

SECTION 3 The Cold War and American Society

Guide to Reading

Main Idea

The Cold War heightened Americans' fears of Communist infiltration and atomic attack.

Key Terms and Names

subversion, loyalty review program, Alger Hiss, perjury, McCarran Act, McCarthyism, censure, fallout, fallout shelter

Reading Strategy

Taking Notes As you read about American reaction to the Cold War, use the major headings of the section to create an outline similar to the one below.

The Cold War and American Society

- I. A New Red Scare
 - A. The Loyalty Review Program
 - B.
 - C.
 - D.

Reading Objectives

- **Describe** the new Red Scare.
- **Discuss** how American society reflected fears of the nuclear age.

Section Theme

Civic Rights and Responsibilities In the early part of the Cold War, the fear of communism led to a hunt for spies and to intolerance and suspicion of people with radical ideas in the United States.

Preview of Events

◆ 1947

March 1947
Loyalty Review Board established

◆ 1950

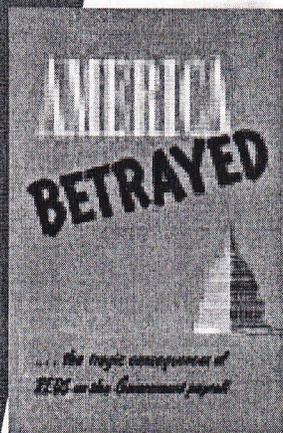
February 1950
McCarthy claims to have a list of Communists in the State Department

◆ 1953

September 1950
McCarran Act passed

June 1953
Rosenbergs executed

★ An American Story ★



Book produced during the Red Scare of the 1950s

In the 1940s, Ruth Goldberg belonged to the Parent-Teacher Association in Queens, New York. In 1947 she agreed to run for PTA president, but the campaign turned nasty. Because Goldberg had associated with people with left-wing interests, a rumor spread through the neighborhood that she was a Communist. Suddenly Goldberg's quiet life became terrifying. Callers threatened her, and the local priest denounced her in his sermons. One afternoon, Goldberg's eight-year-old son came home in tears. A playmate had told him, "You know, your mother's a Red. She should be put up against a wall and shot."

Looking back much later, Goldberg saw the PTA campaign as part of a bigger and more complex pattern of distrust and hatred. "It was a small thing, but it was an indication of what had happened with the Cold War, with this Red specter—that somebody like me could be a danger to a community."

—adapted from *Red Scare*

A New Red Scare

During the 1950s, thousands of ordinary people—from teachers to autoworkers to high government officials—shared Ruth Goldberg's disturbing experience. Rumors and accusations of Communists in the United States and of Communist infiltration of the government tapped into fears that the Communists were trying to take over the world.



The Red Scare began in September 1945, when a clerk named Igor Gouzenko walked out of the Soviet Embassy in Ottawa, Canada, and defected. Gouzenko carried documents revealing a massive effort by the Soviet Union to infiltrate organizations and government agencies in Canada and the United States with the specific goal of obtaining information about the atomic bomb.

The Gouzenko case stunned Americans. It implied that spies had infiltrated the American government. Soon, however, the search for spies escalated into a general fear of Communist subversion. **Subversion** is the effort to secretly weaken a society and overthrow its government. As the Cold War intensified in 1946 and early 1947, Americans began to fear that Communists were secretly working to subvert the American government.

GOVERNMENT

The Loyalty Review Program In early 1947, just nine days after his powerful speech announcing the Truman Doctrine, the president established a **loyalty review program** to screen all federal employees. Rather than calm public suspicion, Truman's action seemed to confirm fears that Communists had infiltrated the government and helped increase the fear of communism sweeping the nation.

Between 1947 and 1951, over 6 million federal employees were screened for their loyalty—a term difficult to define. A person might become a suspect for reading certain books, belonging to various groups, traveling overseas, or even seeing certain foreign films. About 14,000 employees were subject to intensive scrutiny from the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI). Some 2,000 employees quit their jobs during the check, many under pressure. Another 212 were fired for “questionable loyalty,” though no actual evidence against them was uncovered.

HUAC Although the FBI helped screen federal employees, FBI Director **J. Edgar Hoover** was not satisfied. In 1947 Hoover went before the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC). Formed in 1938 to investigate both Communist and Fascist activities in the United States, HUAC was a relatively minor committee until Hoover catapulted it to prominence.

Hoover urged HUAC to hold public hearings on Communist subversion. The committee, Hoover said, could reveal “the diabolic machinations of sinister figures

engaged in un-American activities.” Once Communists were identified, he explained, the public would isolate them and end their influence. Hoover's aim was to expose not just Communists but also “Communist sympathizers” and “fellow travelers.” Under Hoover's leadership, the FBI sent agents to infiltrate groups suspected of subversion and wiretapped thousands of telephones.

