

American History 102

CIVIL WAR TO THE PRESENT

Stanley K. Schultz, Professor of History
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Lecture 22

From New Deal to Fair Deal: New Game?

When Harry S Truman succeeded Franklin Roosevelt in 1945, most Americans knew little about their new President. Having served as Roosevelt's vice president for only three months, Truman now struggled to sell Roosevelt's New Deal policies to an increasingly conservative Congress and American public. This lecture examines Truman's attempts to follow up on the New Deal with his own Fair Deal as America began to shift rightward politically, economically, and psychologically.

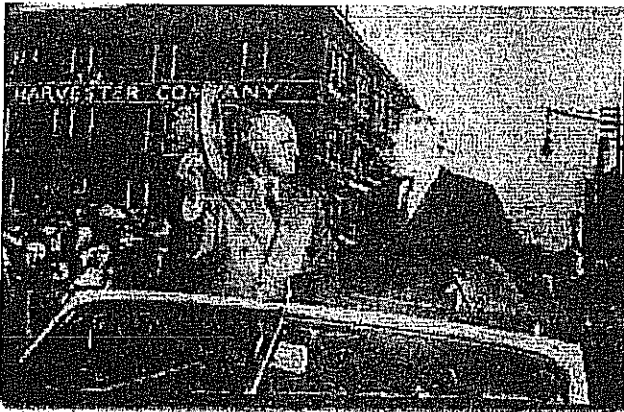
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Some questions to keep in mind:

1. What was the "conservative coalition" that blocked Truman's reform programs? How and why did this coalition emerge?
2. Why did conservatives dislike Harry Truman? Why did liberals dislike Harry Truman?
3. Why was inflation such a problem after World War II?
4. What was the Taft-Hartley Act? Why did Congress pass this act? Was it effective in achieving its goals?

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About this image



Harry S Truman in Madison with Governor Rennebohm

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The American public was shocked to hear of Franklin D. Roosevelt's death on April 12, 1945, no one more so than his vice president, Harry S Truman (1884-1972). Upon learning that he would be taking over the presidency, Truman told reporters:

"Boys, if you ever pray, pray for me now. I don't know if you fellas ever had a load of hay fall on you, but when they told me what happened yesterday, I felt like the moon, the stars, and all the planets had fallen on me."

This type of speech was typical for Truman, who was called the "common man's common man." Two of his favorite phrases were:


"The buck stops here"

and

"If you can't stand the heat, get out of the kitchen."

At times humble, Truman could also be brash and stubborn. The President's colorful speech, in fact, sometimes shocked Americans, especially after the genteel manners and refined style of FDR. Truman's daughter, Margaret, for example, fancied herself an up-and-coming opera star. When *Washington Post* correspondent Paul Hume gave a negative review of Margaret's concert debut in Washington D. C., the President immediately dashed off the following retort on White House letterhead:

"I have just seen your lousy review of Margaret's concert. It seems to me you're a frustrated old man. Someday I hope to meet you. When that happens, you'll need a new nose, a lot of beefsteak for black eyes, and perhaps a jock supporter below. (signed)
HST, President."


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Rightward, Ho!

As we mentioned in Lecture 21, one of the consequences of World War II was a shift to the political right in American society. Already in the 1940s, there was a spirit of new conservatism that laid the groundwork for the Eisenhower era of the 1950s. Upon taking office, Truman tried to continue FDR's policies and he sent to Congress a host of New Deal-style bills. These were not bold new endeavors, but extensions of policies already in place, including:

1. Raising the minimum wage from \$0.40 to \$0.65
2. Extending and expanding Social Security coverage
3. Clearing slums and offering a national housing plan
4. A national health insurance plan

