DEFINING MOMENTS
McCARThYISM
AND THE
COMMUNIST THREAT

Kevin Hillstrom

Omnigraphics
P.O. Box 31-1640
Detroit, MI 48231
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Preface ................................................................. ix  
How to Use This Book ............................................ xiii  
Research Topics for *McCarthyism and the Communist Threat* ........ xvi

## NARRATIVE OVERVIEW

Prologue ................................................................. 3  
Chapter One: Early American Fears about the “Red Menace” ........... 5  
Chapter Two: HUAC and the Early Cold War ............................ 23  
Chapter Three: The Rise of Joseph McCarthy ......................... 43  
Chapter Four: The Impact of McCarthyism on American Life .......... 63  
Chapter Five: McCarthy's Stunning Political Collapse ................ 77  
Chapter Six: The Legacy of the McCarthy Era ........................ 89

## BIOGRAPHIES

Roy Cohn (1927-1986) .................................................. 105  
*Lawyer and Chief Aide to Joseph McCarthy*

Martin Dies (1900-1972) ............................................. 108  
*First Chairman of the House Un-American Activities Committee*

Alger Hiss (1904-1996) ................................................ 111  
*State Department Official Accused of Being a Soviet Agent*

J. Edgar Hoover (1895-1972) ........................................ 115  
*Director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), 1924-1972*
Defining Moments: McCarthyism

Joseph McCarthy (1908-1957) ......................................................... 119
U.S. Senator and Namesake for the “Age of McCarthyism”

Arthur Miller (1915-2005) ............................................................. 123
Playwright and Author of The Crucible

Edward R. Murrow (1908-1965) ................................................. 127
Radio and Television Journalist

Joseph Welch (1890-1960) ............................................................. 130
Chief Counsel for the Army during the Army-McCarthy Hearings

PRIMARY SOURCES

The Smith Act Takes Aim at American Communists .................. 135
A Communist Screenwriter Defies the House Un-American Activities Committee .................................................. 139
Whittaker Chambers and Alger Hiss Testify before HUAC .......... 143
The Speech That Launched McCarthy’s Political Rise ............... 152
Margaret Chase Smith’s Declaration of Conscience .................... 158
Julius and Ethel Rosenberg Receive Death Sentences for Treason . 163
Ronald Reagan Assesses Hollywood’s Progress against the Reds . 166
Edward R. Murrow Takes on McCarthy ................................. 169
The Army-McCarthy Hearings Bring McCarthy Down ............... 178
The Senate Condemns McCarthy ............................................... 185
Playwright Arthur Miller Recalls the McCarthy Era ................. 187
A Conservative Writer Defends the Legitimacy of Questions about the “al-Qaeda Seven” ........................................... 193
A Liberal Columnist Condemns the “al-Qaeda Seven” Video as Modern-Day McCarthyism ............................... 197
## Table of Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Important People, Places, and Terms</td>
<td>201</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chronology</td>
<td>207</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sources for Further Study</td>
<td>211</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bibliography</td>
<td>213</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Photo and Illustration Credits</td>
<td>217</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Index</td>
<td>219</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter Four

THE IMPACT
OF MCCARTHYISM
ON AMERICAN LIFE

All I can say is [when deciding to blacklist actors] there were no differentiations made between Communists, Communist sympathizers, those who had lunch with Communist sympathizers, those who knew somebody who had lunch with Communist sympathizers, and so forth.... In certain cases it even—I’m ashamed to say—included the elimination of people from shows because they had the same name as members of the Communist Party.

—Hollywood producer Mark Goodson

As Senator Joseph McCarthy’s anti-Communist crusade intensified, American insecurities and fears also escalated. Convinced by McCarthy and his allies in government and the press that Communist agents and Communist sympathizers were operating in American universities, labor unions, and the U.S. government, people became more distrustful of their neighbors, church leaders, schoolteachers, librarians, and political leaders than they had ever been before. Many of these Americans ignored—or even defended—instances in which the hunt for Communists violated the constitutional rights of fellow Americans.

Meanwhile, countless other Americans rejected McCarthy’s claims that treacherous “Reds” lurked in every corner of American society. But they hesitated to express opposition to McCarthy or voice any other controversial political beliefs out of fears that they too might be branded as “disloyal.” They knew that in the early 1950s, many people whose background or political ideology came under suspicion were losing their jobs, friends, reputations, and—in some cases—freedom.
Defining Moments: McCarthyism

Government Service during the McCarthy Era

Perhaps the most high-profile institution in American society to be affected by the Red Scare of the late 1940s and early 1950s was the U.S. government itself. Ever since the founding of the United States, men and women who decided to pursue careers in government service could generally count on stable, safe, and secure jobs. During the early Cold War and McCarthy eras, however, employment in many government agencies became fraught with peril. Workers ranging from agency heads and diplomats to clerks and typists operated under a cloud of fear. Every day they woke up wondering if their department would be the next one to attract the hostile attention of anti-Communist committees in Washington.

Some influential diplomats and officials believed that such investigations were necessary—though many of them also later admitted that McCarthy’s “witch hunts” went too far. According to the influential Cold War analyst and diplomat George Kennan, “penetration of the American governmental services by members or agents (conscious or otherwise) of the American Communist Party in the late 1930s was not a figment of the imagination of the hysterical right-wingers.… It really existed and assumed proportions which, while never overwhelming, were also not trivial.”

