

Bryn Mawr College
Professor Stephen Vider
Not for circulation without permission

TWO
WORLDS

1950

Communist Containment and the 1950s Red Scare

Wednesday, September 9, 2026

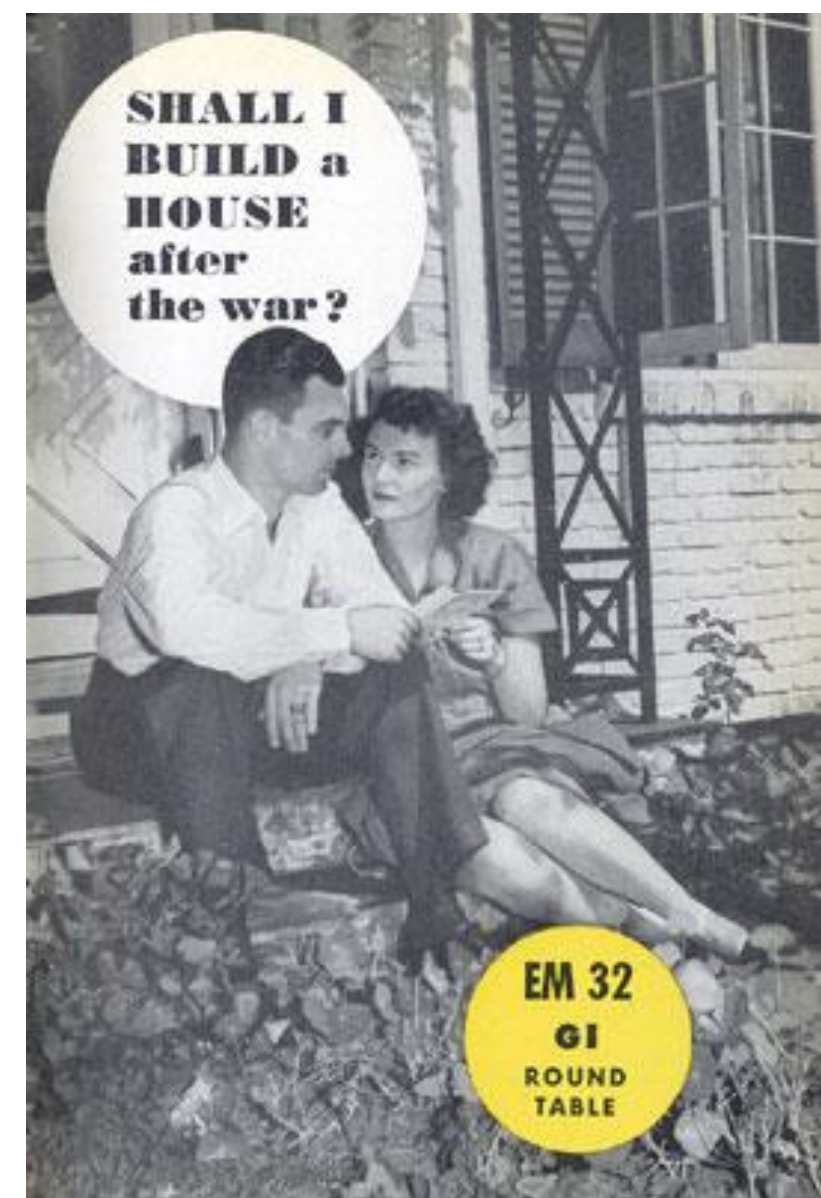


Review from last time

1. World War II opens up new opportunities for mobility and expands gender and sexual norms.
2. G.I. Bill expands education and homeownership, but in ways that reinforce more restrictive gender and sexual norms (the breadwinner-homemaker household) while largely ignoring racism as barrier to access.
3. G.I. Bill advances a model of government as partnership – mutual responsibility of the citizen and the government. At the same time, some citizens are more deserving than others.



