

# The Cold War at Home

## MAIN IDEA

During the late 1940s and early 1950s, fear of communism led to reckless charges against innocent citizens.

## WHY IT MATTERS NOW

Americans today remain vigilant about unfounded accusations.

## Terms & Names

- HUAC
- Hollywood Ten
- blacklist
- Alger Hiss
- Ethel and Julius Rosenberg
- Joseph McCarthy
- McCarthyism

## One American's Story

Tony Kahn made the neighbors uncomfortable because they thought his father, Gordon Kahn, was a Communist. In 1947, Gordon Kahn was a successful screenwriter. However, when a congressional committee began to investigate Communists in Hollywood, Kahn was blacklisted—named as unfit to hire. Later, in 1951, he was scheduled to testify before the committee himself.

To save himself, Gordon Kahn simply had to name others as Communists, but he refused. Rather than face the congressional committee, he fled to Mexico. Tony Kahn remembers how the Cold War hurt him and his family.



Tony Kahn

### A PERSONAL VOICE TONY KAHN

“The first time I was called a Communist, I was four years old. . . . I’ll never forget the look in our neighbors’ eyes when I walked by. I thought it was hate. I was too young to realize it was fear.”

—from *The Cold War Comes Home*

The members of the Kahn family were among thousands of victims of the anti-Communist hysteria that gripped this country in the late 1940s and early 1950s. By the end of the period, no one was immune from accusations.



VIDEO

**THE COLD WAR  
COMES HOME**  
**Hollywood  
Blacklists the  
Kahn Family**

## Fear of Communist Influence

In the early years of the Cold War, many Americans believed that there was good reason to be concerned about the security of the United States. The Soviet domination of Eastern Europe and the Communist takeover of China shocked the American public, fueling a fear that communism would spread around the world. In addition, at the height of World War II, about 100,000 Americans claimed membership in the Communist Party. Some people feared that the first loyalty of these American Communists was to the Soviet Union.

**LOYALTY REVIEW BOARD** Strongly anti-Communist Republicans began to accuse Truman of being soft on communism. Consequently, in March 1947, President Truman issued an executive order setting up the Federal Employee Loyalty Program, which included the Loyalty Review Board. Its purpose was to investigate government employees and to dismiss those who were found to be disloyal to the U.S. government. The U.S. attorney general drew up a list of 91 “subversive” organizations; membership in any of these groups was grounds for suspicion.

From 1947 to 1951, government loyalty boards investigated 3.2 million employees and dismissed 212 as security risks. Another 2,900 resigned because they did not want to be investigated or felt that the investigation violated their constitutional rights. Individuals under investigation were not allowed to see the evidence against them. **A**

**MAIN IDEA**

**Drawing Conclusions**

**A** How did the Loyalty Review Board pose a threat to civil liberties?

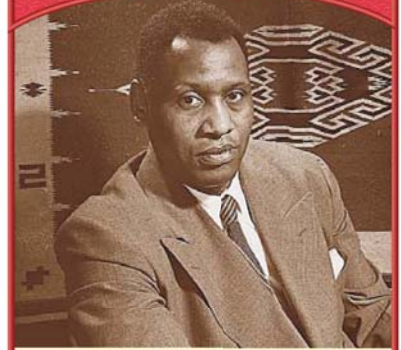
**THE HOUSE UN-AMERICAN ACTIVITIES COMMITTEE**

Other agencies investigated possible Communist influence, both inside and outside the U.S. government. The most famous of these was the **House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC)**. HUAC first made headlines in 1947, when it began to investigate Communist influence in the movie industry. The committee believed that Communists were sneaking propaganda into films. The committee pointed to the pro-Soviet films made during World War II when the Soviet Union had been a United States ally.

HUAC subpoenaed 43 witnesses from the Hollywood film industry in September 1947. Many of the witnesses were “friendly,” supporting the accusation that Communists had infiltrated the film industry. For example, the movie star Gary Cooper said he had “turned down quite a few scripts because I thought they were tinged with Communistic ideas.” However, when asked which scripts he meant, Cooper couldn’t remember their titles.

