

SUMMARY DIAGRAM

The Truman Doctrine and Latin America

The Cold War and American society and culture

▶ *Key question: How and why did the Cold War affect American society and culture?*

Background to the Red Scare under Truman

The American people disliked Communism because it was atheistic and seemed to threaten the 'American Dream' that everyone was free to get ahead and to get rich. The historian James Patterson (1996) noted that Americans have 'periodically lashed out at radicals, alleged subversives, aliens, immigrants, blacks, Catholics, Jews, and other vulnerable groups who could be blamed for complex problems'. The first American **Red Scare**, which followed the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917, was one such outburst.

During the poverty-stricken 1930s, right-wing politicians and intellectuals feared **socialism** and Communism might gain popularity so the House of Representatives Committee on Un-American activities (HUAC) investigated **left-wingers**. During the Second World War, there was even less tolerance of different ideas, as in 1940 when the Smith Act targeted advocates of revolution, including Communists. President Roosevelt encouraged **FBI** director J. Edgar Hoover to check on possible Communists and initiated programmes in 1942 that sought out those who were a 'security risk'.

A new Red Scare

At the end of the Second World War, the vast majority of Americans regarded Communism as an alien ideology that was godless, repressive, aggressive and socialistic. This traditional ideological aversion, the surge of patriotism

KEY TERM

Red Scare An outburst of anti-Communist hysteria, in which Communists (real and imagined) were seen everywhere ('Reds under the bed').

Is it surprising that a Red Scare gripped the USA under Truman?

KEY TERM

Socialism Political philosophy that advocated redistribution of wealth. Some contemporaries used the words Communism and socialism interchangeably.

Left-wingers Those sympathetic to the ideals of socialism and Communism, favouring government activism.

FBI The Federal Bureau of Investigation was established in 1935 in order to investigate federal crime and to collect intelligence.

Who or what was to blame for the Red Scare?

generated by the Second World War, and the fear of Soviet military strength combined to generate a second Red Scare, an era of unprecedented anti-Communist hysteria.

HUAC

In 1945 Congressman John Rankin suggested HUAC be made permanent and given broader powers in order to deal with domestic subversion (he was convinced it was a Communist plot when the Red Cross did not label blood according to race). In 1947 the Republicans won control of Congress and of HUAC and began investigating a supposed Hollywood-centred Communist conspiracy to overthrow the government. The 'Hollywood 10', a group of writers and directors who had been or were members of the American Communist Party, were convicted of contempt of Congress and given one-year jail sentences. The hysterical pursuit of suspects then moved to Broadway (New York City's theatre district) and in 1948 the courts moved against Communist Party officials.

Truman's responsibility for the new Red Scare

In 1950, the McCarran or Internal Security Act said members of Communist-affiliated organizations had to register with the federal government or face jail or fines. Those who registered could be denied passports or deported. President Truman was torn between trying to defend his administration from charges that they were lax on security, and the desire to defend civil liberties. On the one hand, he tried (but failed) to veto the Internal Security Act, saying, 'In a free country we punish men for the crimes they commit, but never for the opinions they have.' On the other hand, soon after declaring the Truman Doctrine, he had contributed to the Red Scare by ordering Executive Order Number 9835, which ordered a loyalty investigation into federal employees.

KEY TERM

Justice Department The part of the federal government with special responsibility for monitoring the enforcement of laws and the administration of justice.

Gestapo Nazi Germany's feared secret police force.

The **Justice Department** and particularly the FBI were greatly involved in hunting Communists. Determined to root out Communism from the USA, J. Edgar Hoover ordered his men to follow up all leads on supposed subversives, however trivial. He was especially interested to hear about the sexual activities of those being investigated. Estimates of the numbers affected vary, but it has been suggested that between 1947 and 1952, there were 3000 investigations, 14,000 enquiries, over 1000 dismissals and several thousand resignations proffered in order to pre-empt investigations. Leading Democrat Clark Clifford recalled that Truman thought the Communist scare 'was a load of baloney. But political pressures were such that he had to recognize it.' Privately, Truman compared Hoover and the FBI to the *Gestapo*.

