

Ch. 3 — DOMESTIC FACTORS IN US FOREIGN POLICY, 1945-72

Learning Intentions

In this section, you should understand the impact of the following on US foreign policy:

- McCarthyism (and the Red Scare).
- The anti-war movement.
- Race relations.

Introduction

US foreign policy was influenced by many **domestic factors**. Presidents were very conscious of public opinion, particularly in the run-up to congressional and presidential elections. As well as this, various interest groups within the US tried to influence foreign policy, from the military-industrial complex to the press. From the 1940s to the 1980s, three other factors had an important influence. These were:

- McCarthyism (and the Red Scare).
- The anti-war movement.
- Race relations.

KEY PERSONALITY: SENATOR JOE MCCARTHY - 'TAIL GUNNER JOE'

Joe McCarthy was born in Wisconsin in the American Midwest. He served in the Second World War, mostly in a desk job. After the war, he was elected to the US Senate for Wisconsin in 1946.

He had a **poor record** as a Senator - he liked playing poker and drinking - and he seemed likely to be defeated in the next congressional election. He needed an issue to fight the election and friends advised him to go after subversives. *'That's it,'* he said, *'The government is full of Communists. We can hammer away at them.'*

In February 1950, he claimed that the **State Department** had 200 employees who were Communists. This was the beginning of the accusations which brought him fame - he was on the cover of *Time* and *Newsweek* - and re-election. But it also intensified the growing anti-Communism (the **Red Scare**) which spread fear around the US for the next four years.

McCarthy was a **strong and dramatic speaker** who cleverly stoked up fears. He attacked individuals and groups with a wicked and nasty tongue. He said of a fellow Republican that he was *'a living miracle in that he is without question the only man who has lived so long with neither brains nor guts'*. He attacked the Protestant clergy (he was a Catholic), the civil service, writers and scientists.

KEY PERSONALITY: SENATOR JOE MCCARTHY - 'TAIL GUNNER JOE'

He detested what was called the **Eastern Establishment** - the well-educated, often wealthy, mainly Protestant young men who ran government and much of industry at the time. He linked **liberalism** and the **New Deal**, which he hated, with **socialism** and **Communism**.

He was supported by the **Republicans**, who encouraged his attacks on Truman and the Democrats, accusing them of being **soft** on Communism. After President **Eisenhower** was elected McCarthy continued his attacks on Democrats. It even seemed Eisenhower was afraid of him because the President dropped a section of a speech defending George Marshall, a friend, when he was attacked by McCarthy.

McCarthy became chairman of the Senate Committee on Subversion. His attacks on the US army, and the **Army-McCarthy** hearings which were televised, led to his downfall. His downfall came in 1954 and he died two years later of **liver disease** due to his drinking. But his influence continued long after. Many Americans now look back on McCarthyism as a disgraceful episode in their history.

KEY CONCEPT: PUBLIC OPINION

The views and attitudes of the people. This is measured in elections or in between elections in opinion polls. In a democracy, political parties have to get elected so they have to pay attention to public opinion.

KEY CONCEPT: MILITARY-INDUSTRIAL COMPLEX

Military-Industrial Complex was the combination of the armed forces, the politicians who supported them and the industries who supplied them. They had a strong influence on government decisions.

The Downfall of McCarthy

In 1952, McCarthy became chairman of the **Committee on Government Operations** and its **Subcommittee on Investigations**. He began hearings on Communist infiltration in the federal government but he did not uncover anything. His campaign led to the banning of over **400 writers** by the State Department. His downfall came when he accused the army of harbouring Communists. The **Army-McCarthy hearings** were televised from April to June 1954. These showed the public what a **bully** he was as he shouted at witnesses and interrupted them. Public opinion changed and his support dropped from 50 per cent to 34 per cent, with 45 per cent disapproving of his actions. The Senate censured him in 1954 for bringing that body into disrepute.

The Influence of McCarthyism on US Foreign Policy

The Red Scare and McCarthyism set the tone for American foreign policy in the late 1940s and for the next 30 years. By heightening **fear of Communism**, McCarthyism clouded much of American thinking on foreign policy. It contributed to making the Cold War more extreme. It reinforced the view that all events everywhere should be viewed as part of a Communist conspiracy, led by the Soviet Union and Communist China. Both Democrats and Republicans agreed that anti-Communism should be the **main aim** of US foreign policy. It brought America into supporting corrupt governments once they appeared to be anti-Communist, particularly in Asia and South America. In Asia, for example, it led the US into supporting the corrupt and incompetent **Chiang Kai-shek** in Taiwan and also into refusing to recognise the Communist government in China.

The **State Department** lost many of its finest people. In particular, the Far East and Asia department lost many able people. Some historians link the US failure in Vietnam and their misreading of the situation to the lack of knowledge or information on the area. The US viewed Vietnam as a Cold War conflict when it was much more a **nationalist uprising** against the French colonial government.

