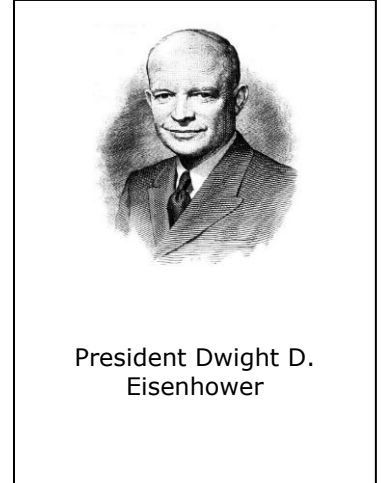


# Eighty-Fourth Congress

Jan. 5, 1955-July 27, 1956

## First Administration of Dwight D. (“Ike”) Eisenhower

Historical Background.....	1
War or Peace? .....	2
Economic Trends and Conditions.....	3
Major Treaties.....	4
Landmark U.S. Supreme Court Decisions .....	5
1955 Events .....	6
1956 Events .....	7
Major Acts.....	9



### Historical Background

During the waning days of the 83<sup>rd</sup> Congress, on May 17, 1954, the Supreme Court handed down a unanimous decision in *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*, 347 U.S. 483 (1954), overturning the 1896 decision in *Plessy v. Ferguson*, 163 U.S. 537 (1896). In its ruling, the court held that the establishment of separate public school systems for White and Black students—the so-called “separate but equal” doctrine—violated the Fourteenth Amendment’s Equal Protection Clause. The ruling implicitly paved the way for the integration of public schools in the United States, though the decision did not provide any explicit guidelines for the process. A second decision, the so-called Brown II, handed down in 1955, included the order that states must desegregate “with all deliberate speed.” The impact of the decision would drive the incipient Civil Rights Movement over the coming years.

In his State of the Union Address delivered on January 6, 1955, President Dwight D. Eisenhower presented a contrast between the free nations of the world and the Soviet Communist bloc. He described the struggle as not merely one of competing economic theories, forms of government, or military power, but rather about the true nature of man as either a being only a “little lower than the angels,” holding dominion over the works of his creator; or a soulless, animated machine meant to be enslaved, used, and consumed by the state for its own glorification. On the positive side, he noted that free nations were collectively stronger than they had been at any time in recent years, but on the negative side, the massive military machines and ambitions of the Soviet bloc continued to create uneasiness.

House	Senate
Majority Party: Democrat (232 seats)	Majority Party: Democrat (48 seats)
Minority Party: Republican (203 seats)	Minority Party: Republican (47 seats)
Other Parties: None	Other Parties: Independent (1 seat)
Speaker of the House: Sam Rayburn	Majority Leader: Lyndon B. Johnson

Congress feared an assault by Chinese communist forces against Formosa and the Pescadores Islands, so in January 1955 the lawmakers authorized the President to employ U.S. Armed Forces in their defense in the event of attack. During the few weeks that followed, the Senate ratified the treaty that established the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO), as well as the protocols ending the occupation of Germany, and which permitted West Germany to rearm and provide for its membership in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).

The peace treaty with Austria—which established it as an independent, neutral state—was ratified by the Senate on June 17, 1955.

During his 1956 State of the Union Address, Eisenhower noted the strength of the economy, a strong security posture, high levels of employment, and the rising standard of living in most sectors of society. Farm families, however, were not sharing in the general prosperity due to rising production costs and declining prices. Soviet and Chinese communism were thought to still pose a threat to the free world, with communist tactics shifting from the threat of violence to reliance on division, enticement, and duplicity. Eisenhower also stressed the importance of the participation of the United Nations and cooperation with free world nations.