Alger Hiss In 1948 **Whittaker Chambers**, a *Time* magazine editor and former Communist Party member, testified to HUAC that several government officials were also former Communists or spies.

The most prominent government official named by Chambers was **Alger Hiss**, a lawyer and diplomat who had served in Roosevelt's administration, attended the Yalta conference, and taken part in organizing the United Nations. After Hiss sued him for libel, Chambers testified before a grand jury that in 1937 and 1938 Hiss gave him secret documents from the State Department. Hiss denied being either a spy or a member of the Communist Party, and he also denied ever having known Chambers.

The committee was ready to drop the investigation until Representative Richard Nixon of California convinced his colleagues to continue the hearings to determine whether Hiss or Chambers had lied. As the committee continued to question Hiss, he admitted that he had indeed met Chambers in the 1930s. When Chambers continued to claim that Hiss was a Communist, Hiss sued him, claiming that his accusations were unfounded and malicious.

To defend himself, Chambers produced copies of secret documents along with microfilm that he had hidden in a hollow pumpkin on his farm. These “pumpkin papers,” Chambers claimed, proved that

***Picturing* History**

Convicted of Conspiracy Ethel and Julius Rosenberg were convicted of transmitting atomic secrets to Soviet Russia. What sentence did they receive?



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he was telling the truth. A jury agreed and convicted Hiss of perjury, or lying under oath.

The Rosenbergs Another sensational spy case centered around accusations that American Communists had sold the secrets of the atomic bomb. Many people did not believe that the Soviet Union could have produced an atomic bomb in 1949 without help. This belief intensified the hunt for spies.

In 1950 the hunt led to Klaus Fuchs, a British scientist who admitted sending information to the Soviet Union. His testimony led the FBI to arrest **Julius and Ethel Rosenberg**, a New York couple who were members of the Communist Party. The government charged them with heading a Soviet spy ring.

The Rosenbergs denied the charges but were condemned to death for espionage. Many people believed that they were not leaders or spies, but victims caught up in the wave of anti-Communist frenzy. Appeals, public expressions of support, and pleas for clemency failed, however, and the couple was executed in June 1953.

Project Venona The American public hotly debated the guilt or innocence of individuals like the Rosenbergs who were accused as spies. There was, however, solid evidence of Soviet espionage, although very few Americans knew it at the time. In 1946 American cryptographers working for a project code-named "Venona" cracked the Soviet spy code of the time, enabling them to read approximately 3,000

messages between Moscow and the United States collected during the Cold War. The messages confirmed extensive Soviet spying and sent federal investigators on a massive hunt. To keep the Soviets from learning how thoroughly the United States had penetrated their codes, authorities chose not to make the intercepted messages public. Not until 1995 did the government reveal **Project Venona's** existence. The Venona documents provided strong evidence that the Rosenbergs were guilty.

The Red Scare Spreads Following the federal government's example, many state and local governments, universities, businesses, unions, and churches began their own efforts to find Communists. The University of California required its 11,000 faculty members to take loyalty oaths and fired 157 who refused to do so. Many Catholic groups became strongly anticommunist and urged their members to identify Communists within the church.

The Taft-Hartley Act required union leaders to take oaths that they were not Communists, but many union leaders did not object. Instead they launched their own efforts to purge Communists from their organizations. The president of the CIO called Communist sympathizers "skulking cowards" and "apostles of hate." The CIO eventually expelled 11 unions that refused to remove Communist leaders from their organization.

Reading Check Explaining What was the purpose of the loyalty review boards and HUAC?

Hollywood on Trial

One of HUAC's first hearings focused on the film industry as a powerful cultural force that Communists might use and manipulate. Its interviews routinely began, "Are you now, or have you ever been, a member of the Communist Party?" As fear of Communists in Hollywood spread, producers then drew up a blacklist and agreed not to hire anyone in the film industry who was believed to be a Communist or who refused to cooperate with the committee. The blacklist created an atmosphere of distrust and fear. People could be blacklisted for making chance remarks, criticizing HUAC, or knowing a suspected Communist.

Ronald Reagan, head of the Screen Actors Guild at the time, testified that there were Communists in Hollywood.



Ten screenwriters, known as the "Hollywood Ten" (shown here with their lawyers), used their Fifth Amendment right to protect themselves from self-incrimination and refused to testify before HUAC.

"A Conspiracy So Immense"

In 1949 the Red Scare intensified even further. That year, the Soviet Union successfully tested an atomic bomb, and China fell to communism. To many Americans these events seemed to prove that the United States was losing the Cold War. Deeply concerned, they wanted an explanation as to why their government was failing. As a result, many continued to believe that Communists had infiltrated the government and remained undetected.

