

# The 1950s and the Cold War

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An Online Professional Development Seminar



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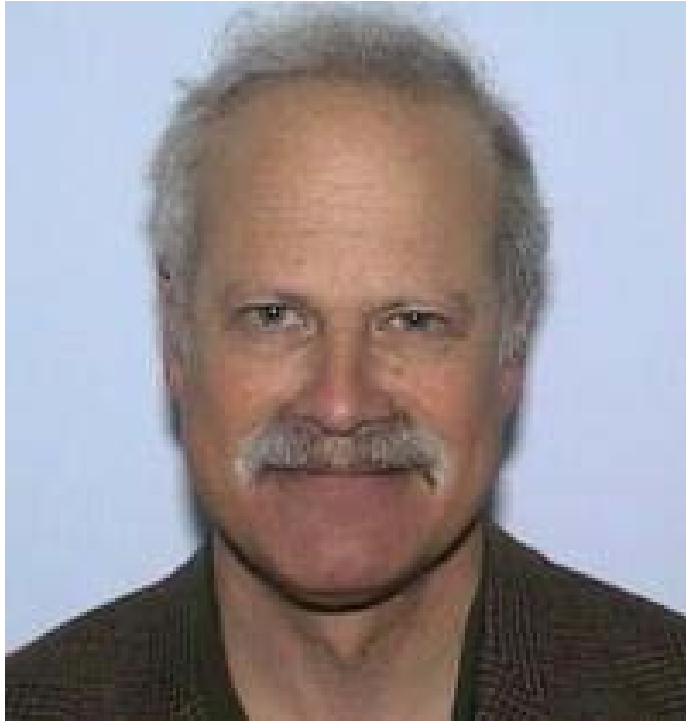
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## Understanding

The immediate postwar period, marked by an atmosphere of suspicion and fear, showed how the American public and its representatives opted for conformism at the expense of autonomy and for authority at the expense of liberty.

- How did the fear of nuclear war affect life in America?
- How real was the nuclear threat? Was it propaganda reserved for Americans?
- Did people in the Soviet Union share the same fear?
- How did Sen. McCarthy come to have so much power in this country?
- Was McCarthyism rooted in American culture, or was it something new in the 1950s?
- Who were the targets of McCarthyism?
- What role did government institutions, like the FBI, play in the repression of the 1950s?
- Did private organizations, like corporations, play a role?

- Did the nature of the Cold War change in the 1960s?
- How serious was the Cuban Missile Crisis? What affect did it have on the Cold War?
- How has the fall of the Soviet Union and the release of documents from Soviet and Warsaw Pact archives changed our view of the Cold War? Have we learned anything from Chinese sources that has changed our views of the Cold War?



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Field Specialties: the intersection of politics  
and ideas in twentieth-century America.

*The Culture of the Cold War*  
(1991)

- V-J Day brought the United States to unrivaled, unprecedented power. No nation dominated the world, militarily and economically, as did the U. S. in 1945. Within a few years, and with the loss of a nuclear monopoly, the shock of peril to national security led to a climate of anxiety and fear.
- Given the international power of the nation, the cause of that sense of insecurity was sought within--among those who were believed to be seeking the weakening of the U. S. The search for traitors easily blurred into the stigmatization of dissidents, critics and leftists in general.
- This emotional vulnerability could easily be exploited by those seeking political and personal aggrandizement, whether it be the House Committee on Un-American Activities (which sought to impose cultural conformity) or a demagogue like Senator Joseph R. McCarthy (R-Wisconsin), whose capacity for slandering and lying recklessly threw the public culture into turmoil.
- By the end of the 1950s, with McCarthy's death, and with the beginning of judicial restraint imposed upon HUAC, the fever broke, and the struggle for civil liberties was renewed, even though the Cold War was to continue in foreign policy until the breakup of the Soviet Union in 1991.

## House Committee on Un-American Activities

HUAC or HCUA was created on January 3, 1945, succeeding the Special Committee on Un-American Activities (known as the Dies Committee) which had existed since 1938.

