

Handout #4: Eisenhower and His Times

1890

Dwight David Eisenhower is born on October 14 in Denison, Texas, the third son of Ida and David Eisenhower.

“If we were poor-and I’m not sure that we were by the standards of the day- we were unaware of it. All in all, we were a cheerful family. We would have been insulted had anyone offered us charity: instead my mother was always ready to take home remedies or food and start out to help the sick.”

--Dwight D. Eisenhower, *In Review: Pictures I’ve Kept*, 1969

1891

Eisenhower family moves to Abilene, Kansas, a small farm town. Dwight grows up as the third of six brothers.

“You get to meet anyone face to face with whom you disagree.”

--Dwight D. Eisenhower, quoted in Relman Morin, *Dwight D. Eisenhower, A Gauge of Greatness*, 1969

1907

Eisenhower is an outstanding high school athlete, playing football and baseball.

“I believe that football...tends to instill in men the feeling that victory comes through hard—almost slavish—work.”

--Eisenhower, *At Ease: Stories I Tell to Friends*, 1967

1909

Eisenhower graduates from high school. He does not have the money to go to college.

“[My father’s]...sterling honesty, his insistence upon the immediate payment of all debts, his pride in his independence earned for him a reputation that has profited all of us boys. Because of it, all central Kansas helped me to secure an appointment to West Point in 1911.”

--Eisenhower, *Diaries*, March 12, 1942, the day his father is buried

1911-1915

Eisenhower wins an appointment to West Point and takes the oath as a plebe.

“A feeling came over me that the expression ‘The United States of America’ would now and henceforth mean something different than it ever had before... Suddenly, the flag itself meant something.”

--Dwight D. Eisenhower, *At Ease: Stories I Tell to Friends*, 1967

Eisenhower is a popular student who sometimes gets into trouble. He graduates 61st of 164 cadets academically and 125th of 164 in conduct.

“Ike liked people and it is awfully hard for them not to like him in return.”

--Omar Bradley, West Point classmate and teammate, in Merle Miller, *Ike the Soldier—As They Knew Him.*, 1987

1915

Eisenhower is assigned to Fort Sam Houston, where he meets Mamie Geneva Doud. They marry on July 1, 1916.

“My ambition in the Army was to make everybody I worked for regretful when I was ordered to other duty... [My experience has brought me into contact with] men of ability, honor, and a sense of high dedication to their country.”

--Eisenhower, in Stephen Ambrose, *Ike: Abilene to Berlin*, 1973

1917

The Eisenhower's first child, Doud Dwight, is born September 24.

1918

Eisenhower's first command is at Camp Colt, near Gettysburg.

1919

Eisenhower publishes papers proposing that tanks should play a more prominent role in warfare. Now assigned to Camp Meade, he meets George Patton, who shares these ideas. Doud Dwight catches scarlet fever. Shortly, after the new year, Doud Dwight dies.

“We were completely crushed... I have never known such a blow.”

--Dwight D. Eisenhower, *At Ease*

1922

Eisenhower is sent to Panama as Executive Officer to General Fox Connor, who recommends that Eisenhower attend the Command and General Staff School. An instructor at the school suggests that Eisenhower should consider dropping out. Instead, Eisenhower applies everything he has learned from General Connor and from his own independent study. He graduates first in his class.

“Always take your job seriously—never yourself.”

--Gen. Connor’s advice to Eisenhower

1928

Eisenhower is sent to Paris to write a book about World War I battlefields. He visits them all and remembers everything. This information proves crucial later.

1932

Eisenhower joins the staff of General Douglas MacArthur.

1935

Eisenhower accompanies MacArthur to the Philippines. Their assignment is to help the Philippine government organize an army. Eisenhower learns much from MacArthur, although they often disagree.

“This is the best officer in the army. When the next war comes, he should go right to the top.”

--General Douglas MacArthur, Eisenhower’s commanding officer

“Probably no one has had more, tougher fights with a senior than I had with MacArthur. I told him time and time again, ‘Why in the h—don’t you fire me?... You do things I don’t agree with and you know... I don’t.’”

--Eisenhower, in Stephen Ambrose, *Eisenhower—Soldier, General of the Army, President-Elect*

1939

The President of the Philippines offers Eisenhower a large increase in salary if he will resign his commission in the U.S. Army and become an adviser to the Philippine army.

“I want to be there if what I fear is going to come about actually happens.”

--Eisenhower, *In Review*

1941

Eisenhower leads an army of men in a war game exercise. After winning the war game, he becomes widely known. In the same year, Eisenhower is promoted to Brigadier General. He is assigned to work for Army chief of Staff George Marshall in Washington.

“When they get clear down to my place on the list, they are passing out stars with considerable abandon.”

--Eisenhower, Stephen Ambrose, *Eisenhower—Soldier, General of the Army, President-Elect*

1942

Marshall assigns Eisenhower to head a group planning the Allied (British and American) invasion of Europe.

