

## **Cold War Case Files: The Rosenberg Trial – Was Justice Fairly Served?**

**Author:** Andrea Orndorff, Marriotts Ridge High School, Howard County Public School System

**Grade Level:** High

**Duration:** Two-three 50-minute class periods

### **Overview:**

The Rosenberg case remains among the most controversial in American history. Ethel and Julius Rosenberg were put to death for espionage on June 19, 1953 at the height of the Cold War. Considering the social and political climate of the early 1950s, it is important to ask whether justice was fairly served. Were the Rosenbergs guilty as charged and the death penalties appropriately imposed, or were they victims of McCarthy-era fear and hysteria?

## **History Standards**

### **National History Standards**

#### **Era 9: Postwar United States (1945 to early 1970s)**

Standard 2: Domestic policies after World War II

Standard 2A: The student understands the international origins and domestic consequences of the Cold War.

- Explain the origins of the Cold War and the advent of nuclear politics.

### **Historical Thinking Standards**

Standard 5: Historical Issues-Analysis and Decision Making

- Identify issues and problems in the past and analyze the interests, values, perspectives, and points of view of those involved in the situation
- Evaluate alternative courses of action, keeping in mind the information available at the time, in terms of ethical considerations, the interests of those affected by the decision, and the long-and short-term consequences of each
- Evaluate the implementation of a decision by analyzing the interest it served; estimating the position, power, and priority of each player involved; assessing the ethical dimensions of the decision; and evaluating its costs and benefits from a variety of perspectives

### **Common Core Standards for Literacy in History/Social Studies**

#### **Grades 9-10**

- |           |  |
|-----------|--|
| RH.9-10.1 | Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, attending to such features as the date and origin of the information.                       |
| RH.9-10.2 | Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of how key events or ideas develop of the course of the text.           |
| RH.9-10.6 | Compare the point of view of two or more authors for how they treat the same or similar topics, including which details they include and emphasize in their respective accounts. |

RH.9-10.9 Compare and contrast treatments of the same topic in several primary and secondary sources.

WHST.9-10.1 Write arguments focused on discipline-specific content.

WHST.9-10.9 Draw evidence from informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

### Grades 11-12

RH.11-12.1 Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, connecting insights gained from specific details to an understanding of the text as a whole.

RH.11-12.2 Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary that makes clear the relationships among the key details and ideas.

RH.11-12.3 Evaluate various explanations for actions or events and determine which explanation best accords with textual evidence, acknowledging where the text leaves matters uncertain.

RH.11-12.9 Integrate information from diverse sources, both primary and secondary, into a coherent understanding of an idea or event, noting discrepancies among sources.

WHST.11-12.1 Write arguments focused on discipline-specific content.

WHST.11-12.9 Draw evidence from informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

### College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Framework for Social Studies Standards

D2.Civ.19.9-12 Analyze the impact and the appropriate roles of personal interests and perspectives on the application of civic virtues, democratic principles, constitutional rights, and human rights.

D2.His.1.9-12 Evaluate how historical events and developments were shaped by unique circumstances of time and place as well as broader historical contexts.

D2.His.4.9-12 Analyze complex and interacting factors that influenced the perspectives of people during different historical eras.

D2.His.16.9-12 Integrate evidence from multiple relevant historical sources and interpretations into a reasoned argument about the past.

D2.His.1.9-12 Construct arguments using precise and knowledgeable claims, with evidence from multiple sources, while acknowledging counterclaims and evidentiary weaknesses.

## **Purpose**

In this History Lab, students will analyze a collection of historical sources related to the trial of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg to determine whether the Rosenbergs were indeed guilty of espionage and deserving of the death penalty or were victims of Cold War fear and hysteria.

Students will:

- Explore the Second Red Scare, McCarthyism, and general anxiety that pervaded American society and culture during the early 1950s.
- Analyze and evaluate the evidence presented during the Rosenberg trial to determine the Rosenbergs' guilt or innocence, as well as the significance of their actions.

By examining trial testimony and evidence, students will gain a deeper understanding of the consequences of the culture of fear and anti-Communist sentiment that pervaded American society during the early years of the Cold War.

## **Lab Objectives**

- Students will explore the culture of fear and anti-Communist hysteria that characterized the early years of the Cold War.
- Students will source and corroborate primary source evidence from the Rosenberg trial to draw conclusions about the rectitude of the verdict.
- Students will make claims about the rectitude of the Rosenberg verdict and support their claims with evidence.

## **Topic Background**

### **The Cold War and the Atomic Bomb**

The end of World War II ushered in both the nuclear age and the Cold War. The first was inaugurated when the United States compelled Japan to surrender by dropping the first two atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The Manhattan Project, a top-secret program, whose main laboratories were located in the remote area of Los Alamos, New Mexico, had developed the bombs during the war. The physicist, Robert Oppenheimer, led the team of scientists whose work resulted in the detonation of the first atomic bomb at the Trinity test site on July 16, 1945, followed by the production of the two bombs that were dropped on Japan in August 1945. The Second World War thus concluded with the U.S. as the world's lone nuclear power.

Even before the war ended, relations with the Soviet Union, one of America's leading wartime allies, were rapidly deteriorating. Conflicting ideologies and world interests drew the two nations apart. The Soviet Union, a one-party dictatorship with a communist ideology of public ownership and authoritarian state control, presented a stark contrast to the democratic and capitalistic ideals the United States sought to uphold. Indeed, President Harry Truman believed that one of the side-benefits of dropping the atomic bombs on Japan would be to impress the Soviets with the power of this immense new weapon, and thereby to persuade them to be more respectful of American interests. U.S. foreign policy for the next four decades came to focus on fighting the challenge of communism and attempting to maintain its military advantage in the ensuing Cold War. As each

nation tried to keep ahead in this conflict, the postwar world became an increasingly frightening place.

In August 1949, four years after the end of World War II, the Soviet Union announced it had successfully tested its own atomic bomb. After verifying the accuracy of this report, President Truman announced the startling news to the American people. In response, his administration increased military spending and made a commitment to build an even more devastating nuclear weapon, the hydrogen bomb. The nuclear arms race had begun.

Questions were immediately raised in the United States about the rapid development of the Soviet atomic program. How were the Soviets able to construct their A-bomb so quickly? Though it was well known that the Soviet Union possessed the scientific knowledge to develop the bomb, U.S. military officials and scientists had expected that it would take another five years before the Russians could perfect the required technology. Suspicions quickly emerged that the Soviets had relied on spies within the U.S. atomic program. Such fears were further intensified by the growing ideological tensions within U.S. political culture. Many on the right now asked: to what extent were left-wingers and communist sympathizers a threat to national security?