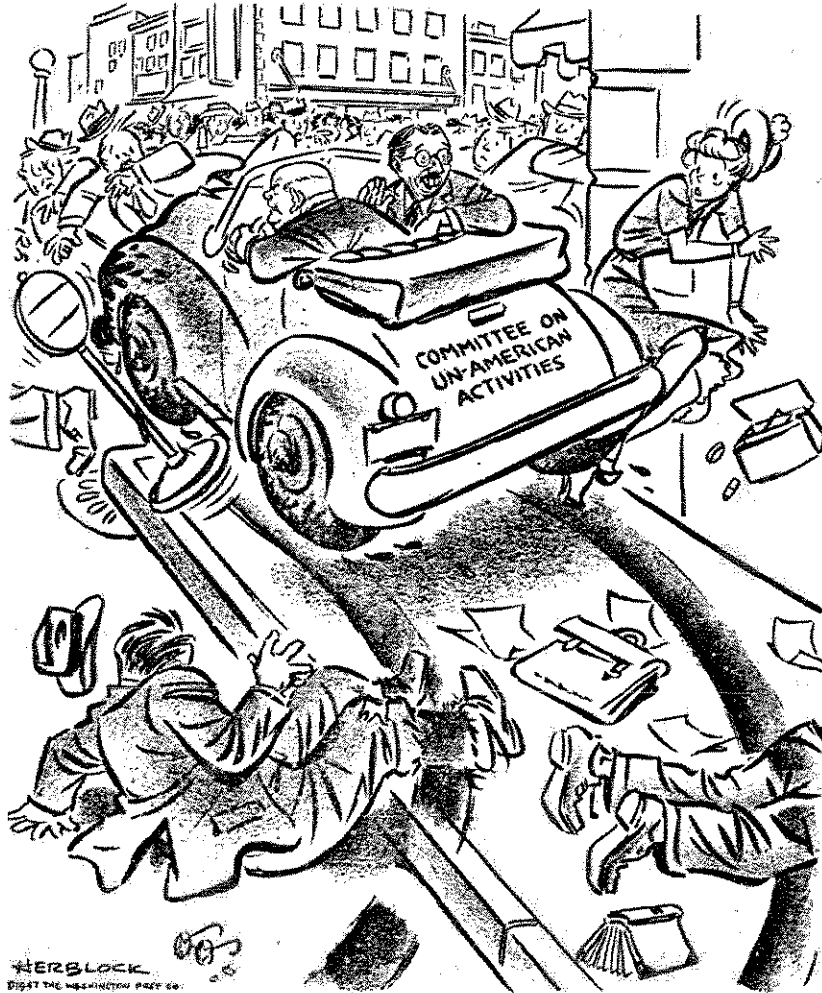
Communist successes, 1949–50

As advised by Senator Vandenberg, Truman had 'scared the hell' out of the American people with his Truman Doctrine. Americans grew even more anxious in 1949 when the Soviets exploded their first atomic bomb and

SOURCE L

'It's Okay – We're Hunting Communists'. A 1947 cartoon on HUAC, published in the *Washington Post*. (A 1947 Herblock Cartoon, copyright by The Herb Block Foundation.)

Look at Source L. What is the cartoonist's attitude towards HUAC?



China became Communist. In February 1950, Klaus Fuchs, who had worked on the development of the atomic bomb, was arrested in Britain for betraying atomic secrets to the Soviets. Other arrests followed in North America, including Ethel and Julius Rosenberg and State Department official Alger Hiss in January 1950.

Republican Party ambitions

Democrats had occupied the White House since 1933, so the Republicans needed an issue. Patriotism in the face of the Soviet threat required foreign policy consensus, so all the Republicans could do was to attack the

Democrats for not waging the Cold War with sufficient vigour. Beginning with the Republican successes in the 1946 congressional elections, the strategy worked. A spring 1948 poll found 73 per cent of Americans considered Truman too soft on the Soviets. In this already paranoid atmosphere, Republican Senator Joseph McCarthy convinced many Americans that the Truman administration contained Communists, although the Red Scare was obviously not just McCarthy's fault.