. . . make from time to time investigations of (1) the extent, character, and objects of un-American activities in the United States, (2) the diffusion within the United States of subversive and un-American propaganda that is instigated from foreign countries or of a domestic origin and attacks the principle of the form of government as guaranteed by our Constitution, and (3) all other questions in relation thereto that would aid Congress in any necessary remedial legislation.

## House Committee on Un-American Activities

- Martin Dies, Democratic House Member from Texas, turned the committee into a political extension of conservatism and used every means at his disposal to discredit the New Deal, labor organizations, and FDR's perceived far-Left liberalism. He stated the sole objective of the HUAC was the investigation of subversive activities in the U.S.
- Dies came under attack from those who saw HUAC as a method of blocking progressive policies being advocated by Franklin D. Roosevelt. Dies retaliated by suggesting that the HUAC investigate political propaganda in Hollywood. In 1946 Richard M. Nixon joins HUAC.
- Hearings began in October 1947. The first ten men accused of being communists refused to answer any questions about their political and union activities. They claimed that the First Amendment of the Constitution gave them the right to do this. They became known as the Hollywood Ten.
- In March 1951, HUAC began an "Investigation of Communism in the Entertainment Field."
- Over 320 people were placed on the blacklist that stopped them from working in the entertainment industry. In 1969, HUAC was renamed the Internal Security Committee. Six years later it was abolished and its functions transferred to the House Judiciary Committee.



- Born Olathe, Kansas, December 13, 1914
- Early 1940s, Parks moves to Hollywood. In 1946 he wins an Academy Award for his performance in the “The Jolson Story.”
- March 21, 1951 Parks admits to HUAC that he joined the American Communist Party in 1941.
- At first he refused to name other party members.
- However, Parks agreed to name members in a private session of the HUAC.
- Despite naming other former Communist Party members, he was still blacklisted.
- An attempt to be removed from the blacklist failed, but he did continue to perform on Broadway.
- Parks died on April 13, 1975.



Larry Parks (1914-1975) before HUAC, 1951

I am not a Communist. I would like to point out that, in my opinion, there is a great difference between being a Communist, say in 1941, ten years ago, and being a Communist in 1951. To my mind this is a great difference and not a subtle one. It is also, I feel, not a subtle difference to be a member of the Communist Party and being a Communist. I do not believe in my own mind that this is a subtle difference either. I would furnish you with— I guess you would call it an allegory (analogy?) as to what I mean, so that you will see why I say it is not a subtle difference. The President of this country is the head of the Democratic Party. There are many people who call themselves Democrats. There are certain Southern Democrats, for instance, that do not follow the aims and platform of the Democratic Party, yet they are called Democrats. They, in my opinion, are Republicans really.

## Discussion Questions

Actor Larry Parks joined the CPUSA in 1941 and left it about five years later. Why does he insist on the “great difference” between 1941 and the date of his testimony in assessing the meaning of Party membership? What *was* the difference?

Well, counsel, these—I would prefer not to mention names, if it is at all possible. I don't think it is fair to people to do this. I have come to you at your request. I will tell you everything that I know about myself, because I feel I have done nothing wrong, and I will answer any question that you would like to put to me about myself. I would prefer, if you will allow me, not to mention other people's names.

...

Well, as I asked the counsel and as I asked the Committee if you will allow this, I would prefer not to mention names under these circumstances: That these were people like myself who—and I feel that I—have done nothing wrong ever. I mean along this line. I am sure none of us is perfect. Again, the question of judgment certainly is there, and even that is debatable, but these are people—

## Discussion Questions

Why did HUAC want the names of Party members Parks might have known? Why might he have been reluctant to name names?

And I ask you again, counsel, to reconsider forcing me to name names. I told you that I was a member only for a short time and at that particular time, in my opinion, the people I knew were like myself. I don't think that this is really American justice, to force me to do this, when I have come to you three thousand miles and opened myself as I have.

...