### **The FBI Investigation of the Atom Spy Ring**

The Soviet development of the A-bomb set off a hunt for communist spies in the United States. In the summer of 1949, agents from the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) discovered and decoded a clandestine report regarding the progress of the Manhattan Project. Found in the office of a Soviet official in New York, it had been written in 1944 by Klaus Fuchs, the British atomic scientist. The discovery suggested that Soviet spies had penetrated the Manhattan Project: they had either stolen the report or Fuchs himself was a Soviet spy.

When interrogated, Fuchs admitted to having given information to the Soviets while working on the Manhattan Project in the United States. He named a man called "Raymond" as the contact to whom he had passed the secret documents. A few months later, the FBI identified Harry Gold, a chemist working in New York, as the man known to Fuchs as "Raymond." Gold confessed as well. He told the FBI that he took information from a soldier at Los Alamos and delivered it to Anatoli Yakovlev, the head of Soviet spy operations working in New York City. Gold did not know the name of the soldier at Los Alamos, but he recalled that the soldier's wife was named Ruth. Further investigation led the FBI to David Greenglass, a soldier working as a machinist at Los Alamos and the husband of Ruth Greenglass.

David Greenglass was brought into custody. Like Klaus Fuchs and Harry Gold, David Greenglass was ready to talk. He confessed to giving information about the atomic bomb to Gold. Then, Greenglass implicated his brother-in-law, Julius Rosenberg, telling the FBI that Rosenberg had recruited him to become a spy and had given him the instructions concerning his meeting with Harry Gold in New Mexico.

Rosenberg was questioned a few days later. He called Greenglass a liar and denied working for the Soviets as a spy. The FBI released Rosenberg and continued to gather evidence about the spy ring. On July 17, 1950, agents returned to the Rosenberg's apartment. This time, they came with an arrest warrant. Rosenberg was taken away in handcuffs, leaving behind his wife, Ethel, and their two young sons. He would never return.

## The Rosenbergs and the Greenglasses

Julius and Ethel Rosenberg lived in a three-room New York City apartment. In 1950, they appeared to be an ordinary couple raising two young sons, Michael, age seven, and Robert, age three. Although they both grew up in the same predominantly Jewish neighborhood on Manhattan's Lower East Side, Julius and Ethel did not meet until Julius was a student at City College of New York (CCNY). Ethel had been an advanced student in high school and graduated early at the age of fifteen. She enjoyed singing and acting, but never aspired to attend college. Ethel met Julius at a New Year's Eve dance where she was singing. They married in the summer of 1939, right after he received his degree in electrical engineering from CCNY.

The couple had a common interest in politics. Julius had been introduced to left-wing political ideas in college. This was the time of the Great Depression. Many Americans were out of work and living in dire poverty, while the nation as a whole suffered through an unprecedented economic crisis. Like many on the left at the time, Julius came to believe that communism would be a better economic system for the United States because it sought to address the problems of poverty and unemployment and to prevent future economic depressions. Ethel also embraced communism. At her job as a shipping clerk, she became upset with the working conditions and led 150 of her co-workers in a strike against the company. Ethel was fired for her union activities, but her experience left her convinced that a communist system would benefit all workers.

For a few years before their sons were born, Julius and Ethel were active members of the Communist Party. On occasions, they hosted party meetings in their apartment. Ethel's younger brother, David Greenglass, and his wife, Ruth, also joined the political movement, becoming members of the Young Communist League. David was an impressionable teenager who looked up to Julius. In early 1944, Julius and Ethel withdrew from the Communist Party and stopped receiving subscriptions to the *Daily Worker*, the party's official voice. It is possible that the couple did not stop their communist activism, but were distancing themselves from formal party involvement while secretly working as spies for the Soviets.

In 1943 and 1944, the Communist Party in the United States had more members than at any other point in its history. At the time, as the Second World War reached its climax, the United States was allied with the Soviet Union. Many in the U.S. were drawn to the communist ideology because they saw the Soviet Union as a leader in the struggle against fascism. In addition, as the Nazi regime in Germany pursued its murderous treatment of Europe's Jewish population, many Jewish Americans, like the Rosenbergs and Greenglasses, became converts to communism. Confessed spy Harry Gold later explained why he favored the Soviet Union: "Nazism and fascism and anti-Semitism were identical...anything that was against anti-Semitism I was for" (Hornblum, 2010, pp. 39-40).

When David Greenglass went into the army in 1943, he was proud to serve his country, but he also felt pride in furthering the communist cause by supporting the Soviet Union and recruiting fellow soldiers into the Communist Party. As a soldier, Greenglass was assigned to the Manhattan Project lab facility in Los Alamos, New Mexico. He worked as a machinist and later became foreman in the high explosives unit.

Julius had been exempted from military service and was instead assigned to be an engineering inspector of electrical equipment for the U.S. Army Signal Corps. However, before the war ended, in the spring of 1945, Julius was fired when it was discovered that he had concealed his previous

membership in the Communist Party. Subsequently, he took a job working with Emerson Radio Corporation, where he was involved with many of the military contract projects he had earlier worked on as a government inspector (Radosh and Milton, 1997).

### **The Trial and its Political and Social Context**

A federal grand jury was convened in August 1950. At first, Ethel was not named in the indictment, but she was arrested while returning home on the subway following her testimony to the grand jury that was considering the indictment against Julius (Burnett, 2004). Both husband and wife were indicted for conspiracy to commit espionage. Morton Sobell, a friend of Julius's from his days at CCNY was also named in the indictment as a member of the spy ring. All three would be tried together as co-conspirators under the provisions of the Espionage Act of 1917. The charge of "conspiracy" was chosen because it was much easier for the prosecution to prove than espionage itself. Once the existence of a conspiracy was established by the court, each co-conspirator could be held legally responsible for the actions of the others. Further, in a conspiracy case, hearsay testimony is permissible. Yet, like espionage, conspiracy to commit espionage was a capital offense (Burnett, 2004).

The trial was set for March 1951. The political climate at that moment was fervently anti-communist. The Korean War had recently broken out in Asia, and, in Washington, Senator Joseph McCarthy had set off the "Second Red Scare," as he began his campaign to identify and expose communists and their sympathizers within the United States government. It was not until 1954 that McCarthy came to be censured by the Senate and his activities discredited for ruining the reputations and careers of innocent people. The House Committee on Un-American Activities (HUAC) was also actively pursuing communists. The Hollywood blacklist was growing and a new investigation into the film industry's connections with communism was launched in the same year. Further, a HUAC investigation had led to the arrest of Alger Hiss, a U.S. State Department and U.N. official, who was accused of being a Soviet spy. In January of 1950, at the conclusion of a high profile trial, Hiss was convicted of perjury and sentenced to five years in prison.