The Rosenbergs

Communists Ethel and Julius Rosenberg were the only American citizens executed for espionage in the Cold War. They were 'shopped' by Ethel's brother David. Like Julius, David was a Soviet spy. In 1996, David confessed that he had lied about his sister being a spy in exchange for the freedom of his wife (also a spy). Julius died after the first series of electrocutions, but when the attendants removed Ethel's strapping and other equipment after the normal course of electrocutions, it was found that her heart was still beating. Three more courses of electrocution were applied, after which smoke rose from Ethel's head. Doctors then attested that she was dead. No relatives would adopt the Rosenbergs' two orphaned sons, but a Jewish songwriter did so. It has been suggested that anti-Semitism played a part in the fate of the Rosenbergs.

What was the significance of McCarthy and McCarthyism in Cold War America?

McCarthy and McCarthyism

Born to a poor Irish farming family in central Wisconsin, Joseph McCarthy survived serious criticisms of his performance and behaviour as a county judge. In 1946, his successful campaign for the Senate owed much to his lies about his war record. He claimed his limp was due to a war wound but it was the result of falling down stairs at a party.

A 1949 poll of Washington correspondents voted McCarthy the worst US senator. Needing some good publicity, McCarthy presented himself as a diligent patriot, making a series of speeches in early 1950 in which he said there were card-carrying Communists in the State Department (the numbers he said he could name varied from speech to speech). The Senate then established a special committee under Millard Tydings, a conservative Democrat from Maryland, to investigate McCarthy's charges. The Tydings Committee quickly reported that McCarthy's lies were 'a fraud and a hoax', but McCarthy supporters in Maryland retaliated by circulating a fake photograph showing Tydings conversing animatedly with US Communist Party leader Earl Browder. Tydings failed to get re-elected in November 1950.

Investigations during the McCarthy hysteria

In 1952, McCarthy headed congressional committees that investigated Communist subversives in the USA. By 1953, these congressional investigations covered the media, the entertainment industry, colleges and

SOURCE M

A faked photograph of Senator Millard Tydings supposedly talking to Communist Party leader Earl Browder.



Can you tell that the photograph in Source M has been doctored? What does this photograph tell you about photographic evidence?

universities. State legislatures joined in the witch hunt, and around 500 state and local government employees and 600 school teachers and 150 college professors lost their jobs. McCarthyites attacked **US Information Agency** libraries because they had exhibited the work of 'radicals' such as Mark Twain (1835–1910), the creator of two fictional characters much loved by American children, Huckleberry Finn and Tom Sawyer. The nation that considered itself to be the world's leading democracy was stifling freedom of speech and censoring books.

McCarthy and the presidential election of 1952

In 1952, McCarthy helped ensure the defeat of many Democrats ('Commie-crats'), including presidential candidate, Adlai Stevenson ('I'd like to teach patriotism to little Ad-lie'). Future president Richard Nixon had made his name in the second Red Scare-era investigations. He defeated Helen Gahagan Douglas in the California Senate race, mostly by accusing her of being a Communist, 'pink down to her underwear' (she retaliated by christening him 'Tricky Dick', a nickname that stuck). In 1952, Nixon mocked 'Adlai the appeaser', graduate of the Truman administration's 'cowardly College of Communist Containment'. This anti-Stevenson feeling owed much to class hatred (McCarthy and Nixon came from poor backgrounds). Newspapers with working-class and/or right-wing editorship and readership were particularly hard on Stevenson. The *New York Daily News* called Adlai 'Adelaide', and said he 'trilled' his speeches in a 'fruity' voice. In a homophobic age, it was quite usual to smear establishment figures with supposed Communist sympathies with suggestions of homosexuality.

KEY TERM

US Information Agency

Established by President Eisenhower in 1953 to educate foreigners about the USA.

Pink Cold War Americans referred to Communists as 'Reds' or as 'pink'.

How did McCarthy get away with it?

