

TAHPDX: TEACHING AMERICAN HISTORY PROJECT

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HISTORICAL TOPIC

The Great Fear: Balancing Freedom against Security in the McCarthy Era (1947-1956)

In the period running from roughly 1947 to 1956, a “Great Fear” gripped citizens of the United States. At its core was a deep apprehension about communism which was embodied by the nation’s former World War II ally, the Soviet Union. Spurred by the threat of Soviet aggression during the Cold War, Senator Joseph McCarthy, a Republican of Wisconsin, continuously dominated the nation’s headlines as a tireless crusader for vigilance against internal subversion by homegrown Communists who, he said, had infiltrated key areas of the federal government and the armed services. They threatened not only to render the nation’s foreign policy and its military impotent, but to assist in the Communists’ ultimate goal of weakening and finally dominating, if not destroying, the United States from within. His obsession was shared by other political figures such as Richard Nixon, elements within Congress like the members of the House Committee on Un-American Activities (HUAC), powerful publishers, editors, and columnists, as well as others who strongly believed that the nation was, indeed, locked in a death struggle with an enemy capable of any deceit in order to destroy democracy and capitalism. While the broad public was deeply concerned about the Communist threat, it was also ambivalent about the tactics of McCarthy and his allies, and often apathetic toward politics in general. Thus, he was opposed largely by a small band of politicians, civil libertarians, commentators, and academics. They denounced him for what they said were his persecutions of innocent people caught up in his opportunism and demagoguery.

*The Great Fear topic contains the subtopics listed below. Each subtopic includes a narrative with highlighted text [resources] and notations indicating that additional support material is available for viewing and/or downloading including primary documents, maps, spreadsheet data and websites. To access the material go to the TAHPDX: Teaching American History Website and use the links available on the **TOPIC AREAS [The Great Fear: McCarthyism]** page or the **QUICK NAVIGATION** pages.*

Search TAHPDX on the internet or access the website via the link on the Community Geography page at <http://www.pdx.edu/ims/comgeo.html>.

SUBTOPICS:

1. Introduction
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Curriculum Units developed for this topic (download using the TAHPDX website):

- McCarthy and the “Great Fear” (featuring a dramatic script of the Rosenberg Trial)

This Unit also features a printable PDF poster that summarizes the major people and events of the McCarthy Era (download using the TAHPDX website).

1. Introduction

In the years immediately following the end of World War II in 1945, interaction between the United States and its former ally, the Soviet Union, deteriorated into an antagonistic relationship. The chronic geopolitical rivalry that developed between the two strongest powers in the world, with their essentially inimical values—the US, the model of capitalism and democracy, versus the socialist and totalitarian USSR—lasted roughly 45 years, until the collapse of the USSR in 1990. The confrontation between the world’s two superpowers was labeled the Cold War. In its early years, the politics of this struggle generated remarkable tensions both in international diplomacy and within the US itself. The war taught Americans that the world was a dangerous place for their country. The developing stress with the Soviets showed that, with Europe ravaged by the late conflict, the US was essentially alone in the struggle against the forces of repression, whether they were Fascist or Communist. Moreover, the reputation of the Soviets for espionage and various forms of subversion of foreign governments in pursuit of their apparent agenda of world domination made many Americans uneasy. There was a strong sense among the public that the US must be constantly vigilant against not only the bold and disruptive maneuverings of the Soviets abroad, but their deceitful and insidious machinations at home.

A period of domestic repression thus followed World War II. It was characterized by official and unofficial attempts to stamp out the Communist presence in the country and to eliminate the ability of those sympathetic to the aims of the USSR to influence government policy or, more chillingly, to give or sell state secrets to the country’s new nemesis. Some historians have called this the era, which lasted roughly from 1947 to 1956, the “Great Fear.” During its span, few Communists were discovered in positions of influence or power, but there were clear cases of espionage that made plain the threat. In March 1949, for example, a Justice Department employee named Judith Coplon was apprehended in the company of a Soviet United Nations employee; her purse was full of documents labeled “top secret.” Although convicted of espionage twice in separate trials, the verdicts against Coplon were eventually reversed on appeal because of faulty due process. Nevertheless, Judge Learned Hand observed that her “guilt is plain.”

Book Resource: Mitchell, Marcia and Thomas Mitchell. 2002. *The Spy Who Seduced America: Lies and Betrayal in the Heat of the Cold War: The Judith Coplon Story*. Montpelier, VT: Invisible Cities Press. Contains transcripts of court documents and other related primary information.

Then there was the physicist Dr. Klaus Fuchs, who gave away key secrets of the atom bomb to the Soviet Union, thus breaking the American monopoly on what was then the ultimate weapon. Fuchs, who had worked on the atomic bomb in England and the US said to the police who captured him, “I had complete confidence in Russian policy, and I had no hesitation in giving all the information I had.”

Web Resource: PBS *American Experience* “Race for the Superbomb” (<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/bomb/index.html>). Highlights the people, events, and politics surrounding the development of atomic weapons including a biography of Klaus Fuchs and a transcript of his 1950 confession.

However legitimate some cases were, a number of citizens were victims of overzealous prosecution by the courts. Others suffered false accusations, innuendoes from various arms of the federal government and groups outside of government. Some were so tainted by the suspicion that they had been in the past or remained in the present Communists or Communist sympathizers, sometimes known as “fellow travelers,” that without any formal charges leveled against them, they nevertheless suffered job loss, social ostracism, and, as a result, economic and emotional deprivation. In some cases, the situation was so severe that they were ruined and, in a few instances, the “accused” took their own lives.

The most intense part of the era opened in 1949 and 1950, when the United States suffered a number of reverses in the developing war of nerves with the Soviets that made the public tense. The so-called “loss of China,” when Mao Tse-tung and his communist forces won the civil war they were waging against Chiang Kai-shek in October of 1949, the trial of Alger Hiss, the news of a Russian atomic bomb, the revelation of the spying of Klaus Fuchs, the physicist who passed key atomic secrets to the Soviets—all of this unfolding over about six months—put the nation on edge. Moreover, news that the Soviets were in many respects better armed than the American military was a severe blow to American confidence.

Notwithstanding the clear fact that the USSR did represent a serious threat to the US and that there were, indeed, some Soviet spies operating within the borders of the nation, the attention and energy devoted to the Communist threat during this period was remarkable for its intensity. In some respects, it took on the attributes of a mass hysteria. Standing at the eye of the hurricane generating the climate of fear of the ‘50s was Senator Joseph R. McCarthy, a Republican of Wisconsin. McCarthy, or “Tail Gunner Joe” as he was sometimes called “in honor” of a campaign stunt he pulled at a county fair when he fired off a long burst from a plane parked on a runway, was by no means the only champion of an aggressive posture toward domestic Communists. Other prominent anti-Communists of the era included Richard Nixon, who, as a representative and later senator from California in the late ‘40s and early ‘50s, was a particularly vigorous pursuer of Communists, Senator Pat McCarran, first chairman of the Senate Internal

Security Sub-committee (which fostered the Subversive Activities Control Board from the McCarran Internal Security Act; McCarran-Walter Immigration Act), Representatives J. Parnell Thomas and Martin Dies of the House Committee on Un-American Activities (HUAC), and J. Edgar Hoover, then director of the FBI. There were also syndicated columnists like Westbrook Pegler and union leaders such as Philip Murray who crusaded in print and in their institutions against domestic Communists. But McCarthy's name and style have become synonymous with the Communist-hunting activities of the era, as a steadfast hero to some and an archetype of opportunism and intolerance to others.

2. Who Lost China?

A landmark episode of the Great Fear unfolded in late 1949 heralded by the cry, "Who lost China?" On 1 October of that year the Communists under Mao Tse-tung proclaimed the establishment of the Peoples' Republic of China. This followed a long civil war between the Communists and the Kuomintang (KMT), or Nationalists, under Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek. The internal civil war had been on hold until after the defeat of the Japanese occupation forces during World War II. Following WWII, a number of analysts in the State Department and university scholars whose views influenced policy making on Asia (known as China Hands because many had been born and worked in China) advised that the US should back the Communists because of the corruption and incompetence of KMT officials. When the Communists actually triumphed, Republican politicians and their allies outside of government, supporters of Chiang and known collectively as the China Lobby, were the chief publicists of the charge that China had been "lost" to the Communists through the treachery of State Department insiders. They immediately began to raise a hue and cry about the culpability of these insiders in allowing China to slip into the Communist orbit.

