

▲ Anticommunist comic

WITNESS HISTORY AUDIO

Battling the Communist Menace

In the 1950s, Americans were alarmed by charges that communists had infiltrated their government and other institutions. Cold War themes made their way into movies, television shows, and novels. Even comic-book heroes like Superman battled the communist menace. In a 1952 comic book, a character states the concerns of many Americans:

“Today’s headlines shout of battles with Communist hordes in Korea—of Red riots in Rome and Paris and Berlin! But there’s another secret battle taking place—right here, right now! A [secret] underground fight between Communism and democracy for the youth of America.”

—“Backyard Battleground,” in *Daring Confessions*, 1953

The Cold War at Home

Objectives

- Describe the efforts of President Truman and the House of Representatives to fight communism at home.
- Explain how domestic spy cases increased fears of communist influence in the U.S. government.
- Analyze the rise and fall of Senator Joseph McCarthy and the methods of McCarthyism.

Terms and People

Red Scare	Alger Hiss
Smith Act	Julius and Ethel Rosenberg
HUAC	Joseph R. McCarthy
Hollywood Ten	McCarthyism
blacklist	

NoteTaking

Reading Skill: Identify Causes and Effects

List efforts taken to protect Americans from communism and how these policies affected rights.

Why It Matters Americans have often faced the difficult task of balancing the need to provide national security with the need to protect people’s rights and freedoms. In times of crisis, rights have sometimes been limited. Beginning in the late 1940s, the Cold War dominated American life. For some of those years, the nation was in the grip of a new Red Scare. The hunt for communists netted some spies, but it also disrupted the lives of thousands of innocent Americans. **Section Focus Question:** How did fear of domestic communism affect American society during the Cold War?

Worrying About Communists at Home

The Cold War influenced many aspects of American life. American soldiers fought and died in Korea. Industries hummed with activity, turning out weapons and supplies. Americans read newspaper articles about who “lost” China or who was winning the “space race.” Popular culture reflected an us-versus-them attitude—democrats versus totalitarians, capitalists versus communists, the West versus the East. In the end, the Cold War was turning out to be every bit as global and as encompassing as World War II had been.

Truman Roots Out Communists The fear that communists both outside and inside America were working to destroy American life created a reaction known as a **Red Scare**. This fear was not unique to the late 1940s and 1950s. The 1917 Russian Revolution and the

Anticommunist Policy	Effect on Rights

communists' call for worldwide revolution had led to a similar Red Scare in 1919 and 1920. However, the Red Scare that followed World War II went deeper and wider—and lasted far longer—than the earlier Red Scare. Truman's Attorney General, J. Howard McGrath, expressed the widespread fear of communist influence when he warned that communists “are everywhere—in factories, offices, butcher stores, on street corners, and private businesses. And each carries in himself the death of our society.”

The spread of communism into Eastern Europe and Asia raised concerns that American communists, some in influential government positions, were working for the enemy. In truth, some American communists were agents of the Soviet Union, and a handful of them held high-ranking positions in government. However, overwhelmingly, government officials were loyal to the United States.

Recognizing public concern about domestic communism, President Truman created a Federal Employee Loyalty Program in March 1947. The order permitted the FBI and other government security agencies to screen federal employees for signs of political disloyalty. About 3,000 federal employees either were dismissed or resigned after the investigation. The order also empowered the Attorney General to compile a list of “totalitarian, fascist, or subversive organizations” in the United States. Americans who belonged to or supported organizations on the Attorney General's list were singled out for more intense scrutiny. Many were labeled “security risks” and dismissed from their jobs.

The Truman administration also used the 1940 **Smith Act** to cripple the Communist Party in the United States. This act made it unlawful to teach or advocate the violent overthrow of the U.S. government. In 1949, a New York jury found 11 communists guilty of violating the Smith Act and sent them to prison.

Congress Hunts Communists Congress joined in the search for communists. In 1938, the House of Representatives had created the **House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC)** to investigate possible subversive activities by fascists, Nazis, or communists. After the war, the committee conducted several highly publicized hearings on communist activities in the United States. HUAC investigators probed the government, armed forces, unions, education, science, newspapers, and other aspects of American life.

