

# Communism, Espionage, and the Cold War

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INCLUDING THE COMPLETE FIRST LESSON

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A Unit of Study for Grades 9-12

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# INTRODUCTION

## I. APPROACH AND RATIONALE

*Communism, Espionage, and the Cold War* is one of a collection of over seventy units that The National Center for History in the Schools (NCHS) has developed for teaching with primary sources. They represent specific dramatic episodes in history from which you and your students can pause to delve into the deeper meanings of selected landmark events and explore their wider context in the great historical narrative. By studying a crucial turning point in history, the student becomes aware that choices had to be made by real human beings, that those decisions were the result of specific factors, and that they set in motion a series of historical consequences. We have selected dramatic moments that best bring alive that decision-making process. We hope that through this approach, your students will realize that history is an ongoing, open-ended process, and that the decisions they make today create the conditions for tomorrow's history.

Our teaching units are based on primary sources, taken from documents, artifacts, journals, diaries, newspapers and literature from the period under study. What we hope to achieve using primary source documents in these lessons is to remove the distance that students feel from historical events and to connect them more intimately with the past. In this way we hope to recreate for your students a sense of "being there," a sense of seeing history through the eyes of the very people who were making decisions. This will help your students develop historical empathy, to realize that history is not an impersonal process divorced from real people like themselves. At the same time, by analyzing primary sources, students will actually practice the historian's craft, discovering for themselves how to analyze evidence, establish a valid interpretation, and construct a coherent narrative in which all the relevant factors play a part.

## II. CONTENT AND ORGANIZATION

This unit provides: Teacher Background materials, including a Unit Overview and Unit Context, the Correlation to the National Standards for United States History, Unit Objectives, and Lesson Plans with Student Resources. This unit should be used as a supplement to your customary course materials. Although these lessons are recommended for grades 9–12, they can be adapted for other grade levels.

The Historical Background sections in each lesson should provide you with a good overview for the lesson. It is assigned to students as reading; however, if your students are not of sufficient grade level to understand the materials on their own, you may consult it for your own use in class lectures.

The Lesson Plans include a variety of ideas and approaches for the teacher which can be elaborated upon or cut as you see the need. These lesson plans contain student resources which accompany each lesson. The resources consist of primary source documents, handouts and student background materials, and a bibliography.

In our series of teaching units, each collection can be taught in several ways. You can teach all of the lessons offered on any given topic, or you can select and adapt the ones that best support your particular course needs. We have not attempted to be comprehensive or prescriptive in our offerings, but rather to give you an array of enticing possibilities for in-depth study, at varying grade levels. We hope that you will find the lesson plans exciting and stimulating for your classes. We also hope that your students will never again see history as a boring sweep of facts and meaningless dates but rather as an endless treasure of real life stories and an exercise in analysis and reconstruction.

# Teacher Materials

## I. UNIT OVERVIEW

*Communism, Espionage, and the Cold War* makes use of documents available for the first time since the end of the Cold War and the demise of the Soviet Union. These documents shed light on aspects of the Cold War that up to now have been based on a limited documentary record. In addition to sources from the former Soviet Union, the most significant source of documents comes from the deciphered cables of the Venona Project, a top secret United States Army Signal Intelligence Service program to read Soviet diplomatic cablegrams. These “reveal that hundreds of Americans had formal ties to Soviet intelligence services in the 1930s and 1940s” (*Venona*, 331).

First, the unit examines the fear of communism as a threat to national security post-World War II as it was first played out in the House Committee on Un-American Activities (HUAC) based on testimonies such as that of Elizabeth Bentley (**Lesson One**). **Lesson Two** then explores how Joseph McCarthy played on that fear creating an accusatory atmosphere that became known as McCarthyism. Through use of the Venona Project documents, **Lesson Three** looks at intelligence methods, an integral part of the Cold War especially when examining the espionage efforts of the Soviet Union in the United States. **Lessons Four and Five** cover two famous espionage cases of the period: Alger Hiss and the corresponding testimony of ex-communist Whittaker Chambers’s testimony and the trial and subsequent execution of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg.

## II. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

**T**hough the communist Soviet Union (USSR) was a temporary ally of the United States during World War II, the alliance was a tentative one that soon dissolved as the war was ending. In August, 1945, the same month that atomic bombs were dropped and Japan surrendered unconditionally, the Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI) had their first interview with confessed former communist Elizabeth Bentley. By November 1948 she had submitted a 112-page confession implicating many others in espionage for the Soviets. Though it would take some time for the investigation of the named individuals, the event was emblematic of the fact that by the late 1940s the Soviet Union and the United States had again become ideological opponents engaged in an arms and technological race while striving to gain political, economic, social, and cultural dominance in the world. This all-but-military rivalry became known as the “Cold War.” The early phases of the Cold War are usually depicted as a “second red scare.” The “first red scare” had followed the Russian Revolution and World War I when a series of strikes and bombings caused many Americans to become convinced that communism in the homeland was a real and immediate threat. Following the bombing of his home and the subsequent death of his chauffeur, Attorney General A. Mitchell Palmer launched a series of raids on suspected radicals.

Much of the story of the early years of the Cold War and the renewed fear of communism, especially on American home soil, has focused on Joseph McCarthy and “McCarthyism” as symbolic of the attempts to ferret out communist sympathizers and spies in the United States. However, McCarthy only became prominent in February, 1950. Two years earlier, President Harry S. Truman had already instituted the Federal Loyalty Program (a way to test the political sympathies of federal employees) and the HUAC had moved their focus away from the Ku-Klux-Klan to investigation of domestic communist activity based on the late-1945 confessions of former communist Elizabeth Bentley. Alger Hiss, a former State Department official, was convicted of perjury in January 1950. Only then did McCarthy come to the forefront, claiming in several speeches that he knew of varying

numbers of government officials who were communists. His accusations were investigated by the Tydings Committee which voted down party lines that they were without basis. He was not involved, for example, in the espionage trial of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg in 1951, but as a result of McCarthy's continued outspoken ways, the efforts to purge communism from American society and government became known as "McCarthyism." McCarthy's own accusations continued until his censure from Congress in 1954 following his conduct during the Army-McCarthy hearings.

How justified was the fear of communism? Ever present in issues of homeland security, the impact on civil liberties of McCarthyism and the various investigative efforts of congressional committees is weighed against the actual severity of the threat of communism in the United States during the Cold War as well as the nature of the communist threat on the international stage.

For example, Ellen Schrecker, who is critical of McCarthyism, contends there was a "demonizing of communism" and that "the Communist party did not provoke the repression visited upon it." Further, "the threat [of Communism] was grossly exaggerated, but it was not a total fantasy" (Schrecker, 3). Those who disagree point to the espionage efforts of American Communists as evidence that there was validity in being anti-Communist and that what to some would seem to be "repression" could also be seen as a legitimate effort to bring traitors to justice. In recent years, scholars like Arthur Herman and popular authors such as Ann Coulter have mounted a vigorous defense and reassessment of the investigations led by McCarthy and others.

The late 1990s public release of intelligence related to Soviet espionage in the United States (the Venona Project) as well as limited access to former KGB files has allowed for a re-examination of the evidence pertaining to both the accused spies and their accusers.