One of the China Hands was John Patton Davies, the son of missionaries who was born and raised in China. On graduation from college in 1933, Davies joined the Foreign Service and was posted to China. During WWII he served under General Joseph Stillwell and ultimately under General Patrick Hurley, with whom he clashed repeatedly. During the war Davies had helped to form the so called "Dixie Mission," the first group from the US Government to establish diplomatic and military ties with the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). It was Davies' view that working with the Communists was better than leaving them to the influence solely of the Soviets, and he ultimately saw the CCP as a better option for the post-war governance of China than the KMT. Hurley, however, envisioned a coalition government of the KMT and CCP. The two argued frequently with Hurley accusing Davies of being a Communist and threatening to ruin his career and eventually arranging his transfer to the US's Moscow embassy. Despite Davies' distinguished service in other posts, his accurate prediction that the CCP would triumph in China, the award to him of the Medal of Freedom, and his ardent anti-Communism, which included advocacy of a nuclear showdown with the USSR, Davies was fired by Secretary of State John Foster Dulles in 1954, who cited "a lack of judgment, discretion and reliability." Dulles had acted under pressure from Senators Joseph McCarthy (R-WI) and Pat McCarran (R-NV), as well as the China Lobby. By the time of his dismissal, Davies had endured nine investigations of his loyalty stretching back to 1948.

Web Resource: "The Dixie Mission." A photo-documentary by Captain John "Jack" P. Klein – US Army Signal Corp. (O.S.S.). Tour of duty February to October 1945 in Yan'an, China (<http://www.dixiemission.org/>).

PDF Resource: 40th Bomb Group Association, Issue #14, March 1987. *The Dixie Mission to the Communist Chinese*. Louis Jones' personal account of his experience in 1945 as a US intelligence officer working with the Communist Chinese.

Another figure who was caught up in the questioning over the China debacle was Owen Lattimore. Like Davies, Lattimore was born in China. Unlike him, he spent the better part of his career in academia as the Director of the Walter Page School of International Relations (IPR) at Johns Hopkins University. But Lattimore, a fluent speaker of Chinese, also had enormous experience in China as a businessman and, during World War II, as the US Government's political advisor to Chiang Kai-shek. Nevertheless, as editor of *Pacific Affairs*, a wide-ranging journal of Asian issues, Lattimore ran afoul of one of the journal's board members, Alfred Kohlberg, a stalwart of the China Lobby who idolized Chiang. Kohlberg became convinced of Lattimore's antagonism toward Chiang, which was reflected, he said, in *Pacific Affairs* articles that were often critical of the generalissimo and the KMT. Kohlberg was so incensed by what he perceived as the anti-Chiang bias of *Pacific Affairs* that he left the board and in 1944 founded his own magazine, *Plain Talk*, to refute what he felt was the prejudicial tone of Lattimore's journal. After the war, Kohlberg and the China Lobby generally regarded Lattimore as a principal antagonist of Chiang and a key figure in Chiang's ultimate downfall due to his influence over US policy.

In March 1950, Senator McCarthy, testifying before Senator Millard Tydings' committee which was investigating McCarthy's claims of Soviet infiltration of the State Department, accused Lattimore of spying for the Soviet Union. During a lengthy and rancorous hearing, McCarthy introduced a surprise witness, Louis Budenz, the former editor of the Communist newspaper, the *Daily Worker*, who testified against Lattimore. Budenz claimed that Lattimore, while not a paid Soviet agent, furthered Soviet foreign policy through his vast influence with policy makers. Lattimore was cleared in the majority report of the Tydings committee, but condemned by the minority report.

In 1952, Lattimore was called before Senator McCarran's Senate Internal Security Subcommittee (SISS). McCarran had subpoenaed the records of the IPR and used them to ask obscure questions of Lattimore, the answers to which were lost in memory, making him seem suspiciously forgetful. Testifying again, Budenz this time claimed that Lattimore was both a paid Soviet agent and a Communist. Another witness, Nicholas Poppe, a Russian émigré, a former Nazi collaborator, and like Lattimore a scholar of Central Asian affairs, charged his work reflected a Communist bias. As a result of the McCarran hearing, the SISS found that Lattimore "was, from some time beginning in the 1930s, a conscious articulate instrument of the Soviet conspiracy." He was charged with seven counts of perjury including misleading the committee, Six of the counts were based on the discrepancies between the IPR records and Lattimore's recollection of them. It took almost three years for Lattimore to clear his name, but in the end

all of the charges were dismissed. Nevertheless, Lattimore ended his career at the University of Leeds in England, an exile with a tainted past.

PDF Resource: *Federal Bureau of Investigation Reports: Owen Lattimore.* Scan of reports from the 1940's-1950's espionage investigation of Owen Lattimore conducted as a result of allegations linking him to Soviet espionage – released by way of the Freedom of Information Act. Much of the information in the report is still “blacked out.”

PDF Resource: *United States v. Lattimore.* Presents the case United States v. Lattimore argued before the US Supreme Court on May 2, 1953. Includes opening arguments, listing of the grand jury indictments, conclusions of the court, and comments by judges.

Davies and Lattimore were by no means the only China Hands who were exposed to such grueling examination. O. Edmund Clubb, John K. Fairbank, John Stewart Service, John Carter Vincent, and some others, all of whom had enjoyed successful careers in government or academia, suffered to a greater or lesser extent the same scrutiny and damage to their reputations and careers because of their apparent failure wholeheartedly to support the anti-Communist movement in China prior to its defeat by Mao-Tse-tung and the CCP.

3. Alger Hiss: Betrayer of the Plain Men and Women

In August 1948, Whitaker Chambers, Foreign Affairs editor at *Time Magazine* and a confessed former Communist, testifying in front of HUAC, accused Alger Hiss of having been a member of the Communist Party from 1934 to 1938. Hiss was a brilliant man of impeccable establishment credentials which included the “right” schools, a Harvard law degree, a stint with the State Department as an aide to President Roosevelt, and in his early forties ascension to the top position at the prestigious Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. Appearing before the Committee himself following Chambers’ testimony, he seemingly candidly and credibly denied all the accusations. He then sued Chambers for defamation of character, requesting \$75,000 in damages, although his friends had advised him to acknowledge his Communist past as a youthful indiscretion and move on. Hiss seemed by far the more believable figure and when, in the 1948 elections, the Democrats captured the House of Representatives and Harry Truman scored a stunning victory over Thomas Dewey in the presidential campaign, it looked as if Chambers’ charges and the entire HUAC hearings on Communist infiltration, not to mention HUAC itself, would disappear. Indeed, Truman, commenting on the charges against Hiss after the election, called them a “red herring,” in an attempt at once to divert attention from the accusations while calling attention to what he considered the Republican-controlled Congress’s obstructionism.

But a young California Congressman on the committee named Richard Nixon managed to convince his HUAC colleagues to allow him to question Chambers one more time. As the year ended, under renewed interrogation by Nixon, Chambers added substance and gravity to his charges: He now said that Hiss had been not just a Party member—hardly an unusual dalliance for a young idealist during the Depression—but part of an espionage ring, passing secret State Department documents to Chambers (himself a Soviet operative), who then passed them on to

the Soviets. Chambers, at that point casting himself as a repentant Communist sounding a clarion call against the insidious threat the USSR represented to a slumbering America, backed his new charges with evidence including classified State Department papers, some of which were purported to be in Hiss's handwriting and others from Hiss's typewriter. Chambers subsequently led HUAC investigators to a pumpkin patch at his Maryland farm where, among a row of the fruits, was one that had been carefully hollowed out. Secreted within it were more papers and some microfilms of classified State Department documents.