McCarthy terrorized many Americans with his untrue accusations. He got away with his lies because of the tradition of hysterical anti-Communism, the spy scares, Communist successes and expansionism (as demonstrated in Korea), and because of the Republican desire to regain control of the presidency and Congress ('20 years of treason'). Democrats felt they dare not defend the accused lest they be called Communist sympathizers and draw down McCarthy's fire on their own heads. Senators who did stand up to McCarthy suffered defeat in the 1952 congressional elections. McCarthy maintained good relations with many reporters, and the press was rarely hostile to him. Truman's Republican successor, Eisenhower (1953–61) said that he did not want to 'get into a pissing contest with that skunk'. In 1950, Harvard sociologist David Reisman summed it up, describing Cold War Americans as mindless, timid conformists.

The fall of McCarthy

McCarthy always had critics and he eventually fell from grace. When in one speech in Congress, he accused Secretary of State Dean Acheson (whom he described as 'this pompous diplomat with his striped pants and phoney British accent') and Second World War hero and Secretary of Defense George Marshall of Communism, all but three senators left the Senate chamber in disgust. The final straw was the 'Army-McCarthy' hearings, in which McCarthy frequently appeared unshaven and drunk. When McCarthy investigated a supposed spy ring on the army base at Fort Monmouth, New Jersey, the army filed charges against him, and his poll ratings slumped. In March 1955, the Senate finally censured him. He died in 1957, supposedly of cirrhosis of the liver.

Conclusions about the importance of McCarthy

Much of the paranoia and persecution that afflicted Cold War America was due to McCarthy, who also influenced American foreign policy and defence policy. Along with the Truman Doctrine and containment, McCarthy played an important part in getting the USA involved in the Korean War (see Chapter 3). Historian James Patterson (1996) credits him with making any attempt at negotiation with the USSR or China 'politically perilous': when Stalin died, the new Soviet regime sought *détente*, but no one in the Eisenhower State Department wanted to annoy McCarthy.

KEY TERM

Détente A relaxation in Cold War tensions.

How did the Cold War change the USA?

→ The impact of the Cold War on American life

The Cold War had a massive impact on American society and culture. In a country that considered itself to be the world's leading democracy, states and towns banned Communists from government jobs. The struggle with the USSR led to an anti-Communist hysteria in which the American ideals of freedom of thought and freedom of expression were damaged. Thousands of innocent people suffered: several thousand lost their jobs, several hundred were jailed and over 150 were deported.



Children

The Cold War affected everyday life. In preparation for a nuclear attack, schoolchildren practised hiding under their desks like the government-sponsored cartoon character 'Bert the Turtle'. Bert knew to lower his head when threatened, so American schoolchildren would lower their heads when the teacher shouted 'Drop!' in the nuclear fallout drill. Many parents bought backyard bomb shelters. Even children's favourite comic-strip characters were drafted into the anti-Communist ranks. In *Annie*, Daddy Warbucks blew up a plane carrying an H-bomb toward America.

Entertainment

The impact on American culture was sometimes stultifying. On the one hand, many important books had little to do with Communism, as with J.D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye* (1951). Similarly New York City was a world-beating centre of artistic and architectural creativity in the Truman years. On the other hand, popular culture was greatly affected, as demonstrated in Hollywood. Depression-era films explored social and economic problems, but Cold War Hollywood avoided such issues. Anti-Communist films abounded, including *The Iron Curtain* (1948), *The Red Menace* (1949) and *My Son John* (1952), who was betrayed to the authorities by his own anti-Communist mother. Hollywood played on fears of a nuclear holocaust: science-fiction movies were popular in an age that anticipated facing the horrors of the unknown. 'Subversives' from the world of entertainment who found themselves increasingly unemployed included outstanding musicians such as Leonard Bernstein and Aaron Copland, actor Edward G. Robinson and actor and singer Paul Robeson. British-born silent movie superstar Charlie Chaplin was no longer welcome in the USA after 1952. All had demonstrated leftist sympathies.