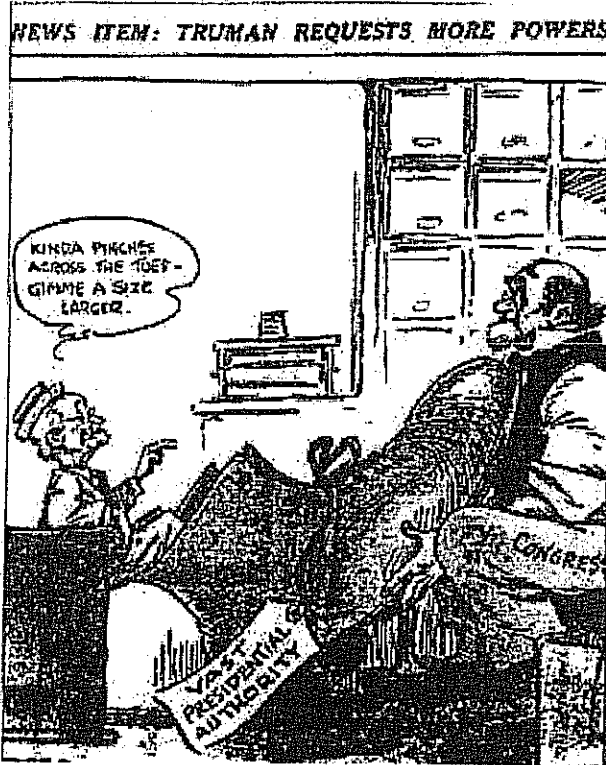
Truman was unable to achieve any of these goals. In Congress, a new conservative coalition had arisen out of opposition to New Deal liberalism and FDR's internationalism. This conservative coalition brought together Southern Democrats and Northern Republicans. Southern Democrats, on the whole, were more conservative fiscally, socially, and politically than Democrats in the Northeast or the Midwest. In addition, they opposed Truman's liberal stance on civil rights for African-Americans. Furthermore, Northern Republicans who joined this emerging political coalition generally opposed government involvement in the nation's economy.

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The 1946 Elections: "To Err is Truman"

1946 was not a good year for Truman or his supporters. Critics on all sides attacked the President and his policies. On the one hand, liberals pined for Roosevelt and criticized Truman's labor policies. On the other hand, the fuel of post-war inflation added to the anti-Truman fire of conservatives. Truman's approval ratings dropped significantly--from 87% when he took office to 32% in early November, 1946. During the midterm congressional elections of 1946, Republicans ran under the slogan "Had enough?" Apparently, many Americans had had enough: the GOP gained 11 seats in the Senate and 56 in the House and took control of Congress for the first time since 1928.

About this image



Cartoon depicts Harry Truman asking Congress for powers he is not big enough to handle

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The 1948 Elections: "The Comeback Kid"

The presidential election of 1948 was a classic political upset that demonstrated that liberalism was still a force in American politics. Prior to the Democratic National Convention, most party members were unhappy with Truman, but refused to break with tradition by failing to nominate an incumbent President for reelection. The Republicans chose Governor Thomas E. Dewey of New York as their candidate.

About this image



"The Campaign Begins in Earnest," cartoon by Walt Kelly in the New York Star (depicts Thomas Dewey, Harry Truman, and Henry A. Wallace)

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There were also two candidates that represented groups that had splintered from the Democratic Party. One of these groups was the Progressive Party, which nominated Henry A. Wallace, a former Vice President under Franklin D. Roosevelt. These Progressives were not cut from the same cloth as Teddy Roosevelt or Robert LaFollette. Instead, they were leftists who championed nationalized banking and greater socialization of the economy and who enjoyed the support of the Communist Party of the United States.

About this Image



Barry Goldwater (1909-)

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At the same time, another party also broke away from the Democrats. At the 1948 Democratic Convention, Hubert Humphrey of Minnesota introduced a platform plank that committed the party to civil rights. In protest, a host of southern delegates stormed out and formed the States' Rights party. These so-called "Dixiecrats" nominated Governor J. Strom Thurmond of South Carolina as their candidate for President.

Harry Truman had progressive views on civil rights and was a strong advocate of Humphrey's proposal. In a 1947 speech, Truman stated:

"Our immediate task is to remove the last remnants of the barriers which stand between millions of our citizens and their birthright. There is no justifiable reason for discrimination because of ancestry or religion or race or color."

