# McCarthyism and the Second Red Scare

This was not the first occasion the United States had experienced a Red Scare. However, the immediate post-war years saw the Soviet Union set up satellite nations and expand communism in Eastern Europe. In 1949, communists prevailed in taking over China, and supported an attack on South Korea, hoping to spread communism throughout the Korean peninsula. **Americans feared that communism’s influence would spread at home.**

**The Short Leash of Loyalty:** President Truman was a victim of growing fear of communism, as anti-Communist Republicans accused him of being weak in battling communism.

* **March 1947:** Truman responded to his critics by issuing an executive order setting up the Federal Employee Loyalty Program
  + The program included a **Loyalty Review Board**
    - Investigated government employees and dismissed those found to be disloyal to the U.S. government.
  + A list of 91 “subversive” organizations was made by the U.S. attorney general
  + 1947-1951: The Loyalty Review Board investigated 3.2 million employees
    - 212 were dismissed as security risks
    - Nearly 3,000 resigned to escape investigation or because they felt the investigation violated their constitutional rights
* **1949**: Twelve communists were convicted and sent to prison for advocating the overthrow of the U.S. government by force.
* They had violated the Smith Act of 1940- the nation’s first anti- sedition law since 1798’s Alien and Sedition Acts
* They appealed their convictions
  + The Supreme Court upheld their convictions in *Dennis v. United States* (1951)

The scope of Truman’s Loyalty Review Board was broadened by an agency created in 1938, the **House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC)**.

* HUAC was established to investigate “subversion” within American society.
* **1947**: HUAC began investigating communist influence in the movie industry
  + Communists were suspected of inserting favorable propaganda in films, based on pro-Soviet films made during WWII…when the Soviet Union was an ally
  + HUAC subpoenaed 43 witnesses from Hollywood to testify
    - Many were “friendly” witnesses- they testified that Communists had indeed infiltrated Hollywood
    - Ten “unfriendly” witnesses, the **Hollywood Ten**, refused to testify.
      * They believed the hearings were unconstitutional
      * For refusing to testify, these individuals were thrown in prison
  + Responding to the hearings, and popular pressure, Hollywood film executives began a **blacklist**- a list of people believed to be communists or communist sympathizers.
    - Approximately 500 actors were blacklisted
    - Their careers were ruined, as they could no longer find work in the film industry
* **1950**: The McCarran Internal Security Act was passed by Republicans in Congress
  + Made it illegal to plan any action that might lead to the establishment of a totalitarian dictatorship in the U.S.
  + Authorized the president to detain suspicious people during an “internal security emergency”
    - Truman vetoed the bill
    - Congress overrode Truman’s veto

While the Loyalty Review Board, HUAC, and McCarran Act may have gone overboard with communist hysteria, there was indeed a real reason to fear communist subversion in America during the post-war era. Two spy cases would prove that.

**1948: The Alger Hiss Case**

* + A former Communist spy, Whittaker Chambers, accused **Alger Hiss** of spying for the Soviet Union.
    - Chambers showed microfilm containing government documents the he claimed had been typed on Hiss’s typewriter
  + Too much time had passed from the date of the crime for the government to charge Hiss with espionage (spying)

**1950:** Hiss was convicted of perjury, or lying under oath, and sent to prison

* + A young Republican congressman, Richard Nixon, came to prominence for pursuing the conviction in the case
    - Nixon would be Eisenhower’s running mate in the 1952 election…and become vice president.
  + Although Hiss claimed he was innocent, claiming Chambers forged the documents used against him, later evidence would prove Hiss was a spy.
    - Soviet cables released by the National Security Agency in the 1990s proved Hiss was guilty of spying

**1950: The Rosenberg Case**

* + Klaus Fuchs, a German-born physicist, admitted providing the Soviet Union with U.S. secrets to developing the atomic bomb
    - This information probably helped the Soviets complete their bomb years earlier than if they didn’t get the information
    - Fuch’s testimony implicated **Julius and Ethel Rosenberg**, who were activists in the American Communist Party
  + The Rosenbergs denied the charges and refusied to testify against themselves
    - Both were convicted and sentenced to death
  + Many people from all over the world protested their conviction and sentence
    - Many thought the evidence too weak to warrant the death penalty
    - The case was appealed all the way to the Supreme Court
  + The Supreme Court refused to overturn the conviction
    - Ethel and Julius were executed by electric chair in 1953
      * They were the first U.S. citizens executed for espionage

### In February of 1950, Senator Joseph McCarthy of Wisconsin charged that Communists were taking over the U.S. government. With his salacious accusations, McCarthy launched one of the most notorious “witch hunts” in American history.

**McCarthy’s Witch Hunt-** McCarthy came to prominence by taking advantage of American’s heightened concern about Communism in America.

* Feb 1950: McCarthy claimed that there were 205 Communists working in the State Department
  + He also Charged that the Democratic Party was guilty of “20 years of treason” for allowing Communist infiltration into the U.S. government
  + When pressed to provided names, McCarthy said there were only 57 real communists…and he failed to identify even one!
* For the next several years, McCarthy continued his accusations only in the Senate, where he was free from being sued for slander, and never naming names.
  + Republicans used his witch hunt to attack Democrats- it was politically advantageous
* 1954: McCarthy went too far, making accusations against the U.S. Army
  + 20 million Americans watched the Army-McCarthy hearings on television
    - McCarthy bullied the witnesses, and lost support of the American public
  + The Senate condemned him for improper conduct that “tended to bring the Senate into dishonor and disrepute.”
  + Three years later, McCarthy died of alcoholism
* Taking advantage of people’s concerns about communism (or any other topic) and making unsupported accusations became known as **McCarthyism.**