The best-known HUAC hearings targeted the movie industry in 1947. The HUAC investigations uncovered people who were, or had been, communists during the 1930s and 1940s. A group of left-wing writers, directors, and producers known as the **Hollywood Ten** refused to answer questions, asserting their Fifth Amendment rights against self-incrimination. The hearings turned into a war of attacks and counterattacks as committee members and witnesses yelled at each other and pointed accusatory fingers.



Analyzing Political Cartoons

Red Scare or Red Smear This American cartoon appeared in 1949, when government officials were prosecuting communists and others for subversive activities.

1. What is the cartoonist's attitude toward the attempt to uncover communists?
2. How do you think President Truman might have responded to this cartoon?

After the hearings, the Hollywood Ten were cited for contempt of Congress and were tried, convicted, and sent to prison. Movie executives circulated a **blacklist** of entertainment figures who should not be hired because of their suspected communist ties. The careers of those on the list were shattered. Not until the case of *Watkins v. United States* (1957) did the Supreme Court decide that witnesses before HUAC could not be forced to name radicals they knew.

The HUAC investigation had a powerful impact on filmmaking. In the past, Hollywood had been willing to make movies about controversial subjects such as racism and anti-Semitism. Now, most producers concentrated only on entertainment and avoided addressing sensitive social issues.

Freedom of Speech Takes a Hit The case of the Hollywood Ten demonstrated that in the mood of fear created by Soviet aggression, freedom of speech was not guaranteed. Americans lost their jobs because they had belonged to or contributed to an organization on the Attorney General's list. Others were fired for associating with people who were known communists or for making remarks that were considered disloyal. Teachers and librarians, mail carriers and long-shoremen, electricians and construction workers—people from all walks of life—might be accused and dismissed from their jobs.

The effort to root out communist influence from American life cut across many levels of society. Communists were exposed and blacklisted in the country's **academic** institutions, labor unions, scientific laboratories, and city halls.

Government Investigates Oppenheimer The case of J. Robert Oppenheimer illustrates the difficulty of distinguishing loyalty from disloyalty. During World War II, Oppenheimer had led the Manhattan Project, which developed the atomic bomb. After the war, he became chairman of the General Advisory Committee of the U.S. Atomic Energy Commission (AEC). However, Oppenheimer

Vocabulary Builder

academic—(ak uh DEHM ihk) *adj.*
related to education

● INFOGRAPHIC ■ AUDIO

RED SCARE CULTURE

Pop culture reflected the fears of the time. Some books and films bordered on hysteria. Audiences were shocked by the 1950 film *I Married a Communist*, but they cheered when John Wayne starred as Big Jim McClain, a two-fisted HUAC investigator chasing communists in Hawaii.



▲ This comic book enlisted a popular hero in the fight against communism.



▲ Some novels and movies predicted a devastating atomic war between the United States and the Soviet Union.

had ties to people who belonged to the Communist Party, including his wife and brother.

In 1954, the AEC denied Oppenheimer access to classified information. Although the AEC had no evidence that Oppenheimer himself had ever been disloyal to the United States, it questioned whether his communist ties disqualified him from holding this position.

✓ **Checkpoint** What steps did Truman and Congress take to investigate communist influence in the United States?

Spy Cases Worry Americans

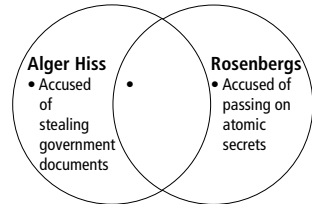
Two sensational spy trials drew the nation's attention to the threat posed by communist agents working to subvert the United States. The accused in the two cases could not have been more different. **Alger Hiss** had been educated at Johns Hopkins University and Harvard Law School. **Julius and Ethel Rosenberg** were from the poor, lower east side of Manhattan. Although Hiss and the Rosenbergs never met, their crimes and their trials have linked them in the public's imagination.

Whittaker Chambers Accuses Alger Hiss Until 1948, Alger Hiss's career seemed flawless. A seemingly dedicated government servant, Hiss had worked on several important New Deal agencies and helped to organize the United Nations. But a man named Whittaker Chambers disrupted Hiss's image.

As a young man, Chambers had become a communist espionage agent. But Chambers later turned against communism because of the brutality of Stalin's rule. Chambers began writing compellingly about the evils of communism. In 1948, he testified before HUAC about his

NoteTaking

Reading Skill: Compare and Contrast As you read, identify similarities and differences between the Hiss case and the Rosenberg case. Consider both the facts and the impact of the two spy cases.



