Worry about infiltration of the United States by subversive elements first emerged in the 1930s, when it was believed that German agents were spreading Nazi propaganda through the country. Congress responded in 1934 by forming a Special Committee on Un-American Activities, which held hearings, issued a report, and quietly disbanded in 1935. In 1938 it was reconstituted as the House Committee on Un-American Activities (HUAC), chaired by Texas Democrat Martin Dies, and it was intended to be permanent. While this committee was charged with investigating pro-fascist groups, as well as hate organizations like the Ku Klux Klan, Dies chose to focus instead on suspicions that members of the Communist Party had managed to infiltrate a number of federal agencies (FYI – he blamed the New Deal as a breeding ground for Communist infiltration). Martin Dies was interested only in the actions of Communists and New Dealers, categories he saw as largely indistinguishable. Fascist groups like the KKK, the Silver Shirts, and the Knights of White Camelia were soon applauding the work of HUAC, which ironically was originally created to investigate them!

Because the United States and the Soviet Union were allies during World War II, HUAC remained fairly quiet during the war years, but in 1946 it became a permanent standing committee, charged with investigating any individual or group that challenged “the form of government guaranteed by our Constitution.” In the Cold War climate of the late 1940s and 1950s, the belief that Communists were prominent in the New Deal, as well as on college campuses and in CIO unions, spread widely. 1950s Democrats and New Dealers reacted very defensively, and actually admitted that they were aware of the problem, and went to great lengths to act tough on Communism, which served to overstate the “threat” of Soviet espionage both during the New Deal and during the 1950s. Surely such activities did exist, but there was nothing approaching a dangerous conspiracy. To be sure, Marxism, or Communism, was never a significant movement in the United States, but the thinking of New Dealers (and society), as we studied, moved to the left -- we can say that it was greatly influenced by “Marxist ideas,” which is to simply argue that people were thinking more in terms of cooperation and equality, than individualism and competition. Historians have described the New Deal/Great Depression era as one with “cooperative values.” We must remember that Marxism is a very complex intellectual framework, and consequently has been interpreted a number of ways (some very very bad -- can you say “Stalin?”). Put simply, many Americans attempted to blend what they thought were the best features of the American tradition (liberal capitalism), with the socially responsible aspects of Marxism. These scholars were appalled at the values of the American capitalist marketplace that seemed to be void of all social responsibility. Hence, the injection of a cooperative value system, that did not mean the control over the individual, but rather it meant, to them, a way to provide the economic security necessary for individuals to be truly free to express their individuality. These were the values of the New Dealers, and a large portion of society throughout the 1930s and 1940s. This is also what makes it an easy target.

Back to HUAC - Then, after Republicans won majorities in both houses of Congress in the 1946 elections, the committee began to examine federal employees who were allegedly attracted to communism, and who had promoted policies favorable to the Soviet Union.

This lesson will examine the operations of HUAC in the late 1940s. This lesson will ask you to address one fundamental question that is still relevant today: What constitutes an “un-American” activity? In association with that theme, you will determine whether there are some ideas that are so dangerous that even their expression should be limited and whether certain professions—government service, entertainment, education, etc.—are so influential that the personal views of people in them should come under public scrutiny.

Guiding Question

- What constitutes an "un-American" activity?
- How did the House Un-American Activities Committee go about defining and investigating such activities?

Do Now → Un-American Activities

Directions: Read the following excerpt from House Resolution 282, the legislation that established the House Un-American Activities Committee in May 1938. When you have finished, make a list of activities that you think might qualify as “un-American.” Be prepared to share your answers with the class. At the end of the lesson, we will revisit this list, and compare it to the activities HUAC did in fact investigate.
“Resolved, that the Speaker of the House of Representatives ... is hereby, authorized to appoint a special committee to be composed of seven members for the purpose of conducting an investigation of (1) the extent, character, and object of un-American propaganda activities in the United States, (2) the diffusion within the United States of subversives 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 the Constitution, and (3) all other questions in relation thereto that would aid Congress in any necessary remedial legislation.”

What sort of activities do you consider “un-American”?

Activity 1 → HUAC vs. Hollywood

Annotation
One of the most famous episodes in HUAC’s history was its investigation of Hollywood. In this case the committee looked into the production of certain films during World War II that were accused of creating an overly-positive image of socialism or the Soviet Union. A number of prominent Hollywood figures, including studio executives, movie stars, and screenwriters, were called to testify in 1947. When some of these refused to answer questions about their alleged communist affiliations, or refused to identify others who were suspected of being communists, ten of them—soon dubbed the "Hollywood Ten"—were charged and convicted of contempt of Congress. Eventually as a result of these hearings some 300 directors, actors, and screenwriters found that they had been "blacklisted" by the motion picture industry; that is, the studios agreed not to hire them. Some, like Charlie Chaplin, left the country; some screenwriters continued to work under false names.

Activity 2 → the Case of Alger Hiss

Annotation
HUAC also dealt with offenses of a more serious nature. In an executive session of the committee in August 1948, Whittaker Chambers, a confessed Soviet agent, who used several identities, accused Alger Hiss, a Harvard Law School graduate and a prominent New Dealer, of having been part of the same spy ring. The resulting committee hearings, and Hiss's subsequent perjury trial, helped to focus the nation's attention on the question of communists in government. The hearings also helped to make a household name of one committee member, a young Republican congressman named Richard M. Nixon, who was particularly zealous in proving that Hiss was a Soviet agent.