Paralyzed Veterans of America, founded 1946 (Source: PVA)



“Shall I Go Back to School?” “Shall I Take Up Farming?” “Shall I Build a House after the War?” G.I. Roundtable pamphlets, 1944

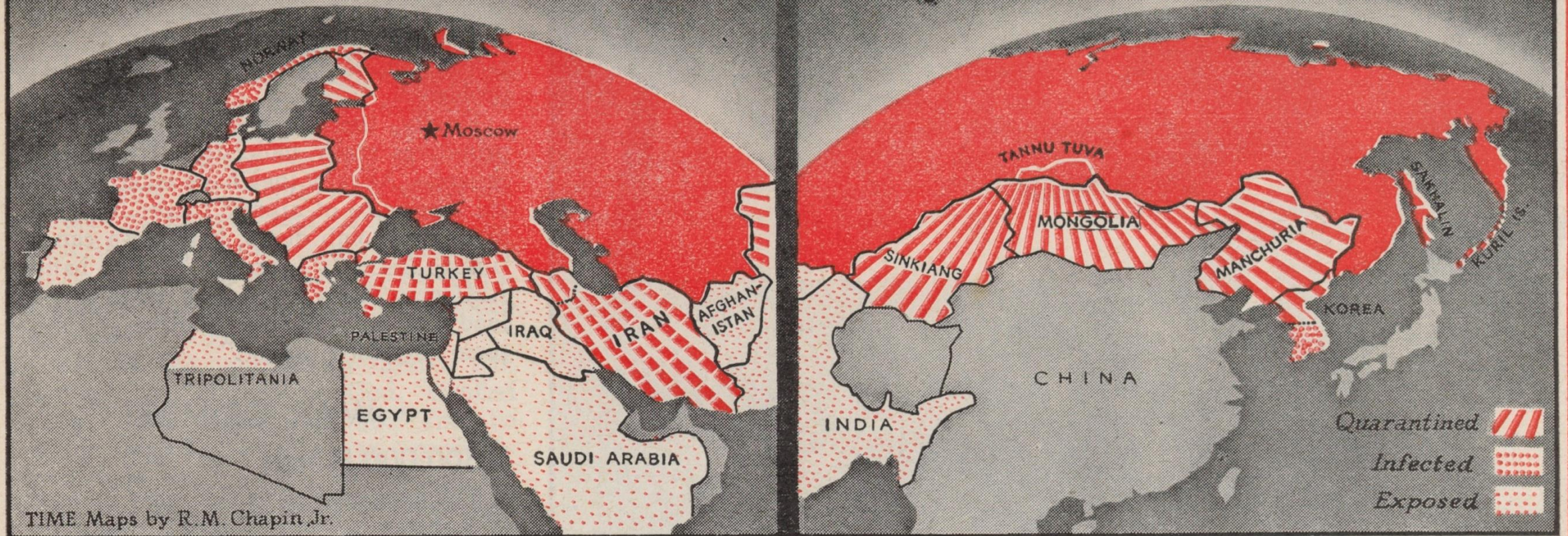
Key Questions for Today

1. How did the logic of “containment” reflect new understandings of the place of the United States in the world?
2. How did the fear of the Soviet Union’s influence abroad translate into a fear of Communism within the U.S.?
3. How did the Red Scare transform perceptions and practices of U.S. politics and culture?

The Emergence of the Cold War

- Shifting global dynamics after World War II led to heightened crisis over global politics and economics
- **Stalin in February 1946:** “It would be wrong to think that the Second World War was a casual occurrence or the result of mistakes of any particular statesmen, though mistakes undoubtedly were made. Actually, the war was the inevitable result of the development of world economic and political forces on the basis of modern monopoly capitalism.”
- **Churchill in March 1946:** “The Communist parties, which were very small in all these Eastern States of Europe, have been raised to pre-eminence and power far beyond their numbers and are seeking everywhere to obtain totalitarian control. Police governments are prevailing in nearly every case, and so far, except in Czechoslovakia, there is no true democracy.”

COMMUNIST CONTAGION



WHAT DOES RUSSIA WANT?

Time magazine “Communist Contagion,” illustrated by Robert Chapin, Jr.:
“Quarantined,” “Infected,” and “Exposed”

Containment

“Containment” policy coined by diplomat George Kennan in anonymous 1947 article, “The Sources of Soviet Conduct

Advocates for long-term, but muted pushback:

“The theory of the inevitability of the eventual fall of capitalism has the fortunate connotation that there is no hurry about it. The forces of progress can take their time in preparing the final coup de grace.... The Kremlin has no compunction about retreating in the face of superior force. And being under the compulsion of no timetable, it does not get panicky under the necessity for such retreat... These considerations make Soviet diplomacy at once easier and more difficult to deal with than the diplomacy of individual aggressive leaders like Napoleon and Hitler.... In these circumstances it is clear that the main element of any United States policy toward the Soviet Union must be that of a long-term, patient but firm and vigilant containment of Russian expansive tendencies.”

Truman Doctrine / U.S. interventionism

March 12, 1947, President Harry S. Truman address to joint session of Congress:

“The United States has received from the Greek Government an urgent appeal for financial and economic assistance... [A]ssistance is imperative if Greece is to survive as a free nation. I do not believe that the American people and the Congress wish to turn a deaf ear to the appeal of the Greek Government.