But while Cold War officials and historians have had spirited debates about whether Reds (Communists and Socialists) in the U.S. government posed much of a threat, they widely agree that the campaigns to “smoke them out” took a heavy toll on the morale of many innocent federal workers. In the summer of 1950, for example, the magazine American Scholar published a survey of employee reaction to the Truman loyalty program. According to the survey’s findings, government agencies were becoming paralyzed by the “fear of ideas and of irresponsible and unknown informers.” The survey’s authors also reported that “government employees are afraid to attend meetings of politically minded groups; they are afraid to read ‘liberal’ publications; they screen their friends carefully for ‘left-wing’ ideas. Government employees are in very real danger of dying intellectually and politically.”

The working environment became even more toxic after McCarthy arrived on the scene. This deterioration was especially evident in agencies like the State Department, the nation’s most important agency on foreign policy and diplomacy issues. McCarthy, Hoover, and other “Red-hunters” in Washington hammered and investigated the State Department and its Foreign
Service operations on such a relentless basis that agency officials found it harder and harder to retain or attract talented employees. Many prospective workers chose instead to pursue careers outside of government, where they would be less likely to have their life history become the subject of an FBI investigation. The situation eventually became so bad that in January 1954, five distinguished ex-diplomats (including former U.S. ambassadors to Japan, Spain, and Italy) publicly warned in a letter to the *New York Times* that McCarthyites were endangering the nation:

> The Foreign Service has been subjected to a series of attacks from outside sources which have questioned the loyalty and the moral standards of its members. With rare exceptions ... these attacks have been so flimsy as to have no standing in a court of law or in the mind of any individual capable of differentiating repeated accusation from even a reasonable presumption of
Defining Moments: McCarthyism

guilt. The conclusion has become inescapable … that a Foreign Service officer who reports on persons and events to the very best of his ability and who makes recommendations which at the time he conscientiously believes to be in the interest of the United States may subsequently find his loyalty and integrity challenged and may even be forced out of the service and discredited forever as a private citizen after many years of distinguished service. A premium therefore has been put upon reporting and upon recommendations which are ambiguously stated or so cautiously set forth as to be deceiving…. The ultimate result is a threat to national security.\(^3\)

But while investigations of the State Department garnered most of the news headlines, other government agencies and programs also received heavy attention from J. Edgar Hoover. It was his Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) that was responsible for conducting most of the investigations desired by McCarthy and other investigative committee chairmen in Washington. By 1953 the FBI had conducted more than 26,000 field investigations under the authority of Truman’s 1947 executive order authorizing loyalty programs for federal employment. By that same time it had gathered more than 100,000 informants across the country and carried out nearly 24,000 break-ins of the offices and homes of suspects. Many of those break-ins were conducted without legal search warrants.\(^4\)

Conformity in the Workplace and on Campus

McCarthyism also had a major impact on job security in the private sector. Suspected Communists in all sorts of industries were kicked out of their jobs during the late 1940s and 1950s. Some major employers, including General Motors and General Electric, even adopted policies in which workers who invoked the Fifth Amendment in official testimony were automatically fired. Since the Fifth Amendment was a Constitutional protection, these companies generally cited other justifications for cutting loose workers who “hid” behind it. But everyone involved understood exactly why the worker was being fired.

Industry programs to root out undesirable employees convinced many of those who survived the purgings to keep quiet about their political or social beliefs. Indeed, the dismissal of a single worker was often enough to silence an entire department full of employees. “Ten thousand people may
“You Read Books, Eh?”
—A 1962 Herblock cartoon, copyright by The Herb Block Foundation

This 1949 cartoon by Herb Block (known as Herblock) depicts a horde of “anti-subversive” investigators intimidating a school teacher. The investigator leaning on the desk with the cigar suspiciously states, “You read books, eh?”
have lost their jobs,” explained historian Ellen Schrecker. “Is that few or many? It may well be useful to reflect on an earlier debate among historians about the applications of sanctions—in this case the apparently low number of whippings administered under slavery—to realize that it may not be necessary to whip many slaves to keep the rest of the plantation in line.”

Teachers and librarians in schools and universities were hit particularly hard by the anti-Communist hysteria enveloping the country. Local and state politicians in many parts of the United States insisted that schoolteachers take loyalty oaths to keep their jobs. During this same period, school librarians and public librarians were frequently cross-examined by local authorities or conservative groups like the American Legion and Daughters of the American

Defining Moments: McCarthyism

An American Communist Defends Using the Fifth Amendment

Writer Howard Fast had a thriving career as a screenwriter and novelist until 1950, when he was called before the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC). By the time of this appearance before HUAC, Fast had been an active member of the Communist Party for several years. But when asked by his interrogators whether he was a Communist, Fast refused to answer. Instead, he repeatedly cited the Fifth Amendment in the Bill of Rights, which gives every American the legal right to refuse to testify against himself or herself in a criminal case. Fast also refused to cooperate when investigators demanded to know the names of his Communist associates.