Transcript #1: Testimony of Whittaker Chambers. August 3, 7, and 25, 1948 (Pages 4-6)

Transcript #2: Testimony of Alger Hiss. August 5, 16, and 25, 1948 (Pages 7-10)

Transcript #3: The Hiss-Chambers Hearings. August 17 and 25, 1948 (Pages 12-14)
**Directions (Group #1):** Read the excerpts below from *Whittaker Chambers’s* testimony before HUAC. As you read, answer the following questions:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Answer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Who was Whittaker Chambers?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Why did Chambers become a communist?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why did he break with the Communist Party?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>What did Chambers accuse Alger Hiss of doing?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Why was Congressmen Mundt so interested in Hiss?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>What was the basis for Chambers’s claim that Hiss is a communist?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you find Chambers to be a credible witness? Why or why not?</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

[Note: Aside from Chambers himself, others involved in the following excerpts are Robert Stripling (the committee’s chief investigator) and committee members Rep. Karl Mundt (Republican-South Dakota), Rep. F. Edward Hebert (Democrat-Louisiana), and Rep. Richard M. Nixon (Republican-California).]
Mr. STRIPLING. Will you state your full name?
Mr. CHAMBERS. My name is David Whittaker Chambers....

Mr. STRIPLING. What is your present occupation?
Mr. CHAMBERS. I am senior editor of *Time* magazine.

Mr. STRIPLING. When and where were you born?
Mr. CHAMBERS. I was born April 1, 1901, in Philadelphia.

Mr. STRIPLING. How long have you been associated with *Time* magazine?
Mr. CHAMBERS. Nine years.

Mr. STRIPLING. Prior to that time what was your occupation?
Mr. CHAMBERS. I was a member of the Communist Party and a paid functionary of the party.....

Mr. STRIPLING. When did you disassociate yourself with the Communist Party? [....]

Mr. CHAMBERS. Almost exactly 9 years ago...I went to Washington and reported to the authorities what I knew about the infiltration of the United States Government by Communists....

I had joined the Communist Party in 1924. No one recruited me. I had become convinced that the society in which we live, western civilization, had reached a crisis, of which the First World War was the military expression, and that it was doomed to collapse... I did not understand the causes of the crisis or know what to do about it. But I felt that, as an intelligent man, I must do something. In the writings of Karl Marx I thought that I had found the explanation of the historical and economic causes. In the writings of Lenin I thought I had found the answer to the question, What to do?

In 1937 I repudiated [rejected] Marx's doctrines and Lenin's tactics. Experience and the record had convinced me that communism is a form of totalitarianism, that its triumph means slavery to men wherever they fall under its sway...I resolved to break with the Communist Party at whatever risk to my life or other tragedy to myself or my family.... For a year I lived in hiding, sleeping by day and watching through the night with gun or revolver within easy reach. That was what underground communism could do to one man in the peaceful United States in the year 1938. I had sound reason for supposing that the Communists might try to kill me. For a number of years I had myself served in the underground, chiefly in Washington, D.C. The heart of my report to the United States Government consisted of a description of the ... [underground activities]. It was an underground organization of the United States Communist Party.... I knew it at its top level, a group of seven or so men.... The head of the underground group at the time I knew it was Nathan Witt, an attorney for the National Labor Relations Board [New Deal Agency].... Lee Pressman was also a member of this group, as was Alger Hiss, who, as a member of the State Department, later organized the conferences at Dumbarton Oaks, San Francisco, and the United States side of the Yalta Conference.

The purpose of this group at that time was not primarily espionage. Its original purpose was the Communist infiltration of the American Government. But espionage was certainly one of its eventual objectives....

It is 10 years since I broke away from the Communist Party. During that decade I have sought to live an industrious and God-fearing life. At the same time I have fought communism constantly by act and written word. I am proud to appear before this committee. The publicity inseparable from such testimony has darkened, and will no doubt continue to darken, my effort to integrate myself in the community of free men. But that is a small price to pay if my testimony helps to make Americans recognize at last that they are at grips with a secret, sinister, and enormously powerful force whose tireless purpose is their enslavement....

Mr. STRIPLING. Who comprised this cell or apparatus to which you referred?
Mr. CHAMBERS. The apparatus was organized with a leading group of seven men, each of whom was a leader of the cell....

Mr. STRIPLING. When you left the Communist Party in 1937 did you approach any of these men to break [from the Communist Party] with you?
Mr. CHAMBERS. No. The only one of those people whom I approached was Alger Hiss. I went to the Hiss home one evening at what I considered considerable risk to myself and found Mrs. Hiss at home. Mrs. Hiss is also a member of the Communist Party.

Mr. MUNDT. Mrs. Alger Hiss?
Mr. CHAMBERS. Mrs. Alger Hiss.... Mrs. Hiss attempted while I was there to make a call, which I can only presume was to other Communists, but I quickly went to the telephone and she hung up, and Mr. Hiss came in shortly afterward, and we
talked and I tried to break him away from the party. As a matter of fact, he cried when we separated; when I left him, but he absolutely refused to break.

Mr. McDowell. He cried?

Mr. Chambers. Yes, he did. I was very fond of Mr. Hiss.

Mr. Mundt. He must have given you some reason why he did not want to sever the relationship.

Mr. Chambers. His reasons were simply the [Communist] party line....

Mr. Mundt. Mr. Chambers, I am very much interested in trying to check the career of Alger Hiss.... As a member of the Foreign Affairs Committee ... I have had ... [the ability] to check the activities of Alger Hiss while he was in the State Department. There is reason to believe that he organized within that Department one of the Communist cells which endeavored [attempted] to influence our Chinese policy and bring about the condemnation of Chiang Kai-shek [formerly leader of the Nationalist Government in China, who fled to Taiwan after the Communist victory in the Chinese Civil War] and I think it is important to know what happened to these people after they leave the Government. Do you know where Alger Hiss is employed now?

Mr. Chambers. I believe Alger Hiss is now the head of the Carnegie Foundation for World Peace....

Mr. Herbert. You remained an American citizen and yet you joined the Communist Party?