Among the most important domestic enactments approved by Congress during 1955-1956 were the multi-billion-dollar Federal highway program, providing for a 41,000-mile interstate superhighway program as part of the most extensive public works projects in the Nation's history, and the Agricultural Act of 1956, which included the soil bank program, which supporters hoped would limit farm surpluses and raise farmers' incomes. Congress also voted for an increase in the minimum wage to \$1 per hour, approved the creation of a Ready Reserve force of 250,000 men, authorized \$500 million in grants to help local communities to build sewage treatment plants, provided for a reorganization of the Fish and Wildlife Service, and approved the \$760 million Colorado River Storage Project.

Sources:

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Eisenhower, Dwight D. [Report from the President to Congress on the State of the Union](#), House, Jan. 6, 1955, 84<sup>th</sup> Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> Session. H.doc.1. ProQuest Congressional, 11840 H.doc.1

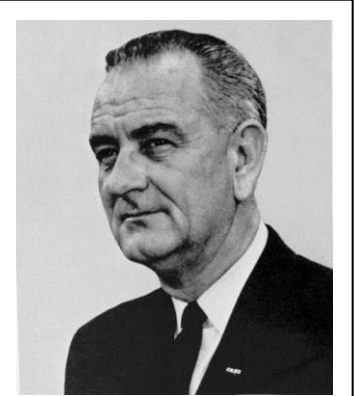
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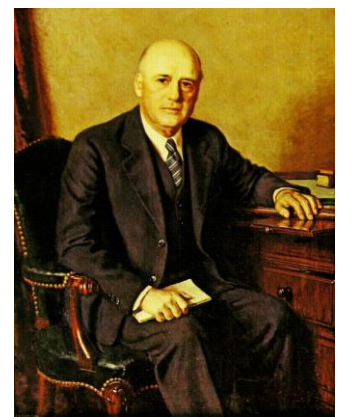
## War or Peace?

### Cold War

For the most part, the years 1955-1956 were a time of peace and prosperity for the U.S, although Cold War tensions existed throughout. In addition to



Senate Majority Leader  
Lyndon B. Johnson



Speaker of the House  
Sam Rayburn

political and military pressures, the Soviet Union also applied economic pressures, especially in poorer, underdeveloped countries. At the 20<sup>th</sup> Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union held during February 1956, Party Secretary Nikita Khrushchev said:

“...from the fact that we advocate peaceful competition with capitalism one should under no circumstances conclude that the struggle against the bourgeois ideology and against the remnants of capitalism will be relaxed by our people; our tasks consists in continuous attack on the bourgeois ideology and the unmasking of its antisocial and reactionary character.”

In 1955, the U.S. took a dual approach to helping to stem the reach of communism from North to South Vietnam. Overtly, the Federal government adopted a program of economic, military, and financial assistance to shore up the government of South Vietnam. At the same time, a covert program provided intelligence and military assistance to the South Vietnamese in their struggle against North Vietnam and the Việt Cộng.

From July through November of 1956 all was not peaceful in the Middle East and Eastern Europe. On July 26, Egyptian President Gamal Abdul Nasser of seized control of and nationalized the Suez Canal Company. On Oct. 10, Israel attacked Jordan. On Oct. 23, Hungarian students in Budapest who were protesting their country's domination by the Soviet Union clashed with secret police. On Oct. 29, Israel attacked Egypt, and on Oct. 31, the United Kingdom and France together attacked Egypt. By Nov. 10, the Hungarian Revolution had been suppressed by the Soviet Union, and by the end of the year, British and French troops had withdrawn from the Suez region.

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## **Economic Trends and Conditions**

In its 1955 report, the Joint Economic Committee stressed the importance of a strong and expanding national economy as the U.S. faced a “stern reality of imperialistic communism and the hydrogen bomb.”

At the beginning of 1955, the U.S. economy had recovered much of the ground previously lost due to the relatively mild economic adjustment

related to the end of the Korean War. Most indices were up, with the recovery sparked by automobile and steel production, home building, and inventory reversal. The strength of the economy throughout 1955 enabled the U.S. to reach the threshold of a \$400 billion economy without price inflation. Incomes were generally improving in all sectors except farm operations.