McCarthy also undermined respect for American policy in **Europe**, particularly among the young, who developed an anti-American view. They looked on his actions as being **undemocratic**. In this way, McCarthyism damaged America's reputation abroad.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What led to McCarthy's downfall?
2. How did McCarthyism influence US Foreign Policy?
3. What effect did McCarthyism have on the State Department?

22. *The* **ANTIWAR** *Movement*

The Anti-war Movement

The majority of Americans supported government policy during the Vietnam War. But as the war progressed, greater and greater numbers began to criticise American actions in the war. The anti-war movement began among university students. The first **teach-in** was held in the University of Michigan in 1965.

As the number of university students grew in the 1960s, some of them were committed to improving society, as well as abolishing racism and poverty. These were members of the **New Left** who formed the **Students for a Democratic Society** (SDS).

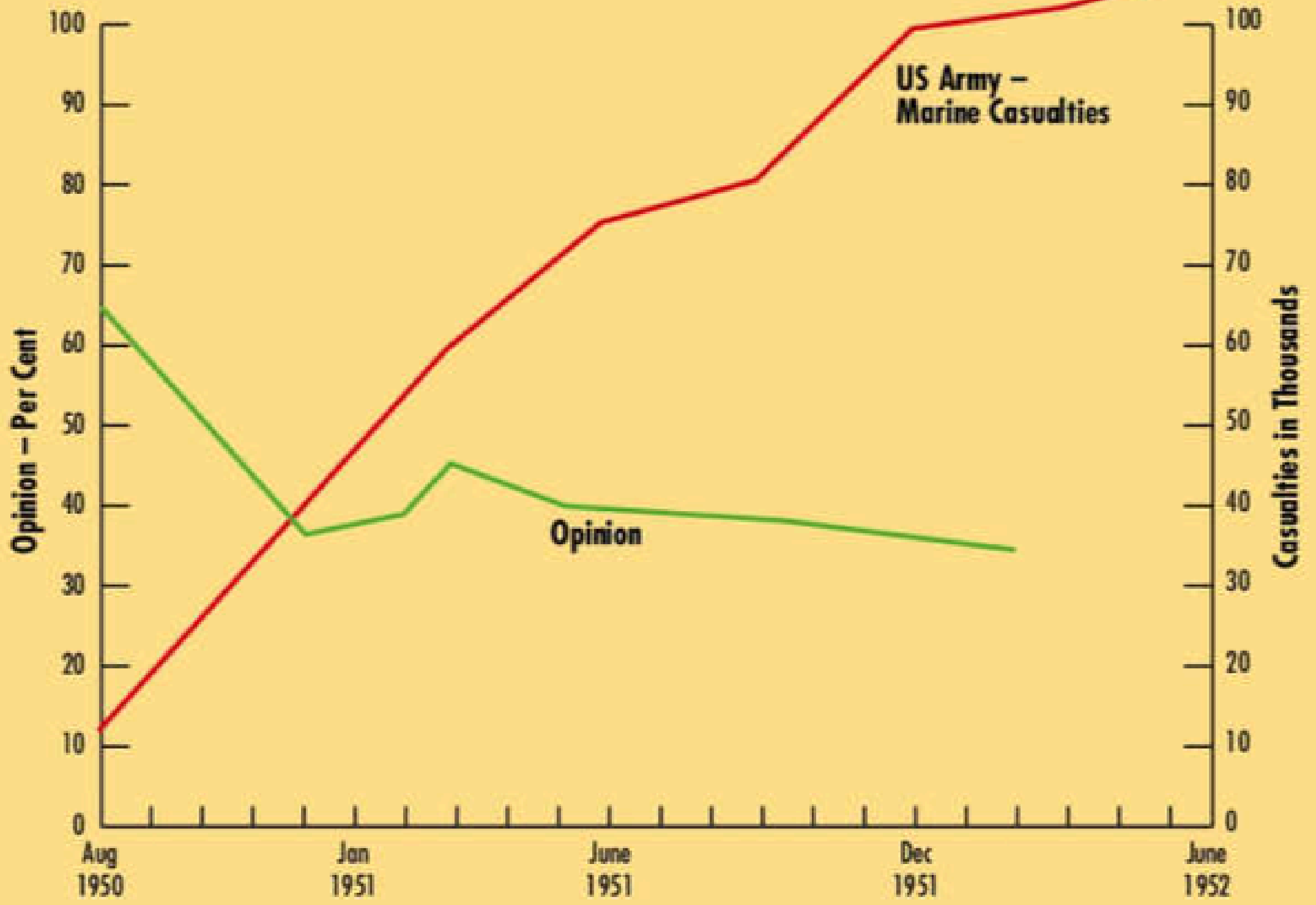
THE ANTI-WAR MOVEMENT IN THE KOREAN WAR

The anti-war movement was on a small scale during the Korean War. It originated in the **peace movement** which was opposed to all war. It drew its support from religious groups such as the Quakers and the Methodists. Some prominent individuals also criticised the war. These included **WEB Du Bois** who was one of the founders of the **National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People** (NAACP), and also **Paul Robeson**, the internationally known singer and actor. Overall, they had little impact on opinion.