Fast ended up spending three months in prison on contempt-of-Congress charges, and he endured years of blacklisting in the publishing industry. But he remained defiant throughout this period. In 1954 he even published an essay in which he strongly defended his use of the Fifth Amendment before HUAC:

The Communist who declares he is a Communist finds that his life has become both complex and dangerous. If he lives in the state of Pennsylvania, such a statement can result in a twenty-year prison sentence.... If he is a resident of California, local law can sentence him almost indefinitely for the same admission....
Revolution to make sure that their book and magazine collections did not contain “dangerous” or “radical” materials. Hundreds of elementary and high school teachers and librarians lost their jobs as a result of these investigations. McCarthyism also triggered extensive efforts to ban or censor books and other reading materials. State legislators in Nebraska passed a law that not only required every school district to inspect textbooks for “foreign ideas,” but also forced them to reserve hours of school time for the singing of patriotic songs. Educators in a number of cities also reported that some factual information, such as materials describing New Deal legislation and other liberal policy priorities, was challenged as “un-American” by McCarthyite lawmakers and activists. The State Department, meanwhile, sent its overseas

---

The McCarran Act provides means for keeping him in prison ten years. The Smith Act, as we have already seen in a number of federal courts, can be used as a mechanism to sentence him to prison for as long as five years. But a vengeance even more immediate than the above would be visited upon any Communist Party member who answered, yes, he was a Communist and proud of it. The record ... shows that such a person would immediately be asked to provide the names of every other Communist he knew or had heard of or had ever met with, the places where he met with them, and the substance of what was spoken of or decided upon at these meetings.

In addition, Fast noted that anyone who admitted to being Communist would no longer be allowed to invoke the Fifth Amendment: “His previous waiver of the privilege of the Fifth Amendment would destroy his subsequent use of the privilege. Therefore, his unwillingness to become a stoolpigeon, a police informer, would be rewarded with a year in prison for contempt of Congress, and fines which could be as high as $10,000. Any one of our federal kangaroo courts could also very easily—as they have in the past—construe his unwillingness to answer the question as a result of conspiracy, and add many more years of prison to the congressional sentence of one year.”

departments lists of controversial books that they should avoid stocking on
their library shelves.

In June 1953 it briefly appeared that President Dwight
Eisenhower, who was a Republican like McCarthy, was pre-
pared to lead a counterattack against this surge in book
censorship. At a June 14 commencement address at Dart-
mouth College, he stated: “Don’t join the book-burners.
Don’t think you are going to conceal faults by concealing
evidence that they ever existed. Don’t be afraid to go in
your library and read every book as long as that document
does not offend your sense of decency. That should be the
only censorship.” In three days later, however, Eisenhower
backtracked by claiming that there were some circum-
stances in which book burning and censorship was accept-
able. This reversal left defenders of free speech even more
depressed than they had been before the president’s
remarks at Dartmouth.

The impact of all these acts of intimidation, censor-
ship, and demands for conformity was also evident on
America’s college campuses. After three tenured professors
at the University of Washington were fired in 1948 for
alleged Communist backgrounds, a wave of similar dis-
missals of faculty members took place across the country. Few of these profes-
sors were dismissed for being Communists. Rather, most lost their jobs after
refusing to sign university loyalty oaths or after taking the Fifth Amendment
when called before congressional or university committees. Many of the men
and women who lost their jobs in the latter manner were ex-Communists who
refused to “name names”—reveal the identities of old friends and colleagues
to investigators. These academic purges took place in both private and public
schools, but they were most commonplace in public universities that relied on
funding from anti-Communist state lawmakers.

Virtually none of the professors who were dismissed for political reasons
during the McCarthy era were ever accused of slanting their scholarly work in a
pro-Communist way or of indoctrinating their students with “anti-American”
ideas. But the slightest association with Communism or other left-wing politi-
cal views was still enough to kill careers. Not surprisingly, then, professors and
high school teachers alike became extremely reluctant to discuss Communism
in their classrooms in any capacity. And in the end, this muffling of American education and knowledge-seeking hurt students as much as anyone.

Paul Hoffman, who served as chairman of the Studebaker-Packard car company, recalled that after he delivered an address on freedom to an audience of college students, a student approached him and asked: “Do you think there ought to be any study of communism in a school such as this?”

“Yes,” Hoffman responded. “I think we ought to teach what communism is, so that the new and most important generation of Americans can know exactly why it is such a menace to our way of life.”

“I think so too,” the student said, “but it’s dangerous to say that around here now.”

The changed atmosphere on campuses was not sufficient, however, to satisfy Americans who accepted McCarthy’s view of universities as hotbeds of anti-patriotic, pro-Communist sentiment. Suspicious and frightened, these men and women stopped seeing universities as citadels of intellectual freedom and learning and started seeing them as threats to the American way of life. In fact, Goldman observed that many Americans of this era began using the word “intellectual” as if it “meant some compound of evil, stupidity, and treason.”

American Media Cower in the Face of McCarthyism

The American news media and popular culture were also profoundly affected by McCarthyism. During the Red Scare of the late 1940s and McCarthy’s rise to power in the early 1950s, a handful of reporters, columnists, and commentators issued repeated warnings about the excesses of McCarthyism. The most prominent anti-McCarthyism journalists included Drew Pearson, Mary McGrory, Walter Lippmann, Joseph and Stewart Alsop, Elmer Davis, Martin Agronsky, I. F. Stone, and Herbert “Herblock” Block. Some of these men and women spoke from a conservative political orientation, while others were far more liberal. But all of them urged their readers and viewers to think for themselves and to resist the hysteria and fear that the worst Red-hunters were churning up in American communities.

These bold voices, however, were largely drowned out by the soft, uncritical coverage provided by many other journalists and news outlets. Eager to boost their circulation and increase their advertising revenue, newspapers, magazines, and radio and television news programs frequently passed
Defining Moments: McCarthyism

along McCarthy's most outrageous smears and innuendos without hesitation. “The real scandal,” charged the famous journalist David Halberstam many years later, “was the behavior of the members of the Washington press corps, who, more often than not, knew better. They were delighted to be a part of [McCarthy’s] traveling road show, chronicling each charge and then moving on to the next town, instead of bothering to stay behind to follow up. They had little interest in reporting how careless he was or how little it all meant to him. It was news and he was news; that was all that mattered.”

