



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute  
2006 Volume III: Postwar America: 1945-1963

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## **McCarthy v. Murrow: The Public Battle that Defined America's New Self in the Aftermath of World War II**

Guide for Curriculum Unit 06.03.01  
by Joseph A. Corsetti

By the end of the 1940s the United States had entered the Cold War, a conflict that would endure for the second half of the century. Out of this conflict would emerge perhaps one of the greatest threats to our democratic way of life: communism. More than just ideologically different, communism would change our perception of right and wrong, of moral and immoral, and of friend and foe. On the home front, and equally important battleground in the Cold War, a fierce battle would ensue; a veritable witch-hunt disguised amid patriotism. McCarthy would bring to the nation a stand on communism that could hardly be ignored, charges that required attention. In his public speeches McCarthy was the voice of a movement. McCarthy would define the role government would play in battling communism on domestic soil. In opposition to McCarthy stood Edward R. Murrow, who dared to attack the public giant via the airwaves and risked his own stature as a respected journalist. This battle that would take place via the airwaves would be instrumental in defining what America ought to be. Furthermore, the standards of journalism created by Murrow would help to define the role of television and the media as a source of information.

This unit will focus on a few historical topics linked to this final battle on television, the end product being an indictment hearing of Senator Joseph McCarthy on charges of inciting unnecessary fear and riotous behavior in the United States. The trial is designed to have students wrestle with complex ideas and to have them use, interpret and analyze primary source documents as evidence to support their arguments.

(Developed for U. S. History II, grade 11; recommended for U. S. History II, grade 11)

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