Mr. Chambers. All Communists do that.

Mr. Herbert. You are an intelligent individual and well educated. You said members of the Communist Party were disloyal. Did it ever occur to you that you were disloyal to your own Government? Why didn't you renounce your citizenship?

Mr. Chambers. No Communist would ever think of doing such a thing.

Mr. Herbert. You knew you were being disloyal to the American Government?

Mr. Chambers. Yes.

Testimony of Whittaker Chambers before the House Committee on Un-American Activities. August 7, 1948:
http://www.law.umkc.edu/faculty/projects/ftrials/hiss/8-7testimony[1].htm

Mr. Nixon. Do you have any other evidence, any factual evidence, to bear out your claim that Mr. Hiss was a member of the Communist Party?

Mr. Chambers. Nothing beyond the fact that he submitted himself for the 2 or 3 years that I knew him as a dedicated and disciplined Communist.

Mr. Nixon. Did you obtain his party dues from him?

Mr. Chambers. Yes, I did.

Mr. Nixon. Over what period of time?

Mr. Chambers. Two or three years, as long as I knew him....

Mr. Nixon. How often?

Mr. Chambers. Once a month.

Mr. Nixon. What did he say?

Mr. Chambers. That was one point it wasn't necessary to say anything. At first he said, "Here are my dues."

Mr. Nixon. And once a month over a period of 2 years, approximately, he gave you an envelope which contained the dues?

Mr. Chambers. That is right.... Mr. Nixon. Is there any other circumstance which would substantiate your allegation that he was a member of the party? You have indicated he paid dues, you indicated that Mr. Peters, the head of the Communist underground, informed you he was a member of the party before you met him the first time.

Mr. Chambers. I must also ... [add] here that all Communists in the group in which I originally knew him accepted him as a member of the Communist Party.

Mr. Nixon. Referred to him as a member of the party?

Mr. Chambers. That doesn't come up in conversation, but this was a Communist group.

Mr. Nixon. Could this have possibly been an intellectual study group?
Mr. CHAMBERS. It was in no way [just] an intellectual study group. Its primary function was not that of an intellectual study group. I certainly supplied some of that intellectual study business, which was part of my function, but its primary function was to infiltrate the Government in the interest of the Communist Party.

Mr. NIXON. At that time, incidentally, Mr. Hiss and the other members of this group who were Government employees did not have party cards?

Mr. CHAMBERS. No members of that group to my knowledge ever had party cards, nor do I think members of any such group have party cards.

Mr. NIXON. The reason is?

Mr. CHAMBERS. The reason is security, concealment.


Mr. STRIPLING. Mr. Chambers, do you know the individual who is now standing at the witness stand? [....]

Mr. CHAMBERS. Mr. Alger Hiss.

Mr. STRIPLING. When did you first meet Mr. Hiss? [....]

Mr. CHAMBERS. 1934.

Mr. STRIPLING. When did you last see Mr. Hiss?

Mr. CHAMBERS. About 1938....

Mr. STRIPLING. Would you now give to the committee a chronological resume of your meeting with Mr. Hiss, and how long you knew Mr. Hiss and the circumstances under which you met him?

Mr. CHAMBERS. The meeting took place in Washington, and I believe in a restaurant. I then continued to know Mr. Hiss until I broke with the Communist Party in early 1938, and I saw him once again toward the end of 1938....

Mr. STRIPLING. Did you ever meet Mr. Hiss at his apartment on Twenty-eighth Street?

Mr. CHAMBERS. I did.

Mr. STRIPLING. How many times did you meet Mr. Hiss, would you say at the address on Twenty-eighth Street? [....]

Mr. CHAMBERS. I would think—well, let's say 20 times.

Mr. STRIPLING. Twenty times at Twenty-eighth Street...Now, did you see Mr. Hiss any time after 1935?

Mr. CHAMBERS. Yes; I saw Mr. Hiss constantly through 1937, until I broke with the Communist Party....

Mr. NIXON. Did you ever stay overnight in his home?

Mr. CHAMBERS. I stayed overnight frequently in his home.

Mr. NIXON. When you say "frequently," do you mean twice or more than that?

Mr. CHAMBERS. I mean that I made his home a kind of headquarters.

Mr. NIXON. Mr. Hiss' home was a kind of a headquarters?

Mr. CHAMBERS. That is true....

Mr. NIXON. Mr. Chambers, can you search your memory now to see what motive you can have for accusing Mr. Hiss of being a Communist at the present time?

Mr. CHAMBERS. What motive I can have?

Mr. NIXON. Yes, I mean, do you—is there any grudge that you have against Mr. Hiss over anything that he has done to you?

Mr. CHAMBERS. The story has spread that in testifying against Mr. Hiss I am working out some old grudge, or motives of revenge or hatred. I do not hate Mr. Hiss. We were close friends, but we are caught in a tragedy of history. Mr. Hiss represents the concealed enemy against which we are all fighting, and I am fighting. I have testified against him with remorse and pity, but in a moment of history in which this Nation now stands, so help me God, I could not do otherwise.
**Directions (Group #2):** Read the excerpts below from Alger Hiss’s testimony before HUAC. As you read, answer the following questions:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Answer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Who was Alger Hiss?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What was Hiss accused of?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How did Hiss respond to the accusations?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How did Hiss’s testimony change between August 5 and August 16?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What did Hiss accuse HUAC of trying to do in these hearings?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you find Hiss to be a credible witness? Why or why not?</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

[Note: Aside from Hiss himself, others involved in the following excerpts are Robert Stripling (the committee’s chief investigator) and committee members Rep. John E. Rankin (Democrat-Mississippi), Rep. Karl E. Mundt (Republican-South Dakota), and Rep. Richard M. Nixon (Republican-California).]

