

Section 3

The Cold War and American Society

Guide to Reading

Big Ideas

Struggles for Rights 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.

Content Vocabulary

- subversion (p. 546)
- loyalty review program (p. 546)
- perjury (p. 548)
- censure (p. 550)
- fallout (p. 553)

Academic Vocabulary

- manipulate (p. 547)
- convince (p. 548)

People and Events to Identify

- Red Scare (p. 546)
- Alger Hiss (p. 548)
- McCarran Act (p. 550)
- McCarthyism (p. 550)

Reading Strategy

Summarizing As you read, summarize the section content by using the major headings 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.

TENNESSEE STANDARDS United States History

Performance Indicators State:

9.6 Recognize domestic impact of the Cold War on American society (i.e., McCarthyism, fear, conformity, counterculture, generation gap, highway system, consumerism).

Fearing subversive activity, the government tried to root out Communists in government, Hollywood, and labor unions, while Americans learned to live with the threat of nuclear attack.

A New Red Scare

MAIN Idea Public accusations and trials followed in the wake of fears of communism and spies.

HISTORY AND YOU Do you remember reading about the fears of communism during the early twentieth century? Read on to learn of a second major scare in the 1950s.

During the 1950s, thousands of ordinary people—from teachers to autoworkers to high government officials—shared a disturbing experience. Rumors and accusations of Communists in the United States and of Communist infiltration of the government tapped into fears that 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 weaken a society secretly and overthrow its 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 to increase the fear of communism sweeping the nation.

Between 1947 and 1951, more than 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 scrutiny by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI). Some 2,000 employees quit their jobs

The Hunt for Spies, 1947–1954

▲ **Hiss v. Chambers, 1948**

In 1948, Whittaker Chambers, a *TIME* magazine editor and former Communist Party member, testified that U.S. diplomat Alger Hiss was a Communist. Hiss denied being a spy or a member of the Communist Party. Evidence provided by Chambers led to Hiss being convicted of perjury.

▲ **Loyalty and Dissent, Oppenheimer, 1953**

Although he had led the effort to develop the atomic bomb, Dr. Robert Oppenheimer's left-wing views and opposition to the hydrogen bomb led to the suspension of his security clearance and controversial public hearings.

Analyzing VISUALS

- 1. Summarizing** What were the Rosenbergs accused of and what was the result?
- 2. Explaining** Why was Robert Oppenheimer's security clearance suspended?

▶ **The Rosenbergs Are Convicted, 1950**

In 1950 the hunt for spies who had given U.S. nuclear secrets to the Soviets led to the arrest of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg. Accused of running a Soviet spy network, the Rosenbergs became the first civilians executed for espionage in 1953. Their case was controversial and led to public protests.



during the check, many under pressure. Another 212 were fired for "questionable loyalty," although no actual evidence against them was uncovered.

House Un-American Activities Committee (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 minor committee until Hoover expanded its importance.

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." 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.

Hollywood on Trial One of HUAC's first hearings in 1947 focused on the film industry as a powerful cultural force that Communists might **manipulate** to spread their ideas and influence. HUAC's interviews routinely began, "Are you now, or have you ever been, a member of the Communist Party?" Future American president Ronald Reagan was head of the Screen Actors Guild at the time and, when called before HUAC, he testified that there were Communists in Hollywood.

During the hearings, ten screenwriters, known as the “Hollywood Ten,” used their Fifth Amendment right to protect themselves from self-incrimination and refused to testify. The incident led producers to blacklist, or agree not to hire, anyone who was believed to be a Communist or who refused to cooperate with the committee. In 1950 a pamphlet called *Red Channels* was published, listing 151 blacklisted actors, directors, broadcasters, and screenwriters. The blacklist created an atmosphere of distrust and fear.

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 official named by Chambers was **Alger Hiss**, a 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 had given 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. 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 Hiss was lying. A jury agreed and convicted Hiss of **perjury**, or lying under oath.