Judge Irving Kaufman presided over the Rosenberg-Sobell trial in March of 1950. The jury was comprised of eleven men and one woman. One of the jurors was African American. The rest were white. None of the jurors was Jewish. The lack of diversity and absence of Jewish representation would spark controversy after the trial, when some of the supporters of the Rosenbergs came to claim that the couple did not have a fair trial. However, both the prosecution and the defense had rejected potential Jewish jurors during the jury selection process (Burnett, 2004).

The prosecution called many witnesses, including Harry Gold, David Greenglass, and Max Elitcher, another friend of Julius' from CCNY. All confessed to spying on behalf of the espionage ring. Ruth Greenglass also testified. Among the evidence submitted by the prosecution was a replica of a Jell-O box that Greenglass had testified was cut and given to him as a recognition signal, and sketches of the A-bomb and other equipment that Greenglass also recreated for the prosecution, based on the ones he claimed to have drawn and passed to Harry Gold.

Overall, the testimony was strong against Julius Rosenberg, but scant against Ethel. The most incriminating evidence regarding Ethel's participation came in testimony by her brother and sister-in-law. Both David and Ruth Greenglass stated that they had witnessed Ethel typing up the handwritten notes that David had brought back from Los Alamos. The defense questioned the Greenglass' motives. It emerged that the FBI had promised David that they would not prosecute his wife if he told

all he knew (Haynes, Klehr, and Vassiliev, 2009). The defense also said that David had lost money in a business partnership with his brother and Julius, suggesting that he was seeking revenge for a business deal gone bad.

Up until the end, many expected Julius to confess his own guilt in order to spare Ethel's life. In fact, there is strong evidence to suggest that the prosecution knew that she was innocent of direct involvement in the conspiracy, and only used the threat of a death sentence for Ethel to persuade Julius to confess and name other conspirators (Radosh and Milton, 1997). However, both Julius and Ethel pleaded the Fifth Amendment, invoking their constitutional right not to incriminate themselves. They appeared cold and arrogant to the jury.

In the end, the jury came back with a verdict of guilty for all of the defendants. Morton Sobell was sentenced to 30 years in prison, and David Greenglass (officially a defendant, but not convicted by the jury since he had previously pled guilty) was given 15 years. Julius and Ethel Rosenberg received the death penalty

### **Trial Aftermath and the Execution of the Rosenbergs**

For the next two years, the Rosenbergs' attorneys appealed the verdict all the way up to the Supreme Court. They presented three main arguments to the appellate judges: (1) that the government failed to prove that the Rosenbergs acted with the intention of doing vital harm to the country; (2) that David Greenglass had testified for ulterior reasons; and (3) that Judge Kaufman had biased the jury by using emotional language and adding vastly exaggerated accusations (Burnett, 2004). As the date of execution neared, support for the Rosenbergs intensified. Ethel's poems and letters from prison showed she was a loving wife and mother. Sympathy for the Rosenbergs grew and a grassroots organization, the National Committee to Secure Justice in the Rosenberg Case, was formed to support their cause. However, mainstream public opinion supported Judge Kaufman's ruling. Most Americans believed the Rosenbergs were traitors who deserved to be put to death.

In the end, the U.S. Supreme Court refused to re-consider the case, and President Truman left the decision about granting clemency to his successor, President Dwight Eisenhower. Eisenhower flatly denied clemency, but there was a glimmer of hope for the Rosenbergs just before their execution date. Supreme Court Justice William Douglas issued a stay of execution as the court was commencing for the summer holiday, after the Rosenberg defense team had argued to Douglas that the Rosenbergs had been tried under the wrong law. Instead of the Espionage Act of 1917, Julius and Ethel should have been tried under the Atomic Energy Act of 1946. The 1946 law required that a judge not sentence defendants to death without a sentencing recommendation by the jury (Arnow-Alman and Alman, 2010). Douglas had expected that the court would hear the case when it resumed in the fall. The Rosenbergs would have lived for at least a few more months and might even have been granted a new trial. To Douglas' surprise, the chief justice called the court back into session, where the stay of execution was lifted by a majority ruling of the justices present. The Rosenbergs were executed in the electric chair at Sing Sing Prison on Friday, June 19, 1953. At their death, Julius was 35 and Ethel was 37.

The Rosenbergs' two sons, Michael, 10, and Robert, 6, were left orphaned after the execution of their parents. Most of the Rosenberg and Greenglass family members wanted to distance themselves from the infamous atom spy case and formally changed their names. Michael and Robert were adopted by a family named Meeropol and lived private lives until adulthood. Since then, they have

spoken out to proclaim their parents' innocence and denounce the death penalty. They have also been instrumental in securing the release of sealed documents related to the case.

### **New Evidence and Questions that Still Remain**

Since the trial in 1951, there have been several new developments in the case, most significantly, the declassification of the Venona files. The Venona Project was the CIA-National Security Agency decoding of secret Soviet reports that began in 1943 and lasted several decades. Partial translations were released in 1995. The messages did not provide any new ground-breaking evidence related directly to the Rosenberg case, but they confirmed Julius' participation in the Soviet spy ring. The absence of any reference to Ethel in the files suggests that she was not involved directly in the ring's activities.

Other information, including records of the deliberations of the Supreme Court and the Atomic Energy Commission, documents from the FBI and Justice Department, and memos and diaries of the participants have become available over the decades. Each new release offers something of interest to Rosenberg scholars. For example, in a closed hearing of the AEC, General Leslie Groves, the military director of the Manhattan Project, revealed that the information passed to the Soviets by the spy ring had been of minor value (see References: Reactions to the Rosenberg Case Resource Sheet #07: Quote B).

Most of the grand jury transcripts were released in 2008, except for David Greenglass' testimony, who requested that it remain sealed. Greenglass was, however, interviewed by journalist Sam Roberts for the CBS television program, *60 Minutes*, in 2001. Greenglass, who insisted on wearing a disguise during the interview, admitted that he did not recall ever observing Ethel Rosenberg type his handwritten notes for the design of the atomic bomb, and said that he was encouraged to say so by the prosecutors, who promised not to charge his wife, Ruth, if he testified against both Rosenbergs (Landes and Rosenbaum, 2001). Recently released transcripts of Ruth's own testimony to the earlier grand jury support her husband's admission. They show that she had originally confessed to having herself written the notes given to the Soviets, though she later joined her husband in testifying at the trial that Ethel Rosenberg had done so (see References: Resource Sheet #3: Source F – Excerpt of Testimony of Ruth Greenglass to the Grand Jury. See also *Washington Post*, 2008).