Meanwhile, producers of American popular culture displayed extreme caution in their operations. Radio and television studios and networks avoided any programming that had the slightest chance of sparking political controversy. Instead, they fed their audiences a steady diet of lighthearted comedies, quiz shows, and Westerns. Hollywood displayed even greater fears about being labeled as soft on Communism or otherwise “un-American” (see “Ronald Reagan Assesses Hollywood’s Progress against the Reds,” p. 166). With the memories of the Hollywood Ten episode still fresh in their minds, most movie executives stayed away from any scriptwriters, actors, directors, or storylines that had the potential to anger McCarthy and his allies. In fact, Hollywood went so far as to release thirteen films with clear anti-Communist messages in 1952 alone. As film scholar Dorothy Jones later remarked, “Probably never before in the history of Hollywood had such a large number of films been produced which the industry itself doubted would prove really profitable at the box office.”

There were a few notable exceptions to this general timidity. An early-1950s science fiction television show called The Twilight Zone featured several episodes that took thinly veiled shots at McCarthyism. In 1956 Columbia Pictures released Storm Center, in which actress Bette Davis portrayed a heroic small-town librarian who refuses to pull a Communist book off the shelves, even though her stand against censorship leads the community to falsely brand her as a Communist. This film, which a nervous Columbia released only after several delays, was the first Hollywood film to explicitly criticize McCarthyism. American writers, meanwhile, produced numerous novels, essays, and plays condemning McCarthy and “the Great Fear” he was fomenting across the country. The most famous of the era’s anti-McCarthy works was Arthur Miller’s 1953 play The Crucible, which used Massachusetts’s Salem Witch Trials of 1692 as a parable for McCarthyism (see “Playwright Arthur Miller Recalls the McCarthy Era,” p. 187).
These brave stands, however, did little to calm Americans who had fallen under the spell of McCarthyism. In many parts of the country, even the smallest incident was enough to set off a fit of hysterical overreaction. In 1952, for example, a policeman in Wheeling, West Virginia—where McCarthy had issued the famous speech that launched him to stardom—reported that local penny-candy vending machines were dispensing candies with little geography lessons attached. One of the little geography cards was for the Soviet Union, and it included a tiny representation of the Soviet flag and basic information such as its capital city (Moscow), its population (211 million), and its status as the planet’s largest country by area. The discovery of this “propaganda” caused such a fuss in Wheeling that the city manager ordered the seizure of all penny-candy machines in town. These “stern measures,” as historian Eric F. Goldman mockingly called
them, thus protected “the candy-store set from the knowledge that the Soviet Union existed and that it was the biggest country in the world.”

“The Black Silence of Fear”

As McCarthyism steadily tightened its grip around American society, prominent individuals and organizations from all corners of the country joined the uphill battle being waged against McCarthy. In January 1952, for example, Supreme Court Justice William O. Douglas set aside the Court’s customary silence on political issues to deliver a stinging indictment of the “black silence of fear” that had settled across America:

The Communist threat inside the country has been magnified and exalted far beyond its realities. Irresponsible talk by irresponsible people has fanned the flames of fear. Accusations have been loosely made. Character assassinations have become common. Suspicion has taken the place of goodwill. Once we could debate with impunity along a wide range of inquiry. Once we could safely explore to the edges of a problem, challenge orthodoxy without qualms, and run the gamut of ideas in search of solutions to perplexing problems. Once we had confidence in each other. Now there is suspicion. Innocent acts become telltale marks of disloyalty. The coincidence that an idea parallels Soviet Russia’s policy for a moment of time settles an aura of suspicion around a person.…

Fear has driven more and more men and women in all walks of life either to silence or to the folds of the orthodox. Fear has mounted: fear of losing one’s job, fear of being investigated, fear of being pilloried. This fear has stereotyped our thinking, narrowed the range of free public discussion, and driven many thoughtful people to despair. This fear has even entered universities, great citadels of our spiritual strength, and corrupted them. We have the spectacle of university officials lending themselves to one of the worst witch-hunts we have seen since early days.

But many other groups and individuals that had a strong orientation toward the defense of freedom of speech and other civil liberties were strangely quiet or passive during the McCarthy era. Many lawyers refused to provide
legal representation to accused Communists out of fear that their reputations would suffer or their other clients would object. Organizations that usually stood on the front lines of battles over constitutional rights also remained quiet. The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), for example, refused to get involved in specific cases—and in some cases ACLU officials even cooperated with the FBI on its investigations. Meanwhile, internal dissension and leadership struggles within the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) kept it from organizing any effective response to the firings of professors that took place across the country in the late 1940s and early 1950s.

The U.S. Supreme Court also stood on the sidelines, despite the urging of Douglas. It let many anti-Communist laws and regulations stand despite the fact that they violated basic constitutional rights such as freedom of speech. For the majority of Supreme Court justices, national security concerns outweighed any other considerations.