The "Pumpkin Papers" caused an immediate sensation in the press while President Truman, who as noted had campaigned against the HUAC hearings, continued to downplay the volatile situation. But, in the waning days of 1948, a grand jury indicted Hiss on two counts of perjury: his statement that he had not passed secrets to Chambers and his statement that he hadn't seen Chambers since January 1937. Considering the gravity of Hiss's alleged crime, the perjury charges seemed trivial, but the statute of limitations had expired on more serious ones and, in any case, the public instinctively knew that the real issue was whether or not Alger Hiss had spied on the US for the Soviet Union. The first trial, begun in the spring of 1949, ended in a hung jury. The second ran from November 1949 through January 1950. The trial featured a fascinating parade of witnesses whose colorfulness turned the proceeding into what today would be labeled a media circus. As the trial dragged on with the nation riveted by the newspaper and radio accounts, one thing became increasingly clear: The country was splitting into almost irreconcilable camps on the question of Hiss's guilt as he and Chambers came almost to embody the social and political differences abroad in the nation. Chambers himself later captured the split in his 1960 autobiography, *Witness*, in which he wrote,

No feature of the Hiss case is more obvious, or more troubling, than the jagged fissure, which it did not so much open as reveal, between the plain men and women of the nation, and those who affected to act, think and speak for them. It was not invariably, but in general, the "best people" who were for Alger Hiss and who were prepared to go to almost any length to protect and defend him.

"The plain men and women"—surely no phrase, however romantic, could have captured the nature of Chambers' support better than this evocation of ordinary Americans, lower middle class Republicans and some from the deeply conservative upper classes who were appalled by the turn of events. Although Chambers was erudite and bohemian, not to mention fat, rumpled, and possessed of remarkably bad teeth, he and his newfound anti-Communism became a symbol of and for the part of the country that was fed up with New Deal and Fair Deal (Truman's version of New Deal programming) innovation and its alleged "softness" on Communism. Hiss was just as erudite, but on the other hand, was slender, handsome, well dressed, and urbane. His defenders, many of whom would have been bemused to find themselves included among "the best people," were convinced he and they had a more nuanced view of the world, both domestically and internationally, than those who saw reality as a Manichean struggle between the "Communist Menace" and the nation whose self-assigned role was "Guardian of the Free World." They acknowledged the threat represented by the USSR, but believed in diplomacy rather than stark force as the key to international stability and internal security for the US.

Some historians have observed that between the first and second Hiss trials in 1949, the evidence of internal and external Communist aggression formed a backdrop against which the courtroom drama was carried out. The triumph of Mao Tse-tung in establishing a Communist state, the occupation of one eastern European country after another by the Red Army, the arrest of Judith Coplon for espionage in the US and of Klaus Fuchs in England, the Soviets' explosion of their first nuclear device, among many incidents, created an atmosphere in which the public found itself tense and unable to countenance divided loyalties among citizens, let alone government functionaries, regardless of their pedigree. Thus it was, it has been asserted, that Hiss was doomed to be convicted and forced to spend 44 months of a five-year sentence in prison. Hiss's supporters, however, were not willing to accept the verdict, and his fellow patrician, Secretary of State Dean Acheson, said of his conviction, "I do not intend to turn my back on Alger Hiss." This comment merely confirmed for many Americans the truth of Richard Nixon's description of the State Department under Acheson. In a paroxysm of alliteration, Nixon labeled it Acheson's "college of cowardly Communist containment," an effort to frame it as a hotbed of effete appeasers of the Neville Chamberlain type. Ironically, during his presidency, Nixon was to turn to Acheson for foreign policy advice. Meanwhile, Acheson's remark became the opening salvo in a long battle of words among liberals and conservatives attempting to vindicate or damn once and for all Alger Hiss.

Hiss, for his part, spent the rest of his long life—he lived to be 92—protesting his innocence through two memoirs and in failed appeals to the Supreme Court. In any event, over the years as the Cold War thawed and passions cooled, it became clear to many of his defenders as well as objective observers, that Hiss was, in fact, guilty. However, Senator Homer Capehart of Indiana, rising in the Senate to vent his frustration with the situation of America in the wake of Hiss's conviction, cut to the heart of the exasperation and urgent fear gripping the country at the time when he said, "How much more are we going to take? Fuchs and Acheson and Hiss and hydrogen bombs threatening outside and New Dealism eating away the vitals of the nation. In the name of heaven, is this the best America can do?"

Web Resource: *Famous Trials: The Alger Hiss Trials* [1949-50] (<http://www.law.umkc.edu/faculty/projects/ftrials/hiss/hiss.html>). Includes a comprehensive archive of images, transcripts, letters, information about the "Pumpkin Papers" and additional commentary. Hosted by the University of Missouri [Kansas City] Law School.

Web Resource: *The Alger Hiss Story*. Hosted by New York University (<http://homepages.nyu.edu/~th15/>). This site contains a comprehensive archive of primary documents, court proceedings and new commentary about Alger Hiss based on recently released Soviet and US intelligence information. This site also includes a link to numerous video clips.

Book Resource: Hiss, Alger. *In the Court of Public Opinion*. New York: Knopf, 1957.

4. HUAC: Finding the Un-Americans

The House Un-American Activities Committee was founded in 1938, long before the Great Fear of the '50s, to investigate the propagandizing of both Nazi and Communists in the US. The charge to its seven members was to discover if and what remedial legislation could be helpful in

combating subversive propaganda. The first chairman was a Texas representative named Martin Dies, who used it as a platform to excoriate New Deal programming, which he characterized as slightly disguised Communism. He also used the authority of the committee to identify persons and organizations he didn't like, such as the union leader Harry Bridges of the Longshoremens and the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO), as un-American. Others on the committee took the same tack. During World War II HUAC was dormant, but its enemies attacked it as biased against labor and the left generally.

Although HUAC was originally to be a temporary body, in early 1945 it was made a permanent standing committee of the House, but it did little with its new status, conducting only two investigations during the 79th Congress. One was of the Office of Price Administration because the conservative members believed it was the entering wedge of a Communist takeover, and the other of the American Communist Party itself. However, when the Republicans gained control of the House—and HUAC—after their victory in the 1946 elections, the chairmanship passed to an ostentatious Republican of New Jersey, J. Parnell Thomas, who promptly launched high profile investigations into alleged Communist activities, including spying. Thomas threw objectivity to the winds stating at the outset of the investigations that he believed the committee would discover un-American activity. He set a tone of aggressive questioning of those he called to testify, engaged in heated colloquies with them, and imposed his own views, ignoring witnesses' right to refuse to cooperate with the committee, a posture he was certain was simply an attempt by Communists and their fellow travelers to “create a lot of fog about constitutional rights, the First Amendment, and so forth.”

Under Thomas, in 1947-48, HUAC heard a great deal of testimony concerning Communist activities within the Roosevelt and Truman administrations. It was under this initiative, after hearing testimony from Whitaker Chambers, Elizabeth Bentley, and Louis Budenz, all former Communists, that Richard Nixon, who became a HUAC member in 1947, began his unrelenting pursuit of Alger Hiss. But the committee had other business as well in that year including examining such alleged Communist-fronts as American Youth for Democracy, the Southern Conference for Human Welfare, and the Civil Rights Congress. Using innuendo and unsubstantiated charges, the committee labeled these groups as Communist or Communist-front organizations. A Columbia University law professor who analyzed the report on the Southern Conference for Human Welfare concluded that the Committee was “either intolerably incompetent” or “intent upon publishing misinformation.”

Web Resource: The *HUAC Testimony of Whitaker Chambers*, August 3, 1948 (<http://www.law.umkc.edu/faculty/projects/ftrials/hiss/8-3testimony.html>). From the Trials of Alger Hiss webpage.

Web Resource: *The House Un-American Committee* (44 minutes). Produced by RadicalFilms.com and posted on YouTube (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U1Z5aYU6x0o&feature=related>). Has a definite anti-HUAC bias, but contains great footage of events and testimony. Spans the history of HUAC from 1938 to 1960.

5. You Ought Not to Be in Pictures

With Thomas at its helm, HUAC began its work in the 80th Congress in 1947 investigating Gerhart Eisler, a reputed Soviet agent, and his brother, Hanns Eisler, a composer who had scored a number of films in Hollywood. Starting in October of 1947, HUAC called a parade of notable Hollywood witnesses including the powerful moguls like Jack Warner and screen idols like Gary Cooper, Robert Montgomery, and Ronald Reagan, some of whom were willing and able to draw a convincing picture to committee members of serious Communist activity in the movie world. The committee's main interest was to discover if Communist agents had achieved the unthinkable: insidiously seeding Communist ideals within the film fantasies that ordinary, unsuspecting citizens took in on a regular basis.

PDF Resource: *Testimony of Walt Disney* at the HUAC hearings, October 24, 1947.

