

Reading Essentials and Study Guide



The Cold War Begins, 1945–1960

Lesson 3 The Cold War and American Society

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

How did the Cold War shape postwar international relations? How did Cold War tensions affect American society?

Reading HELPDESK

Academic Vocabulary

***manipulate** to operate or arrange manually to achieve a desired

***convince** to bring to belief, consent, or a course of action

Content Vocabulary

subversion a systematic attempt to overthrow a government by using persons working secretly from within

loyalty review program a policy established by President Truman that authorized the screening of all federal employees to determine their loyalty to the U.S. government

perjury lying when one has sworn under oath to tell the truth

censure to express a formal disapproval of an action

fallout radioactive particles dispersed by a nuclear explosion

TAKING NOTES: *Organizing*

ACTIVITY As you read, summarize the lesson content by using the major headings to create an outline similar to the one below.

<p>The Cold War and American Society</p> <p>I. A New Red Scare</p> <p> A. The Loyalty Review Program</p> <p> B.</p> <p> C.</p> <p>II.</p> <p> A.</p> <p> B.</p> <p>III.</p> <p> A.</p> <p> B.</p>

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IT MATTERS BECAUSE

The government was worried about people trying to hurt the United States. It tried to root out any Communists in government, Hollywood, and labor unions. At the same time, Americans learned to live with the threat of nuclear attack.

A New Red Scare

Guiding Question *How did the post-World War II Red Scare compare and contrast with the one that followed World War I?*

During the 1950s, rumors and accusations led to fears that Communists were trying to take over the world. In September 1945, a clerk named Igor Gouzenko walked out of the Soviet Embassy in Ottawa, Canada. He had defected from the Soviet Union. Gouzenko had documents that showed the Soviets were trying to infiltrate Canadian and U.S. agencies. The Soviets wanted information about the atomic bomb. This was the beginning of the Red Scare. The documents suggested that spies had infiltrated the U.S. government. This shocked Americans. Soon the search for spies grew into a general fear of Communist **subversion**, or effort to weaken a society and overthrow its government.

The Truman Loyalty Review Program

In early 1947, President Truman started a **loyalty review program**. This program checked, or screened, the loyalty of all federal employees in the U.S. government. Truman's establishment of this program seemed to confirm suspicions that Communists had infiltrated the government. The public's fear that communism was sweeping the nation increased. Between 1947 and 1951, more than six million federal employees were screened for loyalty—a difficult idea to define. A person might become a suspect for reading certain books or belonging to various groups. Someone could also become a suspect for traveling overseas or watching certain foreign films. The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) looked closely at around 14,000 people. About 2,000 quit their jobs. Many of these people did so under pressure. Another 212 were fired for “questionable loyalty” even though there was not any actual proof.

HUAC and Anti-Communist Investigations

FBI director J. Edgar Hoover was not satisfied with these results. In 1947, he went before the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC). This group was formed in 1938 to look into activities that could be harmful to the United States. HUAC had been a minor committee before Hoover's involvement. He urged HUAC to hold public hearings to root out not just Communists, but also “Communist sympathizers,” and “fellow travelers.” Under Hoover's leadership, the FBI sent agents to work undercover in groups thought to be subversive. Agents also listened in on thousands of telephone conversations.

Hollywood on Trial One of HUAC's first hearings in 1947 focused on the film industry. HUAC looked at film as a cultural force that Communists might **manipulate** to spread their ideas and influence. Future U.S. president Ronald Reagan was head of the Screen Actors Guild at the time. When called before HUAC, he testified that there were Communists in Hollywood. During the hearings, ten screenwriters used their Fifth Amendment right to protect themselves from self-incrimination. They refused to testify. This group became known as the “Hollywood Ten.” The incident led producers to blacklist, or agree not to hire, anyone who might possibly be a Communist. Producers also blacklisted those who refused to cooperate with the committee. The blacklist created an atmosphere of distrust and fear.

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The logo for 'networks' features the word 'networks' in a bold, lowercase sans-serif font. A stylized graphic of intersecting lines forms a starburst or network pattern behind the letter 'o'.