Given all of these factors, then, it is little wonder that Americans accused of subversive beliefs or activities frequently felt alone and abandoned. Some men and women targeted for investigation at least had the support of family and close friends, but even these sources of strength did not always remain steadfast in their support. Some friends and family drifted away when charges were first brought. Others faded away when prison sentences for perjury or contempt of Congress were handed down. And still others kept their distance in hopes that they could keep themselves out of the crosshairs of investigators. “The taint of Communism was like a contagious disease,” wrote McCarthy scholar Ellen Schrecker. “Almost every survivor of the McCarthy years—Communist and political innocent alike—has a story of someone crossing the street to avoid eye contact.”16


Defining Moments: McCarthyism

Most Americans who were targeted by McCarthy, Hoover, and other anti-Communist crusaders were law-abiding citizens, but Schrecker acknowledges that relatively few of them were victims of mistaken identity. “Most of the men and women who lost their jobs or were otherwise victimized were not apolitical folks who had somehow gotten on the wrong mailing lists or signed the wrong petitions,” she wrote. “Rather … they had once been in or near the American Communist party. Whether or not they should have been victimized, they certainly were not misidentified. But they were stigmatized, portrayed as members of an illegal conspiracy that somehow threatened America’s very existence. Stereotypes prevailed, turning individual Communists into alien beings whose destruction was, therefore, easy to justify.”17

The terror and humiliation of being investigated by McCarthy and other congressional inquisitors took a heavy toll. Many marriages and friendships buckled under the strain. Some targets fled underground to avoid prosecution. Others endured their circumstances with furious protests, tearful sobs, or dignified silence. And a few Americans who came under investigation were so devastated by the specter of ruined reputations, imprisonments, or deportations that they sought to end their suffering by taking their own lives.

Notes

10 Quoted in Goldman, p. 259.
11 Goldman, p. 123.
14 Goldman, p. 213.
17 Schrecker, p. xii.
Alger Hiss (1904-1996)
State Department Official Accused of Being a Soviet Agent

Alger Hiss was born on November 11, 1904, in Baltimore, Maryland. He was the fourth of five children born to Mary Livinia Hughes and Charles Alger Hiss, a business executive who committed suicide when young Alger was two years old. Hiss attended public schools in Baltimore, then enrolled at the city’s prestigious Johns Hopkins University, where he earned a bachelor’s degree in 1926. Later that year he entered Harvard Law School, where he received his law degree in 1929. Hiss then served a one-year term as law clerk to U.S. Supreme Court justice Oliver Wendell Holmes.

Serves as a Top Diplomat and Advisor

Hiss spent the next three years as an attorney with a leading law firm in Boston. In 1933 he joined the New Deal administration of President Franklin D. Roosevelt. He worked as an attorney in the departments of Agriculture, Justice, and State over the next several years. Hiss remained in the State Department throughout World War II, working as a top-level policy analyst and diplomat. In 1944 he was appointed to the Office of Special Political Affairs (OSPA), which was responsible for planning international recovery and diplomatic efforts that could be undertaken after the war. In the fall of 1944 he served as executive secretary at the Dumbarton Oaks Conference, a historic meeting of diplomats from the United States, China, the Soviet Union, and Great Britain. That gathering paved the way for the formation of the United Nations the following year.

Hiss also served as a key member of the U.S. delegation at the Yalta Conference of February 1945. By the time this summit was over, the leaders of the United States, the Soviet Union, and Great Britain had negotiated a wide-ranging agreement for establishment of the United Nations and post-war policies in Europe. A few months later, Hiss served as secretary-general of the
United Nations Conference on International Organization in San Francisco. This meeting, which ran from April through June, established the charter for the United Nations. In 1946 Hiss departed the State Department for the presidency of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, a private non-profit organization devoted to promoting cooperation and communication among nations around the globe.

By the time Hiss took the helm of the Carnegie Endowment, he was well-known throughout Washington as a bright and talented foreign policy expert with ties to the nation’s most influential progressive political circles. But within a year his seemingly secure existence was threatened by spectacular accusations that he was actually a Soviet spy with longstanding connections to American Communists.

**Accused of Being a Communist Agent**

Hiss’s accuser was Whittaker Chambers, an ex-Communist who had become an editor for *Time* magazine. In August 1948 Chambers told the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) that Hiss had been a fellow member of an underground Communist “cell” group back in the mid-1930s. Hiss not only denied the charges when HUAC called him to testify about the accusations, he also claimed that he had never even met Chambers before. Hiss also received public proclamations of support from a wide range of Democratic politicians and officials who dismissed the whole episode as contemptible Red-baiting.

Chambers, however, refused to back down. Instead he provided investigators with additional information to support his assertion that Hiss had once been an active agent for the Soviets, including convincing details about Hiss’s personal life. As the HUAC investigation of Hiss intensified, the former State Department official changed his story. He acknowledged that he remembered Chambers as an acquaintance from the mid-1930s. Hiss testified, however, that he had known Chambers back then as George Crosley, a freelance writer to whom Hiss had rented an apartment and loaned a car. By this time, Representative Richard Nixon and other HUAC investigators were convinced that Hiss was lying about his past.

On December 15, 1948, Hiss was indicted on two charges of perjury—one for lying about his past knowledge of Chambers and one for lying about passing classified state secrets to Chambers. Hiss was not subject to spying...
charges because the statute of limitations on those crimes, which had allegedly taken place more than a decade earlier, had expired. Hiss maintained his innocence, and his perjury trial ended in a hung jury—one in which the jurors cannot reach unanimous agreement on a defendant's guilt or innocence. Prosecutors responded by calling a second trial. When the jurors returned from deliberations in this second trial on January 21, 1950, they announced a guilty verdict on both charges.

The verdict was met with disbelief by Hiss supporters like Secretary of State Dean Acheson, who reiterated his faith in Hiss's innocence. But Hiss's efforts to overturn the verdict on appeal failed, and he ended up serving forty-four months in Lewisburg Federal Prison. He was released on November 27, 1954.