Ten “unfriendly” witnesses were called to testify but refused. These men, known as the **Hollywood Ten**, decided not to cooperate because they believed that the hearings were unconstitutional. Because the Hollywood Ten refused to answer questions, they were sent to prison.

**HISTORICAL SPOTLIGHT**



**PAUL ROBESON**

Paul Robeson was an all-American football player and Phi Beta Kappa member at Rutgers University. After earning a law degree in 1923, he began a distinguished international career as a singer and actor. He was a vocal civil rights activist, and he was sympathetic to the Soviet culture and political philosophy.

In 1950, when he refused to sign an affidavit indicating whether he had ever been a member of the Communist Party, the State Department revoked his passport for eight years. During that time, he was unable to perform abroad and was blacklisted at home. His income fell from \$150,000 a year to \$3,000 a year.

**Protesters demonstrate in support of the Hollywood Ten.**



In response to the hearings, Hollywood executives instituted a **blacklist**, a list of people whom they condemned for having a Communist background. People who were blacklisted—approximately 500 actors, writers, producers, and directors—had their careers ruined because they could no longer work. **B**

**THE MCCARRAN ACT** As Hollywood tried to rid itself of Communists, Congress decided that Truman’s Loyalty Review Board did not go far enough. In 1950, Congress passed the McCarran Internal Security Act. This made it unlawful to plan any action that might lead to the establishment of a totalitarian dictatorship in the United States. Truman vetoed the bill, saying, “In a free country, we punish men for the crimes they commit, but never for the opinions they have.” But Congress enacted the law over Truman’s veto.

**MAIN IDEA**

**Analyzing Causes**

**B** Why was Hollywood a target of anti-Communist investigations by Congress?

## Spy Cases Stun the Nation

Two spy cases added to fear that was spreading like an epidemic across the country. One case involved a former State Department official named Alger Hiss.

**ALGER HISS** In 1948, a former Communist spy named Whittaker Chambers accused **Alger Hiss** of spying for the Soviet Union. To support his charges, Chambers produced microfilm of government documents that he claimed had been typed on Hiss’s typewriter. Too many years had passed for government prosecutors to charge Hiss with espionage, but a jury convicted him of perjury—for lying about passing the documents—and sent him to jail. A young conservative Republican congressman named Richard Nixon gained fame for pursuing the charges against Hiss. Within four years of the highly publicized case, Nixon was elected vice president of the United States.

Hiss claimed that he was innocent and that Chambers had forged the documents used against him. However, in the 1990s, Soviet cables released by the National Security Agency seemed to prove Hiss’s guilt.

### NOW & THEN

#### TELEVISION: MAKING NEWS

Historians of popular culture believe that the early 1950s were the best years of television. Most programs were filmed live and had a fresh, unrehearsed look. Along with variety shows, early television presented some of the best serious drama of the age.

Since the 1950s, television has also become a major vehicle for reporting the news. Not only does television report the news, it also has increasingly helped to shape it.


**1954** In 1954, the Communist-hunting senator Joseph McCarthy, in U.S. Senate hearings that were televised live, accused the U.S. Army of “coddling Communists.” As many as 20 million Americans watched the combative senator malign people who had no chance to defend themselves.



**1960** In the 1960 presidential election, a major factor in John Kennedy’s victory over Richard Nixon was a series of four televised debates, the first televised presidential debates in history. An estimated 85 million to 120 million Americans watched one or more of the debates, which turned the tide in favor of Kennedy.

**THE ROSENBERGS** Another spy case rocked the nation even more than the Hiss case, partially because of international events occurring about the same time. On September 3, 1949, Americans learned that the Soviet Union had exploded an atomic bomb. Most American experts had predicted that it would take the Soviets three to five more years to make the bomb. People began to wonder if Communist supporters in the United States had leaked the secret of the bomb.