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Alger Hiss Whittaker Chambers was a magazine editor and former Communist Party member. In 1948, he told HUAC that several government officials were also former Communists or spies. One official Chambers named was Alger Hiss. Hiss was a diplomat who had been part of Roosevelt’s administration. In this role, he had attended the Yalta Conference and had helped organize the United Nations. Hiss sued Chambers for libel. In spite of that, Chambers testified to HUAC that, in 1937 and 1938, Hiss had given him secret State Department documents. Hiss denied that he was a spy or a member of the Communist Party. He also denied that he knew Chambers.

The committee was ready to drop the investigation. But then California representative Richard Nixon **convinced** his coworkers to continue the hearings to find out who had lied. Chambers turned in copies of secret documents. He also had microfilm that he had hidden in a hollow pumpkin. The secret papers and microfilm became known as the “pumpkin papers.” These “pumpkin papers,” Chambers claimed, proved Hiss was lying. A jury agreed and convicted Hiss of **perjury**, or lying under oath.

The Rosenbergs Another spy case centered on accusations that U.S. Communists had sold secrets about the atomic bomb to the Soviets. These secrets could have helped them build a bomb in 1949. In 1950, the hunt for spies led to the arrest of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg. This New York couple belonged to the Communist Party. The government charged them with spying for the Soviets.

The Rosenbergs denied the charges. They were sentenced to death for spying. Many people believed that the Rosenbergs were victims caught in the wave of anti-communism. Appeals and pleas for mercy failed, however, and the couple was executed in June 1953.

Project Venona In 1946, U.S. and British cryptographers were working on a project code-named “Venona.” They figured out the Soviet Union’s spy code. This made it possible to read about 3,000 messages between Moscow and the United States that were collected during the Cold War. The large number of messages proved how often Soviet spying had happened. The content of the messages revealed ongoing efforts by the Soviets to steal nuclear secrets. The government did not tell anyone about Project Venona until 1995. The Venona documents gave strong evidence that the Rosenbergs were indeed guilty.

The Red Scare Spreads

Many state and local governments, universities, businesses, unions, churches, and private groups also began efforts to find Communists. The University of California made its teachers take loyalty oaths. The school fired 157 who refused. Many Catholic groups became anti-Communist. They urged their members to report Communists within the Church. The Taft-Hartley Act of 1947 made union leaders take oaths saying that they were not Communists. Many union leaders did not object. Instead, they started to remove suspected Communists from their own organizations. Eventually federated union leadership banned 11 unions that would not remove Communist leaders.

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Reading Progress Check

Comparing and Contrasting What was one way that the Red Scare of the 1950s and the Red Scare of the 1920s were similar?

McCarthyism

Guiding Question *Why did many Americans believe Senator McCarthy's accusations?*

In 1949, the Red Scare grew when the Soviet Union successfully tested an atomic bomb. That same year, China fell to communism. To many Americans, these events seemed to prove that the United States was losing the Cold War.

In February 1950, little-known senator Joseph R. McCarthy gave a speech to a Republican women's group. He claimed to have a list of more than 200 Communists who were working in the State Department. The Associated Press sent the statement nationwide. Reporters at an airport asked McCarthy for an opportunity to see his list. McCarthy agreed to share the list. Although he never did, he continued to make charges.

McCarthy stated that Communists were a danger in the United States and abroad. He gave out a booklet accusing Democratic Party leaders of corruption and of protecting Communists. McCarthy often targeted Secretary of State Dean Acheson. McCarthy said Acheson was ineffective in his job and a tool of Stalin. He also accused George C. Marshall, former army chief of staff and secretary of state, of disloyalty. People's fears about communism made many Americans willing to accept McCarthy's claims.

The McCarran Act

In 1950, McCarthy and others stirred up fears of Communist spies. That year Congress passed the Internal Security Act, also called the McCarran Act. The act made it illegal to try to set up a dictator-run government in the United States. It required all Communist-related organizations to publish their records. These organizations also had to register with the U.S. attorney general. Communists could not have passports. In cases of a national emergency, Communists could be arrested and put in jail. Truman was not willing to punish people for their opinions and vetoed the bill. But Congress easily overrode his veto in 1950. Later Supreme Court cases limited the power of the McCarran Act.