### **Conclusion**

Contemporary views on the Rosenberg case reflected the deeply divided opinion at the height of the Cold War. For some, the execution of the Rosenbergs was a deserved punishment for spies who had betrayed their nation and was meant to punish their treason and deter future espionage. For others, the Rosenbergs were the scapegoats for Cold War anxieties and the disquieting loss of America's short-lived nuclear monopoly.

Today, a preponderance of scholars who have studied the notorious case believe that the Rosenbergs were far from innocent, but their trial and execution were a miscarriage of justice. There is consensus that Julius Rosenberg was a Soviet spy and that Ethel probably knew of his activities and supported them. However, it is now thought that David and Ruth Greenglass may have committed perjury in some of their testimony, especially against Ethel. This is confirmed by David's later admission that he did not see his sister typing up the reports, a confession that appears to undermine the only direct evidence that she had been actively involved in her husband's spying efforts. The contradictions in his wife's own testimony to the grand jury and at the trial about who actually wrote the notes for the



Soviets also indicate that the evidence against Ethel may have been fabricated by the Greenglasses and the prosecution. Other pieces of key evidence presented at trial, such as the drawings of the bomb, were facsimiles that did nothing to prove the existence of the original material that Greenglass claimed to have given to the spy ring. In any case, the scientific information contained in those documents was judged by contemporary experts, such as General Groves, to have been of little real value.

At the same time, it is known that the prosecution did not enter into evidence records of communications that demonstrated that Julius was a spy because the FBI had obtained the records via an authorized wiretap. Other evidence could not be revealed in open court because of national security concerns (Radosh and Milton, 1997).

The imposition of the death sentence has also been the subject of much controversy. Some contemporaries supported the sentence as the legitimate punishment for the crime committed. However, Judge Kaufman had justified his imposition of this most extreme sentence by suggesting that in passing the design for the nuclear bomb to the Soviets, the Rosenbergs were indirectly responsible for the new-found confidence that encouraged the communist bloc to start the Korean War. Yet we now know from recently released sources that this was a wild exaggeration of the actual significance of the information given to the Soviets. In addition, legal scholars argue the death penalty sentence should not have been imposed under the provisions of the law, since the death penalty under the Espionage Act was reserved for aiding enemy foreign nations in wartime. The Soviet Union had been an ally during the time the crime was committed and was not a combatant during the Korean War (Radosh and Milton, 1997).

In their 1997 book, *The Rosenberg Files*, considered the leading piece of Rosenberg scholarship, Ronald Radosh and Joyce Milton summarize the lessons Americans should take away from the Rosenberg case:

Julius and Ethel Rosenberg and their accomplices were so captive to their blind adulation of Stalinist Russia that they failed to perceive the true implication of their espionage, much less to comprehend how their actions would discredit the Left in the eyes of their fellow Americans. The Rosenberg's accusers, on the other hand, were oblivious to the fact that the danger to national security for ideologically motivated amateur spies—already a vanishing breed by the time of the trial—was far less than the damage that would be done by allowing American justice to appear to serve as a handmaiden to Cold War politics. Partisans on both sides were convinced that they held a monopoly on the truth and that the end justified the means. The result was the grisly tandem electrocution of a husband and wife—a sentence that seemed justified by the passions of the moment but that had begun to inspire public revulsion even before it was carried out. The execution of the Rosenbergs stands as an ominous footnote to the first decade of post-nuclear history. (pp. 453-454)

### **Bibliography:**

Alman, E. A., & Alman, D. (2010). *Exoneration: The trial of Julius & Ethel Rosenberg and Morton Sobell*--Prosecutorial deceptions, suborned perjuries, anti-Semitism, and precedent for today's unconstitutional trials. Seattle, WA: Green Elms Press.

Bernett, B. (2004). *The trial of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg: A primary source account*. New York: The Rosen Publishing Group.

Glazer, N. (1983). "The death of the Rosenbergs." In P. Kurtz (Ed.), *Sidney Hook: Philosopher of democracy and Humanism* (pp. 65-76). Buffalo, NY: Prometheus Books.

Hornblum, A. M. (2010). *The invisible Harry Gold: The man who gave the Soviets the atom bomb*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Landes, J. & Rosenbaum, M. (Producers). (2001). *The Traitor* [Television series episode]. *60 Minutes II*. New York: CBS News. Retrieved from <http://www.cbsnews.com/video/watch/?id=7409384n>

Radosh, R., & Milton, J. (1997). *The Rosenberg File* (2nd ed.). New Haven, CT: Yale University Press. (Original work published 1983)

Schneir, W. (2010). *Final verdict: What really happened in the Rosenberg case*. Brooklyn, NY: Melville House.

*Washington Post* (2008), Watt, Holly. "Witness Changed Her Story During Rosenberg Spy Case". (September 12, 2008).

## Vocabulary

**Atomic Energy Commission (AEC)** – agency responsible for nuclear power and nuclear weapons beginning January 1, 1947 when the Manhattan Project formally ended, created by the Atomic Energy Act of 1946

**Capital crime** – a crime that can be punishable by death

**Clemency** – forgiveness, cancellation of punishment in part or in whole

**Conspiracy** – a crime in which there is an agreement among two or more people to engage in illegal activity. At the trial, the Rosenbergs and Morton Sobell were charged with conspiracy to commit espionage, not espionage itself.

**Espionage** – transmitting information relating to the national defense to the advantage of a foreign nation, spying

**Espionage Act of 1917** – first enacted during World War I, prohibited interference with military operations and recruitment, prohibited support to U.S. enemies during wartime, the law has been amended many times (ex. Sedition Act of 1918, Internal Security Act of 1950), Rosenbergs-Sobell case was tried under this law

**Facsimile** – a copy or reproduction, such as the documents (drawings and cut up Jell-O box) submitted by the prosecution at the Rosenberg's trial as demonstrations of the material allegedly used by the spy ring or passed to the Soviets

**House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC)** – House of Representatives investigative committee, operated from 1947 to 1975, focus was anti-communist

**Indictment** – formal accusation from a grand jury who decide whether there is enough evidence to warrant a trial, required for a capital case

**Internal Security Act of 1950 (Subversive Activities Control Act or McCarran Act)** – required Communist organizations to register with the U.S. Attorney General, created board to investigate subversive activities, gave the government the power to detain, deport, and revoke the citizenship of suspected subversives

**KGB** – Soviet secret police

**Manhattan Project** – top-secret U.S. government project to build the atomic bomb

**Los Alamos** – Manhattan Project lab in New Mexico, David Greenglass was stationed there

**Recognition Signal** -- secret words or objects used by spies to identify each other

**Treason** – a criminal offense involving the attempt, by overt acts, to overthrow the government to which the offender owes allegiance or to betray the state to a foreign power, the Rosenbergs were *not* charged with treason

**Venona Project**– a CIA-National Security Agency decoding of secret Soviet reports, began in 1943 and lasted several decades, partial translations released in 1995, did not provide any new ground-breaking evidence relating to the Rosenberg case, but supports Julius' involvement in the Soviet spy ring and Ethel's innocence

## Conducting the History Lab

### Overarching Question:

Were the Rosenbergs guilty as charged and the death penalties appropriately imposed, or were they victims of Cold War fear and hysteria during the McCarthy era?