With the Democratic Party split three ways, it looked as if Dewey's win was inevitable. Truman went on a whistle-stop campaign across the nation and attacked the "do-nothing Congress." The results of the election startled everyone, especially the *Chicago Daily Tribune*, which had printed up its morning edition with the banner headline: "Dewey Defeats Truman."

Why Truman won:

1. Republicans were overconfident
2. He had shown courage in the face of incredible odds
3. Truman revived the New Deal coalition of labor, farmers, and African-Americans

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The Fair Deal

After his successful election campaign, Truman set out to prove that New Deal liberalism was not yet dead in America. He proposed an ambitious legislative agenda that he dubbed the "Fair Deal." Although Truman had supported New Deal relief and reform, he also believed that newer reforms were needed to solve the nation's economic and social problems in the post-war era. He contended that his Fair Deal program would redistribute income among people of various classes--transfer money from the very rich to the very poor--and, in the process, assuage many of the nation's most pressing social problems. Truman's Fair Deal included six major federal initiatives:

- New civil rights legislation

- Federal housing programs
- Unemployment insurance benefits
- New tax cuts for the poor
- Federal funding for education
- A federal health care and health insurance program

About this image



Harry S Truman (1884-1972)

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In the end, Truman's attempt to introduce his Fair Deal was largely a failure. Few of his initiatives became law. Congress refused to create a national health care program, did little to reform education (with the exception of the G. I. Bill), extended unemployment benefits only slightly, and put off new civil rights legislation. Truman did convince Congress to pass a major housing initiative in 1949. Otherwise, however, the conservative political coalition blocked the President at every turn. While Truman's election in 1948 proved that liberalism was not yet dead, the country did seem to be moving further and further to the right politically.

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An Economic Shift to the Right

Changes in the economy also suggested that the country was shifting more and more to the right at mid-century. In the immediate aftermath of World War II, the nation's economy faced two major problems: reconversion from a wartime to a peacetime economy and the growing power of American labor unions.

Reconversion--The problem of reconversion had three main parts:

1. Spiraling inflation. During the war, the Office of Price Administration had controlled prices and wages. After the war's end, many conservatives wanted to eliminate such controls and ultimately succeeded in doing so in 1946. American consumers were also anxious to spend money on new products. Without wartime price controls, consumer demand outran supply, and inflation ballooned in the United States.

2. Wartime to peacetime production. One reason for the continued shortage of consumer goods was the transition necessary to move from wartime to peacetime production. Business leaders had been unaware of the atomic bomb and were not prepared for such a quick end to the Pacific war. As a result, when the war came to an end, American factories were still producing planes and tanks instead of radios and washing machines.


3. What to do with the returning G. I. To avoid repeating the situation after the First World War, when servicemen came home to find no jobs, few educational opportunities, and a housing crunch, Congress passed the Servicemen's Readjustment Act in 1944. The G. I. Bill (as it was popularly known) committed billions of federal dollars of support for housing, education, health benefits, and job training.

Labor--The second crucial post-war issue was labor unrest. In the aftermath of the War, a wave of strikes swept the nation. In 1946, for example, 400,000 miners struck not once, but twice. In all, 4.6 million workers struck at one time or another during that year. The

conservatives' reply to the labor problem was the Taft-Hartley Act of 1947. This act remains on the books today. Three presidents, in fact, have evoked the law on different occasions to undermine the power of organized labor in the United States. The act has four main points:

1. Prohibited the closed shop
2. Prohibited secondary "sympathy" strikes
3. Prohibited political contributions by unions
4. Gave the President power to impose a cooling-off period to avert strikes

As it turned out, the Taft-Hartley Act may have strengthened big labor by forcing various groups to work together in the face of extraordinary opposition. Over the next decade, the conservative attack on unions encouraged these groups to coordinate strategies and to pool their resources. In 1955, for example, two competing unions joined forces: the American Federation of Labor (AFL) and the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO). The AFL-CIO represented over 70% of the American unionized labor force and became the largest federation of labor unions in the United States.

