The Cold War and the Idea of Freedom

Along with the military/political aspect of the Cold War, it boiled down to a war of ideologies. It was about winning the hearts and minds not just land. But just like other wars the idea of freedom was very important in gaining support for the war. The idea of freedom was seen in everything from academic research, popular journalism, mass culture, and official pronouncements. Freedom was the one word that could explain America to the rest of the world.

The Cultural Cold War

“Militant Liberty” was the code name that the NSA and CIA gave to its encouragement of Hollywood to produce anticommunist movies. Part of this was also to remove less than peaceful aspects of American history - like treatment of Native Americans. Funding for these projects was top secret - no one wanted to know or let it be known that the CIA was funding the arts and trying to convince Americans to think a particular way. (This is mostly because this is what was done in communist countries) The CIA also funded a lot of European and overseas publications, conference etc. to improve the international image of the US. And prove it wasn’t a cultural wasteland. A perfect example of this is the work on Jackson Pollock. For him it was all about the process not the finished product. He would often drip paint over canvas with no real subject matter. The CIA sold this as an expression of American free, individual expression.

Freedom and Totalitarianism

Totalitarianism was a word created to describe the aggressive, ideologically driving states that sought o subdue all of civil society, including churches, unions, and other voluntary associations. They left no room for individual rights.

1. McCarran Internal Security Act barred totalitarians from entering the US - basically meant anyone on the other side of the Cold War.
2. Showed that the greatest threat to freedom as in an overly powerful government.

Whatever Moscow stood for was the opposite of freedom and this was often described as socialized. This concept was used to defeat Truman’s plan for national health care. It was called socialist by the American Medical Association in the largest public relations campaign in US history. Other examples of how socialism was used:

1. Real estate - public housing was called socialized housing
2. 1954 under God was added to the pledge of Allegiance because the Soviets opposed religion.

The Rise of Human Rights

The concept of Human rights is nothing new. They were developed during the Enlightenment of the 18th century and have continued to be defined throughout the various time periods. The events of WWII brought the issue of human rights to the forefront again. As a result of the Nuremberg Trials, individuals were held responsible for their individual actions and many were imprisoned and 10 were executed for their crimes against humanity. The UN charter continues the attention of human rights with strong league prohibiting discrimination based on race, sec, or religion. In 1948, the UN passed the Declaration of Human Rights (committee was led by Eleanor Roosevelt) it included things such as freedom of speech, religious toleration and protection against arbitrary governments. Also the right to an adequate standard of living and access to housing, education and medical care. There was no enforcement attached but at its core was the belief that a nation’s treatment of its own citizens could and should be evaluated by others. The problem with this is who is to determine what is right. One of the reasons that many have problems with the Declaration of Human Rights is that both the US and the Soviet Union did not want any outside body evaluating how it dealt with its own citizens. When Secretary Dulles helped create the charter for the UN he opposed any statement regarding human rights for fear that it would open up the race question in the US. Both the US and the Soviet Union would continue to highlight parts of the Declaration of Human Rights that benefited them while it ignored ones that it didn’t like.

The Anticommunist Crusade

As a result of Cold War there were massive changes to the government. It was larger and more powerful than before. A new highway system - to help evacuate major cities if necessary, research facilities in higher education for weapon development. Both the US and the USSR conducted experiments on soldiers exposing them to chemical, biological, and nuclear weapons. Higher education expanded and changes were tame to immigrant policy with refugees from communism being allowed to enter the US regardless of the national origins. The end of segregation was helped by the international embarrassment that US racial policies caused.

Loyalty and Disloyalty

Within two weeks of issuing the Truman Doctrine, Truman established a loyalty review system. All government employees were required to demonstrate their patriotism without being allowed to confront accusers or even knowing the charges themselves. Espionage was not discovered but several hundred were fired and thousands resigned versus going through the investigations.

HUAC launched a series of hearings in 1947 about communist influence in Hollywood. Many well-known Hollywood bigwigs were called to testify. Some like Disney said the movie industry had lots of communists. But ten “unfriendly” witnesses refused to answer questions on the grounds of it violated their first amendment rights. All ten were convicted of contempt of congress and imprisoned for 6 months to a year. All were blacklisted along with 200 others who were accused of communist sympathies or who refused to name names.

The spy Trials

After the Hollywood Ten - several trials were held regarding espionage. The first was the Alger Hiss (a high ranking state dept. employee) trial. He was accused by Whittaker Chambers an editor at Time magazine saying that he had given him secrete government documents to pass to agents of the Soviet Union. Chambers was a member of the communist party at the time. Hiss denied the charges but was still found guilty and suntanned to 5 years in prison. This is where the future President Nixon earned some fame.

After this, the Truman administration put the leaders of the communist party on trial for trying to overthrow the government. In 1951, 11 were sentenced to 5 years in prison.