The productive power of the U.S. economy was demonstrated again during 1956 with the national output of goods and services increasing to \$412 billion, a record level. A growing proportion of homes were owner-occupied, with a rate of 60 percent in 1956 as compared to 55 percent in 1950. Consumer holdings of bank deposits, savings bonds, and other selected financial assets were about 25 percent higher during 1956 compared to 1952. In addition, during 1956 public and private outlays for the construction of educational buildings totaled \$3.1 billion, an increase of 57 percent over four years. Capital outlays rose almost 20 percent in 1956 over 1955's levels, and merchandise shipments abroad (excluding military aid transfers) increased to \$17 billion, a record high nearly \$3 billion over 1955's level of merchandise shipments abroad. During the same period, merchandise imported into the U.S. increased more than \$1 billion to a new high of nearly \$13 billion, and by the year's end, the crisis in the Middle East led the U.S. to a new high output of domestic crude oil.

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## Major Treaties

**SEATO Treaty.** The signatories (the United States, Britain, France, Australia, New Zealand, Pakistan, Thailand, and the Philippines) pledged to resist attack against "the general area of Southeast Asia, and the Southwest Pacific" up to 21 degrees 30 minutes north latitude, a line that excluded Formosa. Concluded Sept. 8, 1954. Approved by the Senate Feb. 1, 1955. ([6 UST. 81-89](#)) \*

**Protocol on the Termination of the Occupation Regime in the Federal Republic of Germany.** Gave West Germany virtual freedom, ended Allied occupation, reserved Allied military rights in that territory, and provided for

West German contributions to the cost of Western defense. Concluded Oct. 23, 1954. Approved by the Senate Apr. 1, 1955. ([6 UST. 4117-5687](#))

**Protocol to the North Atlantic Treaty to Admit Germany to the 14-Member Alliance.** Communicated to the Federal Republic of Germany an invitation to join the North Atlantic Treaty. Concluded Oct. 23, 1954. Approved by the Senate April 1, 1955. ([6 UST. 5707-5713](#))

**Peace Treaty With Austria.** Re-established Austria as a sovereign, independent and democratic state with its pre-1938 frontiers. Barred Austria from any economic or political union with Germany and from owning or making atomic weapons and guided missiles. Also provided for the withdrawal of occupation forces by the end of 1955; and that no reparations would be paid, but Russia was to be given certain oil concessions and refineries; and declared that Austria was "to join no military alliances and to permit no military bases on its territory." Concluded May 15, 1955. Approved by the Senate June 17, 1955. ([6 UST. 2369-2535](#))

\* *UST refers to the State Department's multivolume series which began in 1950 entitled: United States Treaties and Other International Agreements.*

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## Landmark U.S. Supreme Court Decisions

*Williamson v. Leep Optical of Oklahoma*, held that an Oklahoma law which prohibits non-licensed parties from fitting lenses for eyeglasses or recreating optical instruments was within the bounds of state objectives, 348 U.S. 483 (1955)

*Ullmann v. U.S.*, held that the Fifth Amendment does not protect a petitioner in cases of self-incrimination where the petitioner is given immunity from prosecution, 350 U.S. 422 (1956)

*Griffin v. Illinois*, held that convicted persons requesting a transcript of their trial proceedings should have their fees waived, in that if they could not afford the fees, they would be denied the transcripts, and thus be denied the right to appeal, 351 U.S. 12 (1956)

*Communist Party v. Subversive Activities Control Board*, held that the request for the Communist Party of the United States organization register itself as a Communist Action organization was lawful under the Subversive Activities Control Act of 1950, 351 U.S. 115 (1956)

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Costello. George A. and Johnny H. Killian. [Constitution of the United States of America. Analysis and Interpretation](#). CRS, Library of Congress, Jan. 1, 1996. 103rd Congress, 1st Session, S. Doc. 103-6 (Y1.1/3:103-6). ProQuest Congressional, 14152 S.doc.6