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In the aftermath of war, many Americans began to question the wisdom of federal economic and social legislation. At the same time, Americans increasingly feared the growth of Communism at home and abroad. Perhaps no politician personified this growing fear more than Joseph McCarthy, a Senator from Wisconsin who fanned the flames of American anti-Communism at mid-century. McCarthyism, however, was just one element of a larger Cold War mentality that emerged in the United States during the late 1940s and early 1950s. Our discussion of the origins and growth of the Cold War is extraordinarily important. So important, in fact, that we'll take it up in Lecture 23: "The Cold War and the 'Hot' Economy: the 1950s"

Lecture 22 *Related Web Links*

Content	Presentation	Audience	Link	Info
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★★★★	★★★★★	College	Truman's Acceptance Speech, 1948 Democratic Nat'l Convention	more info ->
★★★	★★★★★	High School	Encyclopedia Americana: Dixiecrats	more info ->
★★★	★★★	College	Truman's Inaugural Address, January 20, 1949	more info ->
★★★	★★	High School	Chronology: Harry S. Truman's Life and Presidency	more info ->

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Lecture 23

The Coils of Cold War

In the immediate aftermath of World War II, the United States took a turn to the economic and political right. Nothing demonstrated this shift more than the Second Red Scare. The trials, denuncements, black lists, and paranoia about Communism in the Second Red Scare showed the domestic face of the Cold War--the international struggle between the Soviet Union and the United States for world dominance. This lecture traces how the Cold War transformed anti-Communism from a right-wing to a mainstream ideology.

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Some questions to keep in mind:

1. Compare and contrast the development of political ideologies in the post-WWII era to those of the Depression era, concentrating on the attitudes of Americans toward Communism.
2. Compare the events, justifications, and results of the Second Red Scare to those of the First Red Scare.
3. Who supported Joe McCarthy and why?
4. Compare the competing American and Soviet visions for the post-war world in 1945. How did these opposing ideas lead to a "cold war?"
5. Compare the foreign policy goals of the Truman administration with those of Woodrow Wilson's administration.

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We're no Commies, but here's some information on Communist theory and how it was put into practice in the Soviet Union. As Lenin once said, "Study, study, study!"

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The Second Red Scare

On May 26, 1938, Congress organized the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) to investigate American Fascists and Communists, although its focus soon became strictly anti-Communist. During WWII, HUAC concentrated on labor unrest, but after the war's end, it gained strength and began to investigate left-wing Americans who might be communist sympathizers. This search led HUAC to Hollywood in 1947, where left-leaning actors, writers, and directors were allegedly spreading subversive communist messages through their movies. One young actor who was ready to name names was future President Ronald Reagan. Reagan had come to Hollywood as an ardent New Deal Democrat, but when the political winds began to shift, he became a conservative Republican. HUAC did not uncover any of the systematic subversion it had alleged in Hollywood. Nevertheless, since being questioned or mentioned during a hearing was, in the minds of many studio executives, an indication of guilt, many suspected leftists found themselves on a blacklist that shut them out of jobs in cinema, radio, television, and theater for the next ten years.

The Trial of Alger Hiss

The Alger Hiss case that took place from 1948 to 1950 was another HUAC investigation and the second event that fueled the Second Red Scare. Hiss was a Harvard-educated New Dealer who had come to Washington during the Roosevelt administration. At the time of his trial, he was president of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. His accuser was a self-described "dumpy, middle-aged, unhappy scoundrel" named Whittaker Chambers, who would go on to become a senior editor of *Time* magazine. Chambers accused Hiss of having spied for the Soviet Union in the 1930s when Hiss had been employed at the State Department. Chambers claimed that he and Hiss had belonged to the same espionage ring and that Hiss had given him copies of secret State Department documents. A young California Congressman named Richard M. Nixon took up the case and soon captured national attention. When Chambers claimed that he had hidden a microfilm of the secret documents in a pumpkin field near his farm, Nixon took members of the press with him to document the uncovering of the microfilm. The statute of limitations for an espionage charge had expired, so the federal government prosecuted Hiss for perjury. The result of the first trial was a hung jury. After the second trial, a jury found Hiss guilty and sentenced him to five years in prison. When Hiss was finally released from prison, he struggled to prove his innocence for decades. That moment finally came in 1992, when Hiss was 87. A Russian general in charge of Soviet intelligence archives declared that Hiss had never been a spy, but rather a victim of Cold War hysteria. Hiss died on November 15, 1996, just four days after his 92 birthday.