The Rosenbergs Another sensational spy case centered on accusations that American Communists had sold the secrets of the atomic bomb to the Soviets. 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 a British scientist who admitted sending information to the Soviet Union. After hearing his testimony, the FBI arrested 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 of being spies. There was, however, solid evidence of Soviet espionage, although very few Americans knew it at the time. In 1946 American and British 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 collected using Project Venona confirmed extensive Soviet spying and an ongoing effort to steal nuclear secrets. The government did not reveal Project Venona’s existence until 1995. The Venona documents provided strong evidence that the Rosenbergs were indeed guilty.

The Red Scare Spreads

Following the federal government’s example, many state and local governments, universities, businesses, unions, churches, and private organizations 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 anti-Communist and urged their members to identify Communists within the Church.

The Taft-Hartley Act of 1947 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?

McCarthyism

MAIN Idea Senator Joseph R. McCarthy used the fear of communism to increase his own power and destroy the reputations of many people.

HISTORY AND YOU Have you ever known anyone who spread untrue stories about others? Read on to find out about the false accusations that Senator McCarthy spread in the early 1950s.

In 1949 the Red Scare intensified even further. In 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 to know 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:

PRIMARY SOURCE

"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."

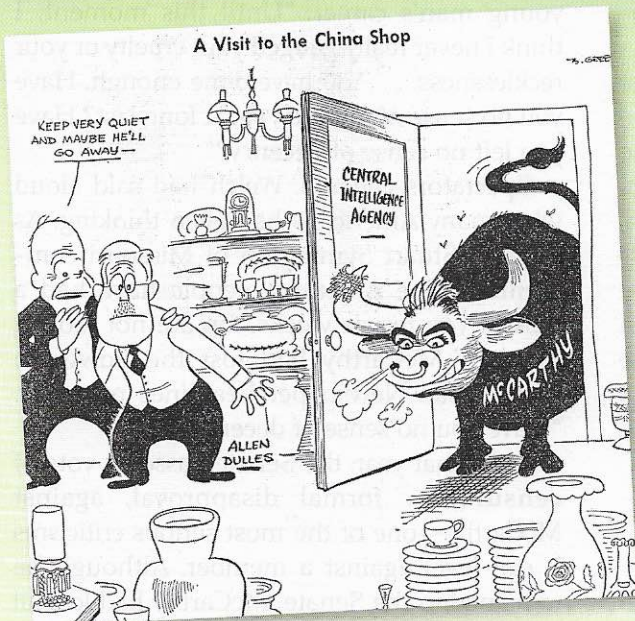
—quoted in *The Fifties*

The Associated Press picked up the statement and sent it to newspapers nationwide. While at an airport, reporters asked McCarthy to see his list of Communists. McCarthy replied that he would be happy to show it to them, but unfortunately, it was in his bag on the plane. In fact, the list never appeared. McCarthy, however, continued to make charges and draw attention.

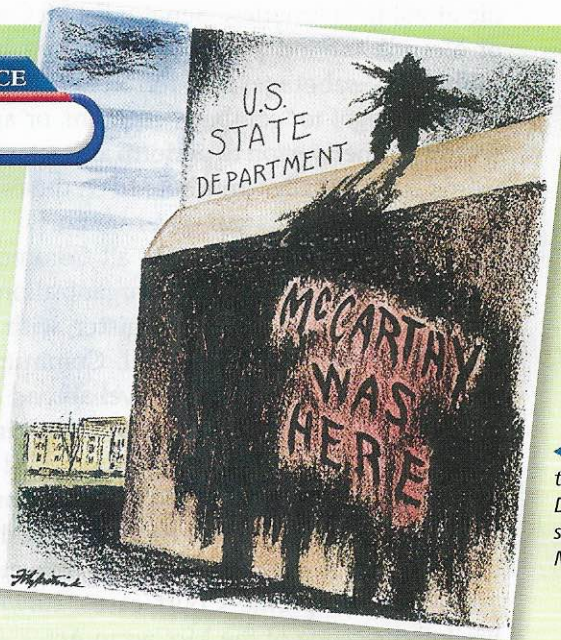
McCarthy's use of sensationalist charges was not new. When he ran for the Senate in 1946, he accused his opponent, Robert M. La Follette, Jr., of being "communistically inclined." McCarthy did not provide any evidence to support his accusation, but it helped him win the election.