Using KGB archive files made available to them, historian Allen Weinstein and former KGB intelligence agent, Alexander Vassiliev conclude that "despite later denials, the truth is that a number of American agents and sources, some from doctrinal devotion and others for cold cash, carried on espionage for Soviet operatives throughout the New Deal and war years. Because of their work, Russian intelligence agencies received substantial and sometimes critical information (including many classified documents) concerning U.S. government policies on highly sensitive subjects, its confidential negotiating strategies, and secret weapons developments, including essential processes involved in building the atomic bomb" (Weinstein and Vassiliev, 343).

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Sources: Ellen Schrecker, *The Age of McCarthyism: A Brief History with Documents* (Boston: Bedford Books, 1994), p. 3; Allen Weinstein and Alexander Vassiliev, *The Haunted Wood: Soviet Espionage in America—The Stalin Era* (New York: Random House, 1999), p. 343.

#### Overview Questions for the Entire Unit:

- What was the real nature of the Communist threat during the Cold War?
- How significant a role did Americans play in Soviet espionage conducted in the United States?
- Who were the specific Americans involved in Soviet espionage in the United States?
- How serious was the threat of Communism as a result of Soviet espionage in the United States?
- What was the extent of the Soviet infiltration of United States government agencies?
- What was the nature of the efforts to investigate the extent of communist involvement in American life?

### III. UNIT CONTEXT

The context for this unit is, naturally, the Cold War. However, it is not an effort to delve into the causes of the Cold War or for that matter to assign blame. It is based upon the existence of hostility between the United States and the Soviet Union, even during the years of World War II when the two nations were allies. Because of this hostility, the Soviet Union conducted espionage in the United States. Of course, the United States also carried out espionage during this period, but the unique feature of Soviet espionage was the extent of the involvement of American citizens who acted as agents for the Soviet Union and the enormous scope of the intelligence involved. There was no comparable involvement by Soviet citizens engaged in espionage on behalf of the United States. The nature and extent of American involvement has been heatedly debated by historians.

While the primary focus of this unit is the Cold War era, it will be helpful to consider aspects of a much larger context. The motivation for the involvement of some Americans in espionage for the Soviet Union must also be understood in the context of the economic upheavals of the Great Depression of the 1930s. Some Americans at that time came to believe that Communism was a solution to the economic problems they attributed to capitalism; their commitment to Communist ideology was a factor in their willingness to engage in espionage for the Soviet Union. Soviet espionage reached its height during World War II. During the late 1930s, many Americans identified Communism with anti-fascism. The Nazi-Soviet pact of 1939, which many anti-fascists saw as a “pact with the devil,” caused a considerable number of Communists to leave the party. However, as documents in this unit demonstrate, the wartime alliance with the USSR and its staunch resistance to Nazism following Germany’s invasion of the USSR in 1940, convinced some United States government officials and scientists to turn over American secrets, including details of the atomic bomb, to the USSR.

Although Senator Joseph McCarthy has come to be a symbol of the Cold War in the United States, he was a relatively short-lived figure on the political scene. While the identification of the struggle against domestic communism with McCarthy has enabled students to put a face on history, it has also limited the scope of the inquiry into a number of significant aspects of the Cold War. Sometimes events are erroneously connected to McCarthy. For example, students may think McCarthy was involved in the various investigations of Hollywood personalities.

The material in this unit is designed to guide students to evaluate the post-World War II threat of Communism to homeland security in the United States by introducing some examples of newly released intelligence from the period. Students are introduced to two of the spy cases, Alger Hiss and the Rosenbergs, and given the opportunity to consider the personalities involved as well as samples of the actual intelligence. Students are guided to make inferences and to develop historical perspectives about homeland security, intelligence, and spies.

### IV. CORRELATION WITH THE NATIONAL STANDARDS FOR UNITED STATES HISTORY

This unit furthers students’ understanding of “the international origins and domestic consequences of the Cold War,” fulfilling Standard 2A of Era 9: Postwar United States (1945 to early 1970s), specifically, evaluating the “flawed peace’ resulting from World War II” and the resultant advent of nuclear politics.”

In addition to the standards that deal with the Cold War era, *Communism, Espionage, and the Cold War* allows students to develop different perspectives on the Standards relating to the 1930s and the Great Depression. For Era 8: The Great Depression and World War II (1929–1945), Standard 1 provides an overview: “Students should understand: the causes of the Great Depression and how it affected

American society.” More specifically, **Standard 1B** indicates “Students should be able to: Demonstrate understanding of how American life changed during the depression years.” Some Americans embraced the beliefs of Communism and rejected Capitalism. The role of these ideological changes in the willingness of some Americans to commit espionage for the Soviet Union is an interesting question for students to consider. “How justified were such actions?” becomes the basis for a possible debate among students.

The unit also addresses **Historical Thinking Standard 3**, “Historical Analysis and Interpretation,” guiding students to (A) “formulate questions to focus their inquiry and analysis;”(B) “compare and contrast differing sets of ideas, values, personalities, behaviors, and institutions;”(E) “compare different stories about a historical figure, era, or event and analyze the different portrayals or perspectives they present;”and (G) “Consider multiple perspectives in the records of human experience y demonstrating how their differing motives, beliefs, interests, hopes, and fears influenced individual and group behaviors.”

## V. UNIT OBJECTIVES

- ◆ To analyze, draw inferences, and develop generalizations from a variety of documentary sources.
- ◆ To examine the role Elizabeth Bentley played in the investigation of the extent of Soviet espionage in the United States.
- ◆ To analyze conflicting viewpoints about Senator Joseph McCarthy and his actions during the Cold War.
- ◆ To examine the nature of McCarthyism, its rise and demise, and its significance within the context of the Cold War and the existence of Soviet espionage.
- ◆ To examine the Venona Project and the methods used to decipher secret coded cipher messages.
- ◆ To assess the documentary record in order to determine the extent of Soviet espionage in the United States and the identification of specific American participants.
- ◆ To analyze two of the dramatic episodes of the Cold War: (1) The Alger Hiss and Whittaker Chambers case; (2) The Julius and Ethel Rosenberg case

## VI. LESSON PLANS

1. Investigating Communism: The House Un-American Activities Committee and Elizabeth Bentley
2. Investigating Communism: Joseph McCarthy and McCarthyism
3. The Evidence of Communist Espionage: The Venona Project and KGB Files
4. Communism on Trial: Whittaker Chamber and the Alger Hiss Case
5. Communism on Trial: Julius and Ethel Rosenberg and Atomic Espionage