More serious was the anti-war sentiment created by the Republicans who criticised Truman's handling of the war. This included criticism by Republican Senator Robert Taft who said the war was *'an unnecessary war... begun by President Truman without the slightest authority from Congress or the people.'*

As the war dragged on, Republican criticisms of the conduct of the war increased public dissatisfaction. This was linked to increasing US casualties in the war, particularly after Chinese intervention in October, 1950. This dissatisfaction undermined the Democrats in the 1952 elections. It resulted in the election of Republican President Eisenhower who promised to end the war.

The Relationship Between US Casualties in Korea and Public Attitudes Towards US Involvement



Source: George Ball - briefing to NSC in July 1965

Reasons for Anti-war Protest

They protested about the war for a variety of **reasons**:

- They believed the war was taking money away from Johnson's **Great Society** programme.
- They said the Vietnam War was really a **civil war** in which the US should not intervene.
- They said the US had **no interest** in South-East Asia.
- They regarded the war as **morally wrong**.
- **Television** brought pictures of the war into US homes - this was the first *'living room war'*.
- Many criticised the **way the US was fighting the war** - saturation bombing, the use of napalm and the deaths of civilians. The cruelties and savagery of the Vietcong were not televised and did not have the same impact.
- Some feared they would be called up in the **draft** to fight.

However, they did not want to see the US defeated and instead hoped for a divided Vietnam with two governments.

Student Protest

The students organised **demonstrations** and **protest marches**. Their placards read 'STOP THE KILLING: WAR ON POVERTY, NOT ON PEOPLE'. Some songs, such as 'Eve of Destruction', expressed their bitterness:

The Eastern world, it is explodin'

Violence flarin', bullets loadin'

You're old enough to kill, but not for votin'

You don't believe in war, but what's that gun you're totin'

And even the Jordan River has bodies floatin'

However, until the late 1960s their protests were confined to a few universities. It was not only the majority of students who were **supporters of the war**, but also labour unions, churches, Congress and the media. Anti-war demonstrators angered some Americans who did not like the protestors' criticisms of American institutions and they did not like people avoiding the draft (military service). *'Here were those kids, rich kids who could go to college, didn't have to fight. They were telling you your son died in vain.'* Instead they believed what their leaders told them. But soon the huge cost of the war, the greater numbers of soldiers fighting and the increasing casualties made people question what was happening.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What do references to Vietnam War in the song 'Eve of Destruction' mean?
2. Listen to the song on YouTube.
3. What other aspects of US history are referred to in the song?

Tet Offensive and the Anti-war Movement

A crucial turning point was the **Tet Offensive** in the (Vietnamese) New Year of 1968. The success of the offensive in threatening most South Vietnamese cities undermined the view of the American government that they were winning the war.

Public approval of Johnson's handling of the war fell to 26 per cent. The anti-war protests became more violent. The police were called **pigs**, students burned draft cards, protestors surrounded the Pentagon and some left the country to avoid the draft.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Where and when did the anti-war movement begin in the 1960s?
2. Why did the anti-war movement protest against the Vietnam War?
3. How did the movement protest?
4. Who opposed to the anti-war movement?

Credibility Gap

By now the anti-war movement spread well beyond the students. A wide range of organisations drew support from leading musicians, entertainers, writers, mothers against the war, black Americans and returning veterans. In 1969, 300,000 anti-war protestors marched past the White House in silent protest. Each carried the name of a dead soldier or a destroyed Vietnamese village.

The **credibility gap** arose as people did not believe what the government was saying about the war. Senior politicians began to go against the war. These included **Eugene McCarthy**, who almost defeated Johnson in a Democratic presidential primary election, and **Robert Kennedy**, who began campaigning for the presidency. The media - press, radio and television - were also angry because they had broadcast the government reports about winning the war. One of the country's most respected newsmen, **Walter Cronkite** of CBS News, publicly questioned US participation in the war.

The anti-war movement led to more people refusing to report for service after being called up. It also affected the morale of serving soldiers who began to question what they were doing in Vietnam. More importantly, the anti-war movement forced Johnson to **withdraw** from the presidential election campaign. It also forced him to change his policies on Vietnam and led to him calling a partial halt to the bombing of North Vietnam and beginning talks with the North Vietnamese.