“The very existence of the Greek state is today threatened by the terrorist activities of several thousand armed men, led by Communists, who defy the government's authority at a number of points...

“There is no other country to which democratic Greece can turn. No other nation is willing and able to provide the necessary support for a democratic Greek government.”

Truman Doctrine / U.S. interventionism

March 12, 1947, President Harry S. Truman address to joint session of Congress:

“At the present moment in world history nearly every nation must choose between alternative ways of life. The choice is too often not a free one.

“One way of life is based upon the will of the majority, and is distinguished by free institutions, representative government, free elections, guarantees of individual liberty, freedom of speech and religion, and freedom from political oppression. The second way of life is based upon the will of a minority forcibly imposed upon the majority. It relies upon terror and oppression, a controlled press and radio; fixed elections, and the suppression of personal freedoms.

“I believe that it must be the policy of the United States to support free peoples who are resisting attempted subjugation by armed minorities or by outside pressures... I believe that our help should be primarily through economic and financial aid which is essential to economic stability and orderly political processes.”

Marshall Plan and European Recovery



European Recovery Programme (1948-1951)

- 13 billion dollars of economic aid
- Largely focused on infrastructure development (i.e. agricultural output, electricity, mechanization)
- Opening up international trade barriers

Poster from Marshall Plan poster competition, 1951
(Source: Marshall Foundation)



“The Marshall Plan at Work,” Greece (c. 1950) National Archives



Broader efforts at U.S./European collaboration

- United Nations (1945)
- World Bank (International Bank for Reconstruction and Development) (1946)
- NATO: North Atlantic Treaty Organization (1949)



Robert Chapin, Jr. "Two Worlds" (1950) (Source: Cornell University)