PDF Resource: *Testimony of Ronald Reagan* (SAG President) at the HUAC hearing, October 23, 1947.

PDF Resource: *The Man From Moscow: Gerhart Eisler*. Time Magazine Article (February 17, 1947). Time-CNN Online Archive.

Web Resource: *The World Was at Stake: Three "Friendly" HUAC Hollywood Witnesses Assess Pro-Soviet Wartime Films*. Testimony of Ayn Rand, Jack Warner (Warner Bros.) and Louis Mayer (MGM). Source: History Matters (<http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/6442>). Created by the American Social History Project/Center for Media and Learning (Graduate Center, CUNY) and the Center for History and New Media (George Mason University).

Forty-three Hollywood figures—mostly screenwriters, but also actors, directors, producers, and some others in the industry—were called to testify before the HUAC committee. Eleven refused to cooperate including the great German playwright Bertolt Brecht (who ultimately did cooperate, testifying in a theatrical way, before departing for Europe never to return to the US). The remaining ten “unfriendly” writers and actors refused to answer what became the committee’s infamous question, “Are you now or have you ever been a member of the Communist Party?” They cited the First Amendment, with its protections for free speech and assembly, in justification. One of their number actually responded to the question. The actor Lionel Stander said,

I know of a group of fanatics who are desperately trying to undermine the Constitution of the United States by depriving artists and others of Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness without due process of law.... I can tell names and cite instances and I am one of the first victims of it.... [This is] a group of ex-Fascists and America-Firsters and anti-Semites, people who hate everybody including Negroes, minority groups and most likely themselves.... [T]hese people are engaged in a conspiracy outside all the legal processes to undermine the very fundamental American concepts upon which our entire system of democracy exists.

Eventually the ten who refused to testify came to be known as the “Hollywood Ten.” They included Alvah Bessie, screenwriter, Herbert Biberman, screenwriter and director, Lester Cole,

screenwriter, Edward Dmytryk, director, Ring Lardner Jr., screenwriter, John Howard Lawson, screenwriter, Albert Maltz, screenwriter, Samuel Ornitz, screenwriter, Adrian Scott, producer and screenwriter, and Dalton Trumbo, screenwriter. They and others like actor Stander were blacklisted by the movie industry. Trumbo was one of the fortunate few who were, by subterfuges, able to keep working through the blacklist period. He wrote such notable films as *The Brave One* (1956), which won an Academy Award for the screenwriter, Robert Rich, which was his pseudonym. In another case, he was awarded an Oscar posthumously for the screenplay of *Roman Holiday* (1953). The award was originally given to Ian McLellan Hunter, who had acted as a “front” for Trumbo. At the insistence of the star Kirk Douglas, he was credited for writing screenplays for the two hits, *Spartacus* and *Exodus*. The recognition was instrumental in the demise of the blacklist, the fate of which was sealed by a 1962 court decision in favor of the radio personality John Henry Faulk against AWARE, an entertainment industry watchdog group that had marked him as disloyal.

Others were not so lucky. Many never worked in Hollywood again or were reinstated only late in their careers; some were driven to the depths of despair and retreated to the bottle or to suicide. A few of those who testified against their colleagues—named names, in the famous phrase—were themselves damaged by the experience. The actor Sterling Hayden was so regretful of his testimony that, in an interview in the ‘60s, he called himself a “stoolie.” He was said to have drunk himself into such a decades-long depression for causing friends to lose their livelihoods that it ruined his health and led to his death in 1986. Others, like the director Elia Kazan, made movies through the ensuing years, but were never forgiven by a large faction of the entertainment community for cooperating with HUAC. At the 1999 Academy Awards, his ambiguous standing in the film community was dramatically revealed when, upon receiving the lifetime achievement award, many in the audience refused to acknowledge him with applause. Still others, like Ronald Reagan, burnished their anti-Communist credentials with their testimony. In his case, it served him well in conservative political circles.

JPG Resource: Photo of the *Hollywood Ten* with caption. From ModernTimes.com.

Web Resource: Audio - *Katherine Hepburn's Speech against HUAC, 1947* (from YouTube at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LqEjFusgUj0>).

PDF Resource: *Blacklisted Hollywood: Seeing Red* (October 24, 1997). After excerpts from the PBS documentary "The Legacy of the Hollywood Blacklist" (1987), Elizabeth Farnsworth talks with writer/producer Paul Jarrico and actress Marsha Hunt about their experiences on the blacklist. Source: PBS Online Focus. This website also includes a RealAudio (requires RealPlayer) download for this interview (audio only).

PDF Resource: *The Hollywood Ten*. Time Magazine Article (April 24, 1950). Time-CNN Online Archive.

PDF Resource: *I'm No Communist* (Photoplay, March 1948). Humphrey Bogart's newspaper editorial about the accusations of Communist sympathies.

6. A Slow, Lingering Death

The Hollywood episode was in many ways the high water mark of HUAC's power and influence. Although it continued to exist into the 1960s, the committee had little to do as the Great Fear of the '50s subsided and Americans learned to live in a world in which Soviet-American tensions were commonplace. The Democratic chairman during the late '50s was Francis Walters of Pennsylvania, who undermined his own credibility and that of the committee by accusing anyone opposed to his obsession with draconian immigration restrictions of being a Communist.

The Vietnam conflict re-energized HUAC to some extent, but it never achieved the importance it had during the previous two decades. Indeed, the Vietnam War may have hastened its demise. Investigating the riot at the 1968 Democratic Convention, the committee called Jerry Rubin and Abbie Hoffman to testify. Unintimidated, they turned the hearing into a circus and mocked the proceedings. Rubin went so far as to wear a Viet Cong flag during his testimony. In 1969, the House renamed HUAC the Committee on Internal Security, but by 1975 it had been abolished.

7. Joe McCarthy: Stalking the Wild Communist

It was against this backdrop that Joseph R. McCarthy, the junior Senator from Wisconsin, rose to prominence and ultimately fell from grace as the nation's foremost Communist hunter. He had won election in 1946 by campaigning against Roosevelt's New Deal and Truman's Fair Deal that appealed to voters longing for the simpler times of Pre-Depression America. He labeled his Democratic general election opponent (Howard J. McMurray) "communistically inclined." This was, in itself, not unusual. It was a tactic used extensively by other Republicans that year, which played to the suspicion that the New Deal/Fair Deal was a socialist experiment and compounded the nationwide fatigue with 14 years of Democratic control of both the executive and legislative branches of government.

PDF Resource: *Political Divisions of the U.S. Congress*. Chart shows the political divisions in the House and Senate from 1899 to 2009, includes a timeline of Presidents and major events.

But McCarthy was despised even by his fellow Republicans because of his penchant for turning policy disagreements into personal vendettas, and when Congress convened in January 1949, their caucus stripped him of all major committee assignments. Voted the worst senator, the only significant publicity he had won to that point was his part in the investigation (in 1949) of some German SS Troopers who claimed they had confessed under duress about their roles in the infamous Malmedy massacre of American soldiers in 1944. McCarthy was part of an Armed Services Subcommittee and claimed the US Army had bungled the case. His aggressive conduct during the hearings was so distressing that the chairman of the investigating subcommittee left political life.

As a minor pariah, McCarthy's Senate career was stalled. He found the cause that would elevate him to national prominence, however, at a dinner in Washington in 1950. His companion, Father

Edmund Walsh of Georgetown University, suggested that McCarthy break out of his obscurity by warning the country of the ever-growing Communist threat. Soon afterward in a speech in West Virginia on Lincoln's birthday in 1950, McCarthy waved a piece of paper claiming it held the names of 205 known "Communists" in the State Department. Although that made no stir, in two later speeches he made the same claim, reducing the number to 57. Neither the first nor the subsequent speeches were original. They were, in fact, cut-and-pasted from a speech by Representative Nixon (of HUAC notoriety). However, the charge made headlines across the country. Later, in a five-hour floor speech in the Senate, McCarthy claimed to have pierced President Truman's "iron curtain of secrecy" by which he had shielded traitors from scrutiny. He said he had 81 names. McCarthy's detractors and supporters would argue through the rest of the 20th century over the exact numbers of alleged traitors and the truth of his allegations.

Book Resource: Goldman, Eric F. 1961. *The Crucial Decade – and After* (America, 1945-1960). New York: Vintage Books. Chapter VII: Dinner at the Colony – highlights the conversation between McCarthy and Father Walsh.