**Claims Innocence to the End**

After his release from prison, Hiss relocated in Massachusetts and devoted the rest of his life to trying to prove his innocence. In 1957 he published *In the Court of Public Opinion*, in which he claimed that HUAC had falsified much of the evidence used against him. In 1975 the American Bar Association reinstated Hiss's license to practice law, which had been revoked upon his 1950 conviction. He thus became the first lawyer ever readmitted to the Massachusetts bar after a major criminal conviction. Thirteen years later he published an autobiography, *Recollections of a Life*, in which he once again insisted that he was innocent.

Hiss died on November 15, 1996, at the age of ninety-two in New York City. His passing brought a new flurry of articles and stories about the Hiss-Chambers case, which remains one of the most famous events of the McCarthy era. As the *New York Times* observed, “the case … became a source of obsessive fascination, a tangle of conspiracy theories and lingering doubts…. It was a kind of morality play that severed society along ideological and emotional lines. At Mr. Hiss's death, nearly 50 years after he was first publicly accused, followers of the case remained bitterly split over whether he was guilty, innocent or something in between.”

Historians have split into different camps regarding Hiss as well. Some scholars believe that Hiss has been unfairly maligned over the years. They believe that he may have tried to hide old Communist ties, but that he did not work as a foreign agent. The consensus among most scholars, though, is that declassified secret documents from the Venona Project and other historical
materials strongly indicate that Hiss did in fact carry out espionage activities for the Soviets during his years in the State Department. According to historians John Earl Haynes and Harvey Klehr, “The evidence from myriad sources—eyewitnesses and written documents, public testimony and private correspondence, fellow spies and Soviet intelligence officers, decrypted cables and long-closed archives—is overwhelming and conclusive”¹ that Hiss was a Soviet spy.

**Sources**

**Notes**
The Speech That Launched McCarthy’s Political Rise

On February 9, 1950, Senator Joseph McCarthy delivered a speech in Wheeling, West Virginia, that became one of the most famous political addresses in American history. In the speech, which was delivered to a local club of Republican women, McCarthy warned that Communists had infiltrated the U.S. State Department and many other important government agencies, and that they were actively plotting to destroy America. Most importantly, he declared that he knew the actual identities of many of these agents. McCarthy’s declaration triggered a national uproar and instantly made him one of the most influential and controversial public figures in the United States.

Audience members in Wheeling reported that McCarthy claimed to know the names of 205 Reds in the U.S. government. But in the version of the speech that McCarthy inserted into the Congressional Record on February 20, 1950, his list contained fifty-seven names. The Congressional Record version of the speech is excerpted below.

Five years after a world war has been won, men’s hearts should anticipate a long peace, and men’s minds should be free from the heavy weight that comes with war. But this is not such a period—for this is not a period of peace. This is a time of the Cold War. This is a time when all the world is split into two vast, increasingly hostile armed camps—a time of a great armaments race. Today we can almost physically hear the mutterings and rumblings of an invigorated god of war. You can see it, feel it, and hear it all the way from the hills of Indochina, from the shores of Formosa right over into the very heart of Europe itself.…

Today we are engaged in a final, all-out battle between communistic atheism and Christianity. The modern champions of communism have selected this as the time. And, ladies and gentlemen, the chips are down—they are truly down.

Lest there be any doubt that the time has been chosen, let us go directly to the leader of communism today—Joseph Stalin. Here is what he said—not back in 1928, not before the war, not during the war—but two years after the last war was ended: “To think that the communist revolution can be carried out peacefully, within the framework of a Christian democracy, means one has either gone out of one’s mind and lost all normal understanding, or has grossly and openly repudiated the communist revolution.”

And this is what was said by Lenin in 1919, which was also quoted with approval by Stalin in 1947: “We are living,” said Lenin, “not merely in a state
but in a system of states, and the existence of the Soviet Republic side by side with Christian states for a long time is unthinkable. One or the other must triumph in the end. And before that end supervenes, a series of frightful collisions between the Soviet Republic and the bourgeois states will be inevitable."

Ladies and gentlemen, can there be anyone here tonight who is so blind as to say that the war is not on? Can there be anyone who fails to realize that the communist world has said, “The time is now”—that this is the time for the showdown between the democratic Christian world and the communist atheistic world? Unless we face this fact, we shall pay the price that must be paid by those who wait too long.

Six years ago, at the time of the first conference to map out peace—Dumbarton Oaks—there was within the Soviet orbit 180 million people. Lined up on the anti-totalitarian side there were in the world at that time roughly 1.625 billion people. Today, only six years later, there are 800 million people under the absolute domination of Soviet Russia—an increase of over 400 percent. On our side, the figure has shrunk to around 500 million. In other words, in less than six years the odds have changed from 9 to 1 in our favor to 8 to 5 against us. This indicates the swiftness of the tempo of communist victories and American defeats in the Cold War. As one of our outstanding historical figures once said, “When a great democracy is destroyed, it will not be because of enemies from without but rather because of enemies from within.” The truth of this statement is becoming terrifyingly clear as we see this country each day losing on every front.

At war's end we were physically the strongest nation on Earth and, at least potentially, the most powerful intellectually and morally. Ours could have been the honor of being a beacon in the desert of destruction, a shining, living proof that civilization was not yet ready to destroy itself. Unfortunately, we have failed miserably and tragically to rise to the opportunity.