Truman loyalty program

In 1947, as part of this growing anti-communist hysteria, President Harry Truman ordered the Justice Department to draw up a list of possible "subversives" in government. Under the terms of this loyalty program, the federal government could dismiss an employee "if reasonable grounds exist for belief that the person involved is disloyal." Truman not only associated Communism with Fascism and Nazism, but believed that Communism was the worst of the three.

McCarthyism

Joseph McCarthy (1908-1957) was a Republican Senator from Appleton, Wisconsin, who did the most to whip up anti-communism during the 1950s. McCarthy was a WWII veteran who liked to call himself "Tailgunner Joe," although he actually flew more desk than plane during the war. First elected to the Senate in 1946, McCarthy did little during the first four years of his term. He

About this image

failed to attach his name to any significant bills and even the Republican party leadership considered him a legislative lightweight. Then, on February 9, 1950, he dropped a political bombshell. McCarthy gave a speech at the Republican Women's Club of Wheeling, West Virginia, where he claimed to have a list of 205 Communists in the State Department. No one in the press actually saw the names on the list, but McCarthy's announcement made the national news.



Joseph McCarthy (1908-1957), anti-Communist crusader

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McCarthy continued to repeat his groundless charges and the number of Communists on his list fluctuated from speech to speech. Senior Republicans didn't care for McCarthy, but appreciated his attacks on the Truman administration. McCarthy labeled Secretary of State Dean Acheson "Red Dean." He also claimed that World War II General George Marshall had been "hoodwinked into aiding a great conspiracy." Furthermore, McCarthy argued that Illinois governor Adlai E. Stevenson—who would run for president on the Democratic ticket in 1952—"endorsed and would continue to endorse the suicidal, Kremlin-directed policies of this nation." The fact that the United States wasn't winning the Korean War (1950-53) also gave credibility to the argument that "subversives" were at work in the government.

Conformity

McCarthy's attacks emerged within a climate of political and social conformity. During this time, for example, one state required pro wrestlers to take a loyalty oath before stepping into the ring. In Indiana, a group of anti-communists indicted *Robin Hood* (and its vaguely socialistic message that the book's titular hero had a right to rob from the rich and give to the poor) forced librarians to pull the book from the shelves. Baseball's Cincinnati Reds renamed themselves the "Redlegs." Cosmetics companies recalled a face powder called "Russian Sable" and renamed it "Dark Dark." Starting in Dearborn, Michigan, and spreading to other parts of the country, "Miss Loyalty" beauty contests became the rage.

McCarthy's Supporters

The ranks of McCarthy's supporters were generally defined along political, religious, and occupational lines. They typically included:

1. Republicans
2. Catholics
3. Conservative Protestants
4. Blue-collar workers

One prominent Democrat who supported McCarthy was Joseph Kennedy. In fact, the senior Kennedy secured for his son, Robert, a job in Washington as an investigator for McCarthy.

McCarthy continued his anti-communist barrage until 1954. Unlike other congressional investigators, McCarthy seemed not to notice that the administration had changed in 1952. With Dwight D. Eisenhower in the White House, McCarthy's campaigns against subversion in the government became an attack on his own party and an increasing liability for Republicans. In the spring of 1954, however, the tables turned when McCarthy charged that the United States Army had promoted a dentist accused of being a Communist. The ensuing hearings proved to be McCarthy's downfall. For the first time, television broadcast allowed the general public to see the Senator as a blustering bully

and his investigations as little more than a misguided scam. In December 1954, the Senate voted to censure him for his conduct and to strip him of his privileges. McCarthy died three years later, but the term "McCarthyism" lives on to describe anti-Communist fervor, reckless accusations, and guilt by association.

About this image



G. David Schine, Joseph McCarthy,
and Roy Cohn at the June 1954 Army
hearings

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Don't forget
Edward R. Murrow's
broadcasts
exposing his
tactics.