### Materials:

#### Student Resources:

RS#01: Excerpts of Letter from Senator Kenneth McKellar to President Harry Truman, September 1945

RS#02: Student Background Materials – Cold War Case Files: The Rosenbergs

RS#03: Rosenberg Trial Evidence Packet

Source A - Prosecution's Opening Statements

Source B - Defense's Opening Statements

Source C - Jell-O Box

Source D - Sketches Recreated by David Greenglass

Source E - Trial Testimony of David Greenglass

Source F - Testimony of Ruth Greenglass to the Grand Jury

Source G - Trial Testimony of Ruth Greenglass

Source H - Prosecution's Closing Speech

RS#04: Timeline

RS#05: Graphic Organizer – Investigation Notes Part One: Contextualization

RS#06: Graphic Organizer – Investigation Notes Part Two: Sourcing and Corroboration

RS#07: Reactions to the Rosenberg Case

RS#08: Graphic Organizer – Making an Argument

### **Teacher Resources:**

Document projector and markers

RS#09: FBI History of the Rosenberg Case

RS#10: Photograph of the Rosenbergs

RS#11: ARCH Historical Thinking Skills Rubric

### **Procedures:**

Note to the teacher – This History Lab can be modified for use with students who are challenged by the number or complexity of the primary sources. For example, the number of sources can be limited and the activities modified to reflect only the sources used. Other modifications include word banks and further excerpting of sources.

#### **I. Initiate the History Lab**

- Distribute and project RS#01, Excerpts of Letter from U.S. Senator Kenneth McKellar to President Harry Truman, September 1945. At this time, the United States was the only nation with nuclear weapons technology, and Truman had asked his trusted advisors to provide their opinions as to whether the United States should share its knowledge of nuclear power with the Soviet Union.
- Ask: Why did Senator McKellar believe that the United States should not give away its nuclear secrets to other nations? What are the positive or negative consequences of only one nation having this technology? What are the positive or negative consequences of more than one nation having this technology?
- Evaluate students' existing knowledge by asking: Would the United States continue to hold a monopoly on the atomic bomb for long? Which nation would quickly catch up?
- Briefly introduce the Cold War and the beginning of the nuclear arms race. Setting the historical and cultural context is a key component of this lab. If the Rosenbergs had been tried at another time, the outcome may have been different.
- Project and/or read aloud RS#09, FBI History of the Rosenberg Case.
- Ask students what they think is meant by the last sentence: "But what of the part played by American traitors?" What possible motive would an American have to share atomic information with the Soviets? What would be the consequences if caught by the U.S. government?
- Introduce the Rosenbergs by sharing RS#10, Photograph of the Rosenbergs. In this photo, the couple is riding to jail in a police wagon. Tell students that Julius and Ethel Rosenberg have gone down in history as traitors, their names infamous in connection with Soviet espionage.

## II. Frame the History Lab

- In this investigation, students will determine if justice was fairly served in the Rosenberg case.
- Have students read RS#02, Student Background Materials – Cold War Case Files: The Rosenbergs.
- Present the overarching question: *Were the Rosenbergs guilty as charged and the death penalties appropriately imposed, or were they victims of Cold War fear and hysteria during the McCarthy era?*
- Facilitate discussion to frame guiding questions. Have students identify possible information that would help provide them with answers to the essential question. For example: What evidence was presented at trial? Did the Rosenbergs remain communists after the war? Who testified against them? How did the spy ring work? Was Ethel accused of doing everything her husband was accused of doing? During this process, generate excitement for the investigation without giving away too many details relating to the outcome of the case.

## III. Model the Historical Process

- Distribute RS#03, Rosenberg Trial Evidence Packet; RS#04, Timeline; and RS#05, Graphic Organizer – Investigation Notes Part One: Contextualization
- Begin the examination by exploring Source A - Prosecution's Opening Statements and Source B - Defense's Opening Statements (RS#03). This evidence will help students frame the basic arguments for and against guilt. Also, a careful analysis of the trial's opening statements allows students to better understand the historical and cultural contexts of the trial, which is essential to evaluating the fairness of the verdict.
- In order to familiarize students with the historical thinking process to be used throughout the lesson, analyze Sources A and B as a class, consulting the Timeline (RS#04), to practice contextualization. Fill out a class copy of the graphic organizer (RS#05).

### Guiding Questions:

- What is the prosecution referring to by the phrase, "the most critical hours in our history?"  
(*World War II*)
- What is the defense referring to when it instructs the jury, "don't be influenced by any bias or prejudice or hysteria?"  
(*the Second Red Scare, a period of heightened fears of Communist influence in the United States, and McCarthyism, the practice of accusing individuals of Communist sympathies and disloyalty with little evidence*)
- What two major world events occurred in 1949 that worried the United States?  
(*explosion of the Soviet Union's first atomic bomb and the establishment of Communism in China*)
- What was happening in the United States relating to communism in 1950, the year the Rosenbergs were arrested?  
(*The Korean War had broken out. The United States Government was actively pursuing suspected communist subversives by passing legislation making it easier*)

*to target and punish Americans suspected of disloyalty, trying suspected spies, and rooting out “Communists” in government.)*

- What things were different in 1951 compared to the 1930s, when the Rosenbergs first developed their communist ideology?  
*(The Great Depression in the 1930s had led many to question capitalism as a viable socio-economic system and to embrace communism as a preferable alternative. The appeal of communism was further enhanced once the U.S. entered the war and found itself closely allied with the Soviet Union. By contrast, the Cold War had begun soon after the war. The Communist Soviet Union had risen in power and influence, and had become a rival to the United States. Other significant parts of the world, including China and Eastern Europe, had fallen to communism. The Soviet Union had acquired the atomic bomb, and the Korean War had started.)*
- Do you think membership in the Communist Party automatically makes the Rosenbergs guilty?  
*(Students will respond in various ways.)*

#### **IV. Facilitate the History Lab**

- Independently or in pairs, have students read and analyze Sources C through H (RS#03), to complete RS#06, Graphic Organizer – Investigation Notes Part Two: Sourcing and Corroboration. This activity uses trial evidence and personal testimony to practice the strategies of sourcing and corroboration.
- After students have worked through the sources on their own, facilitate critical reading by posing guiding questions to encourage a higher level of analysis.