This second spy case seemed to confirm that suspicion. In 1950, the German-born physicist Klaus Fuchs admitted giving the Soviet Union information about America's atomic bomb. The information probably enabled Soviet scientists to develop their own atomic bomb years earlier than they would have otherwise. Implicated in the Fuchs case were **Ethel and Julius Rosenberg**, minor activists in the American Communist Party.


When asked if they were Communists, the Rosenbergs denied the charges against them and pleaded the Fifth Amendment, choosing not to incriminate themselves. They claimed they were being persecuted both for being Jewish and for holding radical beliefs. The Rosenbergs were found guilty of espionage and sentenced to death. In pronouncing their sentence, Judge Irving Kaufman declared their crime “worse than murder.” To him, they were directly responsible for one of the deadliest clashes of the Cold War. 



 Ethel and Julius Rosenberg were executed in June 1953 despite numerous pleas to spare their lives.

**MAIN IDEA**

**Analyzing Causes**

 Why did the cases of Alger Hiss and the Rosenbergs heighten the anti-Communist mood of Americans?

**A PERSONAL VOICE** IRVING KAUFMAN

**“I believe your conduct in putting into the hands of the Russians the A-bomb years before our best scientists predicted Russia would perfect the bomb has already caused, in my opinion, the Communist aggression in Korea . . . .”**

—quoted in *The Unquiet Death of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg*

**1967** By 1967, American support for the Vietnam War had plummeted as millions of TV viewers witnessed the horrors of war on the nightly news.



**1974** The Watergate scandal that toppled Richard Nixon's presidency in 1974 played to a rapt TV audience. During the Senate hearings in 1973, the televised testimony of John Dean, the president's counsel, had convinced two out of three Americans that the president had committed a crime.

**2000** During the 2000 presidential election, the TV networks first projected that Al Gore would win Florida. Later, George W. Bush was declared the winner of Florida, a declaration that led Al Gore to concede. Then, when the Florida vote became too close to call, Gore retracted his concession. That “election muddle” blurred even further the already indistinct line between reporting the news and making it.



## Analyzing Political Cartoons

### “IT’S OK—WE’RE HUNTING COMMUNISTS”

The fear of Communist subversion affected the entire society. People were so suspicious that almost any unusual opinion might be labeled “un-American.” The climate of suspicion was most severe in the years 1947–1954, but it lasted throughout the 1950s.

#### SKILLBUILDER Analyzing Political Cartoons

1. What organization does the car represent?
2. What does the cartoon imply about the methods of this organization?

SEE SKILLBUILDER HANDBOOK, PAGE R24.



a 1947 Herblock Cartoon, copyright by the Herb Block Foundation

People from all over the world appealed for clemency for the Rosenbergs. Many considered the evidence and the testimony too weak to warrant the death sentence. The case was appealed to the U.S. Supreme Court, but the Court refused to overturn the conviction. Julius and Ethel Rosenberg died in the electric chair in June 1953, leaving behind two sons. They became the first U.S. civilians executed for espionage.

## McCarthy Launches His “Witch Hunt”

The most famous anti-Communist activist was Senator **Joseph McCarthy**, a Republican from Wisconsin. During his first three years in the Senate, he had acquired a reputation for being an ineffective legislator. By January 1950, he realized that he was going to need a winning issue in order to be reelected in 1952. Looking for such an issue, McCarthy charged that Communists were taking over the government.

**MCCARTHY’S TACTICS** Taking advantage of people’s concerns about communism, McCarthy made one unsupported accusation after another. These attacks on suspected Communists in the early 1950s became known as **McCarthyism**. Since that time, McCarthyism has referred to the unfair tactic of accusing people of disloyalty without providing evidence. At various times McCarthy claimed to have in his hands the names of 57, 81, and 205 Communists in the State Department. (He never actually produced a single name.) He also charged that the Democratic Party was guilty of “20 years of treason” for allowing Communist infiltration into the government. He was always careful to do his name-calling only in the Senate, where he had legal immunity that protected him from being sued for slander.