POLITICAL CARTOONS PRIMARY SOURCE

McCarthyism



▲ President Eisenhower and CIA Director Allen Dulles try not to make any noise in the hope that the "bull," Joe McCarthy, will go away without doing much damage.



◀ The wall of the U.S. State Department is smeared by McCarthy.

Analyzing VISUALS

1. **Explaining** What does the cartoon on the left imply about President Eisenhower's leadership during the McCarthy era?
2. **Assessing** Which cartoon do you think is more critical of McCarthy? Why?

After becoming a senator, McCarthy continued to proclaim that Communists were a danger both at home and abroad. To some 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 also 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."

McCarthy was not alone in making such charges. In the prevailing mood of anxiety about communism, many Americans were ready to believe them.

The McCarran Act

In 1950, with the Korean War underway and McCarthy and others arousing fears of Communist spies, Congress passed the Internal Security Act, usually called the **McCarran Act**. Declaring that "world Communism has as its sole purpose the establishment of a totalitarian dictatorship in America," Senator Pat McCarran of Nevada offered a way to fight "treachery, infiltration, sabotage, and terrorism." The act made it illegal to "combine, conspire, or agree with any other person to perform any act which would substantially contribute to . . . the establishment of a totalitarian government."

The McCarran Act required all Communist Party and "Communist-front" organizations to publish their records and register with the United States attorney general. Communists could not have passports to travel abroad and, in cases of a national emergency, Communists and Communist sympathizers could be arrested and detained. Unwilling to punish people for their opinions, Truman vetoed the bill, but Congress easily overrode his veto in 1950. Later Supreme Court cases, however, limited the scope of the McCarran Act.

McCarthy's Tactics

After the Republicans won control of Congress in 1952, McCarthy became chairman of the Senate subcommittee on investigations. Using the power of his committee to force government officials to testify about alleged

Communist influences, McCarthy turned the investigation into a witch hunt—a search for disloyalty based on flimsy evidence and irrational fears. His tactic of damaging reputations with vague and unfounded charges became known as **McCarthyism**.

McCarthy's sensational accusations drew the attention of the press, which put him in the headlines and quoted him widely. When he questioned witnesses, McCarthy would badger them and then refuse to accept their answers. His tactics left a cloud of suspicion that McCarthy and others interpreted as guilt. Furthermore, people were afraid to challenge him for fear of becoming targets themselves.


McCarthy's Downfall

In 1954 McCarthy began to look for Soviet spies in the United States Army. During weeks of televised Army-McCarthy hearings, millions of Americans watched McCarthy question and bully officers, harassing them about trivial details and accusing them of misconduct. His popular support began to fade.

Finally, to strike back at the army's lawyer, Joseph Welch, McCarthy brought up the past of a young lawyer in Welch's firm who had been a member of a Communist-front organization while in law school. Welch, who was fully aware of the young man's past, now exploded at McCarthy for possibly ruining the young man's career: "Until this moment, I think I never really gauged your cruelty or your recklessness. . . . You have done enough. Have you no sense of decency, sir, at long last? Have you left no sense of decency?"

Spectators cheered. Welch had said aloud what many Americans had been thinking. As Senator Stuart Symington of Missouri commented, "The American people have had a look at you for six weeks. You are not fooling anyone." McCarthy had lost the power to arouse fear. Newspaper headlines repeated: "Have you no sense of decency?"

Later that year, the Senate passed a vote of **censure**, or formal disapproval, against McCarthy—one of the most serious criticisms it can level against a member. Although he remained in the Senate, McCarthy had lost all influence. He died in 1957.