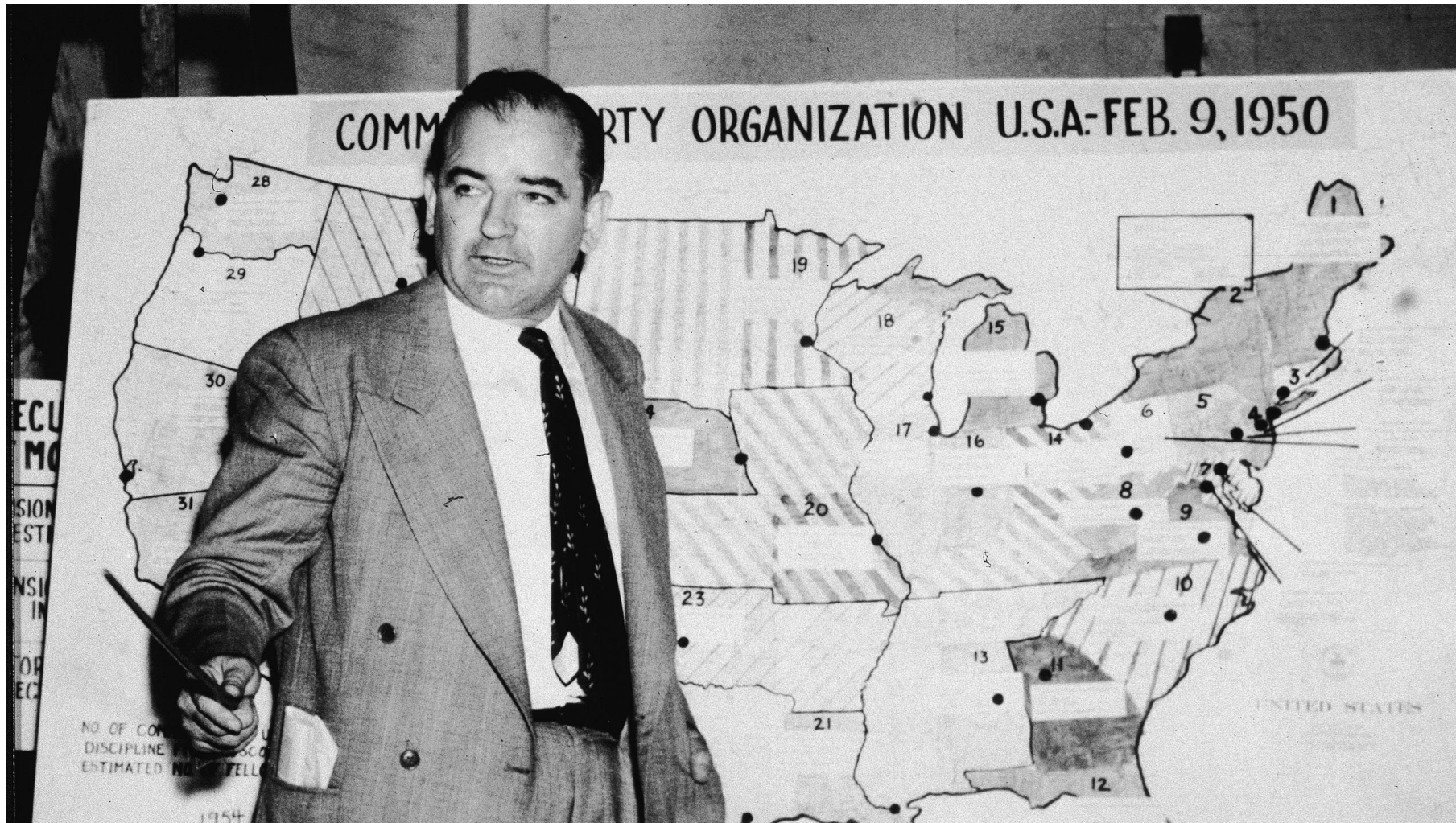


Stalin and Mao Zedong meeting in Moscow, 1949
(Source: Getty Images)



Korean War as Proxy War

Red Scare of the 1950s



Senator Joseph McCarthy at Army-McCarthy hearings 1954



Industrial Workers of the World members released after 18 months of detention at Ellis Island, 1919 (National Archives)



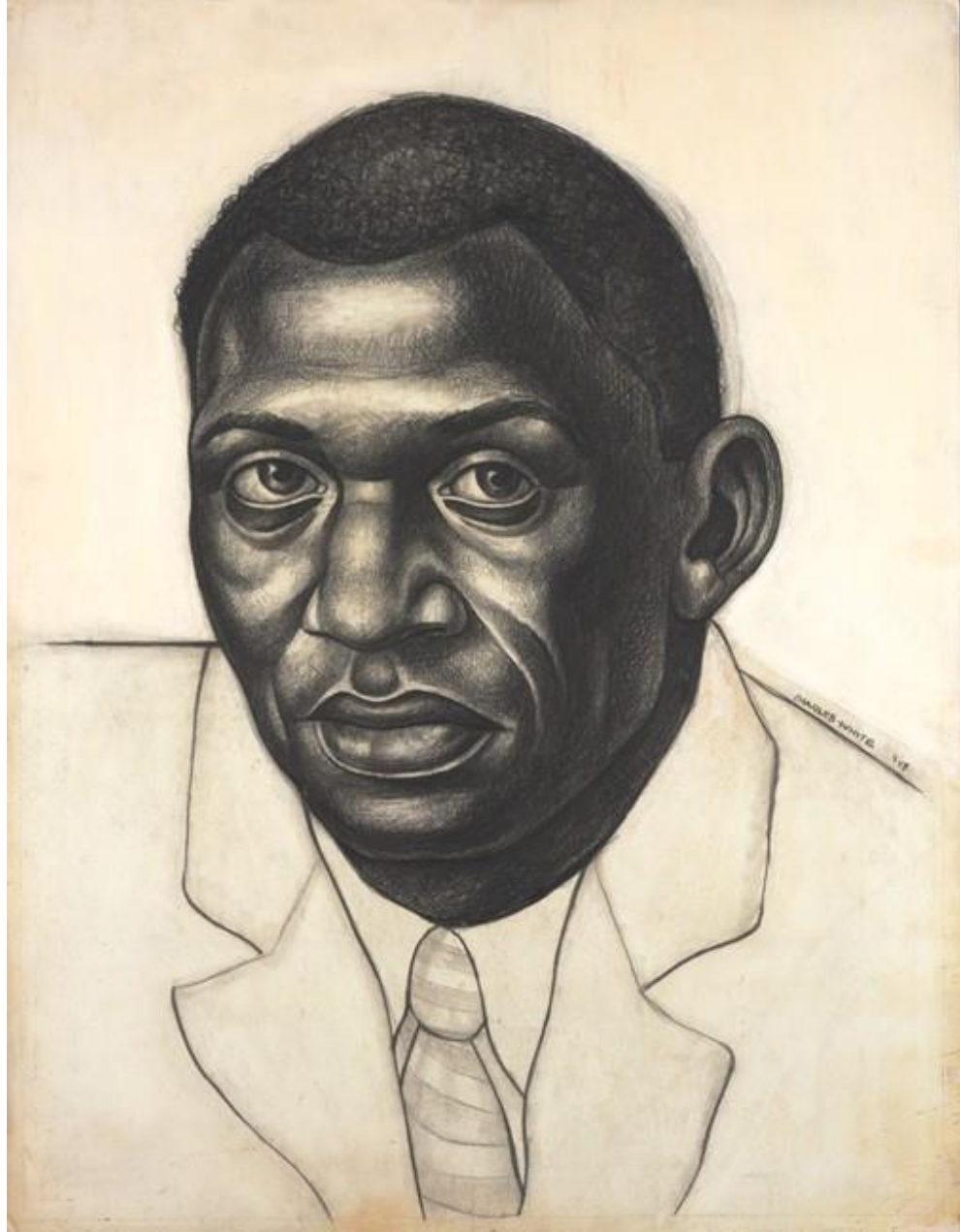
Actor Gary Cooper in front of House Un-American Activities Committee hearing, c. 1950 (Getty Images)