##### Guiding Questions:

- Where did the prosecution get the Jell-O box and the sketches?  
*(They are not the originals. They were re-created by David Greenglass for the trial or by the prosecution according to Greenglass’ instructions.)*
- How helpful do you think these sketches would have been to the Soviets?  
*(Answers will vary, but it should be noted that General Groves thought the sketches alone were unlikely to have been of much help.)*
- Did David Greenglass have a reason to lie? Was he getting anything in exchange for his testimony?  
*(The Government had promised not to prosecute his wife, Ruth.)*
- What motives did the defense suggest Greenglass had for testifying?  
*(He had lost a lot of money he had invested in a business partnership with Julius.)*
- What role did Ethel Rosenberg play in the conspiracy, according to the testimonies of David and Ruth Greenglass?  
*(Draw students’ attention to the contradictions in their accounts of who wrote up the notes that were passed to the Soviets.)*
- What is the significance of General Groves’ statement that the information passed by the Rosenbergs to the Soviets was insignificant? Do his statements change or reinforce your opinion of the case?

*(This suggests that the Rosenbergs may have been put to death for doing something treasonous, but which may have caused little actual harm.) (Answers will vary.)*

## **V. Synthesize Information and Interpretations**

- Conclude the investigation by synthesizing and corroborating the evidence gathered. Readdress the discussion at the beginning of the lab relating to setting the historical context (consequences of other nations obtaining atomic technology, beginning of the Cold War, anti-communist hysteria). Ask students the following questions, probe for insightful responses, and accept all reasonable conclusions:
  - Was it possible for the Rosenbergs to get a fair trial given the political, social, and cultural climate of the U.S. in 1951?
  - How might its outcome have been influenced by other events?
  - Was justice served? (Did the Rosenbergs get what they deserved?)
  - Do you think this case warrants the attention it has received over the last 60 years?
- Encourage the students to share their interpretations and responses to the overarching question: *Were the Rosenbergs guilty as charged and the death penalty appropriately imposed, or were they victims of Cold War fear and hysteria during the McCarthy era?*
- Before moving on, have students briefly identify additional information they would like to know. Possible questions include: How did the Soviets feel about the Rosenberg case? How did the American public react to the Rosenberg verdict? Has any new evidence come to light since the verdict that either confirms the Rosenbergs' guilt or proves their innocence?

## **VI. Assessment**

- Provide students with RS#07, Reactions to the Rosenberg Case. Ask them to consider all points of view and decide which they most agree with, based on the evidence they have examined. Depending upon your confidence in the students' abilities to analyze the statements, you may want to review the points of view as a class. They are:
  - Judge Kaufman: Believes that the Rosenbergs were instrumental in helping the Soviets acquire the atomic bomb, thereby directly causing thousands of deaths.
  - General Leslie Groves: Does not believe that the Rosenbergs' actions caused much real harm, but still believes they deserved death.
  - Telegram Writers Urging Clemency: Believe that the Rosenbergs should not be executed because it is not in keeping with American values and standards of fairness.
  - Julius Rosenberg: Claims innocence, and asserts that trial was handled unfairly.
- Using RS#08, Graphic Organizer – Making an Argument, have students write a claim statement summarizing their response to the overarching question. Possible claim statements include:
  - The Rosenbergs were fairly tried, convicted, and sentenced by the American justice system for their involvement in passing U.S. atomic bomb secrets to the Soviets.
  - The Rosenbergs were guilty of espionage; however, the death penalty was not a just punishment for their crime.

- The American justice system was correct in executing Julius Rosenberg for conspiracy to commit espionage, but Ethel should not have perished along with her husband.
- Julius and Ethel Rosenberg were unfairly put to death during the height of the Cold War. They were victims of McCarthyism and scapegoats for the United States' loss of its atomic bomb monopoly.
- Beneath their claim statements, have students list at least three pieces of evidence from the sources that support their claim.
- Have students develop this claim and evidence into a well-written argument. Ask students to assume the identity of one of the four persons (Judge Kaufman, General Graves, a Telegram Writer, or Julius Rosenberg). Have them write a letter to President Eisenhower in which they voice their support for or censure of the Rosenbergs by stating their claim and supporting it with the evidence identified from the sources.
- To assist with the evaluation of the assessment pieces, you may use scoring tool RS#11, ARCH Historical Thinking Skills Rubric – Claims, Evidence, Corroboration.

## References

### Excerpts of Letter from Senator Kenneth McKellar to President Harry Truman, September 1945 (RS#01)

- Source: McKellar, Kenneth to Harry S. Truman, September 27, 1945. President's Secretary's File, Truman Papers. Harry S. Truman Library and Museum, Independence Missouri. Accessed 2/3/14.  
[https://www.trumanlibrary.org/whistlestop/study\\_collections/bomb/large/documents/pdfs/23.pdf#zoom=100](https://www.trumanlibrary.org/whistlestop/study_collections/bomb/large/documents/pdfs/23.pdf#zoom=100)
- As World War II came to a close, President Truman asked his closest advisors to provide guidance on whether to share nuclear secrets with the Soviet Union. In his response, Senator Kenneth McKellar counsels that it would be dangerous to share atomic secrets not only with the Soviet Union but with any of the Allies.

### FBI History of the Rosenberg Case (RS#09)

- Source: Federal Bureau of Investigations. (n.d.). *FBI: The Atom Spy Case* [Famous Cases and Trials]. Retrieved June 5, 2012, from <http://www.fbi.gov/about-us/history/famous-cases/the-atom-spy-case/the-atom-spy-case>
- In this secondary source, the FBI recounts the U.S. announcement that the Soviet Union had detonated its first atomic bomb and questions the role of U.S. spies in providing the U.S.S.R. with the necessary technology.

### Photograph of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg (RS#10)

- Source: Higgins, Roger. "[Julius and Ethel Rosenberg, separated by heavy wire screen as they leave U.S. Court House after being found guilty by Jury.]" Photograph. New York: *World Telegram*, 1951. From Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. Accessed 2/2/14.  
<http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/97503499/>



- This photograph shows the Rosenbergs returning to prison after receiving a guilty verdict.

