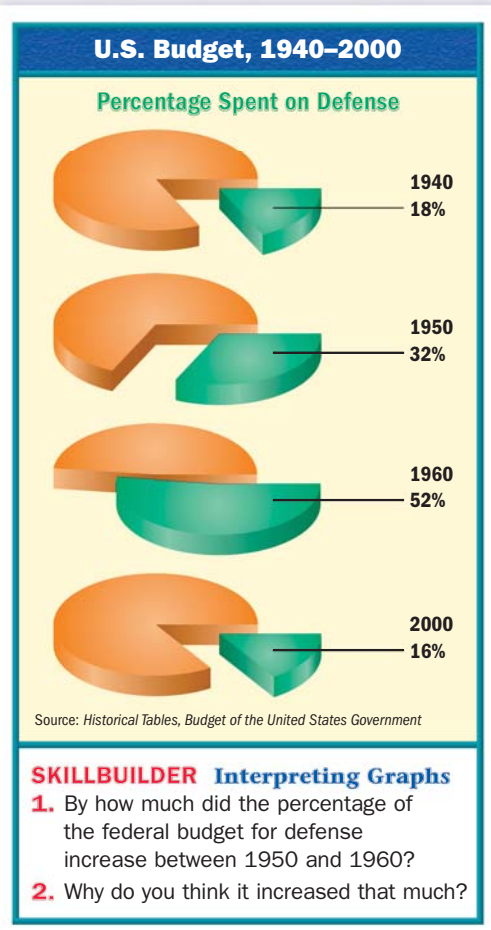
Crowds surround a captured Russian tank during the anti-Communist revolution in Hungary.



Hungarians were bitterly disappointed. The American policy of containment did not extend to driving the Soviet Union out of its satellites.

No help came to Hungary from the United Nations either. Although the UN passed one resolution after another condemning the Soviet Union, the Soviet veto in the Security Council stopped the UN from taking any action.

The Cold War Takes to the Skies



After Stalin's death in 1953, the Soviet Union had no well-defined way for one leader to succeed another. For the first few years, a group of leaders shared power. As time went by, however, one man did gain power. That man was **Nikita Khrushchev** (kröosh'chěf). Like Stalin, Khrushchev believed that communism would take over the world, but Khrushchev thought it could triumph peacefully. He favored a policy of peaceful coexistence in which two powers would compete economically and scientifically. **D**

THE SPACE RACE In the competition for international prestige, the Soviets leaped to an early lead in what came to be known as the space race. On October 4, 1957, they launched *Sputnik*, the world's first artificial satellite. *Sputnik* traveled around the earth at 18,000 miles per hour, circling the globe every 96 minutes. Its launch was a triumph of Soviet technology.

Americans were shocked at being beaten and promptly poured money into their own space program. U.S. scientists worked frantically to catch up to the Soviets. The first attempt at an American satellite launch was a humiliating failure, with the rocket toppling to the ground. However, on January 31, 1958, the United States successfully launched its first satellite.

A U-2 IS SHOT DOWN Following the rejection of Eisenhower's "open skies" proposal at the 1955

Geneva summit conference, the CIA began making secret high-altitude flights over Soviet territory. The plane used for these missions was the U-2, which could fly at high altitudes without detection. As a U-2 passed over the Soviet Union, its infrared cameras took detailed photographs of troop movement and missile sites.

By 1960, however, many U.S. officials were nervous about the U-2 program for two reasons. First, the existence and purpose of the U-2 was an open secret among some members of the American press. Second, the Soviets had been aware of the flights since 1958, as **Francis Gary Powers**, a U-2 pilot, explained.

A PERSONAL VOICE FRANCIS GARY POWERS

"We . . . knew that the Russians were radar-tracking at least some of our flights. . . . We also knew that SAMs [surface-to-air missiles] were being fired at us, that some were uncomfortably close to our altitude. But we knew too that the Russians had a control problem in their guidance system. . . . We were concerned, but not greatly."

—Operation Overflight: The U-2 Spy Pilot Tells His Story for the First Time

MAIN IDEA

Comparing

D Compare Joseph Stalin with Nikita Khrushchev. How were they alike? How were they different?