Anti-communist protesters in Hollywood, 1947 (Getty Images)



Protest in support of Hollywood Ten, 1947 (Source: Everett Collection)



Paul Robeson, portrait by Charles White (Source: Princeton University Art Gallery); Robeson as Othello, 1943 (NYPL)

son, 27,
Clarence

said the
to \$2,500
the re-
fternoon.
been set
at an

dead by
Sunday
rs. Daisy
husband,
car with
n.

Dr. W.
er, attri-
crushed
from a
his head.
evidence
involved.
was not

BRITISH JET FLYING BOAT—The Saunders-
Roe A1, Britain's jet flying boat fighter, under-
goes a successful test off the Isle of Wight. The

boat has two jet uni-
fitted in the nose.

'Purge' Of Government Pay Rolls Opens Today

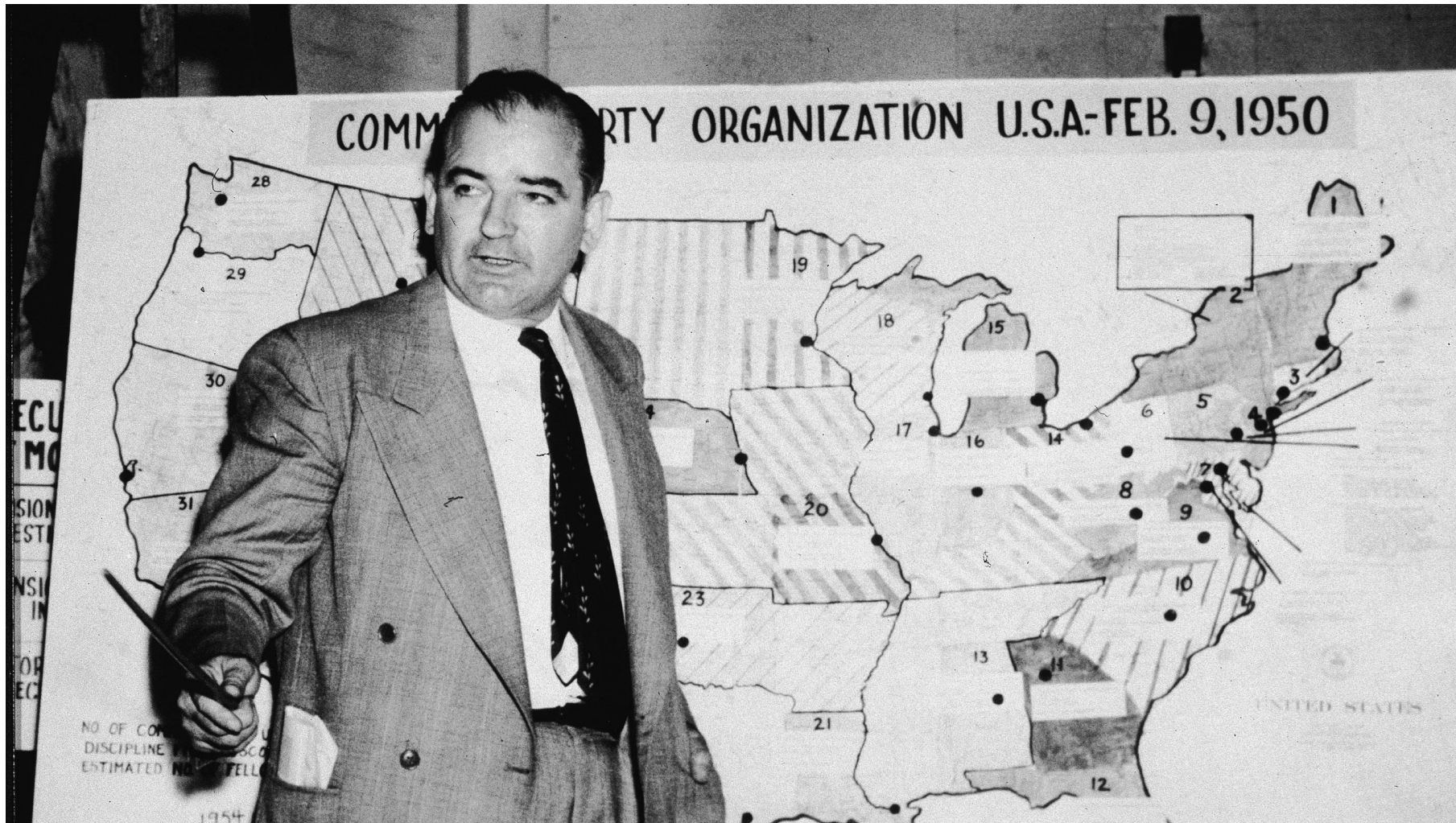
**Long, Expensive FBI Investigations Launched
To Check On 'Loyalty' Of Federal Employees**

