

Module 9: The Cold War – The 1950s

Topic 2 Content: Atom Bombs, Spies, and Growing Fears

Introduction


Tabs

- Nuclear Weapons
- Spies
- Julius and Ethel Rosenberg
- McCarthyism

Introduction

A nuclear arms race between the two superpowers, coupled with several American spies helping the Soviet Union, sparked growing fear in Americans. Click the **NEXT** button to learn more about the Cold War as it heated up.

Image: Titan II Intercontinental ballistic missile



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Nuclear Weapons

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Nuclear Weapons



- Nuclear arms race between U.S. and Soviet Union.
- The United States created the first atomic weapon.
- Four years later, the Soviet Union built its first atomic bomb.

Image: The United States nuclear test of Upshot-Knothole Badger on April 18, 1953

One of the major ways that these two superpowers competed was in the development nuclear weapons. During the Cold War, both countries engaged in a nuclear arms race. The United States was the first country to create an atomic weapon, and for a time this made it the most powerful country in the world. The American atomic advantage did not last long. Just four years later, in 1949, the Soviet Union built and tested its first atomic bomb.

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Spies

Spies

- American spies stole secrets for the Soviet Union.
- Spies helped the Soviet Union quickly develop the atomic bomb.
- Major cases were against Julius and Ethel Rosenberg.

Image: Julius and Ethel Rosenberg, 1951



Nuclear Weapons

Spies

Julius and Ethel Rosenberg

McCarthyism

The United States was surprised by how quickly the Soviet Union developed an atomic bomb. The Americans then discovered that spies had stolen technical secrets about building an atomic bomb and passed them along to the Soviet Union, helping the Soviets develop a bomb more quickly. Famous spy trials that occurred in the early 1950s were those of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg.

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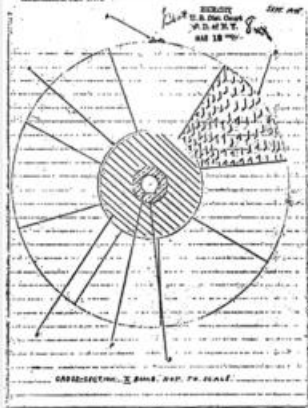
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Julius and Ethel Rosenberg

Julius and Ethel Rosenberg

- Klaus Fuchs' confession led to the arrest of the Rosenbergs.
- Guilty of heading Soviet spy ring.
- Growing fear of communism in the U.S.

Image: David Greenglass' sketch of a nuclear weapon design that he passed onto the Rosenbergs



Nuclear Weapons

Spies

Julius and Ethel Rosenberg

McCarthyism

In 1950, a British scientist, Klaus Fuchs, was caught spying. He admitted to sending information about the atomic bomb to the Soviet Union. Fuchs' confession eventually led to the arrest of the heads of a Soviet spy ring, Julius and Ethel Rosenberg. The Rosenbergs denied the charges, but were found guilty and executed for espionage. This case garnered the attention of the media and was widely followed in the United States.

The public convictions of Americans spying for the Soviet Union and the increasing threat of nuclear war fueled a growing fear among the American people of the communist Soviet Union.

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McCarthyism

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McCarthyism



- Capitalized on American fears.
- Wrongfully accused many Americans of being communist.
- Drew media attention.
- Bullied witnesses during hearings.
- Lost support of Americans.
- **McCarthyism** means making false accusations based on rumor or guilt by association.

Image: Joseph McCarthy, 1954

To further his own political career, Senator Joseph McCarthy capitalized on American fears of communism that were further stirred up by the Soviet Union testing a nuclear bomb and China becoming a communist country. In the 1950s, McCarthy recklessly accused many American government officials and citizens of being communists, based on little or no evidence. Because of the prevailing fear of communism at the time, his accusations drew the attention of the press. McCarthy's tactics have sometimes been compared to a witch hunt. In televised army hearings, the American public watched as McCarthy bullied witnesses. After those hearings, his popularity quickly declined, and McCarthy was no longer capable of arousing the fears of Americans. Ultimately, the Senate passed a censure, or formal disapproval, of McCarthy. This led to the coining of the term *McCarthyism*, or the making of false accusations based on rumor or guilt by association.