## ILLUSTRATION CREDITS

- p. 10 *Rep. Karl Mundt (R.S.D.), chairman of House Unamerican Activities Subcommittee (right), swears in Nathan Gregory Silvermaster (1948).* Library of Congress, LC-USZ62-121529.
- p. 17 (left) *Elizabeth Bentley (1948).* Library of Congress, LC-USZ62-109688; (right) *Earl Browder (n.d.).* Library of Congress.
- p. 23 (left) *Igor Gouzenko (n.d.).* National Archives of Canada, PA-129625; (right) *William Remington and Elizabeth Bentley (1948).* Library of Congress, LC-USZ62-109689.
- p. 27 *Joseph McCarthy (1954).* Library of Congress (LC-USZ62-71719).
- p. 28 *Chairman Joe McCarthy questions witness General Henry Vaughn. Seated, left to right, are Senator Clyde Hoey, McCarthy, Senators Karl Mundt and Margaret Chase Smith. To Smith's right are staff members Bill Lewis and Obie O'Brien, Counsel Jerome Adleman, and Ruth Watt.* Senate Historical Office. Available: <[http://www.senate.gov/artandhistory/history/resources/pdf/watt\\_interview\\_3.pdf](http://www.senate.gov/artandhistory/history/resources/pdf/watt_interview_3.pdf)>.
- p. 34 (left) *Robert Lamphere* and (right) *Meredith Gardner.* The National Security Agency, *Cryptologic History*, "The Venona Project" <<http://www.nsa.gov/docs/venona/monographs/lamphere.gif>> and <<http://www.nsa.gov/docs/venona/monographs/meredith.gif>>.
- p. 35 *Headquarters of the United States Army's Signal Intelligence Service.* The National Security Agency, *Cryptologic History*, "The Venona Project" <[www.nsa.gov/docs/venona/monographs/arlintonhall.gif](http://www.nsa.gov/docs/venona/monographs/arlintonhall.gif)>.
- p. 40 *Lt. General Pavel Fitin.* The National Security Agency, *Cryptologic History*, "The Venona Project" <<http://www.nsa.gov/docs/venona/monographs/fitin.jpg>>.
- p. 45 *Whittaker Chambers (1948).* Library of Congress, LC-USZ62-114739.
- p. 46 *Assistant Secretary, U.S. Treasury, Harry Dexter White and John Maynard Keynes (March 8, 1946).* International Monetary Fund. Available: <<http://www.imf.org/external/np/adm/pictures/images/hwmkm.jpg>>.
- p. 47 (upper) *Sen. Richard Nixon.* "Biographical Directory of the United States Congress." Available: <<http://bioguide.congress.gov/scripts/biodisplay.pl?index=N000116>>; (lower) *Sen. John E. Rankin.* Library of Congress, LC-USZ62-86850.
- p. 48 (upper) *Alger Hiss.* Library of Congress, LC-USZ62-64417; (lower) *Sen. Karl E. Mundt.* "Biographical Directory of the United States Congress." <<http://bioguide.congress.gov/scripts/biodisplay.pl?index=M001078>>.
- p. 53 *John Parnell Thomas.* Library of Congress, LC-USZ62-103193.
- p. 55 (left) *Whittaker Chambers on the stand before the House Un-American Activities Committee (August 25, 1948).* Library of Congress, LC-USZ62-122631; (right) *Secy. of State Edward Stettinius and Alger Hiss (January, 1945).* National Archives, NLR-PHOCO-A-491641468.
- p. 59 (upper) *Iskhak Abdulovich Akhmerov.* The National Security Agency, *Cryptologic History*, "The Venona Project" <<http://www.nsa.gov/docs/venona/monographs/akhmerov.jpg>>. (lower) *Anatolij Gromov/Gorsky.* The National Security Agency, *Cryptologic History*, "The Venona Project" <<http://www.nsa.gov/docs/venona/monographs/gorsky.jpg>>.
- p. 60 *Secretary of State Edward Stettinius leaving the White House (April 12, 1945).* The National Archives, 199068.
- p. 72 *Main Entrance to Fort Monmouth, N.J. Home of the U. S. Army Signal Corps.* [From an undated postcard.] Available: <<http://freepages.genealogy.rootsweb.com/~rmbeckman/billjc.html>>.
- p. 83 (left) *Harry Gold;* (right) *Klas Fuchs.* "Government Exhibit 13, Photographs and mug shots of Ruth and David Greenglass, and Julius and Ethel Rosenberg," National Archives, 278758.
- p. 92 *Police Photos of Ethel and Julius Rosenberg.* "Government Exhibit 13, Photographs and mug shots of Ruth and David Greenglass, and Julius and Ethel Rosenberg," National Archives, 278758.
- p. 93 *Imitation Raspberry Flavor Jell-O box.* "U.S. vs. Julius & Ethel Rosenberg and Martin Sobell Government Exhibit 33," National Archives, Record Group 118: Records of U.S. Attorneys, 1821-1980, 278774.
- p. 95 *Sketch of the High Explosive Lens Mold from the Atomic Bomb drawn by David Greenglass.* "U.S. vs. Julius & Ethel Rosenberg and Martin Sobell: Government Exhibit 2," National Archives, Record Group 118: Records of U.S. Attorneys, 1821-1980, NAIL Control Number: NRAN-118-SDUSATTY-114868-7(11).
- p. 98 *Main Gate of the Los Alamos National Laboratory (ca. 1949).* Los Alamos National Laboratory, 76-12973.

**DRAMATIC MOMENT**  
**Spies in the White House**  
**House of Representatives Committee on Un-American Activities, Washington, DC**

Much of the drama regarding Communism and espionage was played out before the House Committee on Un-American Activities (HUAC). Starting in July 1948, the testimonies of self-confessed former Communist spies captured the newspaper headlines and movie theater newsreels. Former spies such as Elizabeth Bentley and Whittaker Chambers identified other individuals as Communists or who were supportive of the Communists and who were also spies. Those they named were or had been prominent members of the United States Government, some as close as a secretary to the President of the United States employed in the White House.

*Saturday, July 31, 1948*

**Mr. [Robert] Stripling [chief investigator for the committee]** Are there any other names, Miss [Elizabeth] Bentley, of the [Nathan Gregory] Silvermaster group [of spies] . . . ?

**Miss [Elizabeth] Bentley** Just one. The man was not a Communist but he did give information. Lauchlin Currie.

**Mr. Stripling** Was he a secretary to the President [Roosevelt] of the United States?

**Miss Bentley** I believe that was his title. . . . I knew he was one of that circle around the President; yes.

**Mr. Stripling** He was employed in the White House, was he not?

**Miss Bentley** Yes. . . .

**Mr. [John E.] Rankin** You knew that the Communist Party was dedicated to the destruction of this Government, did you not?

**Miss Bentley** I did not at the time I was in it. That was one of the reasons I got out.

**Mr. Rankin** When you found that out you quit. You learned that the Communist Party was plotting the overthrow of this Government?

**Miss Bentley** I would say that was correct; yes. . . . [Communism] is almost a religion and it gets you so strongly that you take orders blindly. You believe it blindly. . . . I would say that their point of view . . . they felt that it was their duty to aid a country that had a Communist government.

**Mr. [Richard M.] Nixon** How long have you been working with the investigative authorities of our Government?

**Miss Bentley** The later part of August 1945.

**Mr. Nixon** In other words . . . this information has been available as to these Government employees for a period of almost 2 years.

**Mr. Mundt** It is also quite apparent we need a new Attorney General.

**The Start of the Great Confrontation: Whittaker Chambers and Alger Hiss**

*Tuesday, August 3, 1948*

**Mr. [Whittaker] Chambers** I had joined the Communist Party in 1924. . . .  
In 1937 I repudiated Marx' doctrines and Lenin's tactics. . . .  
For a year I lived in hiding, sleeping by day and watching through the night with gun or revolver within easy reach. . . .  
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. . . .  
It is ten 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 in the grips with a secret, sinister, and enormously powerful force whose tireless purpose is their enslavement.

**Mr. [Robert] Stripling** Who comprised this cell or apparatus to which you referred?

**Mr. Chambers** Other members of the group were Lee Pressman, Alger Hiss, Donald Hiss, Victor Perlo, Charles Kramer—. . . .