Religion and education

Religion underwent a renaissance in the Cold War era. Evangelical preacher Billy Graham warned great crowds against Communism. In 1954, Bishop Sheen denounced Communism to an audience that reached 25 million per week and the Catholic Knights of Columbus lobbied for a change to the Pledge of Allegiance, uttered daily by schoolchildren, hand on heart, facing the flag of the USA. Congress added to the pledge that the USA was one nation 'under God'.

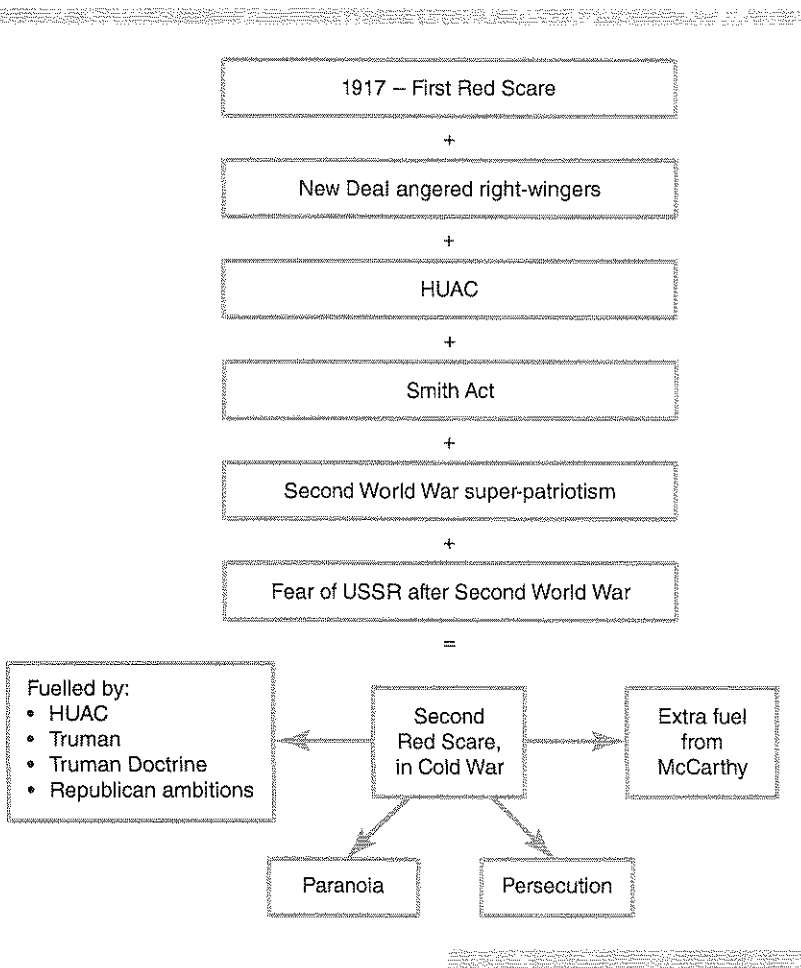
Education was affected in other ways. The 1958 National Defence Education Act funded more opportunities for would-be scientists, mathematicians and linguists who could invent the weapons to defeat the Communists and speak the languages necessary to spy on them and to convince other nations to oppose them.

The Korean War

The Cold War led to the USA fighting in Korea (see Chapter 3). An estimated 36,000 Americans died there and the war cost the American taxpayer



\$67 billion. The increased defence expenditure boosted the gross national product, but also generated inflation and a rise in the cost of living. On the other hand, the Korean War benefited African Americans because it sped up the desegregation of the army. At this time, African Americans in the southern United States were not allowed to vote or to sit in the same schools or restaurants as white Americans, but under the pressure of war, the American forces in Korea were integrated. Short of manpower and slowed up by having to run a black and the white army, both the army top brass and ordinary soldiers realized that segregation hurt them. However, the beneficial impact of the Cold War for African Americans in the armed forces was the exception rather than the rule. In a Cold War in which the USA considered itself to be the champion of freedom against repressive Communist regimes, American society ironically became more conformist and oppressive.



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