*Testimony of Alger Hiss before the House Committee on Un-American Activities.* August 5, 1948:
http://www.law.umkc.edu/faculty/projects/ftrials/hiss/8-5testimony.html

**Mr. Hiss** I was born in Baltimore, Md., on November 11, 1904. I am here at my own request to deny ... various statements about me which were made before this committee by one Whittaker Chambers the day before yesterday. I appreciate the Committee's having promptly granted my request. I welcome the opportunity to answer to the best of my ability any inquiries the members of this committee may wish to ask me. I am not and never have been a member of the Communist Party. I do not and never have adhered to the tenets [beliefs] of the Communist Party. I am not and never
have been a member of any Communist-front organization. I have never followed the Communist Party line, directly or indirectly. To the best of my knowledge, none of my friends is a Communist. As a State Department official, I have had contacts with representatives of foreign governments, some of whom have undoubtedly been members of the Communist Party, as, for example, representatives of the Soviet Government. My contacts with any foreign representative who could possibly have been a Communist have been strictly official. To the best of my knowledge, I never heard of Whittaker Chambers until in 1947, when two representatives of the FBI asked me if I knew him ...I said I did not know Chambers. So far as I know, I have never laid eyes on him, and I should like to have the opportunity to do so....

**Mr. STRIPLING.** Mr. Hiss, would you give the committee a résumé of your educational background, please.

**Mr. HISS.** I was educated in the public schools of Baltimore... I then entered Johns Hopkins University from which I graduated with an A.B. degree in 1926. I then entered the Harvard Law School from which I graduated in 1929.

**Mr. STRIPLING.** Would you now give the committee a brief résumé of your Federal employment?

**Mr. HISS.** My first employment with the Federal Government was immediately after my graduation from law school when I served as a secretary to one of the Associate Justices of the Supreme Court of the United States. I then went into private practice in Boston and New York for a period of 3 years or so, and came to Washington on the request of Government officials in May 1933 as an assistant general counsel to the Agricultural Adjustment Administration [New Deal Agency]....

**Mr. STRIPLING.** Would you continue then with the chronology of your Government employment?

**Mr. HISS.** A Senate committee known as the Committee Investigating the Munitions Industry, of which Senator Nye was the chairman [remember the Nye Committee which investigates why the US entered WWI?], formally requested the Department of Agriculture to lend my services to that committee in its investigations as their counsel. That permission was granted and I served on the staff of the Senate committee.... I think it was early in 1934 when I first started on that committee.

**Mr. STRIPLING.** What was your capacity?

**Mr. HISS.** I was counsel. The technical title was legal assistant.

**Mr. STRIPLING.** Go right ahead.

**Mr. HISS.** When I left the Senate committee I was next employed in the office of the Solicitor General of the United States.... While I was still in the Solicitor General's office, one of the cases I was working on involved the constitutionality of the Trade Agreement Act. Mr. Francis B. Sayre, then Assistant Secretary of State in charge of the Trade Agreements Act, asked me to come to his office as his assistant to supervise the preparation within the Department of State of the constitutional arguments on the Trade Agreements Act. I did so and I remained in the Department of State in various capacities until January 15, 1947. I entered the Department of State, I think it was, in September, 1936. I resigned in January, 1947, to accept the appointment to my present position in private life to which I had been elected the preceding December.

**Mr. RANKIN.** What is that?

**Mr. HISS.** I am president of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace....

**Mr. STRIPLING.** You say you have never seen Mr. Chambers?

**Mr. HISS.** The name means absolutely nothing to me, Mr. Stripling.

**Mr. STRIPLING.** I have here, Mr. Chairman, a picture which was made last Monday by the Associated Press. I understand from people who knew Mr. Chambers during 1934 and '35 that he is much heavier today than he was at that time, but I show you this picture, Mr. Hiss, and ask you if you have ever known an individual who resembles this picture.

**Mr. HISS.** I would much rather see the individual. I have looked at all the pictures ...If this is a picture of Mr. Chambers, he is not particularly unusual looking. He looks like a lot of people. I might even mistake him for the chairman of this committee. [Laughter.] [.....]

**Mr. MUNDT.** You realize that this man whose picture you have just looked at, under sworn testimony before this committee, where all the laws of perjury apply, testified that he called at your home, conferred at great length, saw your wife pick up the telephone and call somebody whom he said must have been a Communist, plead with you to divert yourself from Communist activities, and left you with tears in your eyes, saying, "I simply can't make the sacrifice."

**Mr. HISS.** I do know that he said that. I also know that I am testifying ... to the direct contrary....

**Mr. MUNDT.** Have you ever belonged to any of the organizations the Attorney General's office has listed [as subversive organizations]?

**Mr. HISS.** I have not, Mr. Chairman, and I so stated in my opening remarks.

**Mr. MUNDT.** Has your wife ever belonged?

**Mr. HISS.** She has not, to the best of my knowledge-and I think I would know.

**Mr. MUNDT.** She has never been a Communist?

**Mr. HISS.** She has not. Again I must say under oath, to the best of my knowledge. I think my knowledge is better than Mr. Chambers on that.

**Mr. MUNDT.** It would seem that the testimony is ... opposed and it comes from two witnesses whom normally one would assume-to be perfectly reliable. They have high positions in American business or organizational work. They both appear to
be honest. They both testify under oath. Certainly the committee and the country must be badly confused about why these stories fail to jibe so completely. I think we have neglected to ask you, Mr. Hiss, one other possible clue to this situation. It could be that Mr. Chambers has mistaken you for your brother. Would you know if he would testify under oath whether your brother has ever belonged to any subversive organization or is a Communist?

Mr. HISS: I am not a qualified witness to testify absolutely. I would like to say that absolutely in my opinion he is not and never has been.

