

HISTORY™ CLASSROOM PRESENTS

THE CENTURY: AMERICA'S TIME THE BEST YEARS

Reporter Peter Jennings hosts this important series that chronicles the events and experiences of America in the twentieth century, the century that Henry Luce dubbed “The American Century.” Using archival footage and interviews with historians, veterans, activists and every-day people, this documentary explores the social, political, cultural, and economic changes that have transformed this nation from a burgeoning, isolationist economic power to one of the world’s leaders. *The Century: America’s Time* would be useful for classes on American History, American Culture, Women’s History, Political Science, Civics, Science and Technology, Military History and Ethics. It is appropriate for middle school, high school and college.

THE BEST YEARS

After the initial jubilation at the end of World War II, America faced severe domestic demographic problems and the international specter of communism and the Cold War. In response to the serious housing shortages exacerbated by the high marriage rates and subsequent baby boom of returning soldiers and the girls they left behind, the Truman administration created the GI Bill, which enabled veterans to secure low interest mortgages and college educations. But the domestic bliss of new homes and growing families could not alleviate the growing fears and hysteria of the new atomic age, and a demagogue from Wisconsin, Senator Joseph McCarthy, harnessed this hysteria for his personal political success. This episode covers some of the major events of the immediate post-war years such as the Korean War, McCarthyism, the Marshall Plan, the Berlin Airlift and the adjustment of returning soldiers.

OBJECTIVES

Students will analyze the effects of the twentieth century on American life, political institutions, economics, foreign policy and culture. They will also investigate how events in the twentieth century influenced America’s position as a world leader, and how global and domestic events created change, and sometimes turmoil, in America itself.

NATIONAL HISTORY STANDARDS

The Best Years fulfills the following National Standards for History for grades 5-12: Chronological thinking, historical comprehension, historical analysis and interpretation, historical research capabilities, historical issues-analysis and decision-making for Era 8.

VOCABULARY

Prosperity

Indignant

Utilitarian

Auspices

Indiscriminate
Ironical
Beset

Vibrant
Humiliate
Anarchy

Demographic
Ideological
Intoxicated

Ferocious
Obscure
Litmus

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What is the difference between a “hot” war and a “cold” war?
2. Winston Churchill coined the famous phrase “iron curtain.” What did Churchill mean by “iron curtain?”
3. The U.S. Government granted returning soldiers the GI Bill of Rights. What was the GI Bill of Rights? How did this bill of rights shape the coming decades?
4. What was the Baby Boom? How did it change America? What are the effects of this boom today?
5. Although the post-war economy was the most prosperous in American history, some Americans were excluded. How did the prosperity and economic advantages of the period exclude most African-Americans and women?
6. Discuss the devastating losses Europe suffered in the war and their effects during the post-war period.
7. Discuss the ideological conflicts and differences between the United States and The Soviet Union.
8. What was the Marshall Plan? How did it shape post-war foreign policy?
9. Many times conquering armies rape the women of the conquered nation. Why is this done?
10. What was the American reaction to the Soviets obtaining nuclear power?
11. Why was there such a different reception for Korean War veterans than World War II veterans?
12. What was a blacklist? How did political witch-hunts result in these lists?

EXTENDED ACTIVITIES

1. Create a consumer advertisement for the post-war period.
2. Design a bomb-shelter for your home.