WASHINGTON, Aug. 18.—(UP)—The federal gov-
ernment officially set out today to purge its 2,000,000-
worker pay roll of all persons disloyal to the United
States and its ideals.

Bi
Ag
Fr

N
(UP
Bilb
with
was
deca
tion
Bi
one
and

Red Scare of the 1950s



Senator Joseph McCarthy at Army-McCarthy hearings 1954

McCarthy in Wheeling, West Virginia, February 9, 1950

“I have here in my hand a list of 57 that were known to the Secretary of State as being members of the Communist Party and who, nevertheless, are still working and shaping policy in the State Department.”

What does McCarthy seem to believe is at stake in uncovering Communist sympathizers? And rhetorically, what kinds of arguments, parallels, and language does he use to instill anxiety and support among his listeners?

Within federal government:

Nearly 5 million loyalty forms

27,000 investigations

560 people fired

, SUNDAY MORNING, MARCH 1, 1953

House Un-American Unit To Join Senators in Probe Of Reds in Education

WASHINGTON, Feb. 28 (AP).—Congressional sources revealed today the House Un-American Activities Committee would join forces shortly with the Senate Internal Security Committee in searching out Reds in education.

Investigators for the House and Senate groups, it was learned, have been working together for some weeks.

There was talk of White House participation in working out cooperation between the Senate committee, headed by Senator William E. Jenner (R-Ind.), and the House committee, headed by Representative Harold H. Velde (R-Ill).

PLAN DEVELOPED

A statement made public by the office of Representative Harold T. Ostertag (R-NY), quoted Velde as saying that a plan of "coordination and cooperation" had been developed in conferences with Jenner, Chairman Joseph R. McCarthy (R-Wis) of the Senate Government Operations Committee, the FBI and the "administration, represented by Maj. Gen. W. B. Persons, White House liaison aide."

A spokesman said joint hearings

qualified than the committees to judge whether faculty members were fit to teach.

She declared: "A Communist who is teaching Communist doctrine naturally is unfit to teach." But she added that the current investigations would not do "anything more than frighten people."

'Voice' Quiz Told Of 2 Rejections

Continued From First Page

fied that the State Department ordered suspension of anti-Communist broadcasts to Israel last December—just two weeks after the Prague anti-Semitic trials.

These witnesses were Gerald Dooher, chief of the "Voice's" Near East and Asia Service, and his subordinate, Sidney Glazer, chief of the Voice's Hebrew Service.