In February 1950, soon after Alger Hiss's perjury conviction, a little-known Wisconsin senator gave a political speech to a Republican women's group in West Virginia. Halfway through his speech, Senator **Joseph R. McCarthy** made a surprising statement:

“While I cannot take the time to name all the men in the State Department who have been named as members of the Communist Party and members of a spy ring, I have here in my hand a list of 205 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.”

—quoted in *The Fifties*

By the next day, the Associated Press had picked up the statement and sent it to papers all over the country. When McCarthy arrived at the Denver airport,

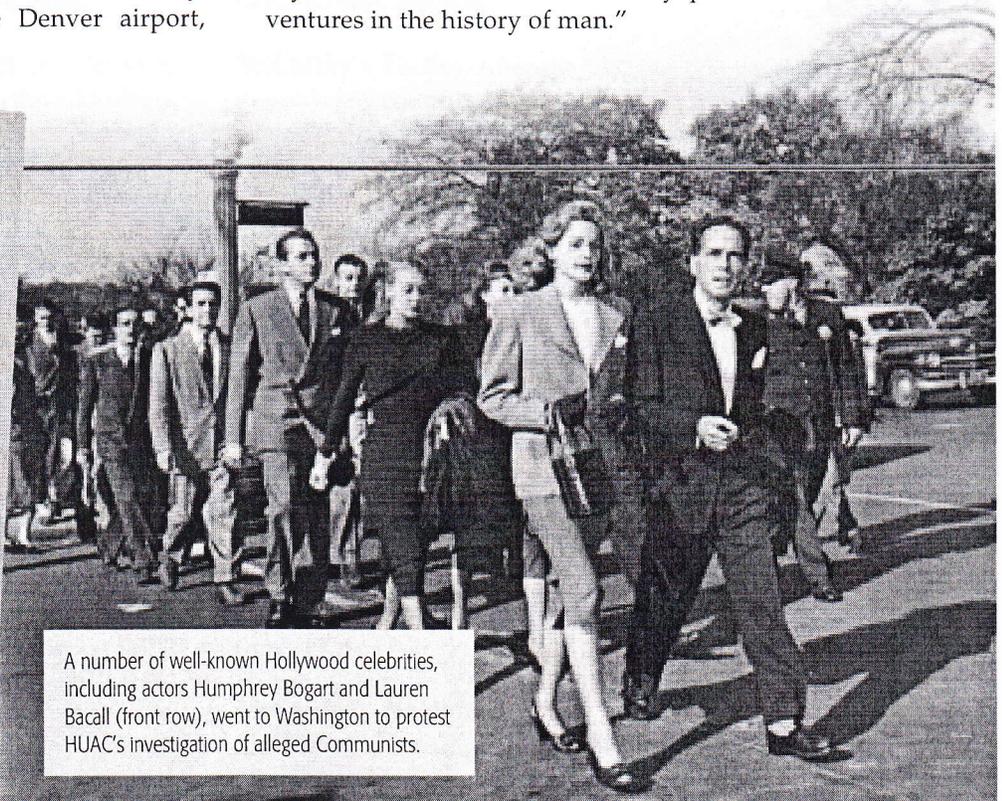
reporters crowded around him and asked to see his list of Communists in the state department. McCarthy replied that he would be happy to show them the list, but unfortunately, it was packed in his bag on the plane. In fact, the list never appeared. McCarthy, however, continued to make charges and draw attention.

McCarthy's Charges Born in 1908 near Appleton, Wisconsin, Joseph R. McCarthy studied law and served in World War II before his first run for the Senate. McCarthy's 1946 political campaign sounded the keynote of his career. Without making any specific charges or offering any proof, McCarthy accused his opponent, Robert M. La Follette, Jr., of being “communistically inclined.” Fear of communism, plus McCarthy's intense speeches, won him the election.

After becoming a senator, McCarthy continued to proclaim that Communists were a danger both at home and abroad. To some of his audiences, he distributed a booklet called “The Party of Betrayal,” which accused Democratic Party leaders of corruption and of protecting Communists. Secretary of State Dean Acheson was a frequent target. According to McCarthy, Acheson was incompetent and a tool of Stalin. He wildly accused George C. Marshall, the former army chief of staff and secretary of state, of disloyalty as a member of “a conspiracy so immense as to dwarf any previous such ventures in the history of man.”



Red Channels, published in 1950, was prepared by three ex-FBI agents. The booklet claimed to identify 151 subversive entertainers in radio and television.



A number of well-known Hollywood celebrities, including actors Humphrey Bogart and Lauren Bacall (front row), went to Washington to protest HUAC's investigation of alleged Communists.