MR. WALTER: But isn't it far more important to learn the extent of the activity, and what the purpose of the organization actually was, than to get a long list of names of bleeding hearts and fools, suckers, hard-boiled Communist politicians? I don't know as it makes too much difference. As long as we have a witness anxious to cooperate in carrying out what I conceive to be our purpose, I think the rest is all immaterial.

## Discussion Questions

How do the remarks of Parks and Walter strike at the heart of the function of a Congressional committee like HUAC? What is its evident purpose?

I will, Mr. Chairman. To be an actor, a good actor, you must really feel and experience, from the top of your head to the tip of your toes, what you are doing. As I told you, this is probably the most difficult morning and afternoon I have spent, and I wish that if it was at all possible—you see, it is a little different to sit there and to sit here, and for a moment if you could transfer places with me, mentally, and put yourself in my place ... My people have a long heritage in this country. They fought in the Revolutionary War to make this country, to create this Government, of which this Committee is a part. I have two boys, one thirteen months, one two weeks. Is this the kind of heritage that I must hand down to them? Is this the kind of heritage that you would like to hand down to your children? And for what purpose? Children as innocent as I am or you are, people you already know ... I don't think I would be here today if I weren't a star, because you know as well as I, even better, that I know nothing that would be of great service to this country. I think my career has been ruined because of this, and I would appreciate not having to— Don't present me with the choice of either being in contempt of this Committee and going to jail or forcing me to really crawl through the mud to be an informer. For what purpose? I don't think this is a choice at all. I don't think this is really sportsmanlike. I don't think this is American. I don't think this is American justice.

...

I think to do something like that is more akin to what happened under Hitler, and what is happening in Russia today. I don't think this is American justice for an innocent mistake in judgment, if it was that, with the intention behind it only of making this country a better place in which to live. I think it is not befitting for this Committee to force me to make this kind of a choice. I don't think it is befitting to the purpose of the Committee to do this. As I told you, I think this is probably the most difficult thing I have done, and it seems to me it would impair the usefulness of this Committee to do this, because God knows it is difficult enough to come before this Committee and tell the truth. There was another choice open to me. I did not choose to use it. I chose to come and tell the truth. If you do this to me, I think it will impair the usefulness of this Committee to a great extent, because it will make it almost impossible for a person to come to you, as I have done, and open himself to you and tell you the truth. So I beg of you not to force me to do this.

## Discussion Questions

How does this testimony suggest why editor Eric Bentley, ed., *Thirty Years of Treason*, called Parks' submission "the most pathetic" in the records of HUAC? And why might one speculate that his confession did not bring absolution or forgiveness, so that his career in Hollywood was ruined?

- Elia Kazan (Kazanoglous) was born in Constantinople, Turkey, September 7, 1909.
- In 1913 his family moved to the US. Kazan attended Williams College and the Yale Drama School.
- In 1932 Kazan joined the Group Theatre in NY. Members of the group tended to have left-wing political views and wanted to produce plays addressing important social issues.
- Kazan joined the American Communist Party in 1934.
- Kazan appeared before HUAC on April 10, 1952. He admitted he had joined the Communist Party in 1934 and left two years later over disagreements about policy. Kazan claimed that he had been instructed to “capture” the Group Theatre. He named Clifford Odets, Joseph Bromberg, Morris Carnovsky and Tony Kraber as former members of the party.
- As a reward for his co-operation, Kazan was allowed to continue working in Hollywood.
- Elia Kazan died on September 28, 2003.



Elia Kazan  
1909-2003

*All My Sons*, by Arthur Miller, 1947: The story of a war veteran who came home to discover that his father, a small manufacturer, had shipped defective plane parts to the Armed Forces during the war. Some people have searched for hidden propaganda in this one, but I believe it to be a deeply moral investigation of problems of conscience and responsibility.

*Gentlemen's Agreement* (picture): Picture version of the best-selling novel about anti-Semitism. It won an academy award and I think it is in a healthy American tradition, for it shows Americans exploring a problem and tackling a solution. Again it is opposite to the picture which Communists present of Americans.