Julius and Ethel Rosenberg was the most famous of the spy cases. They were convicted in 1951 of conspiracy to pass secrets regarding the atomic bomb to soviet agents. Their main accuser was David Greenglass - Ethel’s brother. The information that was passed was not allowed to be submitted in court due to its classified nature - but when they were released they did not seem that important to justify the execution - but they did probably help the Soviets speed up their creation of the bomb. The government had almost no evidence against Ethel and Greenglass even admitted to lying. The prosecutors charged her hoping that her husband would confess. They were charged with conspiracy which is a lesser charge, but the judge said what they did was “worse than murder” and it “caused” the Korean War. They were executed in 1953 despite international attention. Although no one defends the execution of the Rosenberg’s today, there is still a lot of controversy surrounding both cases and it both trials reinforce the idea that an army of Soviet spies were operating in the U.S.

McCarthy and McCarthyism

A Senator from Wisconsin gave himself a name and notoriety over his pursuit of communists. Joseph McCarthy was elected partially on a false record of flying in WWII. In 1950 he announced he had a list of 205 communist working for the state department. He never produced one name and the numbers kept changing, but he was able to use the Senate subcommittee he chaired to hold hearings and level wild charges against lots of people including some who worked in the defense department. He was supported originally by many Republicans who were trying to get rid of Truman, but he lost some support when Eisenhower was elected. In fact he even questioned his anti-communist actions. He fell from grace when the Senate investigated his claims that the army had harbored and “coddled” communists. The hearings were televised and basically showed that McCarthy was a bully and made sweeping accusations with no fact. The Senate eventually put a stop to him after he attacked the army. He died in 1957 – but his name lives on to describe anyone who tried character assassination, guilt by association, and abuse of power in the name of anticommunism.

An atmosphere of fear.

By the early 1950s – an atmosphere of fear had been spread throughout the US. States created their own committees based on HUAC. They required loyalty oaths of teachers, pharmacists and members of other professions. They also banned communists from fishing, holding a drivers’ license and in one state working as a professional wrestler. Anything that was connected to communism – even if it’s a previous association was considered sinister. Books that were considered un-American were banned from the libraries and schools. Even books like Robin Hood – that stole from the rich and gave to the poor were considered socialist. If people refused to sign the loyalty oaths they were fired. The courts did nothing to stop this. *Dennis v. United States* the Supreme Court upheld the jailing of Communist Party even though the charges concerned their beliefs, not any actions they had taken. Even liberals pulled back – the ACLU condemned McCarthy’s tactics, but would not defend any of the indicted communist party leaders.

The Uses of Anticommunism

For the most part espionage in the US was limited. For those who were arrested, it had nothing to do with their actions but having unpopular beliefs. Anticommunism was used by different groups for different reasons. Ethnic groups such as Polish Americans whose homeland was now dominated by the Soviet Union, Catholics who were against the Soviets fear of organized religion. The FBI developed files on thousands of American citizens, dissenters, homosexuals, and others who had no connection to communism at all.

Anticommunist politics

Republicans used anticommunism as a way to block Truman’s political program. Some of the most important actions of Congress were ones the Truman opposed. He vetoed the McCarran Internal Security Bill of 1950 that required subversive groups to register with the government, allowed the denial of passports to their members and authorized their deportation or detention ton presidential order. – but Congress gained the 2/3 majority to override the veto. The McCarran Walker Act of 1952 was the first major piece of immigration since 1924. Truman had asked a commission to rewrite the quotas taking into affect other circumstances like family and loyalty. Instead the quotas were in place and authorized the deportation of immigrants identified as communists even if they had become citizens. In 1954, they passed Operation Wetback. – used the military to invade Mexican American neighborhoods to round up and deport illegal aliens. Roughly 1 million had been deported in 1 year.

The Welfare state of the New Deal was only expanded when Truman was able to extend social security to self employed and domestic workers. It was replaced with private welfare systems – union labor contracts include health insurance plans, automatic cost of living wage increases, paid vacations, and pension plans. In Western Europe this was already provided by the governments. Nonunion members did not enjoy these benefits.

Cold War and Organized Labor

Organized labor, like every other institution had to deal with the anti-communist movement or fade away. This was difficult because many of the leaders for civil rights as well as workers rights were also communists. IN 1947 The Taft-Hartley Act was passed. It withdrew bargaining rights and legal protections from unions whose leaders failed to sear that they were not communists. The CIO expelled lots of members and leaders including communist led unions so roughly 1 million workers were out of a union. Many of those to be expelled were the most militant – and were the strongest supporters of the women’s rights and racial minorities. As a result, labor was not as prepared to deal with the shifting economy with an emphasis on service versus manufacturing.

Cold War Civil Rights

In the beginning racial groups like the NAACP and the Anti Defamation league spoke out against Truman’s loyalty program, but eventually only but a few leaders realized they had no choice but to go along. Two such people were actor Paul Robeson who was denied a passport and WEB DuBois who was indicted for not registering as an agent of the Soviet Union. – but no one protested. DuBois was dismissed by the judge.