*Wednesday, August 4, 1948*

**Mr. [Karl E.] Mundt** Before proceeding with the hearing, the Chair would like to read two telegrams. . . . The second telegram comes from New York:

My attention has been called by representatives of the press to statements made about me before your committee this morning by one Whittaker Chambers. I do not know Mr. Chambers and insofar as I am aware have never laid eyes on him. There is no basis for the statements made about me to your committee. I would appreciate it if you would make this telegram a part of your committee's record, and I would further appreciate the opportunity to appear before your committee to make these statements formally and under oath. . . . Signed, Alger Hiss.

The committee will hear Mr. Hiss in public testimony tomorrow morning at 10:30. . . .

*Wednesday, August 25, 1948*

**Mr. [F. Edward] Hébert** Now, Mr. Chambers, you heard Mr. Hiss on the stand here today, all day long. What is your reaction to his denials?

**Mr. Chambers** Mr. Hiss is lying.

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U.S. Congress, House. House Committee on Un-American Activities. *Hearings Regarding Communist Espionage in the United States Government*. 80th Cong., 2nd sess., July 31; August 3-5, 7, 9-13, 16-18, 20, 24-27, 30; September 8-9. Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1948.

# LESSON ONE

## Investigating Communism

### The House Un-American Activities Committee and Elizabeth Bentley

#### A. LESSON OBJECTIVES

- ◆ To introduce the context of the anti-communist investigations of the Cold War.
- ◆ To assess the documentary record of the House [of Representatives] Committee on Un-American Activities (HUAC) in order to determine the extent of Soviet espionage in the United States and the identification of specific American participants.
- ◆ To examine the role Elizabeth Bentley played in the investigation of Soviet espionage in the United States.
- ◆ To explore the issues of constitutional rights presented by the HUAC investigations.

#### B. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Only recently have scholars begun to give serious consideration to the role of one of the more intriguing figures in the story of Communist espionage in the United States, Elizabeth Bentley. Two academic biographies have been published recently, one in 2002 and the other in 2003. In her 2003 biography of Bentley, Lauren Kessler offers this introduction: “Her code name was “Clever Girl”. . . . To the New York tabloids in the late 1940s, she was the ‘Red Spy Queen.’ She ferried secret documents from covert communists in the federal government to her Russian lover, a KGB operative. She recruited informants. She debriefed agents. During the ‘golden age’ of Soviet espionage, Elizabeth Turrill Bentley . . . ran two of the most productive spy rings in America. And then, one day in 1945, she ‘turned’—and started naming names” (Kessler, 6).

That August 1945, Bentley went to the FBI office in New Haven, Connecticut and began the process that would ultimately bring her into the public spotlight. Two events, while not directly related to Bentley’s initial decision to tell the FBI of her spying activities, were influential in convincing her to continue to talk with the FBI after her initial contact. One was the defection of Soviet spy, Igor Gouzenko in Canada in September 1945. “Gouzenko was the first person to alert U.S. officials that the Soviets had constructed a vast web of espionage in North America” (Olmsted, 93). The other event was the decision of Louis Budenz, editor of the Communist Party’s *Daily Worker*, to renounce the Party in October 1945, and plan a lecture tour to expose the dangers of Communism. Since Budenz had provided Bentley with information, she expected to be identified in his lecture tour. She also believed he was talking to the FBI. While the defections and revelations of Gouzenko and Budenz were made public, Bentley’s actions were not.

From August to November 1945, Bentley carried on her meetings with the FBI. By November, Bentley had supplied the FBI with all of the crucial details that would become public in the HUAC hearings in 1948. By December 1945, seventy special agents were investigating those identified by Bentley. One of those was Alger Hiss.

Unfortunately, the Soviets quickly learned of Bentley’s defection. J. Edgar Hoover told Sir William Stephenson, the British station chief in the United States, on November 9. It is believed that Stephenson told this information to Kim Philby, who worked for British intelligence and was also a Soviet spy. Philby informed the NKGB. By November 23 of 1945, the Soviets were notifying their station chiefs

in the United States to end all relationships with anyone known to Bentley. The FBI's efforts to have Bentley continue as a double agent were largely fruitless.

As a result of the information Elizabeth Bentley gave the FBI, Attorney General Tom Clark sent the case to a grand jury. According to one biographer, Kathryn Olmstead, the investigation had political overtones. Clark sent the case to the grand jury to head off possible charges that he had not fully pursued the investigation of Bentley's charges. The problem with the information Bentley provided was that there was no accompanying documentary evidence. It was her word against the word of others. The quick response of Kim Philby in notifying the Soviets made the destruction of incriminating evidence possible. Without corroborating testimony the grand jury could not hand down indictments. Only recently has Bentley's testimony been validated by Venona documents and documents from the archives of the former Soviet Union.

J. Edgar Hoover, for his part, was also worried, according to Olmstead, that the FBI would face severe criticism if all of its investigative efforts failed to provide corroborating evidence for Bentley's charges. Hoover's solution was to supply information to the HUAC, which would at least 'punish' the accused by making the accusations public. "Since he could not prosecute the spies, Hoover would encourage congressman to publicize their alleged crimes, ruin their future careers, and embarrass the Democrats who had hired them in the first place" (Olmstead, 117).

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Sources:

Lauren Kessler, *Clever Girl: Elizabeth Bentley, The Spy who Ushered in the McCarthy Era* (New York: Devin-Adair, 1951), p. 6.

Kathryn S. Olmsted, *Red Spy Queen: A Biography of Elizabeth Bentley* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2002), pp. 89–118.

## C. LESSON ACTIVITIES

### Activity One: Historical Background

1. Introduce the lesson by providing the background information appropriate to your class, drawing from the "Historical Background" section of the **Teacher Materials** (pp. 4–5) and the "Background Information" from part **B** above. Discuss with the class why communism was feared in the United States post-World War II, why the grand jury was unable to return an indictment after considering Elizabeth Bentley's testimony, and why the investigation was handed over to the HUAC.

2. The members of the HUAC committee, their party affiliations, and home states:

J. Parnell Thomas (chairman)	(R) New Jersey
Richard M. Nixon	(R) California
John McDowell	(R) Pennsylvania
Karl E. Mundt	(R) South Dakota
John E. Rankin	(D) Mississippi
J. Hardin Peterson	(D) Florida
F. Edward Hébert	(D) Louisiana
Richard B. Vail	(R) Illinois
John S. Wood	(D) Georgia

Either give the class background of the committee members or have students research these committee members and prepare brief biographies, using these questions as a guide:

- a. What can you learn about their political views?
- b. Why would these people want to be on this committee given its controversial nature?

Biographies of Congress members are available online:  
<<http://bioguide.congress.gov/biosearch/biosearch.asp>>.

### Activity Two: The HUAC Hearings

1. Review the Fifth Amendment and constitutional protections of the accused prior to providing students with **Student Handouts 1 and 2**. Investigate and discuss the procedures that apply to congressional investigations and hearings.
2. Bentley's testimony focused on the explanation of her activities as a Communist and the identification of individuals who worked in the federal government and with whom she said she carried on espionage work on behalf of the Communist Party of the United States (CPUSA) and the Soviet Union. Individuals she identified came before the HUAC either voluntarily or as a result of being served a subpoena.

The actual testimonies take up hundreds of pages. It is not possible to include the entire testimony of any individual or of all the parties involved. The excerpts presented here represent some of the most fundamental aspects of the hearings. The issue students should focus on is who is telling the truth and who is lying. Bentley identified individuals whom she said were either members of the Communist party or sympathizers. In response, these individuals testified before the committee.

Have students present the hearing excerpts (**Student Handouts 1 and 2**) as a reader's theater. Assign students to the roles of the various characters in all of the testimony excerpts. Provide "rehearsal" time if you wish to conduct more dramatic performances.