◀ *I Was a Communist for the F.B.I.* thrilled movie-goers in 1951.

In this science-fiction classic, aliens invade Earth and take over people's minds. Many viewed this as a warning about communist influence. ▶



Thinking Critically

- 1. Draw Conclusions** Do you think the investigations of the HUAC influenced the nature of pop culture? Explain.
- 2. Recognize Cause and Effect** Do you think the culture of the 1950s made Americans feel safe? Explain.

communist past and named Alger Hiss as one of his contacts in the federal government.

Hiss soon appeared before HUAC. He denied that he was a communist and an espionage agent, and he denied that he even knew Whittaker Chambers. But Richard Nixon, a young member of Congress from California, convinced the other committee members to press the case. Slowly, Hiss's story began to unravel. Chambers proved that he did know Hiss and that Hiss had given him confidential government documents. Chambers had even kept a microfilm copy of some of those documents, storing them in a hollowed-out pumpkin on his Maryland farm.

Hiss was tried for perjury. The first trial ended in a hung jury. At his second trial, he was found guilty and sentenced to five years in prison. Even after his conviction, many Americans continued to believe that Hiss was innocent. However, as years passed, the evidence grew overwhelmingly against him. The fact that someone as influential as Hiss was a communist agent raised serious concerns. The Hiss case had another unexpected effect. The congressional hearings thrust Richard Nixon into the national spotlight. In 1952, he was named Eisenhower's running mate and would later become President.

The Rosenbergs Are Executed Nothing created more concern about internal security than the charge that some Americans had helped the Soviets build an atomic bomb. The case began when a scientist named Klaus Fuchs was charged with sending atomic secrets to the Soviet Union. The investigation against Fuchs ultimately led to the arrest of Ethel and Julius Rosenberg in 1950. The Rosenbergs were charged with conspiring to pass secret information about nuclear science to Soviet agents.

The trial of the Rosenbergs generated intense controversy in America and around the world. The case against them was based largely on the word of one confessed spy. Pleading innocent, the Rosenbergs claimed that they were being persecuted for being Jewish and for holding unpopular beliefs. In the end, both were found guilty and sentenced to death. Many believed that the harsh sentence was intended as a lever to force them to identify other members of the alleged spy ring. But the Rosenbergs claimed they had no such information.

After 26 months on death row, the Rosenbergs were electrocuted in 1953. Years of debate followed the executions. Some believe that anti-Semitic sentiment did influence the outcome. In the 1990s, tangible evidence emerged indicating that Julius Rosenberg was guilty. Ethel Rosenberg appears to have played only a minor role in the espionage. Many people continue to believe that the death penalty was too severe for the little involvement she may have had.



Checkpoint Why did the Rosenberg case attract nationwide attention and controversy?

McCarthy Uses Ruthless Tactics

The early Cold War years saw one ominous event after another. The fall of China, Soviet nuclear bombs, and the exposure of Soviet agents in the United States all undermined American confidence. At that time, as Americans worried about the nation's security, a clever and unscrupulous man began to take



Rosenbergs Executed

Julius and Ethel Rosenberg were executed after being found guilty of spying for the Soviet Union.

Vocabulary Builder

tangible—(TAN juh buhl) *adj.*
solid; definite; capable of being felt or understood

advantage of this sense of fear and helplessness. He suggested that these setbacks were really caused by the work of traitors inside the United States.

McCarthy Makes Accusations In February 1950, a little-known senator from Wisconsin made a speech in Wheeling, West Virginia. The senator, **Joseph R. McCarthy**, charged that the State Department was infested with communist agents. He waved a piece of paper, which, he said, contained the names of State Department employees who were secretly communists.

Primary Source “The reason why we find ourselves in a position of [weakness] is not because the enemy has sent men to invade our shores, but rather because of the traitorous actions of those who have had all the benefits that the wealthiest nation on earth has had to offer—the finest homes, the finest college educations, and the finest jobs in Government we can give. . . . I have here in my hand a list of 205 [individuals] that were known to the Secretary of State as being members of the Communist Party and who nevertheless are still working and shaping the policy of the State Department.”