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## 1955 Events

- **Feb. 28:** Israeli launches a retaliation raid into the Gaza Strip, killing 37 Egyptians
- **Mar. 5:** Elvis Presley makes his first-ever TV appearance on "Louisiana Hayride"
- **Mar. 16:** President Eisenhower upheld the use of atomic weapons in case of war
- **Apr. 12:** [The U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare licenses six manufacturers to produce the Salk polio vaccine](#)
- **May 5:** The Federal Republic of Germany (FRG), also known as West Germany, becomes a sovereign state
- **May 9:** West Germany is admitted to NATO
- **May 14:** Establishment of the Warsaw Treaty Organization comprised of the Soviet Union, Albania, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, East Germany, Hungary, Poland, and Rumania
- **May 15:** [Austrian State Treaty signed formally reestablishing the Austrian Republic to its pre-1938 frontiers as a sovereign democratic state](#)
- **May 31:** [U.S. Supreme Court ordered that States must end racial segregation in public schools "with all deliberate speed"](#)
- **June 22:** Soviet MIGs shoot down a U.S. Navy Patrol plane flying a routine maritime patrol in the Bering Strait
- **July 18:** Geneva Summit held in Geneva, Switzerland between the "Big Four": President Dwight D. Eisenhower of the United States, Prime Minister Anthony Eden of Britain, Premier Nikolai A. Bulganin of the Soviet Union, and Prime Minister Edgar Faure of France
- **Aug. 4:** [Eisenhower Authorized \\$46 million for the construction of CIA headquarters](#)
- **Aug. 8:** Fidel Castro forms his 'July 26th Movement' of insurgents with the stated goal of deposing Cuban President Fulgencio Batista
- **Aug. 20:** Anti-French rioting occurs in Morocco and Algeria resulting in hundreds of deaths
- **Aug. 28:** [Emmett Till is dragged from his uncle's home in Mississippi, brutally beaten and killed after reportedly offending a white woman](#)
- **Sept. 21:** Last allied occupying troops leave Austria
- **Sept. 23:** [Roy Bryant and J.W. Milam, accused of murdering Emmett Till are acquitted by and all white-jury; protected against double jeopardy, the men later publicly admit to killing Till](#)
- **Oct. 26:** Ngo Dinh Diem wins a national referendum in South Vietnam that he uses to designate himself President, dethroning Emperor Bao Dai
- **Nov. 1:** [Vietnam War - President Eisenhower deploys the Military Assistance Advisory Group to train the Army of the Republic of Vietnam, marking the official beginning of American involvement in Vietnam](#)
- **Nov. 25:** [The Interstate Commerce Commission bans segregation in interstate travel](#)



- **Dec. 1:** *Montgomery Bus Boycott* - [Rosa Parks refuses to give up her seat on a bus to a white passenger in Montgomery, Ala., and is arrested](#)
- **Dec. 5:** *Montgomery Bus Boycott* - [Organized by Martin Luther King Jr., the Montgomery Bus Boycott begins in Montgomery, Alabama seeking to end segregation on public buses](#)