The reason why we find ourselves in a position of impotency is not because our only powerful, potential enemy has sent men to invade our shores, but rather because of the traitorous actions of those who have been treated so well by this nation. It has not been the less fortunate or members of minority groups who have been selling this nation out, but rather those who have had all the benefits that the wealthiest nation on earth has had to offer—the finest homes, the finest college education, and the finest jobs in government we can give.
This is glaringly true in the State Department. There the bright young men who are born with silver spoons in their mouths are the ones who have been worst.

Now I know it is very easy for anyone to condemn a particular bureau or department in general terms. Therefore, I would like to cite one rather unusual case—the case of a man who has done much to shape our foreign policy.

When Chiang Kai-shek was fighting our war, the State Department had in China a young man named John S. Service. His task, obviously, was not to work for the communization of China. Strangely, however, he sent official reports back to the State Department urging that we torpedo our ally Chiang Kai-shek and stating, in effect, that communism was the best hope of China.

Later, this man—John Service—was picked up by the Federal Bureau of Investigation for turning over to the communists secret State Department information. Strangely, however, he was never prosecuted. However, Joseph Grew, the undersecretary of state, who insisted on his prosecution, was forced to resign. Two days after, Grew's successor, Dean Acheson, took over as undersecretary of state, this man—John Service—who had been picked up by the FBI and who had previously urged that communism was the best hope of China, was not only reinstated in the State Department but promoted; and finally, under Acheson, placed in charge of all placements and promotions. Today, ladies and gentlemen, this man Service is on his way to represent the State Department and Acheson in Calcutta—by far and away the most important listening post in the Far East.

Now, let's see what happens when individuals with communist connections are forced out of the State Department. Gustave Duran, who was labeled as, I quote, “a notorious international communist,” was made assistant secretary of state in charge of Latin American affairs. He was taken into the State Department from his job as a lieutenant colonel in the Communist International Brigade. Finally, after intense congressional pressure and criticism, he resigned in 1946 from the State Department—and, ladies and gentlemen, where do you think he is now? He took over a high-salaried job as chief of the Cultural Activities Section in the office of the assistant secretary-general of the United Nations....

This, ladies and gentlemen, gives you somewhat of a picture of the type of individuals who have been helping to shape our foreign policy. In my opinion the State Department, which is one of the most important government departments, is thoroughly infested with communists.
I have in my hand 57 cases of individuals who would appear to be either card-carrying members or certainly loyal to the Communist Party, but who nevertheless are still helping to shape our foreign policy.

One thing to remember in discussing the Communists in our government is that we are not dealing with spies who get 30 pieces of silver to steal the blueprints of new weapons. We are dealing with a far more sinister type of activity because it permits the enemy to guide and shape our policy.

This brings us down to the case of one Alger Hiss, who is important not as an individual anymore but rather because he is so representative of a group in the State Department. It is unnecessary to go over the sordid events showing how he sold out the nation which had given him so much. Those are rather fresh in all of our minds. However, it should be remembered that the facts in regard to his connection with this international communist spy ring were made known to the then-Undersecretary of State Berle three days after Hitler and Stalin signed the Russo-German Alliance Pact. At that time one Whittaker Chambers—who was also part of the spy ring—apparently decided that with Russia on Hitler's side, he could no longer betray our nation to Russia. He gave Undersecretary of State Berle—and this is all a matter of record—practically all, if not more, of the facts upon which Hiss' conviction was based.

Undersecretary Berle promptly contacted Dean Acheson and received word in return that Acheson, and I quote, “could vouch for Hiss absolutely”—at which time the matter was dropped. And this, you understand, was at a time when Russia was an ally of Germany.

This condition existed while Russia and Germany were invading and dismembering Poland, and while the Communist groups here were screaming “warmonger” at the United States for their support of the Allied nations.

Again in 1943, the FBI had occasion to investigate the facts surrounding Hiss' contacts with the Russian spy ring. But even after that FBI report was submitted, nothing was done.

Then, late in 1948—on August 5—when the Un-American Activities Committee called Alger Hiss to give an accounting, President Truman at once issued a presidential directive ordering all government agencies to refuse to turn over any information whatsoever in regard to the communist activities of any government employee to a congressional committee.
Incidentally, even after Hiss was convicted, it is interesting to note that the president still labeled the exposé of Hiss as a “red herring.”

If time permitted, it might be well to go into detail about the fact that Hiss was Roosevelt’s chief adviser at Yalta when Roosevelt was admittedly in ill health and tired physically and mentally ... and when, according to the secretary of state, Hiss and Gromyko drafted the report on the conference.

According to the then-Secretary of State Stettinius, here are some of the things that Hiss helped to decide at Yalta: (1) the establishment of a European High Commission; (2) the treatment of Germany—this you will recall was the conference at which it was decided that we would occupy Berlin with Russia occupying an area completely encircling the city, which as you know, resulted in the Berlin airlift which cost 31 American lives; (3) the Polish question; (4) the relationship between UNRRA and the Soviet; (5) the rights of Americans on control commissions of Rumania, Bulgaria and Hungary; (6) Iran; (7) China—here’s where we gave away Manchuria; (8) Turkish Straits question; (9) international trusteeships; (10) Korea.

Of the results of this conference, Arthur Bliss Lane of the State Department had this to say: “As I glanced over the document, I could not believe my eyes. To me, almost every line spoke of a surrender to Stalin.”