Testimony of Alger Hiss before the House Committee on Un-American Activities. August 16, 1948:
http://www.law.umkc.edu/faculty/projects/ftrials/hiss/8-16testimony.html

Mr. NIXON. I am now showing you two pictures of Mr. Whittaker Chambers, also known as Carl, who testified that he knew you between the years 1934-37, and that he saw you in 1939. I ask you now, after looking at those pictures, if you can remember that person either as Whittaker Chambers...or as any other individual you have met.

Mr. HISS. May I recall to the committee the testimony I gave ... when I was shown another photograph of Mr. Whittaker Chambers, and I had prior to taking the stand tried to get as many newspapers that had photographs of Mr. Chambers as I could. I testified then that I could not swear that I had never seen the man whose picture was shown me. Actually, the face has a certain familiarity. I think I also testified to that. It is not according to the photograph a very distinctive or unusual face. I would like very much to see the individual face to face. I had hoped that would happen before. I still hope it will happen today. I am not prepared to say that I have never seen the man whose pictures are now shown me. I said that when I was on the stand when a different picture was shown me. I cannot recall any person with distinctness and definitiveness whose picture this is, but it is not completely unfamiliar. Whether I am imagining that or not I don't know, but I certainly wouldn't want to testify without seeing the man, hearing him talk, getting some much more tangible basis for judging the person and the personality....

Mr. NIXON. Mr. Hiss, let me explain this. Mr. Chambers, as indicated, did testify that he spent a week in your house. He also testified to other facts concerning his acquaintance with you-alleged facts. I should say-and I want to point out that the committee by getting answers to completely objective questions from you will be in a position to go certainly to third parties and to find out whether or not Mr. Chambers has committed perjury. Now, on one point it is pretty clear that you have indicated that Mr. Chambers must have committed perjury because he said he spent a week in your house. Now, these other matters to which Mr. Chambers has testified involve the same type of testimony. I want to say when Mr. Chambers appeared, he was instructed that every answer he gave to every question would be material [i.e. could be used in another trial] and he was instructed off the record before that that a material question would subject him to perjury [if he gave false testimony]. So ... as you see...membership in the Communist Party is one thing because that ... might be and probably would be concealed [by you], but a matter of objective items concerning: his relationship with you, his alleged relationship with you, can be confirmed in some cases by third parties and that... is the purpose of these questions....

Mr. HISS. I have written a name on this pad in front of me of a person whom I knew in 1933 and 1934 who not only spent some time in my house but sublet my apartment. That man certainly spent more than a week, not while I was in the same apartment. I do not recognize the photographs as possibly being: this man. If I hadn't seen the morning papers with an account of statements that he knew the inside of my house, I don't think I would even have thought of this name. I want to see Chambers face to face and see if he can be this individual. I do not want and I don't think I ought to be asked to testify now that man's name and everything I can remember about him. I do not want to testify without seeing the man, hearing him talk, getting some much more tangible basis for judging the person and the personality....

Mr. NIXON. This man who spent the time in 1933 and 1934 is still a man with whom you are acquainted?

Mr. HISS. He is not....

Mr. NIXON. Your testimony is that this man you knew in 1933 and 1934 was in one of the houses you lived in?

Mr. HISS. I sublet my apartment to the man whose name I have written down.

Mr. NIXON. But you were not there at the same time?

Mr. HISS. I didn't spend a week in the same apartment, with him. He did spend a day or two in my house when he moved in.... The name of the man I brought in—and he may have no relation to this whole nightmare—is a man named George Crosley. I met him when I was working for the Nye committee. He was a writer. He hoped to sell articles to magazines about the munitions industry, I saw him... in my office over in the Senate Office Building, dozens of representatives of the press, students,--people writing books, research people. It was our job to give them appropriate information out of the record, show them what had been put in the record. This fellow was writing a series of articles, according to my best recollection, free lanceing, which he hoped to sell to one of the magazines. He was pretty obviously not successful in financial terms, but as far as I know, wasn't actually hard up....

Mr. NIXON. How tall was this man, approximately?

Mr. HISS. Shortish.

Mr. NIXON. Heavy?
Mr. **Hiss**. Not noticeably. That is why I don't believe it has any direct, but it could have an indirect, bearing.

Mr. **Nixon**. How about his teeth?

Mr. **Hiss**. Very bad teeth. That is one of the things I particularly want to see Chambers about. This man had very bad teeth, did not take care of his teeth....

Mr. **Nixon**. Was Mr. Crosley a member of the Communist Party?

Mr. **Hiss**. Not to my knowledge.

Mr. **Nixon**. Never discussed it?

Mr. **Hiss**. No.

Mr. **Nixon**. You feel he might be Whittaker Chambers?

Mr. **Hiss**. I find it difficult to believe. I can't identify him from the pictures and can't see any motive.

Mr. **Nixon**. You haven't the slightest idea what became of him?

Mr. **Hiss**. No; haven't seen him since 1935.


Mr. **Hiss**. Today...will mark my fourth appearance before your committee. I urge... that your committee delay no longer in penetrating to the bedrock of the facts relevant to the charge which you have publicized--that I am or have been a Communist.

This charge goes beyond the personal. Attempts will be made to use it... to discredit recent great achievements of this country of which I was privileged to participate [that is, the New Deal, which remember was being blamed for the Communist infiltration]. Certain members of your committee have already demonstrated that this use of your hearings and the ensuing publicity is not a mere possibility, it is a reality. Your acting chairman, Mr. Mundt, himself, was trigger-quick to cast such discredit....

Before I had a chance to testify, even before the press had a chance to reach me for comment-- after Chambers' testimony--before you had...one single fact to support the charge made by a self-confessed liar, spy, and traitor, your acting chairman pronounced judgment that I am guilty as charged...