## 1956 Events

- **Jan. 16:** [Egyptian Prime Minister and future President Gamal Abdel Nasser pledges to reconquer Palestine](#)
- **Jan. 19:** [Sudan becomes the 9th member of the Arab League](#)
- **Jan. 30:** *Montgomery Bus Boycott* - [Dr. King's home is bombed; he calls for peaceful protests instead of violent retaliation](#)
- **Feb. 21:** *Montgomery Bus Boycott* - [89 people, including Martin Luther King Jr., are indicted for carrying on the boycott](#)
- **Mar. 11:** [The "Southern Manifesto," a resolution condemning the 1954 Supreme Court decision in \*Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka\*, is endorsed by 96 Members of Congress](#)
- **Mar. 2:** [Morocco declares its independence from France](#)
- **Mar. 19:** *Montgomery Bus Boycott* - [Dr. King is ordered to pay \\$500](#)
- **Mar. 20:** [Tunisia granted independence from France](#)
- **Apr. 26:** *First Indochina War* - [The final French forces leave South Vietnam](#)
- **June 5:** *Montgomery Bus Boycott* - [Federal district court rules that bus segregation is unconstitutional](#)
- **June 23:** [Gamal Abdel Nasser becomes President of Egypt](#)
- **July 26:** *Suez Crisis* - [Egyptian President Nasser directs the seizure and nationalization of the Suez Canal Company](#)
- **Aug. 13:** *Suez Crisis* - [9 members of the Arab League declare that an attack on Egypt would be interpreted as an attack on all League members](#)
- **Aug. 29:** *Suez Crisis* - [French government sends troops to Cyprus near Suez crisis](#)
- **Sept. 9:** *Suez Crisis* - [British Prime Minister Eden announced a British, French, US agreement to establish an association to operate the Suez; President Nasser reject plans for international management](#)
- **Sept. 12:** *Suez Crisis* - [Britain France and US say they are going ahead with plans for a Suez Canal Users Association despite Egypt's rejection](#)
- **Oct. 22:** *Suez Crisis* - Britain, France, and Israel secretly meet and make plans to invade Egypt
- **Oct. 23:** *Hungarian Revolt* - [Revolt breaks out in Hungary as students protest the country's domination by the Soviet Union](#)
- **Oct. 24:** *Suez Crisis* - [Britain, France, and Israel secretly agree to a plan to invade Egypt; Israel, angered by cross-border raiding, was to attack the Egyptian Army near the canal as a pretext for military intervention by Britain and France](#)
- **Oct. 29:** *Suez Crisis* - [Israel invades Gaza Strip and Sinai Peninsula](#)

- **Oct. 31:** *Suez Crisis* - Britain and France begin bombing campaign to force reopening of the canal. Nasser responds by sinking 40 ships
- **Nov. 1:** *Hungarian Revolt* - [Soviet military units surround Hungary's airfields and Budapest, the capital](#)
- **Nov. 4:** *Hungarian Revolt* - [Soviet forces attack Budapest](#)
- **Nov. 10:** *Hungarian Revolt* - [the Hungarian revolt is suppressed by the Soviets](#)
- **Nov. 13:** *Montgomery Bus Boycott* - [The Supreme Court upholds the lower district court ruling, striking down racial segregation on buses](#)
- **Nov. 7-21:** *Suez Crisis* - [UN ceasefire comes into force following pressure from the U.S.; UN troops land at Port Said](#)
- **Dec. 21:** *Montgomery Bus Boycott* - [the boycott ends as buses are officially desegregated](#)
- **Dec. 23:** *Suez Crisis* - [Following U.S. pressure, British and French troops withdraw from the Suez Canal region](#)

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[Martin Luther King Jr. correspondence, including bus boycotts, bombing of King's home, King's arrest and attempted assassination, demonstrations by Alabama State College students.](#)



[transcript of King's 1960 appearance on Meet the Press, and Nobel Peace Prize](#) in *Papers of the NAACP, Part 21: NAACP Relations with the Modern Civil Rights Movement*, Group III, Series A, Administrative File General Office File (King, Martin Luther Jr.), Library of Congress, NAACP. Jan 01, 1956 - Dec 31, 1965, ProQuest Historical Vault, 001473-012-0735

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## Major Acts

**Formosa and Pescadores Defense Act.** Authorized the President to employ the Armed Forces of the United States to protect Formosa and the Pescadores from attack by Chinese Communist forces. Approved Jan. 29, 1955. ([69 Stat. 7, Chap. 4; PL84-4](#))

**Air Pollution Control Act.** Provided for the support and aid for technical research to create and implement measures to counter air pollution. Approved July 14, 1955. ([69 Stat. 322; PL84-159](#)) ([Regulatory History](#))

**Reserve Forces Act of 1955.** Authorized up to 250,000 men between the ages of 17 and 18 years and six months to sign up annually (until Aug. 1, 1959) for from three to six months of active duty and remain draft-exempt provided they attended 48 weekly drills and served 17 days of active duty each year for the remainder of their eight-year Ready Reserve obligation.