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The Cold War

Although the Soviet Union and the United States had been allies during World War II, their alliance quickly unraveled once they had defeated their common enemy. Different people have different views on the origins of the Cold War:

1. All the fault of the Soviet Union
2. All the fault of the United States
3. All of the above

The Cold War emerged because the United States and Soviet Union had radically different visions of the post-war world. American politicians believed that the nations of the world were interdependent and should provide open markets for American goods and services. In this vision, free and open trade was necessary to prevent another Depression. In addition, many Americans were proud of their democratic system, believed in Manifest Destiny, and wanted to "share" their version of enlightened self-determination with the rest of the world, especially with the newly-independent states of Asia and Africa (see [chart of American foreign aid 1945-1986](#)).

The Soviet Union, on the other hand, had an entirely different vision of the post-war world. The Soviets were largely concerned about establishing greater security. By some estimates, the U.S.S.R. had suffered military and civilian losses of 20 million during the war. Many more had died in Stalin's brutal political purges. The Soviet government, for example, often executed as traitors returning Red Army soldiers who had had the misfortune of being prisoners of war. Stalin feared that Germany would regain its strength in a matter of decades and launch yet another attack on Russian soil. In this atmosphere of xenophobia and obsession with security, the Soviet Union wanted to:

1. Ward off another attack
2. Establish defensible borders
3. Encourage friendly regimes on its western borders

Soviet leaders believed that they could meet these goals if they could foster friendly states to the west. For this reason, Stalin and other Soviet leaders extended their control over much of eastern Europe during the decades after World War II. Soviet domination in this area denied the United States both free access to markets and the opportunity to export its vision of democracy.

The conflict between the world views of the United States and the U.S.S.R. came to a head with rebellions in Iran, Greece, and Turkey. During World War II, the British had occupied southern Iran, while the Soviets had occupied the north in the area bordering the Soviet republic of Azerbaijan. At war's end, neither side wanted to pull out of the Middle East because both wanted access to the region's rich oil fields. The Soviet Union also sought to protect its southern border. Great Britain asked the United States for aid to prop up the pro-British Shah and to prevent Arab nationalists from gaining power. In 1946, the United Nations negotiated a settlement between the United States and the Soviet Union, but name calling between the American and Soviet delegates marred the session. Even though both sides eventually reached an agreement, growing political, economic, and military tensions between the two powers exacerbated the Cold War.

In Greece, Communist-led insurgents threatened to overthrow the corrupt, British-led monarchy. Although Communist Yugoslavia, rather than the Soviet Union, aided the rebels, Truman was eager to fight Communists of any stripe. Dean Acheson, then undersecretary of state, argued that a Communist victory in Greece would be disastrous for the United States and the Western world. He expressed this fear in the so-called "Rotten Apple Theory:" if Greece and Turkey went Communist, then, like a rotten apple in a barrel of fruit, the Communist menace would spread to Africa, Europe, and the Middle East. American politicians would later restate this position, under different circumstances, as the "Domino Theory."

The Truman Doctrine

On March 12, 1947, Harry Truman appeared before Congress and set forth what would become known as the Truman Doctrine. He asked Congress for \$500 million in aid for Greece and Turkey to put down Communist uprisings. In order to justify United States involvement in the internal affairs of other countries, Truman stated:

"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...The free peoples of the world look to us for support in maintaining their freedoms."

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The Truman Doctrine did not only influence United States foreign policy in Greece. For the next several decades, other American leaders would refer to the doctrine as a justification for United States involvement in Korea, Vietnam, and other nations. The Cold War also shaped United States domestic policy. The domestic consequences of the Cold War at mid-century, in fact, are incredibly important. So important that we named Lecture 24: "The Cold War and the 1950s."

Lecture 23 *Related Web Links*

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★★★★★	★★★★★	College	Senator Joseph McCarthy -- A Multimedia Celebration	more info ->
★★★★★	★★★★★	High School	"A BILL to provide means to eliminate the Communist nuisance," by Arthur Garfield Hays	more info ->
★★★★	★★★★★	College	The Truman Doctrine (1947)	more info ->
★★★★	★★	College	"The Hollywood Blacklist," by Dan Georgakas	more info ->

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