Name _____ The Cold War

The Cold War and Civil Rights

The Cold War, an ideological conflict between the United States and the Soviet Union, had a profound and unexpected impact on the U.S. civil rights movement in the 1950s and 1960s.

World War II ended in 1945, and by 1950, the U.S. was haunted by the specter of communism. China became communist, the Soviet Union was influencing Eastern Europe, and Senator Joseph McCarthy claimed that there were communist agents working undercover in the American government. The American economy was healthy and strong, but only for certain people. African American veterans returning to the South from war found segregation had gotten worse since they had been gone. Jobs were taken from them and given to white veterans. The 50s, which is generally seen as an era of conformity, was also characterized by political protest.

During the 50s and the 60s, the U.S. worked hard to establish itself as a leader of the free world. But while the U.S. was helping to found the United Nations and establishing the Peace Corps on one hand, news reels coming out of the U.S. showed police quelling civil rights protests with violence, murders being committed by white supremacists, and black children being prevented from entering schools. The Soviet Union began a propaganda campaign characterizing Capitalism as an abusive economic system, and positioning Communism as the answer to alleviating oppression. Developing and postcolonial nations saw the Americans as hypocrites. Segregation was undermining American credibility in the Cold War.

For the sake of foreign affairs, Kennedy began to actively support civil rights. When he was assassinated, Johnson solidified the government's position on the issue by signing the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

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QUESTIONS: The Cold War and Civil Rights

Circle the correct answer.

1. What did America feel threatened by in the 1950s and 1960s?
   A. Soviet Union
   B. civil rights movement
   C. political protest
   D. communism

2. Who claimed there were communist agents working undercover in the U.S. government?
   A. Senator Joseph McCarthy
   B. President John Kennedy
   C. the Peace Corps
   D. China

3. Which of the following issues did African Americans face after World War II?
   A. segregation in the south had gotten worse
   B. jobs were taken from them and given to white veterans
   C. both A and B
   D. none of the above

4. What was the U.S. trying to establish itself as in the 50s and 60s?
   A. the Peace Corps
   B. the leader of the free world
   C. capitalists
   D. all of the above

5. Why did the U.S. end segregation?
   A. it was on Kennedy's agenda
   B. Senator Joseph McCarthy demanded it
   C. it was undermining American credibility in the Cold War
   D. both B and C

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