- a. Use the questions that follow the testimony excerpts to engage students in a discussion analyzing some of the significant issues raised by the hearings. Have the class focus on the integrity of each participant.
- b. Make a list or diagram of the members of the two espionage groups named by Elizabeth Bentley. Identify and group the individuals according to the government agency for whom they worked. Consider the kinds of information these spies could obtain.

### Activity Three: Elizabeth Bentley

1. Distribute **Student Handout 3**, "Elizabeth Bentley, Red Spy Queen." Use the questions at the end of the reading to discuss her reliability as a witness.

### Activity Four: Conclusion

1. As a concluding activity, divide the class into groups representing different newspapers reporting on the hearings. One group should represent a paper that supports the HUAC and its activities and welcomes the information that Bentley reveals. Another group should represent a newspaper that is critical of the HUAC and is dubious of the kind of testimony given by Bentley.

Assign each group three tasks: 1) write a factual news story on the hearings, 2) write an editorial giving the newspapers position, and 3) draw a political cartoon depicting the newspaper's editorial policy. Permit students to divide responsibility for the three tasks within each group. Post and/or distribute copies of the student work in the classroom and discuss the different perspectives in the news articles,

editorials, and cartoons. Be sure each group prepares a factual and reasoned argument for the positions they take.

**ELIZABETH BENTLEY**  
**Testimony Before**  
**The Committee on Un-American Activities House of Representatives**

July 31, 1948  
 Naming Names

In her testimony before the House of Representatives Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC), Elizabeth Bentley identified twenty-eight individuals, most of them Communists, whom she said were involved in espionage on behalf of the Soviet Union. She had contact with some of them. She identified two groups of spies: the Silvermaster Group, led by Nathan Gregory Silvermaster and the Perlo Group, led by Victor Perlo. She acted as a courier, collecting information and documents from individuals who were members of one of these groups and worked in the United States government. Bentley then turned over the information to Jacob Golos who forwarded the information to his contacts in the Soviet Union.

In the interest of brevity and clarity, the material has been edited. Nothing that would alter the intent of the testimony has been omitted. Congressional members (such as Rep. Richard Nixon and Rep. Karl Mundt) questioned those appearing before the committee, but the HUAC also had a chief investigator, Robert Stripling, who conducted most of the testimony.

- Mr. Stripling** Miss Bentley, were you ever a member of the Communist Party of the United States?
- Miss Bentley** Yes; I was.
- Mr. Stripling** When did you join?
- Miss Bentley** March 1935.
- Mr. Stripling** Miss Bentley, are you acquainted with an individual or were you acquainted with an individual named Jacob Golos?
- Miss Bentley** Yes; I was.
- Mr. Stripling** When did you first meet Jacob Golos?
- Miss Bentley** In October 1938.
- Mr. Rankin** Where is this Golos Now? . . .
- Mr. Stripling** Mr. Golos is deceased.
- Mr. Stripling** Did Mr. Golos ever ask you to perform any special duties for him in connection with any work that he was doing for the Communist Party in behalf of the Soviet Union?
- Miss Bentley** Later on, yes. . . .
- Mr. Stripling** When was that?
- Miss Bentley** At about the start of the Russian-German war which would be around June or July of 1941.

- Mr. Stripling** What did he ask you to do?
- Miss Bentley** He asked me to take charge of individuals and groups . . . . It was to take charge of individuals and groups who were employed in the United States Government and in positions to furnish information.
- Mr. Stripling** Would you tell the committee how this espionage organization operated and your participation in it?
- Miss Bentley** It started with actual Government employees in about July 1941, when he told me that he had received from Earl Browder the name of a man working for the United States Government, who was interested in helping in getting information to Russia and who could organize a group of other Government employees to help in this work.
- Mr. Stripling** Who was the individual?
- Miss Bentley** N[athan] Gregory Silvermaster. . . . He was with the Farm Security Administration.
- Mr. Rankin** He was a member of the Communist Party, you say?
- Miss Bentley** That is correct.
- Mr. Rankin** And an agent of the Communist International?
- Miss Bentley** Probably an agent of the NKVD. . . .
- Mr. Rankin** That is the Russian Communist secret police?
- Miss Bentley** That is correct.
- Mr. Stripling** You were a courier?
- Miss Bentley** I was the person who made trips to Washington and picked up the material and brought it back to Mr. Golos.
- Mr. Stripling** Can you name any other individuals that you know of your own knowledge were members of this group, this espionage group?
- Miss Bentley** Mrs. Silvermaster . . . William Ludwig Ullman . . . [Solomon Adler] . . . William Taylor . . . Harry Dexter White. . . .
- Miss Bentley** I had one other group that I handled, and I had every reason to believe there were other groups also. . . . I call it the Perlo group because the ostensible leader of it was Victor Perlo.
- Mr. Stripling** Did Victor Perlo turn information over to you?
- Miss Bentley** Yes; he did.
- Mr. Stripling** Information which has been obtained from people who were employed in the Government?
- Miss Bentley** Yes. . . .
- Mr. Stripling** Could you name other members of his group . . . ?
- Miss Bentley** Allan Rosenberg . . . Donald Wheeler . . . Charles Kramer. His real name was Charles Krevitsky. . . .
- Mr. Mundt** Is Kramer a Communist?
- Miss Bentley** Oh, yes. . . .

- Mr. Stripling** Allan Rosenberg and Donald Wheeler.
- Miss Bentley** They were both Communists.
- Mr. Stripling** Can you name any other members of the Perlo group?
- Miss Bentley** Edward Fitzgerald . . . [Harry Magdoff] . . . Harold Glasser
- Mr. Mundt** Is Harold Glasser a Communist?
- Miss Bentley** Yes; they all were.
- Mr. Stripling** Miss Bentley, will you now go back to the Silvermaster group and name any individual who was a part of that group that has not already been previously mentioned?
- Miss Bentley** George Silverman . . . Frank Coe . . . William Gold . . . his wife, Sonia Gold . . . Irving Kaplan . . . John Abt . . . Norman Bursler . . . Lauchlin Currie. . . .
- Mr. Stripling** He [Currie] was employed in the White House . . . ?
- Miss Bentley** Yes.
- Mr. Stripling** But Mr. Currie was not a member of the Communist Party to your knowledge?
- Miss Bentley** Not to my knowledge. . . .

NOTE: Bentley was asked if the individuals she identified were Communists. Sometimes, as the excerpts indicate, she was asked a direct question. For others she was asked if they paid Communist Party dues. Of the Silvermaster group, only William Taylor, Sonia Gold, and Norman Brussler were excluded from this line of questioning. Bentley did not know if Harry Dexter White was a member of the Communist Party (CPUSA). As the excerpt indicates, Bentley said that Lauchin Currie was not a member of the Communist Party. She indicated that all of the others were Communists. She asserted that the entire Perlo group was Communist.



Rep. Karl Mundt (R.S.D.), chairman of House Unamerican Activities Subcommittee (right), swears in Nathan Gregory Silvermaster (1948).

### Questions

1. All of the individuals Bentley identified worked in the United States Government. Should the government adopt security policies that would require investigations and loyalty oaths of all of its employees?
2. What obligation does the government have to adopt programs and policies to provide for the nation's security? Consider the arguments for and against these types of policies and programs. In particular, consider the constitutional questions of any of these programs.
3. You are the President's adviser for internal security. He is concerned about the information Bentley has revealed. He has asked you to develop a program in response to the espionage activities Bentley has identified. What would you recommend? Why?

