**Chapter 25: Cold War America, 1945-1963**

**[[BIG IDEA:** In the first two decades of the Cold War, how did competition on the international stage and a climate of fear at home affect politics, society, and culture in the United States?]]

One of the many interesting aspects of the first two decades of the Cold War, following the end of World War II, is that it’s the first period in American history to be memorialized in the dynamic new medium of the age: television. Our historical memory is shaped by the black and white images beamed into American living rooms. In 1949, Harry Truman gave the first televised presidential inaugural address. In 1954, the Army McCarthy Hearings, at which Joseph McCarthy’s four-year campaign of red-scare tactics came to an end, were the first major congressional event covered by live television. And in 1960, John F. Kennedy and Richard M. Nixon held the first televised presidential debate.

Behind those images on American TV sets were the two developments that defined American life in these decades: international tension over possible war with the Soviet Union and the domestic hunt for so-called subversives in the United States. The lines between international affairs and domestic politics blurred as the threat of communism abroad became linked with anxieties at home over everything from family life to high school textbooks, from the content of television and films to the private lives of government employees.

If we broaden our vision of the Cold War, as this chapter invites you to do, we see two critical developments. First, the global competition between the United States and the Soviet Union, between capitalism and communism, divided the world. What began as a battle over the future of Germany and Eastern Europe became, by the early 1950s, a global conflict over the future of the decolonizing nations, who were throwing off imperialism and becoming independent. The Cold War was, literally, a battle for the hearts and minds, and the markets, of the world.

Second, the Cold War shaped political possibilities at home, as Americans rejected radical solutions to social problems and instead turned to the technocratic knowledge of experts, in government, industry, universities, and the military. The darkest side of this was the hunt for communists and other alleged subversives in American life, which led to new forms of surveillance, distrust, and anxiety.