The Republicans did little to stop McCarthy’s attacks because they believed they would win the 1952 presidential election if the public saw them purging the nation of Communists. But one small group of six senators, led by Senator Margaret Chase Smith of Maine, did speak out.

**Vocabulary**  
**infiltration:** the act of penetrating a group or organization without being noticed for purposes such as spying

### A PERSONAL VOICE MARGARET CHASE SMITH

“I speak as a Republican. I speak as a woman. I speak as a United States senator. I speak as an American. . . . I am not proud of the way in which the Senate has been made a publicity platform for irresponsible sensationalism. I am not proud of the reckless abandon in which unproved charges have been hurled from this side of the aisle.”

—Declaration of Conscience

**MCCARTHY'S DOWNFALL** Finally, in 1954, McCarthy made accusations against the U.S. Army, which resulted in a nationally televised Senate investigation. McCarthy's bullying of witnesses alienated the audience and cost him public support. The Senate condemned him for improper conduct that "tended to bring the Senate into dishonor and disrepute." Three years later, Joseph McCarthy, suffering from alcoholism, died a broken man.

**OTHER ANTI-COMMUNIST MEASURES** Others besides Joseph McCarthy made it their mission to root communism out of American society. By 1953, 39 states had passed laws making it illegal to advocate the violent overthrow of the government, even though such laws clearly violated the constitutional right of free speech. Across the nation, cities and towns passed similar laws.

At times, the fear of communism seemed to have no limits. In Indiana, professional wrestlers had to take a loyalty oath. In experiments run by newspapers, pedestrians on the street refused to sign petitions that quoted the Declaration of Independence because they were afraid the ideas were communist. The government investigated union leaders, librarians, newspaper reporters, and scientists. It seemed that no profession was safe from the hunt for Communists.

Causes and Effects of McCarthyism	
<b>Causes</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Soviets successfully establish Communist regimes in Eastern Europe after World War II.</li> <li>• Soviets develop the atomic bomb more quickly than expected.</li> <li>• Korean War ends in a stalemate.</li> <li>• Republicans gain politically by accusing Truman and Democrats of being soft on communism.</li> </ul>	
<b>Effects</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Millions of Americans are forced to take loyalty oaths and undergo loyalty investigations.</li> <li>• Activism by labor unions goes into decline.</li> <li>• Many people are afraid to speak out on public issues.</li> <li>• Anti-communism continues to drive U.S. foreign policy.</li> </ul>	
<b>SKILLBUILDER Interpreting Charts</b>	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. How did world events help lead to McCarthyism?</li> <li>2. How did McCarthyism affect the behavior of individual Americans?</li> </ol>	

"I Can't Do This To Me!" a 1954 Herblock Cartoon, copyright by the Herb Block Foundation

**SECTION 3**

**ASSESSMENT**

**1. TERMS & NAMES** For each term or name, write a sentence explaining its significance.

- HUAC
- blacklist
- Ethel and Julius Rosenberg
- McCarthyism
- Hollywood Ten
- Alger Hiss
- Joseph McCarthy

**MAIN IDEA**

**2. TAKING NOTES**

Re-create the web below on your paper and fill in events that illustrate the main idea in the center.



Which event had the greatest impact on the country?

**CRITICAL THINKING**

**3. HYPOTHESIZING**

If you had lived in this period and had been accused of being a Communist, what would you have done? **Think About:**

- the Hollywood Ten, who refused to answer questions
- the Rosenbergs, who pleaded the Fifth Amendment

**4. ANALYZING MOTIVES**

Choose one of the following roles: Harry Truman, a member of HUAC, Judge Irving Kaufman, or Joseph McCarthy. As the person you have chosen, explain your motivation for opposing communism.



**5. ANALYZING VISUAL SOURCES**

What does this cartoon suggest about McCarthy's downfall?