Web Resource: *Enemies from Within: Senator Joseph R. McCarthy's Accusations of Disloyalty.* McCarthy speech in Wheeling West Virginia on Feb. 9, 1950 (205 communists) and his letter to President Truman on Feb. 11, 1950 (57 communists). Source: History Matters (<http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/6456>). Created by the American Social History Project/Center for Media and Learning (Graduate Center, CUNY) and the Center for History and New Media (George Mason University).

PDF Resource: *McCarthy's Speech on Communists in the State Department.* CNN Interactive: The Cold War (Episode 6: Reds). Transcript of the speech to Congress (regarding the "57" suspected communists in the State Department).

Web Resource with Primary Documents: *Teaching with Documents: Telegram from Senator Joseph McCarthy to President Harry S. Truman* (<http://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/mccarthy-telegram/>). Includes featured documents: Telegram from McCarthy to Truman restating his accusation of communists in the State Department and Truman's draft reply (probably not sent) vilifying McCarthy.

With the press finally focusing on these sensational charges and generating national interest, the Senate had little choice but to investigate. This was the origin of the Tydings subcommittee (officially the Subcommittee on the Investigation of Loyalty of State Department Employees). As its hearings opened, McCarthy was at last on center stage. The chair of the committee, Senator Millard Tydings, a Democrat from Maryland, made early efforts to control him. But, fearful of creating the impression that he was hindering an inquiry of supreme national importance, he soon gave McCarthy a free hand to present his case. At this point, McCarthy injected the name of Owen Lattimore into the hearings, characterizing him as a "pro-Communist," "an extremely bad security risk," "one of the principal architects of our Far Eastern policy," and "the top Russian espionage agent in the country." Although Louis Budenz corroborated his charges, Lattimore ultimately was able, as has been discussed above, to refute them. But McCarthy was undeterred and followed a strategy of lodging charges against a long list of persons, moving on to new names and charges of disloyalty before the previously accused could even respond. The technique did not satisfy the majority of the subcommittee which on 17 July 1950, after all the testimony had been heard, issued a report that characterized McCarthy's

charges as “a fraud and a hoax perpetrated on the Senate of the United States and the American people.”

PDF Resource: *Senator Joseph McCarthy's Lists and Venona*, by historian John Earl Haynes of the Library of Congress. Contains a comprehensive list of those people McCarthy accused during his many speeches 1950-1951 and notations on the source of the information. Haynes also includes insightful commentary on the “truth” of these accusations.

Still, this exposure was the launch pad for McCarthy’s run as the nation’s major Communist hunter. He received an avalanche of mail from admirers. Their letters often contained money to continue the struggle against Communism. This attitude was stoked by the start of the Korean War in June 1950 which, as described by anti-Communist zealots, was the result of the Truman administration’s weak defense against the spread of Communism. When Truman dismissed General Douglas MacArthur as commander of the United Nations forces in Korea in 1951, McCarthy launched (under the protection of senatorial immunity from the libel laws) one of the most vituperative assaults on a public figure in American history. He said General Marshall (of the “Marshall Plan”) was at the center “of a conspiracy of infamy so black that, when it is finally exposed, its principals shall be forever deserving of the maledictions of all honest men.” When Democratic senators tried to curb what they regarded as his excesses both in his intemperate attacks and questionable financial and political practices, the inquiry they conducted led to no conclusive resolution. Among his growing legion of supporters, their strong impression that he was being persecuted for his vigilance by liberals and Communists was merely confirmed. Indeed, a pivotal moment in McCarthy’s career came when the Republicans took control of the Senate after the 1952 elections. He was given the chairmanship of the Government Operations Committee and of its Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations. These appointments gave him basically a free hand to pursue his inquiries.

PDF Resource: *McCarthy Speech regarding General Marshall, 1951*. From the Internet Modern History Sourcebook. Provides a good example of McCarthy’s inflammatory style.

With a Republican president, Dwight D. Eisenhower, in office as a result of the election, McCarthy might have been expected to curb his zeal, but he did not and Eisenhower refused to confront him, even though the new president had no respect for him. McCarthy took the passivity of the Republican leadership as a sign of their impotence and his freedom to do as he pleased. He then began an investigation of the International Information Agency (IIA), a State Department branch that ran the Voice of America. Roy Cohn and G. David Schine, two of his staff assistants, toured IIA libraries in Europe looking for books written by Communists or fellow travelers and destroying those they said were tainted. In the end, the spectacle of actual book burnings, so reminiscent of the Nazis, forced Eisenhower to defend intellectual freedom at a college commencement speech in June of 1953, but he refused in a subsequent press conference to use McCarthy’s name in discussing the destruction of the materials.

The denouncement of McCarthy’s career came only when he aggressively undertook an investigation of the US Army. McCarthy wanted access to the Army’s secret files on security

and loyalty in order to look into charges that there were spies among the civilian scientists at the Signal Corps Engineering Laboratories at Fort Monmouth, New Jersey. At the same time, his assistant G. David Schine had been drafted and McCarthy was pressuring the Army to give him special treatment, causing resentment within the Army. In February 1954, McCarthy discovered that Irving Peress, an Army dentist since discharged, had been promoted, as demanded by law, even though he refused to answer questions about his political beliefs. McCarthy questioned the dentist about his views, but Peress invoked his Fifth Amendment right against self-incrimination, stoking McCarthy's ardor to find out all he could about the matter. He thus called Brigadier General Ralph Zwicker to testify, but Zwicker refused to identify anyone involved in Peress' promotion. McCarthy exploded in anger and spewed abuse on General Zwicker. Then he launched an investigation of the Army itself from the Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations, with Senator Karl Mundt of South Dakota as chair in place of McCarthy (who, himself, was being accused by the Army of inappropriate requests). The investigation, known as the Army-McCarthy hearings, began on 22 April 1954, with McCarthy in the anomalous position of being both accuser and defendant.

The hearings were televised, giving a mass audience an opportunity to witness McCarthy's blustering, overbearing, and bullying style for the first time. The Army had retained a distinguished Washington lawyer named Joseph Welch as its chief counsel. The antithesis in style of the senator from Wisconsin, Welch's plan was to frustrate McCarthy so that he would make an error of some kind that Welch could use to discredit him. The hoped-for misstep came on 9 June 1954 in what was, for both men, no doubt a wholly unexpected moment. McCarthy had in fact been angered by Welch's continual low key needling and, in an attempt at revenge he revealed that a young associate in Welch's law firm had been a member of the National Lawyers Guild, a leftist organization, which McCarthy described as "the legal bulwark of the Communist Party." Welch had listened with obvious growing sadness through McCarthy's attack on his young colleague. When his turn to speak came, he said unhappily, "Until this moment Senator, I think I never gauged your cruelty or your recklessness. Let us not assassinate this lad further, Senator. You have done enough." With tears in his eyes, he concluded, "Have you no sense of decency, sir, at long last? Have you no sense of decency?"

Web Resource: *Excerpt from the Army-McCarthy Hearing 1953-54* ("have you no decency" speech by Mr. Welch). Source: History Matters (<http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/6444>). Created by the American Social History Project/Center for Media and Learning (Graduate Center, CUNY) and the Center for History and New Media (George Mason University).

Web Resource: *Army-McCarthy Hearing* (<http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/welch-mccarthy.html>). An online video of the McCarthy accusations and Welch's "have you no decency" response.

This was one of the truly remarkable moments in the history of American politics. Welch's spontaneous comments about what was really tangential to the main issue threw into stark relief for millions of people the character of McCarthy and the nature of his enterprise. The imprimatur of the president sealed McCarthy's fate when Eisenhower invited Welch to the White House to shake his hand. Previous to Welch's comments, some Republicans had begun to distance themselves from McCarthy, but the chorus of criticism from members of his own party

grew substantially after Eisenhower's gesture and one senator drew up a resolution to censure him. The most fervent anti-Communists remained McCarthy's loyal allies, but mainstream Republicans in the public were abandoning him, so Senate Republicans came under increasing pressure to help curb him. By a vote of 67-22 on 2 December 1954, the Senate voted to censure McCarthy for contempt and abuse.

PDF Resource: *Senate Resolution 301: Censure of Joseph McCarthy (1954)*. From www.ourdocuments.gov. Contains explanatory narrative and an image of the original document.