I urge that these committee members--your committee members--abandon such verdict-first-and-testimony-later tactics...and get down to business. First, my record should be explored. It is inconceivable that there could have been on my part, during 15 or more years in public office, serving all three branches of the Government, judicial, legislative, and executive, any departure from the highest rectitude [integrity, honesty] without its being known. It is inconceivable that the men with whom I was... associated during those 15 years should not know my true character far better than this accuser [i.e. Chambers]. It is inconceivable that if I had not been of the highest character, this would not have... [been] publicly recorded in the greatest detail. During the period cited by this accuser, I was chief counsel to the Senate Committee Investigating the Munitions Industry, at a great many public hearings, fully reported in volumes to be found in libraries in every major American city. During my term of service under the Solicitor General of the United States, I participated in the preparation of Briefs on a great many of the largest issues affecting the United States. Those briefs are on public file in the United States Supreme Court, in the Department of Justice, and in law libraries in various American cities....

In all this work I was frequently... under the eye of the American press and of the statesmen under whom... I worked. They saw my every gesture, my every movement, my every facial expression. They heard the tones in which I spoke, the words I uttered, the words spoken by others in my presence. They knew my every act relating to official business, both in public and in executive conference [i.e. closed door meetings with FDR]...All are persons of unimpeachable character, in a position to know my work from day to day and hour to hour through many years. Ask them if they ever found in me anything except the highest adherence to duty and honor.

Then the committee can judge, and the public can judge, whether to believe a self-discredited accuser whose names and aliases are as numerous and as casual as his accusations.

The other side of this question is the reliability of the allegations before this committee, the undocumented statements of the man who now calls himself Whittaker Chambers.

Is he a man of consistent reliability, truthfulness, and honor? Clearly not...
Directions (Group #3): Read the excerpts below from the Hiss-Chambers hearings. As you read, answer the following questions:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Answer</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What was the purpose of having Whittaker Chambers and Alger Hiss meet face to face in this hearing?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Under what circumstances did Chambers claim he knew Hiss?</td>
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<tr>
<td>What was the outcome of the meeting between these two men?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Based on this reading, which strikes you as the more believable witness—Hiss or Chambers? Why?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Why was Congressman Mundt originally inclined to believe Hiss?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What led Congressman Mundt to change his mind regarding Hiss?</td>
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[Note: Aside from *Hiss and Chambers*, the others involved in the following excerpts include committee members *Rep. Richard M. Nixon* (Republican-California) and *Rep. Karl E. Mundt* (Republican-South Dakota), as well as the committee’s chief investigator, *Robert Stripling*.]

Mr. Nixon. Sit over here, Mr. Chambers.
Mr. Chambers, will you please stand? And will you please stand, Mr. Hiss? Mr. Hiss, the man standing here is Mr. Whittaker Chambers. I ask you now if you have ever known that man before.
Mr. Hiss. May I ask him to speak? Will you ask him to say something?
Mr. Nixon. Yes. Mr. Chambers, will you tell us your name and your business?
Mr. Chambers. My name is Whittaker Chambers.

[At this point, Mr. Hiss walked in the direction of Mr. Chambers.]

Mr. Hiss. Would you mind opening your mouth wider?
Mr. Chambers. My name is Whittaker Chambers.

Mr. Hiss. I said, would you open your mouth? You know what I am referring to, Mr. Nixon. Will you go on talking?
Mr. Chambers. I am senior editor of Time magazine.

Mr. Hiss. May I ask whether his voice, when he testified before was comparable to this?
Mr. Nixon. His voice?
Mr. Hiss. Would you ask him to say something?

Mr. McDowell. I would say it is about the same now as we have heard.
Mr. Hiss. Would you ask him to talk a little more?

Mr. Nixon. Read something, Mr. Chambers. I will let you read from....

Mr. Hiss. I think he is George Crosley, but I would like to hear him talk a little longer.
Mr. McDowell. Mr. Chambers, if you would be more comfortable, you may sit down.

Mr. Hiss. Are you George Crosley?
Mr. Chambers. Not to my knowledge. You are Alger Hiss, I believe.

Mr. Hiss. I certainly am.
Mr. Chambers. That was my recollection....

Mr. Hiss. The voice sounds a little less resonant [deep] than the voice that I recall of the man I knew as George Crosley. The teeth look to me as though either they have been improved upon or that there has been considerable dental work done since I knew George Crosley, which was some years ago. I believe I am not prepared without further checking to take an absolute oath that he must be George Crosley.

Mr. Nixon. May I ask a question of Mr. Chambers?

Mr. Hiss. I would like to ask Mr. Chambers, if I may.

Mr. Nixon. Can you describe the condition of your teeth in 1934?

Mr. Chambers. Yes; I have.

Mr. Nixon. What type of dental work?

Mr. Chambers. I have had some extractions and a plate.

Mr. Nixon. Have you had any dental work in the front of your mouth?

Mr. Chambers. Yes.

Mr. Nixon. What is the nature of that work?

Mr. Chambers. That is a plate in place of some of the upper dentures.

Mr. Nixon. I see, ...

Mr. Hiss. That testimony of Mr. Chambers, if it can be believed, would tend to substantiate [support] my feeling that he represented himself to me in 1934 or 1935 or thereabout as George Crosley, a free lance writer of articles for magazines....

Mr. Nixon. Can you describe the condition of your teeth in 1934?

Mr. Chambers. Yes. They were in very bad shape....

Mr. Stripling [to Hiss]. Well, now, I would like to preface whatever you are going to say by what I say first. I certainly gathered the impression when Mr. Chambers walked in this room and you walked over and examined him and asked him to open his mouth that you were basing your identification purely on what his upper teeth might have looked like. Now, here is a person that you knew for several months at least. You knew him so well that he was a guest in your home—...