“We’ve got to go to Europe and fight, and we’ve got to quit wasting resources all over the world, and still worse, wasting time. If we’re to keep Russia in, save the Middle East, India, and Burma, we’ve got to begin with air at West Europe, to be followed by a land attack as soon as possible.”

--Eisenhower, *Diaries*, January 22, 1942

In June, Eisenhower is assigned to command the European theater. In less than two years, Eisenhower has risen from an unknown lieutenant colonel in charge of a peacetime battalion to a famous general in command of an invasion force in the greatest war in history.

“Six months ago the prime minister of Great Britain and the president of the United States heartened the people of the United Nations by moving swiftly to merge the military and economic strength of Britain and the United States for a common effort. At that Washington conference they set a more effective pattern for unqualified partnership than has ever before been envisaged by allied nations in pursuit of a common purpose.”

--Eisenhower’s first press conference, June 25, 1942

He’s not the greatest soldier in the world. His real strength lies in his human qualities. He has the power of drawing the hearts of men toward him as a magnet attracts a bit of metal. He merely has to smile at you and you trust him at once.

--British Field Marshal Montgomery, one of Eisenhower’s sharpest critics

1943

After a year spent fighting against the Nazis, Eisenhower writes

“There grew within me the conviction that as never before in a war between many nations the forces that stood for human good and men’s rights were this time confronted by a completely evil conspiracy...because only by the utter destruction of the Axis was a decent world possible, the war for me became a crusade...”

--Eisenhower, *In Review*

December – Eisenhower meets President Roosevelt in Tunis. The President tells him he will command Operation Overlord, the invasion of Europe. Eisenhower finds his biggest job is to persuade the British and American navies, armies and air forces to work together as a team under one command.

“You will enter the continent of Europe and in conjunction with other allied nations, undertake operations aimed at the heart of Germany and the destruction of her Armed Forces.”

--Order to Eisenhower from the Joint Chiefs of Staff

1944

The Allied paratroopers are ready to be flown in behind the beaches, the ships are ready for the channel crossing and the Allies believe they have kept the landing place Secret from the Germans. The invasion is set. But the weather is bad. Eisenhower alone has to make the call and take the responsibility for millions of men.

“OK, let’s go.”

--Eisenhower on the morning of June 6

“Our landings...have failed to gain satisfactory foothold and I have withdrawn the troops. The troops, the Air Force and the Navy did all that bravery and devotion to duty could do. If any blame or fault attaches to the attempt, it is mine alone.”

--Message Eisenhower carries in his pocket on June 6 in case the invasion is a failure

1945

The Allies begin the march to Berlin. Eisenhower continues as commander till the end of European War in May, 1945.

“I want every American unit not actually in the front line to see this place. We are told that the American soldier does not know what he’s fighting for. Now at least he will know what he’s fighting against.”

--Eisenhower, after touring a concentration camp

May – As the war in Europe ends, Eisenhower receives a hero’s welcome in Europe and the United States.

“No man alone could have brought about this result. Had I possessed the military skill of a Marlborough, the wisdom of Solomon, the understanding of Lincoln, I still would have been helpless without the loyalty, vision and generosity of thousands of British and Americans.”

--Eisenhower, speaking to a group in England

1948

Eisenhower leaves the Army and becomes President of Columbia University. He writes his war memoirs, *Crusade in Europe*. From the book sales he accumulates enough money to buy the Gettysburg farm.

1950

In late 1950, President Truman appoints Eisenhower to command the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. This alliance of Western European countries and the U.S. is concerned with stopping the Russian military expansion in Europe.

“I am a soldier and this is a call to duty...My objective will not be to prepare for war but to make sure there won’t be any.”

--Eisenhower, quoted in Jules Archer, *Battlefield President: Dwight D. Eisenhower*, 1967

The Cold War has begun. Though Russia and the U.S. had been allies in World War II, Russia’s takeover of Eastern Europe and attempted takeovers of Greece and Turkey pit the two powers against each other.

1952

Eisenhower is asked to be the Republican candidate for president in 1952. He accepts the nomination and wins the election.

“Time and again I’ve told anyone who’d listen that I will not seek a nomination. I don’t give a d--- how impossible a ‘draft’ may be. I’m willing to go part way in trying to recognize a ‘duty’, but I do not have to seek one, and I will not.”

--Eisenhower, *Diaries*, January 10, 1952

“I accept their summons to lead a crusade, a crusade for freedom in American and freedom in the world...”

--Eisenhower, Acceptance Speech, Republican convention

1953

Eisenhower is sworn in as the 34th President of the United States. He made each Cabinet officer responsible for an area of government affairs. He wanted to reduce government spending and to improve the way government operated. In foreign affairs, he advocated close cooperation with allies.

“I’ve just learned something from Omar Bradley. He addressed me over the phone as ‘Mr. President’... a man who for forty years has called me Ike as I had called him Brad. His salutation put me on notice...I would...to a very different degree be separated from all others, including my oldest friends...”

--Eisenhower, *In Review*

“I am convinced that leadership in the political as well as in other spheres consists largely in making progress through compromise.”