Joe McCarthy never recovered from the censure by his colleagues, although he professed to be unworried. He intensified his drinking, which was in any case always heavy, eventually dying from a liver ailment on 28 April 1957 at age 49. McCarthy's legacy, apart from the fear he instilled in the many who came under his scrutiny—or thought they might—was a word that entered the language while he was still in his heyday: McCarthyism. Coined by the *Washington Post* editorial cartoonist Herblock in 1950, the word was inscribed on a wobbly column of buckets filled with tar stacked one on top of the other, while the Republican elephant was being dragged toward it by the party's right wing element. The word was defined in the *American College Dictionary* as early as 1954 as “public accusations of disloyalty...unsupported by truth...”

JPG Resource: Herblock's “*You mean I'm supposed to stand on that!*” (March 29, 1950) cartoon first coining the term “McCarthyism” published in the *Washington Post*. Source: Library of Congress.

PDF Resource: A collection of photos of McCarthy and the Army-McCarthy Hearings (sources listed on photos).

8. Bombshell: Julius and Ethel Rosenberg Must Die

In April 1951, Julius Rosenberg and his wife Ethel were convicted of espionage. They were—or at least Julius was clearly—part of a spy ring that included a man named Harry Gold, David Greenglass (Julius's brother-in-law), and the scientist Klaus Fuchs (whose exploits are noted above). The group had stolen secrets of the Manhattan Project which had created America's atomic bomb during World War II and passed them to the Soviet Union. Rosenberg had been recruited by a Russian agent, had in turn recruited Greenglass, a sergeant working at Los Alamos, New Mexico (the Manhattan Project site) with access to top secret bomb data. Gold was the courier who actually passed the information on to a Soviet agent. Together they gave the Russians vital facts about the trigger mechanism for the bomb dropped on Nagasaki, the design of a secret proximity fuse for artillery shells, and data on a satellite research initiative.

In May 1950 Gold was arrested, which led to the arrest of Greenglass, whose confession pointed the authorities to Julius Rosenberg. Rosenberg, when taken into custody, said he had done the work “he was slated for,” which was to “directly help Russia.” The FBI then arrested Ethel Rosenberg on a charge of conspiracy to commit espionage, even though there was scant evidence

of her involvement in the plot, in the hope that she could be used as a “lever” to extract a full confession from Julius.

The trial of the Rosenbergs commenced in March 1951. It played out against the full panoply of early Cold War events and personalities of that time, including the Soviets’ explosion of their first nuclear device in 1949, which illustrated dramatically the enormity of the crime with which the couple was charged. The Rosenbergs were found guilty. In pronouncing their death sentences, the trial judge, Irving Kaufman, made a speech that spoke of the “life and death struggle with a completely different system,” one that denied God, the sanctity of the individual, and aggressed “against free men everywhere....” He opined that the crime of the Rosenbergs was worse than murder because Russian possession of the atomic recipe could lead to the death of millions.

Some scholars maintain that the FBI never intended for the Rosenbergs to be executed. No less a Communist fighter than J. Edgar Hoover had misgivings about the guilt of Ethel, whose participation in the scheme was minor, if that. Julius had unquestionably been part of the Fuchs spy ring, but the issue of the guilt of them both was magnified by the superheated political atmosphere of the day, which made it, apparently, politically impossible for leaders like President Eisenhower to intervene on their behalf, despite impassioned pleas for clemency for them from Americans and foreigners alike. In the end, the US Circuit Court denied their appeal and the US Supreme Court refused to hear their case. An application for clemency to President Eisenhower was rebuffed. On 19 June 1953, Julius and Ethel Rosenberg were electrocuted at Sing Sing Prison in New York.

Curriculum (Drama): The curriculum guide “The Great Fear” features a dramatic script of the Rosenberg Trial. Download using the TAHPDX: Teaching American History website.

Web Resource: *History and Trial of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg (1951)*. From the Famous Trials page sponsored by the Law School at the University of Missouri, Kansas City. (<http://www.law.umkc.edu/faculty/projects/ftrials/rosenb/ROSENB.HTM>). Of interest (aside from the actual trial transcripts) is the Judge’s statement on sentencing the Rosenbergs, Ethel Rosenberg’s last letter to her sons on the day of execution, and various images of the players in this drama.

PDF Resource: Images of the Rosenbergs and the “Atomic Spies” Trial (sources shown on photos).

9. Disturbances in Eden: McCarthyism in the Pacific Northwest

Although far from the eye of the anti-Communist storm of the 1950s, the Pacific Northwest had its share of disturbances related to the Great Fear. In 1948, for example, the University of Washington fired three tenured professors for alleged Communist sympathies. They were victims of the demand, common at the time, that they take so-called “loyalty oaths” to express their allegiance to the United States. Many individuals, particularly those in the academic world, found this otherwise routine obeisance to the tenor of the times odious in its hypocrisy, but signed anyway to avoid trouble. Others saw in the oath a trap by which they could be brought

down. The firings were precipitated by the creation of the state's Joint Legislative Fact-Finding Committee on Un-American Activities. Known as the Canwell Committee after its chairman, Rep. Albert Canwell, R-Spokane, the panel's charge was to "investigate the activities of groups and organizations whose membership includes persons who are Communists, or any other organization known or suspected to be dominated or controlled by a foreign power."

The committee believed there were many Communists on the UW faculty and called eleven professors to testify before it. Some admitted they had belonged to the Communist Party and named others they had known in it; some admitted past membership but refused to name others; three refused to say whether or not they were or ever had been members.

After the legislative hearings, the University held its own hearings before the Committee on Tenure and Academic Freedom of the Faculty Senate. Six men were charged: Herbert Phillips, Joseph Butterworth and Ralph Gundlach, who had refused to answer the committee's questions about their activities, and Harold Eby, Garland Ethel, and Melville Jacobs, who admitted past membership in the Communist Party. They would not name others.

The committee recommended that only Gundlach be fired, but University President Raymond Allen recommended to the regents that Phillips and Butterworth also be terminated. The regents agreed. Eby, Ethel, and Jacobs were allowed to remain—on probation for two years. They were required to sign a loyalty oath.

In the wake of the hearings, Phillips, Butterworth and Gundlach never again worked as professors. Gundlach, a psychology professor, became a clinical psychologist. Phillips, a philosophy professor, was forced to become a laborer, and Butterworth, a Chaucer scholar, was forced to live on welfare.

Subsequently, the University rejected hiring of the noted literary critic Kenneth Burke and the father of the American atomic bomb, J. Robert Oppenheimer. They had been in the running for prestigious professorships, but their alleged support of Communist "front" organizations disqualified them. Academia retaliated by ignoring for some time the university's bids to hold important conferences on campus and by withholding its esteem from many departments. Washington State had led the way in creating a state-level version of HUAC and UW was one of the first institutions to be a target of such scrutiny. The investigation and firings emboldened other schools around the country to follow suit and rid themselves of faculty with suspected Communist backgrounds.

Web Resource: *Communism in Washington State: History and Memory Project* (Chapter 6: War and Red Scare, 1940-60). Source: Pacific Northwest Labor History Project, Harry Bridges Center for Labor Studies, University of Washington (<http://depts.washington.edu/labhist/cpproject/curwick.htm>). Detailed narrative about the controversy surrounding Washington's loyalty oath and the firing of the University of Washington professors.

In Oregon during 1954 a similar academic anti-Communist drama unfolded at Portland's Reed College, which had a long-standing reputation for leftist politics among both faculty and students. President Duncan Ballantine fired Stanley Moore, a popular Marxist philosophy

professor with tenure, for failure to reveal to a HUAC investigation if he was a Communist. The renowned calligrapher Lloyd Reynolds who, like Moore, pleaded the Fifth Amendment in response to the committee's queries, was briefly suspended by Ballantine. The response from faculty and students was so intense that the campus was in danger of closure, although despite the protest Moore was never returned to his post. Only in 1981 did Reed offer Moore an apology.

Web Resource: *In the Eye of the Storm*. Reed Magazine, August 1997 (http://web.reed.edu/reed_magazine/aug1997/storm/index.html). An article about the firing of Stanley Moore from Portland's Reed College.