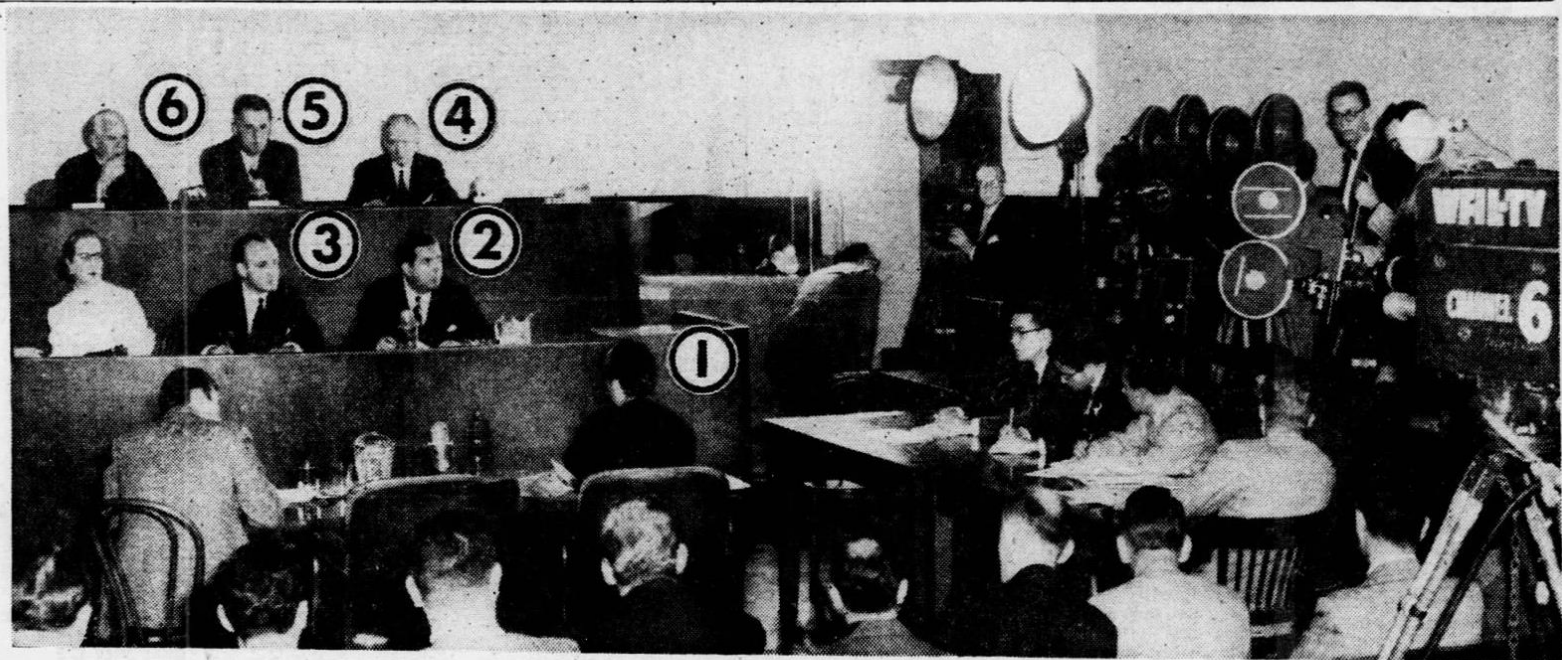
6 Refuse to Aid School Red Quiz

Constitution Is Invoked By Teachers

Deny Membership
In Party as House
Inquiry Opens Here

Invoking the 5th Amendment of the Constitution, five public school teachers and one retired instructor yesterday refused to answer certain questions put by the House Un-American Activities Committee in its opening session in the Federal Building, 9th and Market sts.

All of them denied they were now members of the Communist Party, but refused to state whether or not they had been in the past. Frequently, they brushed aside



General view as House Un-American Activities Committee opens its investigation of Communism among Philadelphia public school teachers. Dr. Bella V. Dodd (1), an ex-

Communist, is the first witness and is being interrogated by Robert Kunzig (2), committee counsel. Next to him is Earl Fuoss (3), committee's chief investigator. At rear are

the committee members: Reps. Francis E. Walter (D., Pa.) (4), Harold H. Velde (R., Ill.), the chairman (5), and Kit Clardy (R., Mich.) (6). Other pictures on Page 2.

House Un-American Activities Committee investigates Philadelphia Teachers

Philadelphia Inquirer, November 17, 1953



Communist Party rally, New York City, 1930 (Getty images)

In what ways, does French argue, did the Red Scare reshape representations and perceptions of the U.S. government, and why might it matter for our understanding of the Red Scare and U.S. policy in the 1950s?

SPIES CONDEMNED TO DEATH



Julius Rosenberg



Mrs. Ethel Rosenberg

The New York Times

ATOM SPY COUPLE SENTENCED TO DIE; AIDE GETS 30 YEARS

Penalties for Rosenbergs Are
First Under '17 Law, in Which
Kaufman Cites Weakness

APPEALS TO ACT AS STAYS

Judge Denounces Theft of
Bomb Secrets for Russia as
'Worse Than Murder'

By WILLIAM R. CONKLIN

In a history-making action, Federal Judge Irving R. Kaufman imposed death sentences yesterday on two spies convicted of stealing the atomic bomb secret for Soviet Russia and sentenced a third spy to thirty years in a Federal penitentiary.