Those who failed to perform satisfactorily could be called to active duty for 45 days or drafted for two years. Approved Aug. 9, 1955. ([69 Stat. 598; PL84-305](#)) ([Regulatory History](#))

**Fair Labor Standards Amendments of 1955.** Raised the minimum wage from 75 cents per hour to \$1 per hour, effective Mar. 1, 1956. Approved Aug. 12, 1955. ([69 Stat. 711, Chap. 867; PL84-381](#)) ([Regulatory History](#))

**Colorado River Storage Project Act.** Provided for the construction by the Bureau of Reclamation of four major dams, the Glen Canyon, Flaming Gorge, Navajo, and Curecanti (all but the Navajo having major power features). In addition, the act authorized 11 small irrigation projects as part of the overall project, one (Central Utah) with sizeable electric generating units of its own. For initial costs, \$750 million was authorized. Approved Apr. 11, 1956. ([70 Stat. 105, Chap. 203; PL84-485](#)) ([Regulatory History](#))

**Agricultural Act of 1956.** Established the soil bank program aimed at retiring land from production and thereby reducing agricultural surpluses. Provided \$750 million per year for four years to pay farmers for reducing crop acreage for corn, wheat, peanuts, cotton, tobacco, and rice. Approved May 28, 1956. ([70 Stat. 188, Chap. 327; PL84-540](#)) ([Regulatory History](#))

**Federal-Aid Highway Act and Highway Revenue Act of 1956.** Amended and supplemented the Federal-Aid Road Act of 1916, to authorize nearly \$31 billion to be spent over the next 13 years for the construction of a 41,000-mile interstate superhighway program. In addition, the Act amended the Internal Revenue Code of 1954 to earmark certain highway user fees and taxes, such as the taxes on motor fuel, tires, and trucks and buses, for a Highway Trust Fund to help finance the interstate programs and required that the Trust Fund never show a deficit. Approved June 29, 1956. ([70 Stat. 374, Chap. 462; PL84-627](#)) ([Regulatory History](#))

**Water Pollution Control Act Amendments of 1956.** Substantially revised the Water Pollution Control Act of 1948. Authorized the Surgeon General to study pollution problems, and provided for grants to States to cover from between 33 percent to 66 percent of the costs of a State plan for pollution control, and \$500 million in grants to help local communities build sewage treatment plants. Approved July 9, 1956. ([70 Stat. 498; PL84-660](#)) ([Regulatory History](#))

**Servicemen's and Veterans' Survivor Benefits Act.** Placed all servicemen under contributory coverage of the Old Age and Survivors Insurance (Social Security) system and replaced the free \$10,000 life insurance coverage authorized in 1951 for all persons on active duty with a schedule of monthly payments to survivors ranging from \$122 to \$266. Approved Aug. 1, 1956. ([70 Stat. 857, Chap. 837; PL84-881](#)) ([Regulatory History](#))

**Fish and Wildlife Act of 1956.** Reorganized the Fish and Wildlife Service into two agencies, the Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife, and the Bureau of Commercial Fisheries. Established a comprehensive national fish and wildlife policy and provided for the Secretary of the Interior to take any

steps needed to conserve and develop fisheries and wildlife resources.  
Approved Aug. 8, 1956. ([70 Stat. 1119, Chap. 1036; PL84-1024](#)) ([Regulatory History](#))

Source:

Dell, Christopher and Stephen W. Stathis. [Major Acts of Congress and Treaties Approved by the Senate, 1789-1980](#). Government Division (CRS), Sept. 1, 1982. 97th Congress, 2nd Session, 82-156 GOV. ProQuest Congressional, CRS-1982-GOV-0005

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