Another aspect of the anti-Communist crusade in the Pacific Northwest was the Smith Act trial of seven members of the International Woodworkers of America (IWA), a union descended from the radical Industrial Workers of the World (IWW). The Alien Registration Act, or Smith Act of 1940, was the first peacetime sedition legislation passed since 1798. It forbade advocacy by word or deed the overthrow of the US government.

The IWA, true to its IWW roots, was a radical union with a history since the '30s of a split between its leftist and more conservative wings. The FBI had infiltrated the union's Oregon and Washington districts and in a trial to determine if the defendants had advocated overthrow of the government as Communists, five of them were convicted. The episode devastated the IWA, especially after one of those convicted, Barbara Hartle, cooperated with HUAC in order to lighten her sentence. The resulting hearings cast a pall over the union for many years.

10. Freedom or Security

At the end of World War II, the US was the greatest power on earth, possessing the strongest military force as well as the "Ultimate Weapon," the most productive and capacious economy, and the most thoroughgoing (if glaringly imperfect) society, while the other leading nations were devastated physically and spiritually, either by defeat or, ironically, victory. The war had chased away the Depression and optimism shone in the land as young GIs came home, found good jobs or took up higher education, married and began raising families, bought homes, cars, and a variety of consumer goods they could never have afforded in the years before the war. If domestic racism remained a potent force holding back African Americans, if women found their options receding in the face of the returning soldiers from their wartime ascent to greater economic and social freedom, there were nevertheless hopeful signs everywhere that the country was becoming a better place for more citizens than ever.

Yet as the peace lengthened, it became increasingly clear that in their entire history the American people had seldom been gripped by fear as they were in the decade or so following World War II. America was isolated by its very status as the preeminent world power. Its wartime alliance with the USSR, the only other power capable of issuing a credible challenge to its hegemony, was crumbling and its other allies, Great Britain and France, were shells of their former selves. But the USSR, for a nation that had suffered perhaps more than any other as a result of the

conflict, was a vigorous menace, as much a threat to peace, democracy, and freedom as the Nazis had ever been. Moreover, it was proving to be just as ruthless, aggressive, and (apparently) thoughtless of human life as the recently defeated Germany in pursuit of its own goal of world domination. The spectacular destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki a few years earlier had illustrated what Armageddon would look like and Americans were shaken by the vision.

Although these circumstances alone probably cannot account for the rise of the anti-Communist fervor of the last years of the 1940s and early '50s, they played a powerful role in the fear that pervaded the nation. Of course, the corrective offered by Senator McCarthy, HUAC, and other Communist hunters of the day of rooting out by whatever means necessary all Communist spies from the government and society was no less irrational than the fear itself. The novelist Philip Wylie pointed out at the time that if the country somehow extirpated every Communist in the US, it

would not slow down a single Soviet reactor or alter by a jot the master schemes of the Kremlin. To feel that the whole 'fight' against communism is the relatively minor and wholly local problem of 'spies' is to be very hysterical indeed. But the emotion does serve to drain away a gigantic amount of hysterical energy in a seemingly effective effort—which actually deludes millions.

What was remarkable in this period was the relative lack of moderating influences in a nation whose entire political culture was otherwise carefully crafted and calibrated to produce a moderate climate. It is generally agreed that President Truman, try forthrightly though he did, was not up to the task politically of reining in either McCarthy or HUAC. By the same token, his successor, Dwight Eisenhower, a certified military hero and a member of McCarthy's own party, was both unwilling and seemingly unable to confront the senator directly. Although he thoroughly despised McCarthy, his tactics, and his aims, Ike was fearful of losing political support by taking him on and, in any case, found it too distasteful to talk to him in person. He tried to outflank McCarthy by appearing tough on Communism, but never was able to find the ground on which to make an open stand against him. Few of the colleagues of those in control of HUAC were able or willing to stand in their way and several of the chairmen, such as J. Parnell Thomas, ran the committee with complete disregard for the rights of witnesses they didn't like. One member, John Rankin of Alabama, was a noted anti-Semite and racist, who dominated the committee's work for several sessions of Congress. Together with McCarthy, these men operated on the principle that those they deemed subversive were not entitled to the ordinary rights accorded loyal Americans. Again, their more responsible colleagues were wary of the political vulnerability automatically accruing to those who protected even merely alleged Communists and thus regularly failed to denounce practices they knew to be unfair or illegal. Richard Nixon, for example, won his first election to the House by "red baiting" his Democratic opponent, Jerry Voorhies, whom he called soft on Communism. Likewise, he smeared his senatorial opponent of 1950, Helen Gahagan Douglas, a Democratic Congresswoman whom he labeled "the Pink Lady." She was, he said, "pink right down to her underwear," based on her voting record in Congress which, in fact, was little different from his own.

Data and Map Resources:

National Election Data: The McCarthy Era (1944-1958). Source: ICPSR. Compiled excel spreadsheets and thematic maps of the results of presidential and mid-term congressional elections, 1944 through 1958, at a national level (by county). The rise and waning of anti-communist sentiment and the political machinations of Joseph McCarthy and others can be explored using the political geography of the McCarthy era as a backdrop, including Roosevelt's landslide victory in 1944, Truman's sensational upset over Dewey in 1948, and the transfer of presidential power to the Republican party by Eisenhower's election in 1952.

The Gallup Polls, Vol. I & II (1935-1958). Compiled Excel spreadsheets and graphs/charts of selected Gallup Poll questions spanning the period from 1945-1958. Question categories include Russia, Communism (in America), McCarthy, and China. American opinions and attitudes about these topics provide a backdrop for the "Great Fear" and illustrate the rise and fall of support for McCarthy.

11. McCarthyism, the Constitution, and the Courts

If various political institutions and figures were ill-equipped to deal with McCarthy, the courts were also unable, for the most part, to help those hunted down by him or HUAC. Legislative immunity protected irresponsible lawmakers from legal actions over outrageous statements made in the course of their work and the cost and embarrassment of a protracted trial in the public eye often dissuaded even those with a viable argument against their inquisitors from taking action. Even those who pursued legal action and won cases against their accusers, like Owen Lattimore, were forever marked as suspected spies or fellow travelers. Those who lost cases, such as Alger Hiss, compounded the problems of future witnesses, whether they might be guilty or innocent. His conviction convinced many who found the whole episode distasteful that where there was smoke, there was fire.

The Great Fear represented a constitutional dilemma of major proportions. If not for the first time, the principles of free speech, freedom of assembly, and other principles of the Bill of Rights protecting individuals were weighed against the imperatives of internal security for the nation at large during the McCarthy era. The rights of individuals often suffered during these years. "We are alive to the danger Communism holds for our way of life. But we want to make the fight against it... according to the principles... in our Constitution," said Senator Herbert Lehman of New York on 2 December 1954, the day McCarthy was censured by the Senate. But this fair-minded formula had already proven easier to enunciate than practice. In the 1952 decision, *Alder v. Board of Education of New York*, the Supreme Court upheld a lower court decision validating a law that allowed state loyalty review boards to fire teachers deemed "subversive." Justice William O. Douglas wrote in dissent: "The present law proceeds on a principle repugnant to our society--guilt by association....What happens under this law is typical of what happens in a police state. Teachers are under constant surveillance; their pasts are combed for signs of disloyalty; their utterances are watched for clues to dangerous thoughts."

PDF Resource: *Adler v. Board of Education of the City of New York (1952)*. Source: FindLaw.com. Contains the text of the majority opinion and two dissenting opinions.

One of Senator McCarthy's most articulate adversaries and defender of constitutional rights was not a legal scholar, lawyer, or politician, but a media figure. Edward R. Murrow was a legendary reporter who began a tradition of great journalism at CBS News. In October 1953, Murrow broadcasted a story on his documentary show, *See It Now*, on the dismissal of Milo Radulovich, a former Air Force officer accused of associating with Communists. Murrow was highly critical of the Air Force's investigatory methods, which included presenting evidence in a sealed envelope that Radulovich and his attorney were not allowed to open. Later, in early 1954, *See It Now* broadcasted another episode on the hunt for Communists, this one assailing Senator McCarthy himself. The report, called "A Report on Senator Joseph R. McCarthy," showed footage of some of McCarthy's speeches. They portrayed him as dishonest, reckless and abusive toward ordinary witnesses as well as more prominent Americans. In wrap-up, Murrow looked into the camera and intoned now famous lines about civil liberties and the rule of law. "We must not confuse dissent with disloyalty," he said. "We must remember always that accusation is not proof and that conviction depends upon evidence and due process of law. We will not walk in fear, one of another. We will not be driven by fear into an age of unreason, if we dig deep in our history and our doctrine, and remember that we are not descended from fearful men."