The link between civil rights and labor was dissolved. Black organizations used the language of the cold war to their benefit though. They said that racism at home was causing a negative view of Americans overseas – and that is what the Russians wanted. In fact, Truman had called attention the civil rights issue for that very reason, but the Cold War was not the right time to look at any wrongs in American culture.

The Truman Presidency –

The Fair Deal –

First thing that Truman had to do after the war was to demobilize the military. 12 million were still active duty in 1945. It was reduced to 3 million within a year. Many had a hard time adjusting to Civilian life. Divorce doubled. Some Took advantage of the GI Bill of Rights for home mortgages, small businesses, and attend college. Most entered the workforce. As a result some 2 million women lost their jobs. The agencies that had regulated industrial production and labor relations were disbanded and prices rose. Because he was backed by many of the New deal supporters, he announced the Fair Deal in September of 1945 that was supposed to continue the programs. He wanted to raise the standard of living. He called for an increase in minimum wage, national health care, and expand public housing, social security and aid to education.

The Post War strike wave

The labor movement was more militant after the war. Operation Dixie was created by the AFL and CIO to bring unionization to the south. Due to the drop in regulation, as well as the drop in demand, the drop in workers’ wages led to a series of strikes. Nearly 5 million workers went on strike. All types of businesses from steelworkers to Hollywood actors went on strike. At one point Truman pledged to draft them all and “hang a few traitors”. Eventually the walkouts ended and Truman created a fact-finding board to deal with future strikes/walkouts. They generally recommended a raise in wages although it wasn’t as much as it had been previously.

The Republican resurgence

In 1946, the voters voted Republican – mostly due to the Labor turmoil. Some didn’t vote at all. Republicans gained control of both Houses. Operation Dixie had failed to unionize the south. Congress ignored the Fair Deal programs and instead issued tax cuts for the wealth and over Truman’s veto passed the Taft Hartley Act, which reversed the gains of labor. The President could end by ordering an 80-day cooling off period. It banned sympathy strikes and secondary boycotts. Outlawed the closed shop and authorized right to work laws, prohibiting other forms of compulsory union membership. Union members also had to swear they were not communists. Labor continued to decline.

Postwar Civil Rights

When the war ended, Truman reached out to many black Americans. 1945-1951 11 states passed fair employment practices commission and many cities passed laws against discrimination in access to jobs and public accommodations. Some addressed non-black minorities – Like California that repeal segregated schools for Chinese and those that barred foreigners from owning land. The NAACP launched a voter registration drive in the South so by 1952 20 percent of black southerners were registered to vote. Police finally took lynching seriously and by 1952 no lynchings were reported. 1947 also saw the color line broken in Baseball with the signing of Jackie Robinson to the Brooklyn Dodgers – which led to the demise of the Negro league.

*To Secure these Rights*

This was the name of Commission on Civil Rights report released in 1947. Called for the federal government to assume responsibility for banning segregation and having equal treatment in housing, employment, education and the criminal justice system. In 1948 Truman answered the report with a plan for a permanent federal civil rights commission, national laws against lynchings and the poll tax, action to ensure equal access to jobs and education. Congress didn’t approve of any. In 1948 right before the election, Truman issued an executive order desegregating the armed forces. He truly despised racial discrimination. The military became he first large institution to root out racism. The Korean War was the first war to be fought with segregated units. The Democratic platform called for the repeal of the Taft Hartley Act, aid to public education and a national health care it was the most progressive in Democratic history.

The Dixiecrats and Wallace revolts

At the Democratic Convention in 1948, a group of Southern Democrats – Dixiecrats walked out and formed the States rights Democratic Party. They nominated Strom Thurman as their candidate who supported “complete segregation”. He said the real issue was freedom. His party stood for “individual liberty and freedom, the right of people to govern themselves. Truman’s wish to force desegregation would “convert America into a Hitler state”.

A new progressive party was also formed in 1948 led by left-winged critics of Truman. They nominated Henry Wallace for president. - he wanted to expand social welfare, denounced racial segregation even more than Truman. The biggest difference though was the Cold War. He wanted international control of all nuclear weapons and to build a relationship with the Soviet Union based on economic cooperation rather than military confrontation. He accepted all Americans regardless of their socialists or communist beliefs. According to Truman – a vote for Wallace was a vote for Stalin.

The 1948 Campaign

The candidates were Wallace (on the left- who might pull votes), Truman, Thurmond – take votes from the South, and Dewey – the Republican nominee who was pretty boring. Although there was a chance that Truman could lose because votes would be pulled away the fact that Dewey refused to commit to anything controversial was Truman’s best ally. This was the last pre-television campaign and the last where various ideologies were presented to the American people. For the most part it seemed like Dewey was going to win based on the polls, but Truman defeated him 303-189 electoral votes was the biggest upset in American politics.