*A Streetcar Named Desire*, by Tennessee Williams, 1947: A famous play. Not political, but deeply human.

*Death of a Salesman*, by Arthur Miller, 1949: It shows the frustrations of the life of a salesman and contains implicit criticism of his materialistic standards.

*Pinky* (picture), 1949: The story of a Negro girl who passed for white in the North and returns to the South to encounter freshly the impact of prejudice. Almost everybody liked this except the Communists, who attacked it virulently. It was extremely successful throughout the country, as much so in the South as elsewhere.



## Discussion Questions

Triumphing on Broadway and in Hollywood, Kazan was the most acclaimed director of his time. Why might he have wanted to list his plays and films in such a fashion? Is his testimony accurate in describing those works? And why did his cooperativeness bring him such vexation, so that his career thereafter remained under a cloud?



- Alger Hiss was born on November 11, 1904 in Baltimore, Maryland.
- He attended Johns Hopkins University and Harvard Law School. Hiss served as a law clerk to Supreme Court Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes. He went on to work in the Roosevelt administration.
- In the late 1930s Hiss was a key State Department official during the formative years of the United Nations. He eventually served as Secretary General at the 1945 San Francisco meeting at which the U.N. was founded.
- In 1939, Whitaker Chambers, a former member of the U.S. Communist Party, told Assistant Secretary of State Adolf Berle that Hiss was a communist.

- Hiss left the State Department to become, in 1947, the president of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. Within a year of Hiss's departure from the State Department, Chambers, a senior editor at Time magazine, told the House Un-American Activities Committee that Hiss had been a fellow communist in the 1930s and had given him State Department documents that he passed to a Soviet official.
- Denying the charges, Hiss sued Chambers for libel. To counter Hiss's charges, Chambers produced handwritten memos and typewritten summaries of State Department documents.
- Under a subpoena authorized by Richard M. Nixon, Chambers guided congressional investigators to a pumpkin patch on his farm in Maryland. Hidden in a hollowed-out pumpkin was what later became known as the “pumpkin papers”—several prints of State Department documents from the 1930s.
- The pumpkin papers were introduced against Hiss in a perjury trial, at which he was accused of lying about having passed State Department papers to Chambers. Hiss was convicted and sentenced to two years in prison, though he vehemently denied the charges for the duration of his life.
- Died November 15, 1996



Joseph R. McCarthy  
1908-1957

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.

## Discussion Questions

Upon whom does the Senator pin the blame for the threat that Communism poses? Who, besides “minority groups,” is also excluded from his targets? And why might he blame the privileged?

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

## Discussion Questions

How does McCarthy suggest that the espionage or treason threat is unprecedented? Does his speech cite any evidence of the impact of espionage? Why does he minimize the danger of “blueprints of a new weapon” falling into the wrong hands?

## Secretary of State Dean Acheson on the conviction of Alger Hiss for perjury

“I should like to make it clear to you [in response to a reporter’s question] that whatever the outcome of any appeal which Mr. Hiss or his lawyers may take in this case, I do not intend to turn my back on Alger Hiss. I think every person who has known Alger Hiss or has served with him at any time has upon his conscience the very serious task of deciding what his attitude is and what his conduct should be. . . . For me, there is very little doubt about those standards or those principles; I think they were stated for us a very long time ago. They were stated on the Mount of Olives and if you are interested in seeing them you will find them in the 25th Chapter of the Gospel according to St. Matthew beginning with verse 34.”

Acheson moreover made clear that he did not in any way “condone” the actions for which Hiss was convicted.

## Sen. McCarthy’s Response

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 therefor, and the reaction of the American people to this would have made the heart of Abraham Lincoln happy.

## Discussion Questions

Secretary of State Dean Acheson proclaimed mercy the supreme virtue of Christianity, in commenting on the conviction of Alger Hiss for (in effect) espionage on behalf of the USSR. To what extent does McCarthy distort Acheson's remark? And what emotions does McCarthy in this passage seem to want to stir?



Final slide.

Thank You