**Explaining Group Operations and ‘Naming Names’ Outside the Espionage Groups**

In this portion of Elizabeth Bentley’s testimony she explains how she carried out her role as a courier. She specifies the kind of information she received and she names other individuals who worked in the government and supplied her with information, but who were not members of the Silvermaster or Perlo group.

**Mr. Stripling** Now that we have completed the naming of the personnel which comprised each group, I wish you would describe to the committee the mechanical operation of the group, just how they operated, what the group did. Take the Silvermaster group first.

**Miss Bentley** It was my policy to come down [to Washington DC] almost regularly every 2 weeks. I would go the Silvermaster home, very often have dinner with them, spend the evening, and collect from them the information which they had previously collected from the members of the group.

**Mr. Stripling** What type of information did Mr. Silvermaster turn over to you?

**Miss Bentley** He turned over whatever members of his group secured, which was varied, depending on the spot the person was in.

**Mr. Stripling** What type of information was actually turned over to you, and which you transferred to Mr. Golos?

**Miss Bentley** Military information, particularly from the Air Corps, on production of airplanes, their destinations to various theaters of war and to various countries, new types of planes being put out, information as to when D-Day would be, all sorts of inside military information.

**Mr. Stripling** How would you transmit this information, yourself, acting as a courier for the group?

**Miss Bentley** That depended. In the very early days they either typed it out or brought me documents. Later they began photographing it.

**Mr. Stripling** Where was the photographing carried out?

**Miss Bentley** In the basement of the Silvermaster house. . . . They had the set-up all ready for putting the documents in and holding the documents in place.

**Mr. Stripling** What did you do with the photographs or documents once you received them?

**Miss Bentley** I gave them to Mr. Golos. . . . [O]ftentimes they [Mr. and Mrs. Silvermaster] came up to New York. . . . I would have breakfast with them. . . . We didn’t always go to the same place.

**Mr. Stripling** In the Silvermaster basement. Do you know who made these photographs?

**Miss Bentley** When Mr. [William Ludwig] Ullman was available, he did it. . . . Mrs. [Helen] Silvermaster worked with him.

**Mr. Stripling** Did any of these people mentioned in the Silvermaster group ever come to the Silvermaster home while you were there?

**Miss Bentley** George Silverman.

**Mr. Stripling.** . . . When you obtained the material, you went to New York and you turned it over personally to Mr. Golos?

**Miss Bentley** Yes; until his death; yes.

**Mr. Stripling** What did Mr. Golos do with the material?

- Miss Bentley** If the material was nonmilitary, of a political character, he first took it down to Mr. Earl Browder [head of the CPUSA from 1930 to 1945] to show it to him, and then passed it on to his Russian contact.
- Mr. Stripling** During your activities in the Communist Party and also during the period you were active as a courier in this espionage ring, did you have any connection or contact with Louis Budenz?
- Miss Bentley** Yes; I did. . . . He did give me information. . . . [Which I gave] to Mr. Golos.
- Mr. Stripling** Going now to the Perlo espionage group, who turned the material over to you?
- Miss Bentley** . . . Whoever was coming to New York. . . . Well, I met Victor Perlo, Harry Magdoff, Edward Fitzgerald, Charlie Kramer, Donald Wheeler, Allan Rosenberg. . . . I first met them . . . in Mr. [John] Abt's apartment. . . .
- Mr. Stripling** Miss Bentley, did any of the people who were involved in any of these groups receive money from the Communist Party or from yourself or from Mr. Silvermaster that you know of?
- Miss Bentley** No; they received no money. They received only traveling expenses if they had to come to New York.
- Mr. Stripling** From whom did they receive money?
- Miss Bentley** Mr. Golos gave it to me, and I gave it to them.
- Mr. Stripling** Why were these people furnishing information to Mr. Golos?
- Miss Bentley** Because they had been told that it was their duty as Communists to do it, and they had been told that Russia was our ally, that she was bearing the brunt of the war, that she was not being properly treated as an ally, and it was their duty to do something about it.
- Mr. Stripling** Did you receive any money from Mr. Golos in connection with your activities?
- Miss Bentley** No; only expenses.
- Mr. Stripling** During this time did you visit the Communist Party headquarters?
- Miss Bentley** Yes; I went down ever so often to see Earl Browder.
- Mr. Stripling** Was it in connection with these espionage activities or not?
- Miss Bentley** Yes; it was.
- Mr. Mundt** . . . [T]here might be some individuals outside of the Silvermaster group whom contacted you [and were] in the government.
- Miss Bentley** Yes; there were. . . . Duncan Lee.
- Mr. Mundt** Was he a Communist?
- Miss Bentley** Yes. . . . Well, there was a circle of lawyers around General [William] Donovan in the OSS [Office of Strategic Services, which was the World War II equivalent of the Central Intelligence Agency.], and he was one of them.
- Mr. Mundt** Who else, then, besides Duncan Lee . . . belonged to neither group?
- Miss Bentley** Helen Tenney. . . . J. Julius Joseph [and] his wife . . . Maurice Halperin . . . Willard Z. Park . . . Robert Miller . . . Joseph Gregg . . . [his wife Ruth] . . . Bernard Redmont . . . Michael Greenberg. . . .

NOTE: Bentley identified all of these individuals with whom she had contact as being Communists in response to direct questions. She indicated Park was a “sympathizer.” She was not asked about Redmont. She indicated Greenberg was a member of the Communist Party in England.

### Questions

1. According to Bentley, how was the Communist Party of the United States (CPUSA) connected to Soviet espionage?
2. According to Bentley, what reason was given to people to encourage them to furnish information to the Soviets? Why would a person consider it “their duty” to do so?
3. What is the significance of the existence of individuals who worked for the OSS and were conducting espionage on behalf of the Soviet Union?
4. According to Elizabeth Bentley, why were “people furnishing information to Mr. Golos and what do her claims suggest about the possible motivations of those who chose to conduct espionage on behalf of the Soviet Union? Evaluate the pros and cons of the possible motivations.

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Source: U.S. Congress, House; House Committee on Un-American Activities, *Hearings Regarding Communist Espionage in the United States Government* (United States Government Printing Office: 80th Cong., 2nd sess., July 31, 1948).