—Joseph McCarthy, February 9, 1950

The charge provoked a furor. When challenged to give specific names, McCarthy said he had meant that there were “205 bad security risks” in the department. Then, he claimed that 57 employees were communists. Over the next months, the numbers on his list changed. McCarthy never did produce the list of communists. Still, with the outbreak of the Korean War in June 1950, McCarthy’s accusations grabbed the attention of the American public.

At the time of the above speech, McCarthy was finishing his first term in the Senate. He had accomplished very little in that term and was looking for a popular issue on which to focus his 1952 reelection campaign. Anticommunism seemed to be just the issue. McCarthy was easily reelected to a second term.

McCarthy’s Power Increases In the following four years, McCarthy put forward his own brand of anticommunism—so much so that the term **McCarthyism**

became a catchword for extreme, reckless charges. By making irresponsible allegations, McCarthy did more to discredit legitimate concerns about domestic communism than any other single American.

Between 1950 and 1954, McCarthy was perhaps the most powerful politician in the United States. Piling baseless accusations on top of charges that could not be proved, McCarthy became chairman of an investigations subcommittee. Merely being accused by McCarthy caused people to lose their jobs and destroyed their reputations. He attacked ruthlessly. When caught in a lie, he told another. When one case faded, he introduced a new one.

Confident because of his increasing power, McCarthy took on larger targets. He attacked former Secretary of State George Marshall, a national hero and author of the Marshall Plan. Even other senators came to fear McCarthy. They worried that he would brand them as communist sympathizers.

McCarthy Falls From Power In 1954, McCarthy went after the United States Army, claiming that it, too, was full of communists. Army leaders responded that McCarthy’s attacks were personally motivated.

HISTORY MAKERS

Margaret Chase Smith (1897–1995)

In 1950, Margaret Chase Smith of Maine was the only woman in the U.S. Senate. Like McCarthy, Smith was a Republican, but she strongly opposed her colleague’s tactics. In June 1950, she spoke out, delivering what she called her “Declaration of Conscience” on the Senate floor. “Those of us who shout the loudest about Americanism in making character assassinations,” she said, “are all too frequently those who . . . ignore some of the basic principles of Americanism: the right to criticize, the right to hold unpopular beliefs, the right to protest.

Her stand against McCarthyism won Smith nationwide attention. In 1964, she ran for president—the first woman nominated for that office at the convention of a major party. She finally retired in 1972 after 32 years in the Senate.





McCarthy Accuses

Day after day, from April to June 1954, Americans watched the Army-McCarthy hearings on TV. Here, the senator displays a piece of evidence. *How can TV coverage influence government and court proceedings?*

Finally, the Senate decided to hold televised hearings to sort out the allegations. For weeks, Americans were riveted to their television sets. Most were horrified by McCarthy's bullying tactics. For the first time, the public saw McCarthy badger witnesses, twist the truth, and snicker at the suffering of others. It was an upsetting sight for many Americans.

By the time the hearings ended in mid-June, the senator had lost many of his strongest supporters. The Senate formally censured, or condemned, him for his reckless accusations. Although McCarthy continued to serve in the Senate, he had lost virtually all of his power and influence.

The end of the Korean War in 1953 and McCarthy's downfall in 1954 signaled the decline of the Red Scare. The nation had been damaged by the suppression of free speech and by the lack of open, honest debate. However, Americans had come to realize how important their democratic institutions were and how critical it was to preserve them.

- Checkpoint** What events led to Senator McCarthy being censured by the U.S. Senate?

SECTION

4 Assessment

Progress Monitoring Online

For: Self-test with vocabulary practice
Web Code: nea-1209

Comprehension

- Terms and People** For each of the following items, write a sentence explaining its significance.
 - HUAC
 - blacklist
 - Alger Hiss
 - Julius and Ethel Rosenberg
 - McCarthyism
- NoteTaking Reading Skill: Identify Causes and Effects** How did fear of domestic communism affect American society during the Cold War?

Writing About History

- Quick Write: Plan Research** Choose one specific topic from this section as the basis for a possible research paper. Write a paragraph describing how you would begin doing research on this topic. Identify one question you would like to answer. Then, describe how you would try to find the information. Be specific about the steps you would take in your research.

Critical Thinking

- Identify Central Issues** Were Americans correct in worrying that domestic communists endangered their security?
- Draw Conclusions** How effective was McCarthy's campaign against communists in government?
- Identify Points of View** How do movies reflect the values of a society?