PDF Resource: *Edward R. Murrow on Joseph McCarthy*, on *See It Now* (CBS-TV, March 9, 1954). Source: University of Maryland. Murrow's scathing expose on McCarthy that hailed the beginning of McCarthy's downfall. In the interest of the "fairness doctrine," McCarthy was given an equal amount of time for a rebuttal.

PDF Resource: *Senator Joseph McCarthy: Reply to Edward R. Murrow* on *See It Now* (CBS-TV, April 6, 1954). Source: University of California, Berkeley. Transcript of a televised broadcast in rebuttal to Murrow's now famous half-hour expose on McCarthy.

Web Resource: E.R. Murrow's response to McCarthy's 4/6/54 broadcast available in text, audio and video (<http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/edwardmurrowtomccarthy.htm>).

Audio/Web Resource: NPR's All Things Considered, *See It Now and McCarthy – 50 years later*. Source: NPR (<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=1753982>). Walter Cronkite narrates a look-back to the *See It Now* programs that pitted Murrow against McCarthy in March-April 1954. Available as an audio download (12:35 minutes).

Murrow's stand against what he saw as the excesses of McCarthyism are often cited as the beginning of the end of McCarthy's career and of the Great Fear itself. Still, there were legal issues to be settled and, with McCarthy's decline, the pieces of a strengthened hand for individuals in their confrontations with government over political activities began to fall into place as a result of successful court tests. An important case was that of John Henry Faulk, a radio personality who was banned from CBS radio as the result of an investigation by a private firm called AWARE, which had branded him as disloyal. Faulk sued in 1957 and won his case in 1962 in which he charged that the company was liable for damages to his professional reputation and financial well being. AWARE and similar agencies soon became relics of the past.

Book Resource: Lief, Michael S. and H. Mitchell Caldwell. 2004. *And the Walls Came Tumbling Down: Closing Arguments that Changed the Way We Live* (Chapter 3: The Enemy Within – Radio Star John

Henry Faulk Challenges the McCarthy-Era Blacklist). New York: Scribner. A thorough account of the final drama around the trial between Faulk and AWARE.

Fortuitously for those worried about the threat to civil liberties that the anti-Communist drive of the times seemed to represent, other legal challengers were handed an advantage as a result of what President Eisenhower often referred to as “his biggest mistake.” He meant by this his appointment of the former Republican governor of California, Earl Warren, to the Supreme Court. Warren and another of Ike’s appointees, William J. Brennan, Jr., were far more liberal than the President had anticipated. Together they became the foundation of a majority on the court sympathetic to those battling against what Richard Rovere, one of Joe McCarthy’s biographers, called “the rents McCarthy was making in the fabric of liberty.” “Thereupon,” he observed, “they wrote a series of decisions that have made the fabric stronger than before.” These decisions included, in 1956, *Slochower v. Board of Education*. Slochower, a Brooklyn College professor, had been fired by New York City for invoking the Fifth Amendment when McCarthy’s committee questioned him about his past membership in the Communist Party. The court overturned the dismissal, noting, “We must condemn the practice of imputing a sinister meaning to the exercise of a person’s constitutional right under the Fifth Amendment.[...] The privilege against self-incrimination would be reduced to a hollow mockery if its exercise could be taken as equivalent either to a confession of guilt or a conclusive presumption of perjury.”

Another significant decision came in a 1957 case entitled *Yates v. United States*. By its finding, the court reversed the convictions of fourteen Communists. Justice Hugo Black wrote for the majority discussing the original “Smith Act” trials. “The testimony of witnesses is comparatively insignificant. Guilt or innocence may turn on what Marx or Engels or someone else wrote or advocated as much as a hundred years or more ago....When the propriety of obnoxious or unfamiliar view about government is in reality made the crucial issue...prejudice makes conviction inevitable except in the rarest circumstances.”

Another 1957 case, *Watkins v. United States*, saw the court curb the power of HUAC to punish uncooperative witnesses by finding them in contempt of Congress. Chief Justice Warren’s opinion for the majority said, “The mere summoning of a witness and compelling him to testify, against his will, about his beliefs, expressions or associations is a measure of governmental interference. And when those forced revelations concern matters that are unorthodox, unpopular, or even hateful to the general public, the reaction in the life of the witness may be disastrous.”

The following year, the Supreme Court in *Kent v. Dulles*, held that Kent was wrongfully refused a passport because of his past Communist affiliation. The right to travel, the majority said, was an inherent element of “liberty” that cannot be denied to American citizens. The Executive could police the travel practices of citizens, by requiring them to obtain a valid passport, but it was barred from conditioning the fulfillment of such a requirement on a rule that abridged basic constitutional concepts of liberty, assembly, association, and personal autonomy.

These decisions by no means put an end to the constitutional questions raised by anti-Communist crusade of the immediate post-World War II era. Indeed, many of the same or similar issues have cropped up in the time since Senator McCarthy dominated the nation’s political life.

However, these decisions and others were in some sense responsible for dissipating much of the zealotry associated with the federal government's pursuit of those its minions deemed subversive.

PDF Resource: *Slochow v. Board of Education, 1956.* Source: Justia – US Supreme Court Center. Transcript of the majority opinion.

PDF Resource: *Yates v. United States, 1957.* Source: Justia - US Supreme Court Center. Transcript of the Judge Hugo Black's opinion.

PDF Resource: *Watkins v. United States, 1957.* Source: Justia – US Supreme Court Center. Transcript of Chief Justice Warren's opinion.

PDF Resource: *Kent v. Dulles, 1958.* Source: Justia – US Supreme Court Center. Transcript of Judge Douglas' opinion.

In the end, the Great Fear followed almost precisely the arc of Joe McCarthy's career. All of the other players were in supporting roles; Tail Gunner Joe was at center stage. When the nation learned to live however uncomfortably with the specter of Soviet Communism, rather than in a state of perpetual agitation over its very existence, its fear subsided and Hobson's choice of freedom or security became less stark, even if it didn't disappear completely. Meanwhile, McCarthy and his supporting cast were largely forgotten.

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Films

"Citizen Cohn" – a film biography of Joe McCarthy's chief investigator, a larger-than-life figure in his own right.

"Fear on Trial" – the story of John Henry Faulk, who sued over the blacklist for defamation and won, thus breaking it.

"The Front" – Woody Allen's study of a man who poses as blacklisted writers during the McCarthy era.

“Good Night and Good Luck” – the recent George Clooney film about the confrontation of Ed Murrow and McCarthy.

“High Noon” – Gary Cooper, ironically a cooperative witness for HUAC, plays a heroic lawman facing down irrational enemies alone, having been abandoned by his otherwise upstanding fellow citizens, not to mention his own wife.

“Hollywood on Trial” – a documentary on the blacklist.

“Invasion of the Body Snatchers” – Open to interpretation as an allegory on McCarthyism.

“The Manchurian Candidate” – a comic presentation of McCarthyism; high camp with a chilling point.

“On the Waterfront” – Elia Kazan, the director, had testified before HUAC and damaged the lives and careers of colleagues. This movie, in which Marlon Brando portrays a dock worker who feels he must inform on friends in a corrupt union, is an amalgam of great acting, directing, and soul-baring self-justification by Kazan.

“Point of Order” – probably the most famous documentary on McCarthyism.

“Rear Window” – an Alfred Hitchcock classic in which the themes of voyeurism and paranoia—the apparent classic ingredients of McCarthyism—are explored, at the height of the Red Scare.

“Tail Gunner Joe” – a 1977 primetime dramatization of the life of Sen. Joseph McCarthy.

“The Way We Were” – Robert Redford and Barbra Streisand star in a schmaltzy romantic drama about a Hollywood writer in the era of the blacklist.

Novels, Plays, Other Works of Fiction

E.L. Doctrow’s “The Book of Daniel” – a *roman a clef* about the Rosenberg family which follows their two sons through their lives after the execution of their parents.

Arthur Miller’s “The Crucible” – the famous often performed allegorical dramatization of the Salem witch trials and their obvious parallels to the so-called witch hunt atmosphere of the 1950s.