Finally, Eisenhower himself wanted the flights discontinued. He and Khrushchev were going to hold another summit conference on the arms race on May 15, 1960. "If one of these aircraft were lost when we were engaged in apparently sincere deliberations, it could . . . ruin my effectiveness," he told an aide. However, Dulles persuaded him to authorize one last flight.

That flight took place on May 1, and the pilot was Francis Gary Powers. Four hours after Powers entered Soviet airspace, a Soviet pilot shot down his plane, and Powers was forced to parachute into Soviet-controlled territory. The Soviets sentenced Powers to ten years in prison.



Francis Gary Powers's military identification card

Francis Gary Powers at a Senate committee hearing following his release by the Soviets



Background

After 18 months, Francis Gary Powers was released from the Soviet Union in exchange for Soviet agent Rudolf Abel, who had been convicted of spying in the United States.

RENEWED CONFRONTATION At first, Eisenhower denied that the U-2 had been spying. The Soviets had evidence, however, and Eisenhower finally had to admit it. Khrushchev demanded an apology for the flights and a promise to halt them. Eisenhower agreed to stop the U-2 flights, but he would not apologize.

Khrushchev angrily called off the summit. He also withdrew his invitation to Eisenhower to visit the Soviet Union. Because of the **U-2 incident**, the 1960s opened with tension between the two superpowers as great as ever.

SECTION 4

ASSESSMENT

1. TERMS & NAMES For each term or name, write a sentence explaining its significance.

- H-bomb
- brinkmanship
- Warsaw Pact
- Francis Gary Powers
- Dwight D. Eisenhower
- Central Intelligence Agency (CIA)
- Eisenhower Doctrine
- U-2 incident
- John Foster Dulles
- Nikita Khrushchev

MAIN IDEA

2. TAKING NOTES

List Cold War trouble spots in Iran, Guatemala, Egypt, and Hungary. For each, write a newspaper headline that summarizes the U.S. role and the outcome of the situation.

Trouble Spot	Headline

Choose one headline and write a paragraph about that trouble spot.

CRITICAL THINKING

3. HYPOTHESIZING

How might the Cold War have progressed if the U-2 incident had never occurred? **Think About:**

- the mutual distrust between the Soviet Union and the United States
- the outcome of the incident

4. EVALUATING

Which of the two superpowers do you think contributed more to Cold War tensions during the 1950s?

5. FORMING GENERALIZATIONS

Should one nation have the right to remove another nation's head of government from power? If so, when? If not, why?

Science Fiction Reflects Cold War Fears

1950–1959 Many writers of science fiction draw on the scientific and social trends of the present to describe future societies that might arise if those trends were to continue. Nuclear proliferation, the space race, early computer technology, and the pervasive fear of known and unknown dangers during the Cold War were the realities that prompted a boom in science fiction during the 1950s and 1960s.