Mr. Hiss. I saw him at the time I was seeing hundreds of people. Since then I have seen thousands of people. He meant nothing to me except as one I saw under the circumstances I have described. My recollection of George Crosley, if this man had said he was George Crosley, I would have no difficulty in identification. He denied it right here.... I am not, therefore, able to take an oath that this man [definitely] is George Crosley. I have been testifying about George Crosley. Whether he
and this man are the same or whether he has means [a way] of getting information from George Crosley about my house, I do not know. He may have had his face lifted.

Mr. HISS [to CHAMBERS]. Did you ever go under the name of George Crosley?

Mr. CHAMBERS. Not to my knowledge.

Mr. HISS. Did you ever sublet an apartment on Twenty-ninth Street from me?

Mr. CHAMBERS. No; I did not.

Mr. HISS. You did not?

Mr. CHAMBERS. No.

Mr. HISS. Did you ever spend any time with your wife and child in an apartment on Twenty-ninth Street in Washington when I was not there because I and my family were living on P Street?

Mr. CHAMBERS. I most certainly did....

Mr. HISS. Would you tell me how you reconcile your negative answers [no responses] with this affirmative answer [yes responses]? [in other words, Chambers is being asked to explain how he can claim he spent time at Hiss’ house, but never went by the name of George Crosley]

Mr. CHAMBERS. Very easily, Alger. I was a Communist and you were a Communist.

Mr. HISS. Would you be responsive and continue with your answer? [In other words, he didn’t answer the question]

Mr. CHAMBERS. I do not think it is needed.

Mr. HISS. That is the answer.

Mr. NIXON. I will help you with the answer, Mr. Hiss. The question, Mr. Chambers, is, as I understand it, that Mr. Hiss cannot understand how you would deny that you were George Crosley and yet admit that you spent time in his apartment. Now would you explain the circumstances? [....]

Mr. CHAMBERS. As I have testified before, I came to Washington as a Communist functionary, a functionary of the American Communist Party. I was connected with the underground group of which Mr. Hiss was a member. Mr. Hiss and I became friends...


Mr. MUNDT. [closing statements] Now, Mr. Hiss, these hearings are drawing to a close, and I want to review with you briefly... the reactions of just one member of this committee to the testimony in which you are involved, and after I conclude my statement, which I shall make without interruption, you then make the statements that you have to make without interruption. But I wish you would take notes on what I am going to say so that you can correct me in your statement where you think I am in error, or where you set my trend of thinking right, where you think it is deviating from a logical course.

We started out in these hearings simply to get at the truth concerning espionage activities in Government. One of our early witnesses, Mr. Whittaker Chambers, mentions your name and the name of your brother, Donald Hiss, in connection with other individuals, most of whom have refused under oath to deny the charges ...You suggested when you first came before the committee that in an effort to get at the facts that we take certain steps, one of which was to go to the records, wherever the records are available. We have done that, and we have spread those records wherever available into this testimony.

You suggested that you be confronted with your accuser. We have done that, both in executive session and in open session. You suggested that we check all the verifiable details, which we have done.

Your testimony that first day was that, to the best of your recollection, you did not know Whittaker Chambers, and that the picture which was presented to you by counsel, Mr. Stripling, did not bring back the memory of anybody whom you had seen by that picture.

The next step in this proceeding was, and I might say here that you made a very fine impression on me, as acting chairman, that first day. I was inclined to be in your corner from the standpoint of accepting the validity of what you said... and that despite the fact, that as a member of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, I had frequently heard the name of Alger Hiss bandied [rumored] around as having possible Communist connections ... I never had seen you; I never had met you; I do not believe your name had ever passed my lips or had been written by me in any correspondence up to that time. But it was, as you have later testified, rather common scuttlebutt [gossip], should we say, around Washington that one Alger Hiss
had been labeled by some as a ... Communist...In spite of that, after hearing your testimony, I was convinced that either Whittaker Chambers must have been falsifying before this committee or else there was a mistaken identity.

So, I asked a subcommittee to go to New York for the purpose of interviewing Mr. Chambers to see whether by some chance, he had confused Alger Hiss with someone else, whether or not he could substantiate his statement that he knew Alger Hiss, and, if so, how well, and what details he could supply, which are verifiable. He supplied a great many details, ... which been released to the press today.

Then you were again interviewed in Washington, and at that time you verified these same details, which were given us by Mr. Chambers, intimate details about your family, about your hobby, about your pets, about the decorations in the room, and after verifying a number of these details, you said, "I might have known a man who had access to that information," and you said that man, if you knew him at all, was one George Crosley. [this explains the prior testimony you read]

The next day the committee went to New York City and brought you and Mr. Chambers together, at which time you identified him positively; you identified him as the George Crosley, but you said then that you sublet him your apartment...You said then that you had him living with you several days in your own home. You said then that you had also seen him at sometime--later than the time when he occupied your apartment, and you said then that you had made a series of small loans.

We have tried since then to verify further the testimony of both yourself and Mr. Chambers. We have been unable to find anybody who knows or who has seen George Crosley. You have been unable to produce anybody for us who knows or has seen George Crosley.

Therefore, in summary...I find that while you said earlier that you did not know Mr. Whittaker Chambers or any man answering that description or looking like him, it is now established testimony that you did know him and that you do know him.

There is some doubt about the name, but there is no question about your having known the individual...You knew this man; you knew him very well. You knew him so well that you even trusted him with your apartment; you let him use your furniture...You had him staying in your home when it was inconvenient for him to stay in the apartment, and made him a series of small loans. There seems no question about that.

In other words, there seems no question about your associations with a man who told this committee that he associated with you.

The points in disagreement, as I see them are these:

Were you or were you not a Communist? ...We know that we cannot get the records of the Communist Party. We cannot get their membership cards, but that was a point we could not hope to establish by verifiable evidence, and it is now a point in dispute...