 **Reading Check** **Evaluating** What were the effects of McCarthyism?

Life During the Early Cold War

MAIN Idea Obsessed with fear of a nuclear attack, many Americans took steps to protect themselves.

HISTORY AND YOU Have you ever felt the need to protect yourself from something dangerous or scary? Read to learn more about how Americans tried to deal with their fears during the early 1950s.

The Red Scare and the spread of nuclear weapons had a profound impact on American life in the 1950s. Fear of communism and of nuclear war affected the thinking and choices of many ordinary Americans, as well as their leaders in government. Some Americans responded by preparing to survive a nuclear

attack, while others became active in politics in an effort to shape government policy. Writers responded by describing the dangers of atomic war and the threat of communism—sometimes to convince people to take action and sometimes to protest policies they feared might lead to war.

Facing the Bomb

Already upset by the first Soviet atomic test in 1949, Americans were shocked when the Soviets again successfully tested the much more powerful hydrogen bomb, or H-bomb, in 1953. The United States had tested its own H-bomb less than a year earlier.

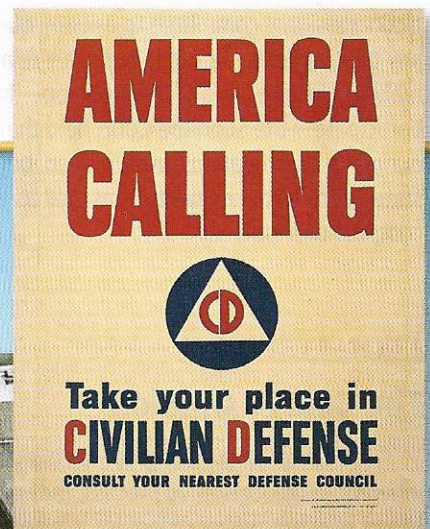
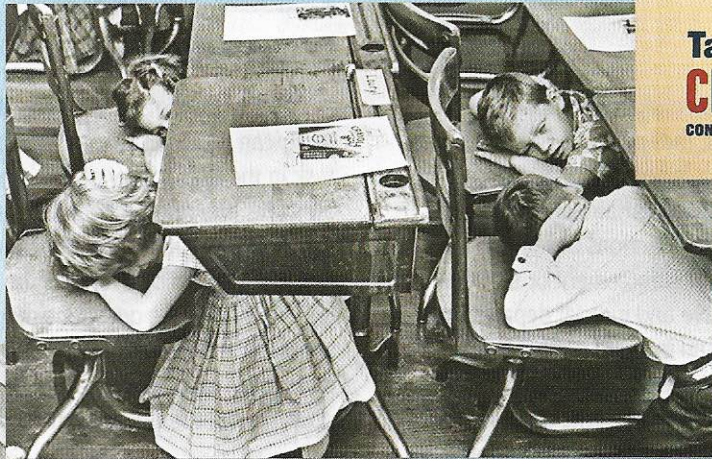
Americans prepared for a surprise Soviet attack. Schools set aside special areas as bomb shelters. In bomb drills, students learned to

PRIMARY SOURCE

Living with the Bomb in the 1950s

The Cold War convinced many in American society that they needed to be prepared to survive a nuclear attack. While authorities made Civil Defense plans, individuals took it upon themselves to build bomb shelters and stockpile supplies.

► In the 1950s school children took part in “duck-and-cover” drills designed to give them a chance at surviving a nuclear blast if they were far enough from the epicenter.



▲ The Civil Defense Agency set up bomb shelters in cities, and made plans to assist survivors after an attack. Today the Civil Defense Agency is known as FEMA—the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

◀ Some Americans invested in personal bomb shelters stocked with food to allow them to survive a bomb blast and the radiation that would follow.

Analyzing VISUALS

- 1. Explaining** What was the purpose of the “duck-and-cover” drills and bomb shelters?
- 2. Making Inferences** Even if some preparations would not work, why might the government have wanted people to prepare for war?