As you hear this story of high treason, I know that you are saying to yourself, “Well, why doesn’t the Congress do something about it?” Actually, ladies and gentlemen, one of the important reasons for the graft, the corruption, the dishonesty, the disloyalty, the treason in high government positions—one of the most important reasons why this continues—is a lack of moral uprising on the part of the 140 million American people. In the light of history, however, this is not hard to explain.

It is the result of an emotional hangover and a temporary moral lapse which follows every war. It is the apathy to evil which people who have been subjected to the tremendous evils of war feel. As the people of the world see mass murder, the destruction of defenseless and innocent people, and all of the crime and lack of morals which go with war, they become numb and apathetic. It has always been thus after war. However, the morals of our people have not been destroyed. They still exist. This cloak of numbness and apathy has only needed a spark to rekindle them. Happily, this spark has finally been supplied.
As you know, very recently the secretary of state proclaimed his loyalty to a man guilty of what has always been considered as the most abominable of all crimes—of being a traitor to the people who gave him a position of great trust. The secretary of state, in attempting to justify his continued devotion to the man who sold out the Christian world to the atheistic world, referred to Christ's Sermon on the Mount as a justification and reason therefore, and the reaction of the American people to this would have made the heart of Abraham Lincoln happy. When this pompous diplomat in striped pants, with a phony British accent, proclaimed to the American people that Christ on the Mount endorsed communism, high treason, and betrayal of a sacred trust, the blasphemy was so great that it awakened the dormant indignation of the American people.

He has lighted the spark which is resulting in a moral uprising and will end only when the whole sorry mess of twisted warped thinkers are swept from the national scene so that we may have a new birth of national honesty and decency in government.

Important People, Places, and Terms

Alien Registration Act  
*see* Smith Act

**Bentley, Elizabeth** (1908-1963)  
American spy for the Soviet Union who in 1945 renounced her Communist ties and cooperated with federal investigators.

**Bolshevik**  
A member of the Russian Social Democratic Workers’ Party that seized power in Russia in 1917; also often used to describe any Communist.

**Chambers, Whittaker** (1901-1965)  
American writer and ex-Communist who accused State Department official Alger Hiss of being a Soviet agent.

**Cohn, Roy** (1927-1986)  
Lawyer and chief aide to Joseph McCarthy.

**Cold War**  
A period of intense political and military rivalry between the United States and Soviet Union that began in the aftermath of World War II and lasted until the breakup of the Soviet Union in 1991.

**Comintern**  
An association of Communist parties around the world that was directed by Soviet leaders in Moscow.

**Communism**  
A political system in which the state controls all economic activity, distributes resources evenly among the populace, and exerts significant control over citizens’ rights and freedoms.

**Dies, Martin** (1900-1972)  
First chairman of the House Un-American Activities Committee.
CHRONOLOGY

1917
Bolsheviks take control of Russia in the Russian Revolution.
The United States passes the Espionage Act of 1917.

1919
The Communist International or Comintern is formed in Moscow to coordinate Communist activities in other countries; later that year the American Communist Party is founded.
In November the U.S. Justice Department launches the first of the Palmer Raids against alleged Communists and other political radicals.

1922
The Soviet Union (USSR) is established.

1924
J. Edgar Hoover becomes the director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI).

1933
President Franklin D. Roosevelt launches his New Deal programs of social welfare and reform.

1935
The Comintern ends its isolation from other political groups and cultivates an anti-Fascist image.

1938
The House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) is established. In its earliest years of operation it is widely known as the Dies Committee.

1939
The United States implements the Hatch Act, which makes loyalty to the United States a condition of federal employment.

1940
The U.S. government begins “loyalty” screenings of federal employees.


BIBLIOGRAPHY

Books


INDEX

A

AAUP. See American Association of University Professors (AAUP)
Acheson, Dean, 52, 92, 154
  defense of Hiss, 113, 155-56
ACLU. See American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU)
Adams, John G., 79, 82, 178
Affordable Care Act, 99
AFL. See American Federation of Labor (AFL)
AGLOSO. See Attorney General’s List of Subversive Organizations (AGLOSO)
Agronsky, Martin, 71
Aiken, George D., 161
Alien Registration Act. See Smith Act
“al-Qaeda Seven” controversy, 99, 193-96, 197-99
Alsop, Joseph, 71
Alsop, Stewart, 71
American Association of University Professors (AAUP), 75
American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), 26, 75, 174, 176
American Communist Party. See Communist Party USA
American Federation of Labor (AFL), 21, 24
American Medical Association, 17-18
American Protective League, 14
anarchism, 9, 12
Anderson, George, 17
anti-immigrant feelings, 5-8
Army-McCarthy Hearings, 106, 121-22, 130-31, 170
  excerpts from, 178-84
Ashcroft, John, 97
Association of Motion Picture Producers, 138
Attorney General’s List of Subversive Organizations (AGLOSO), 27, 32-33

B

Bentley, Elizabeth, 36-37, 38 (ill.)
Benton, William, 54, 58
Biddle, Francis, 27
“Black Silence of Fear” (Douglas), 74
Block, Herb, 54, 67 (ill.), 71
Bogart, Humphrey, 35
Breckinridge, Mary Marvin, 127
Brewer, Roy, 167
Bridges, Henry Styles, 44
Brown, Cecil, 127
Burlingame, Debra, 193, 197
Bush, George W., 97, 98 (ill.)
Butler, John Marshall, 50

C

Carr, Frank, 82
Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), 51
Chambers, Whittaker, 37-40, 112-13
  excerpted testimony of, 143-46
Cheney, Liz, 193, 194, 197
Chicago Tribune, 80
China, 39-40, 44, 154