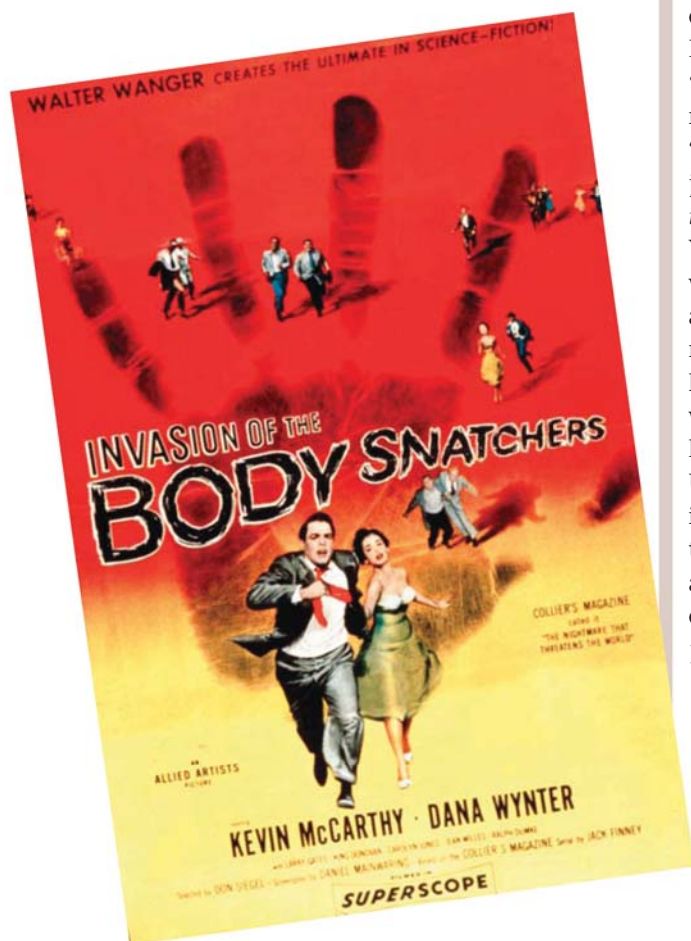
THE BODY SNATCHERS

Published in 1955 at the height of the Great Fear, Jack Finney's *The Body Snatchers* (on which the movie *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* was based) tells of giant seed pods from outer space that descend on the inhabitants of a California town. The pods create perfect physical duplicates of the townspeople and lack only one thing—human souls.

“Miles, he looks, sounds, acts, and remembers exactly like Ira. On the outside. But *inside* he’s different. His responses”—she stopped, hunting for the word—“aren’t *emotionally* right, if I can explain that. He remembers the past, in detail, and he’ll smile and say ‘You were sure a cute youngster, Willy. Bright one, too,’ just the way Uncle Ira did. But there’s something *missing*, and the same thing is true of Aunt Aleda, lately.” Wilma stopped, staring at nothing again, face intent, wrapped up in this, then she continued. “Uncle Ira was a father to me, from infancy, and when he talked about my childhood, Miles, there was—always—a special look in his eyes that meant he was remembering the wonderful quality of those days for him. Miles, that look, ‘way in back of the eyes, is gone. With this—*this* Uncle Ira, or whoever or whatever he is, I have the feeling, the absolutely certain *knowledge*, Miles, that he’s talking by rote. That the facts of Uncle Ira’s memories are all in his mind in every last detail, ready to recall. But the emotions are not. There *is* no emotion—none—only the pretense of it. The words, the gestures, the tones of voice, everything else—but not the feeling.”

Her voice was suddenly firm and commanding: “Miles, memories or not, appearances or not, possible or impossible, that is not my Uncle Ira.”

—Jack Finney, *The Body Snatchers* (1955)



THE MARTIAN CHRONICLES

In *The Martian Chronicles*, Ray Bradbury describes how earthlings who have colonized Mars watch helplessly as their former planet is destroyed by nuclear warfare.

Text not available for electronic use.
Please refer to the text in the textbook.

Ray
Bradbury
in 1965.



A CANTICLE FOR LEIBOWITZ

In *A Canticle for Leibowitz*, Walter M. Miller, Jr., portrays the centuries after a nuclear holocaust as a new “Dark Age” for humanity on earth.

He had been wandering for a long time. The search seemed endless, but there was always the promise of finding what he sought across the next rise or beyond the bend in the trail. When he had finished fanning himself, he clapped the hat back on his head and scratched at his bushy beard while blinking around at the landscape. There was a patch of unburned forest on the hillside just ahead. It offered welcome shade, but still the wanderer sat there in the sunlight and watched the curious buzzards. . . .

Pickings were good for a while in the region of the Red River; but then out of the carnage, a city-state arose. For rising city-states, the buzzards had no fondness, although they approved of their eventual fall. They shied away from Texarkana and ranged far over the plain to the west. After the manner of all living things, they replenished the Earth many times with their kind.

Eventually it was the Year of Our Lord 3174.
There were rumors of war.

—Walter M. Miller, Jr., *A Canticle for Leibowitz* (1959)

THINKING CRITICALLY

- 1. Comparing** What themes, or general messages about life or humanity, do you think these three books convey? How might readers’ interpretations of these messages today differ from readers’ interpretations during the Cold War?



SEE SKILLBUILDER HANDBOOK, PAGE R8.

- 2. INTERNET ACTIVITY** [CLASSZONE.COM](https://www.classzone.com)

Visit the links for American Literature to learn more about Ray Bradbury and *The Martian Chronicles*. When was *The Martian Chronicles* published? How does it reflect Cold War fears? What does the writing tell you about Ray Bradbury’s view of American society at the time?