Section 3 REVIEW

duck under their desks, turn away from the windows, and cover their heads with their hands. These “duck-and-cover” actions were supposed to protect them from a nuclear bomb blast.

Although “duck-and-cover” might have made people feel safe, it would not have protected them from deadly nuclear radiation. According to experts, for every person killed outright by a nuclear blast, four more would die later from **fallout**, the radiation left over after a blast. To protect themselves, some families built backyard fallout shelters and stocked them with canned food.

Popular Culture in the Cold War

Worries about nuclear war and Communist infiltration filled the public’s imagination. Cold War themes soon appeared in films, plays, television, the titles of dance tunes, and popular fiction.

In 1953 Arthur Miller’s thinly veiled criticism of the Communist witchhunts, *The Crucible*, appeared on Broadway. The play remains popular today as a cautionary tale about how hysteria can lead to false accusations. Matt Cvetic was an FBI undercover informant who secretly infiltrated the Communist Party in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. His story captivated magazine readers in the *Saturday Evening Post* in 1950 and came to movie screens the next year as *I Was a Communist for the FBI*. Another suspense film, *Walk East on Beacon* (1951), features the FBI’s activities in an espionage case.

In 1953 television took up the theme with a series about an undercover FBI counterspy who was also a Communist Party official. Each week, *I Led Three Lives* kept television viewers on edge. Popular tunes such as “Atomic Boogie” and “Atom Bomb Baby” played on the radio.

In 1954 author Philip Wylie published *Tomorrow!* This novel describes the horrific effects of nuclear war on an unprepared American city. As an adviser on civil defense, Wylie had failed to convince the federal government to play a strong role in building bomb shelters. Frustrated, he wrote his novel to educate the public about the horrors of atomic war.

One of the most famous and enduring works of this period is John Hersey’s nonfiction book *Hiroshima*. Originally published as the entire contents of the August 1946 edition of *The New Yorker* magazine, the book provides the firsthand accounts of six survivors of the U.S. dropping of the atomic bomb on Hiroshima, Japan. Not only did it make some Americans question the use of the bomb, *Hiroshima* also underscored the real and personal horrors of a nuclear attack.

At the same time that these fears were haunting Americans, the country was enjoying postwar prosperity and optimism. That spirit, combined with McCarthyism, fears of Communist infiltration, and the threat of atomic attack, made the early 1950s a time of contrasts. As the 1952 election approached, Americans were looking for someone or something that would make them feel secure.

Reading Check **Describing** How did the Cold War affect life in the 1950s?

Vocabulary

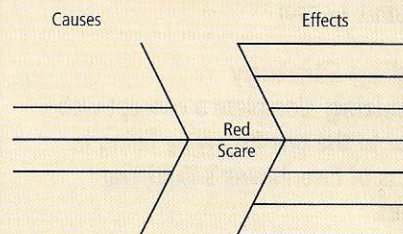
- 1. Explain** the significance of: Red Scare, subversion, loyalty review program, Alger Hiss, perjury, McCarran Act, McCarthyism, censure, fallout.

Main Ideas

- 2. Explaining** What was the result of President Truman’s loyalty review program?
- 3. Analyzing** Hearings to investigate Communist subversion in what organization led to McCarthy’s downfall?
- 4. Identifying** What event made Americans fearful of a nuclear attack by the Soviets?

Critical Thinking

- 5. Big Ideas** How did the Red Scare and McCarthyism change American society and government?
- 6. Organizing** Use a graphic organizer similar to the one below to list the causes and effects of the Red Scare of the 1950s.



- 7. Analyzing Visuals** Study the cartoons on page 549. Which cartoon do you think makes the stronger point? Explain.

Writing About History

- 8. Persuasive Writing** Suppose that you are a newspaper editor during the Army-McCarthy hearings. Write an editorial giving reasons why people should support or condemn Senator McCarthy.

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