## Rosenberg Trial Evidence Packet (RS#03)

### Source A – Prosecution’s Opening Statements

- Source: *United States of America vs. Julius Rosenberg, Ethel Rosenberg, Anatoli A. Yakovlev, also known as “John”, David Greenglass and Morton Sobell*. United States District Court, Southern District of New York, March 6, 1951. Rosenberg Trial Transcript, p. 220. Famous Trials website by Douglas O. Linder. University of Missouri-Kansas City School of Law. Accessed 2/13/14.  
[http://law2.umkc.edu/faculty/projects/ftrials/rosenb/ROS\\_TRIA.HTM](http://law2.umkc.edu/faculty/projects/ftrials/rosenb/ROS_TRIA.HTM)
- **Excerpt 1** – The prosecution presents its case to the jury and emphasizes the significance of the charge, conspiracy to commit espionage, during “the most critical hours” in U.S. history.
- **Excerpt 2** – The prosecution emphasizes that the loyalty of the defendants is to communism, not the United States.

### Source B – Defense’s Opening Statements

- Source: *United States of America vs. Julius Rosenberg, Ethel Rosenberg, Anatoli A. Yakovlev, also known as “John”, David Greenglass and Morton Sobell*. United States District Court, Southern District of New York, March 6, 1951. Rosenberg Trial Transcript, p. 238. Famous Trials website by Douglas O. Linder. University of Missouri-Kansas City School of Law. Accessed 2/13/14.  
[http://law2.umkc.edu/faculty/projects/ftrials/rosenb/ROS\\_TRIA.HTM](http://law2.umkc.edu/faculty/projects/ftrials/rosenb/ROS_TRIA.HTM)
- **Excerpt 1** – The defense asks the jury not to be persuaded by “bias or prejudice or hysteria” and explains that the “trial arises in a rather tense international atmosphere.”
- **Excerpt 2** – The defense asks the jury to evaluate the evidence to determine if the crime has been committed, not if the defendants believed in communism. Also, the defense highlights that the prosecution’s witnesses were participants in the alleged spy ring, so the jury should question their motives in testifying.

### Source C – Jell-O Box

- Source: Jell-O Box Exhibit Used in the Espionage Trial of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg and Morton Sobell, 03/06/1951 - 03/29/1951, searchable by ARC Identifier 278774. Photographs and other Graphic Materials from the Department of Justice, Office of the U.S. Attorney for the Southern Judicial District of New York (1870- ). Record Group 118: Records of U.S. Attorneys, 1821-19914. The U.S. National Archives and Records Administration at New York, New York, NY. Accessed 2/13/14.  
<http://research.archives.gov/description/278774>
- This piece of evidence is a recreation of the Jell-O box David Greenglass testified Julius Rosenberg had cut in order to give him a piece that he could later match with its original mate. Greenglass testified that the other piece was given to the spy (Harry Gold) who later contacted him in New Mexico to receive top-secret information to pass along to the Soviets. In this way, the Jell-O box was used as a recognition signal.

Note that this was not the original Jello-O box that Greenglass claimed to have received from Rosenberg, but a facsimile offered by prosecutors as an example of the original box.

#### **Source D – Sketches Recreated by David Greenglass**

##### **○ Sketch 1 – Cross-section of Atom-bomb**

- Source: Cross-section Sketch of Atomic Bomb, 03/12/1951. Photographs and other Graphic Materials from the Department of Justice. Office of the U.S. Attorney for the Southern Judicial District of New York (1870- ). Record Group 118: Records of U.S. Attorneys, 1821-19914. The U.S. National Archives and Records Administration at New York, New York, NY. Accessed 2/13/14. <http://research.archives.gov/description/278753>
- Greenglass testified that he gave the original of this sketch along with the descriptions of the various parts of the bomb to Julius Rosenberg in the Rosenberg apartment in September 1945. The prosecution argued that the sketch was vital to the Soviets in building the a-bomb. However, scientists have later downplayed its significance. In a move that was probably an attempt to appear patriotic, but that hurt the Rosenbergs' case at the time by exaggerating the value of the material, the defense asked that the sketch be impounded due to its threat to national security. The judge ruled that the jury could see the sketch, but it was then sealed from public view until 1966.

##### **○ Sketch 2 – Lens Mold**

- Source: Lens Mold Sketch from the Atomic Bomb Drawn by David Greenglass, 01/1945. Photographs and other Graphic Materials from the Department of Justice, Office of the U.S. Attorney for the Southern Judicial District of New York (1870- ). Record Group 118: Records of U.S. Attorneys, 1821-19914. The U.S. National Archives and Records Administration at New York, New York, NY. Accessed 2/13/14. <http://research.archives.gov/description/278747>
- Greenglass testified that he gave the original of this sketch of the four-leaf clover shaped high-explosive lens mold design to Julius Rosenberg in January 1945. The lens was the detonation device for the bomb.

##### **○ Sketch 3 – Sketch of Setup to Implode Tubular Materials**

- Source: U.S. vs. Julius & Ethel Rosenberg and Martin Sobell, Government Exhibit 7, sketch of setup to implode tubular materials. The drawing was delivered to Harry Gold, 03/12/1951. Photographs and other Graphic Materials from the Department of Justice, Office of the U.S. Attorney for the Southern Judicial District of New York (1870- ). Record Group 118: Records of U.S. Attorneys, 1821-19914. The U.S. National Archives and Records Administration at New York, New York, NY. Accessed 2/13/14. <http://research.archives.gov/description/278752>
- Greenglass testified that he gave the original of this sketch to Harry Gold in New Mexico in June 1945. The lens is shown attached to the steel tube which would implode upon detonation.

*Note on sketches 1-3: These were not the original documents that Greenglass claimed to have passed on to Gold, but facsimiles drawn up by Greenglass after his arrest and offered by the prosecutors as examples of the original material.*

#### **Source E – Excerpt of Trial Testimony of David Greenglass**

- Source: *United States of America vs. Julius Rosenberg, Ethel Rosenberg, Anatoli A. Yakovlev, also known as "John", David Greenglass and Morton Sobell*. United States District Court, Southern District of New York, March 6, 1951. Rosenberg Trial Transcript, p. 722 & 967. Famous Trials website by Douglas O. Linder. University of Missouri-Kansas City School of Law. Accessed 2/13/14.  
[http://law2.umkc.edu/faculty/projects/ftrials/rosenb/ROS\\_TDGR.HTM](http://law2.umkc.edu/faculty/projects/ftrials/rosenb/ROS_TDGR.HTM)
- **Excerpt 1** – In this part of his testimony, as he was being questioned by the prosecution during the direct examination, Greenglass implicated his sister, Ethel, as a co-conspirator who had typed up his notes describing the cross-section sketch. This was the key evidence against Ethel.
- **Excerpt 2** – The defense also argues that Greenglass was motivated to testify against his sister and brother-in-law because he had lost money in a business partnership. David Greenglass, his brother, and Julius Rosenberg partnered in a machine shop, G. & R., that went sour.