Elizabeth Bentley  
1948



Earl Browder  
Leader of the American  
Communist Party (through 1945).  
Elizabeth Bentley claimed that her lover  
and fellow spy, Jacob Golos, received  
his contact from Browder

## RESPONSES TO ELIZABETH BENTLEY'S TESTIMONY BEFORE THE HUAC

### Testimony of Nathan Gregory Silvermaster (Accused Espionage Leader)—August 4, 1948

- Mr. Mundt** Mr. Silvermaster, will you stand and be sworn, please? Do you solemnly swear that the testimony you are about to give will be the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help you God?
- Mr. Silvermaster** Yes.
- Mr. Stripling** Mr. Silvermaster, are you accompanied by counsel?
- Mr. Silvermaster** Yes, sir.
- Mr. Stripling** Mr. Silvermaster, you appeared before this committee on May 25, 1948, did you not? . . . In Executive session. . . . At the conclusion of your testimony on that date you were advised that the subpoena which had been served upon you calling for your appearance before the committee was continued in effect. Is that true? . . . You are appearing before the committee today by virtue of a telegram sent to you on August 2, 1948 . . . ?
- Mr. Silvermaster** That is true. . . . I am proud that in all the positions which I have held in the Federal Government I have fought consistently for the interest of the American people as a whole and particularly of farm and industrial labor. I am especially proud that during the war I was able to strike effective blows in the Government service at our Fascist enemies.
- Because I have never attempted to conceal my strong advocacy of the rights of the underprivileged and of all New Deal principles, I have been constantly harassed by groundless accusations of disloyalty. . . . The charges made by Miss Bentley are false and fantastic. I can only conclude that she is a neurotic liar. I am and have been a loyal American citizen and was a faithful Government employee. I am not and never have been a spy or agent of any foreign government.
- I consider the proceedings which have gone on before this committee as a continuation of the harassment which has plagued me and interfered with my work and livelihood for years. . . . Upon advice of my counsel, I shall stand upon the constitutional right of every American citizen and shall refuse to testify further on matters relating to Miss Bentley's charges in the exercise of my constitutional privilege against self-incrimination under the fifth amendment.
- Mr. Stripling** Mr. Silvermaster, are you now or have you ever been a member of the Communist Party?
- Mr. Silvermaster** I refuse to answer this question on the grounds which I have already stated.
- Mr. Stripling** [D]o you know Earl Browder? . . . Do you know Jacob Golos? . . . [D]o you know Gerhart Eisler?
- Silvermaster's response to each of these questions was similar: "I refuse to answer" since it "may be self-incriminating."*
- Mr. Stripling** Mr. Silvermaster, would you kindly turn around and, Miss Bentley, would you please stand? . . . Do you know Elizabeth T. Bentley, who is standing?
- Mr. Silvermaster** I refuse to answer the question on the ground that any answer I may give may be self-incriminating.
- Mr. Stripling** You are aware, Mr. Silvermaster, that Miss Bentley has made very serious charges against

you before this committee. You refuse to answer whether you even know her; is that correct?

**Mr. Silvermaster** That is correct, sir . . . .

*Stripling then asked a series of questions. Silvermaster's response to each question was the same: "I refuse to answer . . . any answer . . . may be self-incriminating"*

**Mr. Stripling** Do you know Lauchin Currie? . . . Norman Bursler? . . . Alger Hiss? . . . Frank V. Coe? . . . Edward J. Fitzgerald? . . . Harold Glasser? . . . Sonia Gold? . . . William J. Gold? . . . Joseph B. Gregg? . . . Victor Perlo? . . . Charles Kramer? . . . Duncan C. Lee? . . . Harry Magdoff? . . . William C. Remington? . . . Maurice Halperin? . . . Alex Koral?

**Mr. Stripling** Did you ever furnish any documents from the Government files to Elizabeth T. Bentley?

**Mr. Silvermaster** I refuse to answer this question. . . .

**Mr. Stripling** Did you have photographic equipment in the basement of your home in Washington D.C., for the purpose of photographing Government documents?

**Mr. Silvermaster** I refuse to answer . . . .

**Mr. Stripling** Do you know Mr. William Ullman?

**Mr. Silvermaster** I know Mr. Ullman. . . . Mr. Ullman has resided with me since 1937.

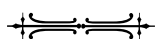
**Mr. Stripling** Is Mr. Ullman a member of the Communist Party?

**Mr. Silvermaster** I refuse to answer. . . .

**Mr. Nixon** Mr. Silvermaster, Miss Bradley before this committee cited certain facts concerning activities. You have stated these facts are false. You have the same right that she had to cite the facts upon which you base the charge that her statements of facts are false.

Will you indicate to the committee what facts in your knowledge you have that would contradict the facts she has presented here in her statement?

**Mr. Silvermaster** I refuse to answer. . . .



### Testimony of Victor Perlo (Accused Espionage Leader)—August 9, 1948

**Mr. Stripling** Mr. Perlo, Are you a member of the Communist Party?

**Mr. Perlo** On advice of counsel I refuse to answer that question both on my rights under the first amendment of the Constitution and on my rights under the fifth amendment of the Constitution on the ground that it might tend to incriminate or degrade me.

**Mr. Stripling** Have you ever been a member of the Communist Party at any time?

**Mr. Perlo** I refuse to answer. . . .

**Mr. Stripling** During the years you held these various posts with the Government were you a member of the Communist Party?

**Mr. Perlo** I decline to answer . . . on the ground that it might tend to incriminate me.

**Mr. Stripling** Mr. Perlo, did you furnish any information to Elizabeth T. Bentley?

- Mr. Perlo** On advice of counsel I stand on my rights under the fifth amendment to the Constitution and refuse to answer this question on the ground that it might tend to incriminate or degrade me.
- Mr. Stripling** Mr. Perlo, will you stand up and turn around, please. Miss Bentley, will you please stand up and take off your glasses. Do you know Elizabeth T. Bentley, who is standing Mr. Perlo?
- Mr. Perlo** On advice of counsel I refuse to answer that question on the ground that it might tend to incriminate or degrade me.
- Mr. Nixon** Mr. Perlo. Have you ever given Miss Bentley any secret or confidential Government information?
- Mr. Perlo** I refuse to answer . . . .

NOTE: Perlo was then asked a series of questions seeking to determine if he knew individuals identified by Elizabeth Bentley and others whose name came to light in other testimony. His response was the same to each question.

- Mr. Stripling** Mr. Perlo, do you know Henry Collins? . . . John Abt? . . . Sonia Gold? . . . William Gold? . . . Bela Gold? . . . Veet Bassie? . . . Alger Hiss? . . . Donald Hiss? . . . Whittaker Chambers? . . . Steve Nelson? . . . Gerhart Eisler? . . . George Silverman? . . . Allan Rosenberg? . . . Donald Niven Wheeler? . . . William H. Taylor? . . . Robert T. Miller? . . . Charles Kramer? . . . Nathan Gregory Silvermaster? . . . Harold Ware? . . . Harry Magdoff? . . . Solomon Adler? . . . Lauchin Currie? . . . William Ludwig Ullman? . . . Harold Glasser? . . . Edward J. Fitzgerald?

**Mr. Perlo.** I . . . refuse to answer . . . .

NOTE: Perlo was also asked if individuals turned over information to him. His response was again essentially the same for the six individuals identified: "On advice of counsel I stand on my rights under the fifth amendment to the Constitution and refuse to answer this question on the ground that it might tend to incriminate or degrade me."

Perlo was then asked to "step aside for a few moments." Elizabeth Bentley was recalled and was asked a number of questions about Perlo and espionage activities.

- Mr. Stripling** Do you know Victor Perlo, the witness who just left the stand?
- Miss Bentley** Yes; I do.
- Mr. Stripling** Did Victor Perlo turn information over to you?
- Miss Bentley** Yes; he did.

*After Bentley's testimony, Perlo was again recalled to the stand.*

- Mr. Stripling** Mr. Perlo, did you furnish any information to Elizabeth T. Bentley?
- Mr. Perlo** On advice of counsel I stand on my rights . . . and refuse to answer this question. . . .

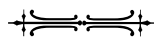
NOTE: Perlo wanted to have a prepared statement read into the record. One part of that statement was as follows: "I vigorously deny the charges which have been leveled against me." Given his refusal to respond to questions about Bentley's charges, committee members had problems with reconciling his statement and his testimony.