Kent State

When Nixon came to power in 1969, he had to continue the process of disengaging from Vietnam - he continued the talks, and began a policy of **Vietnamisation** (getting the South Vietnamese army, the ARVN, to take more responsibility for the war) - which satisfied most people. However, when US troops invaded Cambodia in 1970, this led to the most serious incident in the **anti-war campaign**. Four students were shot dead while protesting at **Kent State University** by Ohio National Guardsmen. This caused a national outcry and 500 universities were closed temporarily due to protests.

Soon afterwards the student anti-war protest lost impetus when the various groups, especially the **SDS**, split over other issues. But by now the momentum toward peace had been established. Americans were now thoroughly opposed to the war as incidents such as the **My Lai Massacre** became public in 1969. Then the **Pentagon Papers** were leaked to the New York Times and the Washington Post in 1971. These showed how the federal government became more involved in Vietnam and that it had **deceived** the public in the process. The anti-war movement had now become a widespread public feeling. However, it took two more years of talks and bombings before the war eventually ended in 1973.

The Anti-war Movement

CASUALTIES AND OPINION ON THE VIETNAM WAR

'The war wasn't really popular in 1964, it just wasn't unpopular. By 1965 the marches and teach-ins began.. there was plenty of opposition to the war without the casualties. But the casualties were the kind of thing that was oppressive. The letters that had to go out to the families; the funerals that were observed when you'd cross [Arlington] Memorial Bridge [Washington] every day. It was getting so that by 1966 and 1967 one could meet people whose sons or husbands had died or had been seriously wounded in Vietnam. In 1964 and 1965 this was a very rare thing. And it was then that the reality of this war came home.'

Chester Cooper, National Security Council staff, interview, March 1982

Undoubtedly the anti-war movement undermined American will to keep on fighting. But it was only **one factor** among many which shaped US foreign policy in relation to Vietnam and South-East Asia.

'In the end the government abandoned its policy because its domestic cost was too high, its chance of success in Vietnam too slim. There was little reason to fight on, every reason to find a way out. The opposition was not alone responsible for this shift in policy, but if there had been no opposition, the shift would not have happened when or the way it did.' (T. Peters)

3. RACE RELATIONS

US Image Abroad

US Presidents were concerned about the image that bad race relations gave the US abroad. This was one of the factors which led to **Truman** and **Eisenhower** desegregating the armed forces.

Kennedy was also worried that racial unrest in the US would damage the national image abroad and sabotage foreign policy goals. In 1960, as he prepared to meet the Soviet leader Khrushchev in Vienna, Kennedy was looking for national unity prior to the summit.

In a clash in Birmingham, Alabama police treated black protesters brutally. Kennedy was concerned about the bad publicity as television showed pictures around the world. This undermined US claims to lead the Free World because they were shown to be trampling on the rights of their own people.

Black Americans and the Vietnam War

As the American commitment to **Vietnam** expanded from 1961 onwards, American black men were just as committed as anybody else to the war. Between 1961 and 1965, the percentage of American soldiers who were **black** was in line with the proportion of the available draft age population. In fact, by 1966 they were three times as likely as whites to re-enlist when their tour of duty was over.

In spite of advances in civil rights in the 1960s, **race relations worsened** by the end of the decade. This was partly because rising expectations among blacks were not fulfilled. The bitter race relations affected black attitudes to all issues, including foreign policy and the Vietnam War.

By 1965, a higher percentage of black Americans were being killed in the war. This was largely because fewer blacks (compared to whites) could avoid the draft in order to finish college. Black political leaders were also turning against the war. **Martin Luther King** spoke against expanding the war in 1965. He wanted money for social and economic improvements. In a speech in 1967, he feared that *'the Great Society has been shot down in the battlefields of Vietnam'*. Two important black civil rights organisations openly opposed the war in 1966.

Black Americans and the Vietnam War

In April 1967, heavyweight champion **Muhammad Ali** refused as a conscientious objector to be inducted into the army. He said, *'I ain't got no quarrel with those Vietcong... They never called me nigger, they never lynched me, they didn't put no dogs on me, they didn't rob me of my nationality, rape and kill my mother and father. Shoot them for what? How can I shoot them poor people? Just take me to jail.'* He was convicted of draft evasion and sentenced to five years in jail. He appealed the conviction which was eventually overturned in 1971. In the meantime, he spoke at many university meetings as the anti-war movement became more widespread.

By the early 1970s, opinion polls showed that a greater proportion of blacks (83 per cent) than whites (67 per cent) thought that the US had made a mistake sending troops to Vietnam in the first place. Not surprisingly, blacks were less willing to serve than before. Also, they would not put up with **racial discrimination** at the front. As a result, American army leaders made changes which resulted in a reduction in the proportion of black deaths.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Why were US Presidents worried about the image of bad race relations?
2. What influence did worsening race relations have on black enlistment in the army?
3. What influence did Martin Luther King and Muhammad Ali have on black enlistment?