#### **Source F – Excerpt of Testimony of Ruth Greenglass to the Grand Jury**

- Source: Testimony of Ruth Greenglass, March 1951. From "Famous Trials Page," University of Missouri-Kansas City School of Law. Accessed 2/6/14.  
[http://law2.umkc.edu/faculty/projects/ftrials/rosenb/ROS\\_TRGR.HTM](http://law2.umkc.edu/faculty/projects/ftrials/rosenb/ROS_TRGR.HTM)
- Ruth recounts a meeting she had with Julius Rosenberg in December 1944 in which she told Rosenberg that her husband, David, had agreed to participate in the conspiracy. Ruth admits that she then wrote down the information provided by David to Rosenberg regarding the set-up for the atomic project's lab and names of scientists.

#### **Source G – Excerpt of Trial Testimony of Ruth Greenglass**

- Source: Testimony of Ruth Greenglass, March 1951. From "Famous Trials Page," University of Missouri-Kansas City School of Law. Accessed 2/6/14.  
[http://law2.umkc.edu/faculty/projects/ftrials/rosenb/ROS\\_TRGR.HTM](http://law2.umkc.edu/faculty/projects/ftrials/rosenb/ROS_TRGR.HTM)
- Ruth testifies that her husband, David, had provided Ethel Rosenberg with notes regarding lab set-ups and the names of scientists working on the bomb project, which Ethel then typed for Julius to pass onto the Soviets.

#### **Source H – Excerpt of Prosecution's Closing Speech**

- **Source:** Closing Speech of Prosecutor Irving Saypol, Rosenberg Case. From "Famous Trials Page," University of Missouri-Kansas City School of Law. Accessed 2/6/14.  
<[http://law.umkc.edu/faculty/projects/ftrials/rosenb/ROS\\_TSAY.HTM](http://law.umkc.edu/faculty/projects/ftrials/rosenb/ROS_TSAY.HTM)>
- Prosecutor Irving Saypol states that Ethel Rosenberg was the person who typed the description of the atomic bomb.

## **Reactions to the Rosenberg Case (RS#07)**

### **Quote A – Judge Kaufman’s Sentencing Speech (1951)**

- Source: Judge Kaufman’s Statement Upon Sentencing the Rosenbergs. From “Famous Trials Page,” University of Missouri-Kansas City School of Law. Accessed 2/13/14.  
[http://law2.umkc.edu/faculty/projects/ftrials/rosenb/ROS\\_SENT.HTM](http://law2.umkc.edu/faculty/projects/ftrials/rosenb/ROS_SENT.HTM)
- In his sentencing speech, Judge Kaufman defends his decision to sentence the Rosenbergs to death by accusing them of causing 50,000 U.S. casualties in Korea. He also equates their crime (conspiracy to commit espionage) with treason. Legal scholars argue that Judge Kaufman imposed the most severe penalty (death) usually reserved for the most serious of all offenses against the nation, treason in wartime. However, the Rosenbergs were convicted of the lesser charge of conspiracy. To put this into perspective, the Rosenbergs remain to this day the only criminals sentenced to death in connection with espionage during peacetime.

### **Quote B – Statement by Director of the Manhattan Project to U.S. Atomic Energy Commission (1954)**

- Source: Statement made on April 10, 1954 at a closed meeting of the U.S. Atomic Energy Commission (AEC), later declassified, published in Radosh, R., & Milton, J. (1997). *The Rosenberg File* (2nd ed.). New Haven, CT: Yale University Press. (Original work published 1983).
- This statement made at a closed meeting of the U.S. Atomic Energy Commission in 1954 during the hearings to determine if Robert Oppenheimer’s security clearance should be revoked. Leslie Groves had been the military head of the Manhattan Project. His statement was meant to be kept off the record but was made public after a court order decades later from a suit brought forth by Michael and Robert Meeropol, the sons of the Rosenbergs. Groves had testified at trial that Greenglass’ cross-section sketch would convey the basic principles necessary to build the plutonium bomb to an outsider not familiar with the technology. However, this statement made in 1954, less than a year after the Rosenbergs’ death, reveals that the information that was passed on to the Soviets was of “minor value.” He emphasizes that he would not want to public to know this.

### **Quote C – Telegram Writers Urging Clemency (1953)**

- Source: Memorandum from William J. Hopkins to Mr. Stephens, February 12, 1953. Dwight D. Eisenhower’s Records as President, Official File, Box 411, 101-R Rosenbergs (1). Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library, Museum, and Boyhood Home, Abilene, Kansas. Accessed 2/5/14.
- In this memorandum, William Hopkins summarizes the public’s response to the President’s decision to deny clemency to the Rosenbergs. Of 493 telegrams received, 436 opposed the President’s decision. In other words, the vast majority of telegram writers wanted clemency for the Rosenbergs because they felt that the punishment was too harsh for the crime or they felt that execution in this case would be inconsistent with American ideals.

**Quote D – Julius Rosenberg (1953)**

- Source: Memorandum, Report of Interview with the Rosenbergs by James Bennett (Director, U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Prisons) to Herbert Brownell, June 5, 1953. Herbert Brownell Papers, Box 75, B(3). Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library, Museum, and Boyhood Home, Abilene, Kansas. Accessed 2/5/14.  
[http://www.eisenhower.archives.gov/research/online\\_documents/rosenbergs/Binder10.pdf](http://www.eisenhower.archives.gov/research/online_documents/rosenbergs/Binder10.pdf)
- After the conviction, the U.S. Department of Justice continued to interrogate the Rosenbergs in hopes of uncovering more information about the espionage despite the fact that the Rosenbergs consistently proclaimed innocence. In this statement, the Director of the U.S. Bureau of Prisons recounts a statement made by Julius Rosenberg in an interview not long before his execution. Rosenberg claimed that he and his wife were the victims of a “deal” made between the U.S. government and the Greenglasses.

**Additional Resources:**

Levin, M., Pinkerson, D., & Meeropol, I. (Producers), & Meeropol, I. (Director). (2004). *Heir to an execution: A granddaughter's story* [DVD].

Roberts, S. (2001). *The Brother: The untold story of atomic spy David Greenglass and how he sent his sister, Ethel Rosenberg, to the electric chair*. New York: Random House.