There is one other point in dispute, and that is while you both admit this association at the time when it was supposed to have taken place, Mr. Chambers said that you knew him as Carl, and you say that you knew him as Crosley. To me, that is not a very important distinction. The important thing is how close your associations were with this man, who is admittedly a Communist at that time.

He is a Communist functionary. Whether he was living in your home as George Crosley or Carl or Whittaker Chambers is comparatively immaterial [irrelevant]....

We proceed on the conclusion that if either one of you is telling the truth ... that you are telling the truth on all of it. And if either one of you is concealing the truth ... it points out that you are concealing from us the truth on obviously the points that we cannot prove....
Discussion Questions:

- Which seems to be the more credible witness—Hiss or Chambers—and why?
- Do you think Hiss was guilty of "un-American activities"?
- What was so politically explosive about the Hiss case?
  - Note: Hiss's long history of service to the FDR administration, and that in 1947 Republicans controlled Congress, and hence HUAC.
  - Many Republicans would use this as evidence that the Democrats had been "soft on communism.")

Homework Reading and Questions:

The Hiss case helped launch the 1950s McCarthy period, a decade of fear and distrust. Senator Joseph R. McCarthy's anti-communist crusade, during which 10,000 Americans lost their jobs, began less than three weeks after Alger Hiss's conviction in 1950.

Hiss always denied that he had ever passed along confidential government papers to Chambers or anyone else. But in December 1948 Chambers let HUAC investigators—including Nixon—to a farm in Maryland, where he showed them a hollowed-out pumpkin that contained four rolls of microfilm. The film, he explained, was of secret documents that had been passed to him by Hiss. The revelation of the so-called "pumpkin papers" meant that suddenly Chambers's story did not seem so implausible [difficult to believe].

Less than two weeks after the revelation of the “pumpkin papers” in December 1948 Alger Hiss was called before a grand jury, where he once again testified that he never gave any documents to Whittaker Chambers. Unfortunately for Hiss, in April 1949 HUAC investigators produced an old typewriter that HUAC claimed had once belonged to him, and had been used to type the “pumpkin papers.”

Most believed this to be incontrovertible evidence that Hiss had been a spy for the Soviet Union. However, the statute of limitations for espionage was only ten years, and the documents discovered in that hollowed-out pumpkin dated from the mid-1930s. But since Hiss had, under oath, told the grand jury that he had not passed classified documents to Chambers, he could be charged with perjury, and this is precisely what happened. A first trial opened on May 31, 1949, but ended in a hung jury early in July. A new trial convened in November, and this time the jury took less than twenty-four hours to find Hiss guilty of two counts of perjury. Four days later Judge Henry Godard sentenced him to five years in prison.

Hiss entered prison in March 1951, but was released after serving less than four years. For the remainder of his life he insisted on his innocence. He died in 1996, at the age of ninety-two.

Alger Hiss, who lived for 47 years after his conviction, devoted those years to a quest for vindication. Along the way, he won several legal proceedings. His government pension was restored to him in 1972, and he was readmitted to the bar in Massachusetts in 1974. But although he brought his own case back to court in 1978, after securing the release of tens of thousands of pages of material from his FBI files, he was never able to have his conviction overturned. Whittaker Chambers, Hiss's accuser, who died in 1961 at the age of 61, and had committed perjury several times, received posthumous honors from the Reagan administration: President Reagan awarded him the Medal of Freedom in 1984, and his Westminster, Maryland farm where he had once concealed the "Pumpkin Papers" was declared a national historic landmark in 1988.

Further interest in the Hiss case has also been stimulated by a series of recent and well-publicized developments:

• In the early 1990s, after the fall of the Iron Curtain, Alger Hiss appealed to the post-Communist Russian government to search their records for any evidence that could throw light on his case. As a result, in 1992, Russian historian General Dmitry A. Volkogonov searched a full range of official Russian government repositories with information about Soviet intelligence operations, including KGB files, military intelligence -or GRU -files, and files at the Presidential Archives, for any possible references to Alger Hiss. This examination was conducted at Hiss's request. Volkogonov reported, in a letter to
Hiss’s longtime associate, John Lowenthal, that the files contained no information indicating that Hiss had been a Soviet spy.

- Some Venona analysts say the Venona transcripts indicate that Alger Hiss as "Ales" received a commendation for his espionage from the Soviet Union while visiting Moscow during the Yalta conference. After examining Hiss’s schedule during the conference, historian Bruce Craig writes that the charges against Hiss are unfounded.

The search for the truth continues.

HUAC continued to exist until 1975, but by the middle of the 1950s its investigations had ceased to generate much interest, but it no doubt contributed in large part to the growing sense of hysteria over communist subversion that swept the country in the late 1940s.

Questions:

1. What did the Alger Hiss court case lead to (which we will study next)?
2. How long after the case did McCarthy begin his anti-communist crusade?
3. What 2 events (which happened in 1948 and 1949) led to Hiss being brought up on charges?
4. Why were the charges perjury, and not for espionage?
5. Why did it take 2 trials to find Hiss guilty? (What happened to the first trial?)
6. What was the sentence?
7. How many years did Hiss serve?
8. At what age did he die? When?
9. Hiss spent his life after prison devoted to proving his innocence. What 2 things were given back to him? When?
10. Did Hiss successfully have his guilty conviction overturned in 1978?
11. What 2 honors has Whittaker posthumously (after death) received?
12. Indicate how each supports Hiss assertion that he is innocent.
   a. Dmitry A. Volkogonov analysis of USSR documents de-classified after USSR fell in 1991 -
   b. Historian Bruce Craig analysis of Venona Documents –
13. When did HUAC end?