**Mr. Nixon** We are not attempting to badger you as a witness. We simply want to get the truth. . . . I question the right of any witness to come before this committee and make the categorical charge that the charges made by another witness are false and still refuse to answer questions concerning those specific major charges.

NOTE: Elizabeth Bentley indicated that the following individuals were involved in espionage on behalf of the Soviet Union: Alexander Koral, Duncan Lee, William Ullman, Robert Miller, Charles Kramer, George Silverman, Lauchlin Currie, Harry Dexter White, Sonia Gold, Frank Coe, and John Abt. Like Silvermaster and Perlo when they testified they refused to answer similar kinds of questions on constitutional grounds.

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Source: U.S. Congress, House; House Committee on Un-American Activities, *Hearings Regarding Communist Espionage in the United States Government* (United States Government Printing Office: 80th Cong., 2nd sess., August 4 and 9, 1948).



### Questions

1. Nathan Gregory Silvermaster worked for the Federal Government when the New Deal was being implemented by the Franklin D. Roosevelt administration. Silvermaster suggested that he was harrassed because of his “strong advocacy of the rights of the underprivileged and of all New Deal principles. During the 1930s and continuing into the 1940s, some conservatives believed that the New Deal was undermining traditional American principles and moving the country in a socialistic and even a communist direction.
  - How would such views factor into concerns about someone like Silvermaster who was accused of espionage on behalf of the Soviet Union and who was also an “advocate for the New Deal?”
2. Remembering the charges of paranoia and hysteria that are invoked to characterize the period, notice that in these hearings there are constitutional safeguards and defined legal procedures, such as subpoenas and the right to have counsel. Consider the use these two witnesses make of constitutional rights.
  - a. Were the rights of the witnesses properly protected?
  - b. Is everyone who invokes the Fifth Amendment guilty?
  - c. What impression does it convey when individuals invoke the Fifth Amendment?
  - d. In what ways are such impressions fair and/or unfair?
3. Agree or disagree: Witnesses took proper advantage of the provisions of the Constitution during the Cold War when they refused to answer certain questions asked of them in the HUAC hearings.
4. What are the pros and cons of congressional investigations or hearings? Be sure to consider the legitimate responsibilities of Congress and also the opportunities, when public, these hearings offer for members of Congress and witnesses to play to the press and public.
5. Conduct further research in order to answer the following question: What would have happened to these witnesses had they admitted to knowing the individuals they were questioned about and that they refused to admit knowing?

## Elizabeth Bentley The Forgotten “Red Spy Queen”

Elizabeth Bentley died December 3, 1963. Her obituary in the December 4, 1963 *Washington Post* included the following:

Elizabeth Bentley, the apostate communist spy who helped unmask a web of wartime treachery in this country, died quietly today. She was 55. She testified at the Rosenberg (Julius and Ethel) trial on how she relayed orders from Moscow to Earl Browder, wartime head of the American Communist Party, and collected information in this country for transmission to Soviet Russia. At the trial she outlined the structure of the wartime espionage apparatus in this country and linked one of her contacts to the Rosenbergs.

Elizabeth Bentley was born on January 1, 1908. In 1926 she won a scholarship to prestigious Vassar College, America's oldest women's college. Bentley would later attribute the influence of Vassar, in general, and Hallie Flanagan, head of Vassar's Experimental Theatre, in particular, for her acceptance of Communism. Olmsted dismisses this claim and notes that Bentley joined the Communist Party five years after she left Vassar. As director of the New Deal's Federal Theatre Project, Flanagan would appear before the HUAC in 1938 to answer questions about the “left-wing” material in some Project plays.

Bentley's mother died a year before she finished Vassar. She traveled to Europe upon graduation and upon her return she took a teaching position at Foxcroft, an exclusive college prep school for girls in Virginia. In 1932 she quit to attend graduate school at Columbia University, winning a scholarship to the University of Florence in 1933.

In her book *Red Spy Queen*, author Kathryn Olmsted describes Bentley as very sexually active during this period and addicted to alcohol. She also contends that “Elizabeth developed her lifelong taste for political extremism in Florence” (6). She returned to New York in 1934 following a notice of possible expulsion from the University and after a suicide attempt. In the apartment building where she lived she met Lee Fuhr, a Communist. As a result, Elizabeth became involved with Communist front groups and joined the Communist Party.

By 1938, Bentley had decided to become a Soviet spy. Her controller was Jacob Golos, one of the top Soviet spies in the United States. They would become lovers. This dual relationship would last until Golos's death in November 1943.

The 1939 Soviet-Nazi pact caused a shock wave among communists worldwide, leading to a number of defections from the Party. According to Olmsted, Bentley's love for Golos minimized any strong ideological commitment to Communism and she was able to rationalize Stalin's decision. She became Golos's courier, and under the codename “Cover Girl” she began to carry out the activities that would later earn her the title of the “Red Spy Queen.”

In August 1941, Elizabeth Bentley began her supervision of a group of spies led by Nathan Gregory Silvermaster, known as the Silvermaster group. This group, with the assistance of additional Communists and Communist sympathizers who worked in the Federal government, supplied information to Silvermaster who in turn handed it over to Bentley. She gave all of this to her controller and lover, Jacob Golos. As Golos's health declined her role expanded and she began to control numerous agents.

Others, who were not part of the Silvermaster group, also gave Bentley, information. In March 1944, Bentley began to meet with members of another group of spies led by Victor Perlo. The Perlo group, like the Silvermaster group, supplied her with information based upon their employment in the Federal government. Julius Rosenberg, known to her only as “Julius” contacted her when he wanted to get in touch with the Russians.

In September 1944, Bentley ended her relationship with the Silvermaster group. She also was assigned a new handler, known to her as “Jack,” Joseph Katz. He also handled Earl Browder and Harry Gold, and after it was learned she had defected, he agreed to kill her. Katz’s superior was Anatoly Gorsky, who had controlled the British spies known as the “Cambridge Five,” that included Kim Philby. Gorsky took control of all her contacts, finally suggesting she move to the Soviet Union. By August of 1945, Bentley had decided to begin talking to the FBI.

Two events, while not directly related to Bentley’s initial decision to tell the FBI of her spying activities, were influential in convincing her to continue to talk with the FBI after her initial contact. One was the defection of Soviet spy, Igor Gouzenko in Canada in September 1945. “Gouzenko was the first person to alert U.S. officials that the Soviets had constructed a vast web of espionage in North America” (Olmsted, 93). The other event was the decision of Louis Budenz, editor of the Communist Party’s *Daily Worker*, to renounce the Party in October 1945, and plan a lecture tour to expose the dangers of Communism. Since Budenz had provided Bentley with information, she expected to be identified in his lecture tour. She also believed he was talking to the FBI.

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Source: Olmsted, *Red Spy Queen*, pp. 89–118.

### Questions

1. In a trial when witness have conflicting stories, juries then must weigh the character of the witnesses. Does this background information change your view of Elizabeth Bentley’s testimony?
2. Elizabeth Bentley’s motives for going to the FBI in August, 1945 should be considered when weighing her truthfulness. What do you think contributed to her initial decision? Personal factors? (Her lover and fellow spy, Jacob Golos, died in 1943—but she continued spying.) Political factors? (The atomic bombs were dropped on Japan in August, 1945.)



(Left) After defecting to Canada, former Soviet spy Igor Gouzenko would appear in public with a bag over his head to protect himself from communist vengeance. (Right) William Remington, one of those Elizabeth Bentley accused of communist espionage, shows her some documents.

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Questions?

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