Julius Rosenberg, 32 years old,
an electrical engineer and his

Julius and Ethel Rosenberg Trial

New York Times, April 6, 1951



Demonstration at White House for Rosenbergs (1953 / Getty Images)



Counterprotest in favor of execution (1953 / Getty Images)

What Motivates Joseph McCarthy

The Senator from Wisconsin, to this Washington observer, looks like an engine of outward fury with an inner mood far from furious.

By WILLIAM S. WHITE

WASHINGTON.

MORE than ever Senator Joseph R. McCarthy is in the limelight. It is timely therefore, to put these fundamental questions: Why did McCarthy rise to power? What sort of man, really, is he? What motivates him? What is his future?

The ingredients of what has become known as "McCarthyism" are far from unknown but they are not often, perhaps, lumped all together so that this curious mixture has an immediately discernible shape and consistency. The most important ingredients of all, then, are vastly dissimilar but nevertheless related.

The first is the state of the world since the late war, the endlessly certi-

fied intention of the world Communist conspiracy, with which is interrelated the long-proved fact that Communist plotters have no regard for truth-telling or any sort of fair play, including the forensic.

The second is accident and nothing else—the accident that Senator McCarthy went out dutifully for Lincoln Day speeches in February of 1950. He went forth to do a routine partisan errand—and all unwittingly he put in motion one of the maddest of our time. Using data that have been endlessly disputed as to their truth and good faith (did he say fifty Communists or 200-odd, or what not?) he accused the Democratic Administration of knowingly harboring men who

were prepared to subvert their country.

And, as the Soviet threat grew, and as this Government took the lead in combating it with such vast designs as the Truman Doctrine and the Marshall Plan and the Atlantic Pact, so grew suspicion and distrust. Powerful and otherwise responsible men permitted, and in some cases even participated in, unrestrained campaigns of denunciation in which some of the highest and heretofore the most respected leaders of the United States were equated with "softness to communism," and even in some cases with treason.

McCarthy's case went largely unanswered in Congress even by the most entrenched members of the very party—the Democrats—against which

for years it was directed. It is a plain and incontestable fact that many Republicans who were then (as now) privately denouncing "that fellow McCarthy" were making every possible political use of him.

It thus came about that many so-called "Eisenhower Republicans," who were so adamant against the late Senator Robert A. Taft, found it possible to do political business with Senator McCarthy. The alliance was a most odd one. For McCarthy's bedrock and basic support has always come from the isolationist, somewhat xenophobic, so-called "Midwestern type" of voter, whose innate suspicions in general seem greater than average. And he has represented direct action, the quick short cut way, the anti-this and anti-that attitudes that in point of fact he has not in every case himself shared.

AT any rate, McCarthy for some years has been an important figure on the American political scene. What sort of man is this?

Joseph R. McCarthy is a muscular, rather dark, totally unzealous man who smiles a great deal, has an incredible energy and is nearly always in absolute command of himself. He has not accomplished his position of power in the Senate by being admired there; on the whole, he has accomplished it by being feared there. He is deplored by most, but not disliked by all, of his colleagues. He has a harsh private candor; he does not delude himself or attempt, in private, to delude others. There is an appeal in him to other and more finished politicians because he is a "fighter," though he is no unthinking fighter and has in fact helped destroy the careers of others, notably former Senator Millard Tydings of Maryland.

McCarthy, in short, is not the kind of man who would attempt to storm the gates of hell with a handsaw. In his student days—and he had a hard, meager beginning in Wisconsin, above which he rose with obvious fortitude and courage—he was a boxer. He is, therefore, never thrown wholly off balance, and on those occasions when he has been driven into close corners, I have never seen him approach the state of white-faced, heedless anger that he has often aroused in others.

HE is anything but a student, anything but a philosopher, anything but personally embittered. Though he has no sense of fastidiousness whatever about his weapons, he is entirely capable of clapping the back, later, of a Senate antagonist about whom he may have said in public things that would be unforgivable by ordinary standards.

He is calm, basically dispassionate and cold, for all the contrary impressions that may (Continued on Page 54)

"What Motivates Joseph McCarthy," New York Times, 1954



Senator McCarthy holds a press conference—"He is not the kind of man who would attempt to storm the gates of hell with a handsaw."

WILLIAM S. WHITE of The Times staff in Washington regularly covers Congress.