McCarthy's Rise and Fall

In 1953, McCarthy became chairman of the Senate subcommittee on investigations. The subcommittee forced government officials to testify about suspected Communist influences. Investigations became witch-hunts—searches for disloyalty based on weak evidence and fears. McCarthy's practice of harming reputations with vague or unfounded charges became known as McCarthyism.

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McCarthy's shocking claims put him in the headlines. The press quoted him often and widely. He questioned witnesses harshly and then would not accept their answers. His way of questioning left a cloud of suspicion that he and others interpreted as guilt. People were afraid to challenge him.

In 1954, McCarthy began to look for Soviet spies in the U.S. Army. During weeks of televised hearings, millions of Americans watched McCarthy question and bully officers. McCarthy harassed them about minor details and accused them of misconduct. His popular support began to fade.

Joseph Welch was the army's lawyer. At one of the televised hearings, 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 knew about the young man's past, got angry at McCarthy for possibly ruining the young man's career.

People watching the conversation cheered. Welch had said what many Americans had been thinking. Later that year, the Senate passed a vote of **censure**, or formal disapproval, against McCarthy. He lost all influence in the Senate. He died in 1957.



Reading Progress Check

Assessing Why were people prepared to accept McCarthy's claims?

Life During the Early Cold War

Guiding Question *How did fears of nuclear war affect American society?*

The Red Scare and the spread of nuclear weapons had a great impact on U.S. life in the 1950s. Fears of communism and war affected both ordinary Americans and government leaders.

Facing the Bomb

Americans were shocked when the Soviets successfully tested a more powerful hydrogen bomb, or H-bomb, in 1953. The United States had tested its own H-bomb less than a year earlier. Americans got ready for a surprise Soviet attack. Schools built bomb shelters and held bomb drills to teach students to "duck-and-cover" to protect themselves.

"Duck-and-cover" may have made people feel safer. But it would not have saved them from nuclear radiation. For every person killed during a nuclear blast, four more would die later from **fallout**. Fallout is the radiation that stays after a blast. To protect themselves, some families built their own fallout shelters.

Popular Culture in the Cold War

The idea of a nuclear war and a Communist takeover worried the public. Cold War themes soon appeared in films, plays, television, music, and popular fiction. Matt Cvetic joined the Communist Party in order to work undercover for the FBI. He wrote a series of popular reports in the *Saturday Evening Post* in 1950. His story was later made into the movie *I Was a Communist for the FBI* (1951).

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Another film, *Walk East on Beacon* (1952), features the FBI's activities in a spy case. In 1953 *The Crucible* appeared on Broadway. This Arthur Miller story criticized the Communist witch hunts of the time. The play remains popular today as a warning tale about how emotions such as fear or anger can get out of control and lead to false accusations.

In 1953, a weekly television series called *I Led Three Lives* started. It was about an undercover FBI counterspy who was also a Communist Party official. Popular songs such as "Atomic Boogie" and "Atom Bomb Baby" played on the radio. The next year, author Philip Wylie published *Tomorrow!* This novel described the horrific effects of nuclear war on an unprepared U.S. city. Wylie wrote his novel to tell the public about the horrors of atomic war.

One of the most famous and lasting works of this period is John Hersey's nonfiction book *Hiroshima*. It was first published as the August 1946 edition of *The New Yorker* magazine. The book gives six original descriptions of the bombing of Hiroshima, Japan. *Hiroshima* talked about the real, personal horrors of a nuclear attack. It made some Americans question the use of the bomb.

At the same time, the country was enjoying postwar wealth and contentment. That feeling, combined with McCarthyism, fears of communism, and the threat of atomic attack, made the early 1950s a time of contrasts. The 1952 election was coming. Americans were looking for someone or something that would make them feel secure.



Reading Progress Check

Analyzing How did the Cold War affect popular culture in the 1950s?