--Eisenhower, in *Ike’s Letters to a Friend*, Robert Griffith, Ed., 1984

“The idea that all wisdom is in the President, in me, that’s baloney.”

--Eisenhower, quoted in *World Book Encyclopedia*

Eisenhower’s first priority is to end the Korean War. After much negotiation, a truce is signed in July 1953.

1954

Republican senator McCarthy continues his investigative hearings claiming there are hundreds of “card-carrying communists” working in the top ranks of government and the army. McCarthy also attempted to ban books he considered to be written by Communists. Though he has no proof, the hearings destroy many people’s careers. Eisenhower objects to McCarthy’s methods, but he does not speak out against him publicly, believing it is beneath the dignity of the office of the President to do so. In December 1954, the Senate condemns McCarthy for conduct unbecoming a senator.

“Senator McCarthy is, of course, so anxious for the headlines that he is prepared to go to any extremes in order to secure some mention of his name in the public press. His actions create trouble on the Hill with members of the party; they irritate, frustrate, and infuriate members of the executive Department. I really believe that nothing will be so effective in combating his particular kind of troublemaking as to ignore him. This he cannot stand.

--Eisenhower, *Diaries*, April 1, 1953

1955

The leaders of France, Great Britain, the Soviet Union, and the United States attend a Summit Meeting in Geneva, Switzerland. Eisenhower proposes Open Skies, under which both the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. would have the right to conduct aerial inspections of each other’s military bases. The Soviets reject this proposal.

It’s essential (to) find some way of controlling the threat of the thermonuclear bomb. You know, we both have enough weapons to wipe out the entire northern hemisphere from fallout alone.”

--Eisenhower at the Geneva Summit

We get your dust, you get our dust, the winds blow and nobody is safe.

--Nikita Khrushchev at the Geneva Summit

Both cited in Michael Beschloss, *Mayday*, 1986

1956

When Egypt tries to nationalize the Suez Canal, France and England attack Egypt. They are soon joined by Israel. The British and the French want the U.S. to join them, but Eisenhower does not agree. He works within the United Nations to secure a cease fire. Eisenhower is re-elected. His campaign slogan is Peace, Progress and Prosperity. In December, Indian Prime Minister Nehru visits the Gettysburg farm.

The talks confirmed the broad area of agreement between India and the United States, which are bound together in strong ties of friendship deriving from their common objectives and their adherence to the highest principles of free democracy.

--Joint Statement following Discussions with Prime Minister Nehru, December 20, 1956

1957

After the 1954 *Brown vs. the Board of Education* decision, schools were to be desegregated "with all deliberate speed." In September, Arkansas Governor Orval Faubus calls out the Arkansas National Guard to keep black students from going to Little Rock Central high School, a previously all white school, thus defying a federal court order. Eisenhower has many phone conversations with Faubus encouraging him to uphold the federal law. Faubus does not and after trouble erupts again, Eisenhower issues a statement that Central high has to be integrated. Finally, Eisenhower sends Federal troops in to desegregate schools.

"If the day comes when we can obey the orders of our courts only when we personally approve of them, the end of the American system, as we know it, will not be far off."

--Eisenhower, *The White House Years, Waging Peace*, 1965

1958

In mid-term Congressional elections, Republicans suffer major losses.

"What counts is not necessarily the size of the dog in the fight-it's the size of the fight in the dog."

--Eisenhower in a speech to the Republican National Committee, 1958

1959

Nikita Khrushchev becomes the first Soviet leader to visit the United States. He and Eisenhower meet at Camp David in September to try to resolve some of the disputes of the Cold War. Khrushchev also visits the Eisenhower farm at Gettysburg.

1960

Just before Eisenhower leaves for the Summit Meeting in Paris, the Soviets shoot down the U2 spy plane piloted by Gary Powers. Though Eisenhower had approved the use of spy planes over the USSR, he and his advisers try to conceal the purpose of the mission, saying the plane had been conducting high-altitude weather studies in eastern Turkey. Khrushchev exposed the truth in a May 7 speech to the Supreme Soviet.

“Comrades, I must let you in on a secret. When I made my report two days ago, I deliberately refrained from mentioning that we have the remnants of the plane-and we also have the pilot, who is quite alive and kicking.”

--Nikita Khrushchev, quoted in Chester Pach and Elmo Richardson, *The Presidency of Dwight D. Eisenhower*

1961

Eisenhower retires to Gettysburg. In his Farewell Address, he challenges the nation to guard against the military-industrial complex.

“We must guard against the acquisition of unwarranted influence, whether sought or unsought, by the military-industrial complex... We must never let the weight of this combination endanger our liberties or democratic processes.”

--Eisenhower, Farewell Address, January 17, 1961

1961

In retirement, Eisenhower's goal is to improve the land on his Gettysburg farm.

When I die, I'm going to leave a piece of ground better than I found it.”

--Interview with Walter Cronkite at the Eisenhower farm, June 1961

1969

Eisenhower dies.