

Estes Kefauver

Essential Question: What roles did Estes Kefauver play in the Red Scare and the labor movement following World War II?

Estes Kefauver was born on July 26, 1903 in the small farming community of Madisonville, Tennessee. He graduated from the University of Tennessee and Yale Law School. He was a member of the United States House of Representatives and the United States Senate.

As a young man, Estes Kefauver learned the value of hard work and respect for the people who labored. Kefauver grew up on a farm. As a young man, he spent a summer living with four coal miners and working in a coal mine near Harlan, Kentucky. He worked his way through law school by waiting and clearing tables. After law school, he taught and coached football in Arkansas. Even though Estes Kefauver was very intelligent and considered by some to be aloof, he understood the common man and knew the common man through his own experiences. Kefauver stood up for civil liberties and supported labor unions by voting against the Taft-Hartley Act in 1947.

Kefauver was a defender of civil liberties and populist therefore he sometimes took unpopular stances on issues in the post-World War II years. When Kefauver ran for the United States Senate in 1948, the state Democratic political boss, "Boss" Crump, worked very hard against Kefauver. Crump had paid for advertisements that pictured Kefauver as a secretive raccoon-like instrument of the communists. At a speech in Memphis, Crump's stronghold, Kefauver put on a coonskin and said, "I maybe a pet coon, but I'm not Boss Crump's pet coon." Kefauver became the second person to challenge Boss Crump for a statewide position and win. Cordell Hull was the first in the 1920's. Kefauver was the only member of the senate in 1954 to vote against a measure to make it a crime to belong to the Communist Party. Kefauver stood against the ideas of Senator Joseph McCarthy and the House Un-American Activities Committee. At the height of the Cold War, Kefauver believed that any effective effort against Communism as a political and economic system had to be fought internationally with American allies. He did not believe that American citizens should be treated as adversaries.

Estes Kefauver is best remembered for his chairmanship in 1950 of the Senate Special Committee to Investigate Crime in Interstate Commerce also known as the Kefauver Hearings. Kefauver and the senators on the committee traveled the country holding hearings and questioning individuals known or suspected to be involved with organized crime. Television was relatively new and the hearings were televised. America watched! Many Americans did not own televisions at this time so most public establishments that had a television were packed when the hearings were on. Organized crime was under the microscope. The exchanges between Kefauver and mafia leader Frank Costello created some drama for the viewing public. Although no charges were brought against organized crime as a result of the hearings, there was a better

understanding of its workings. The Kefauver Hearings paved the way for later congressional action when Attorney General Robert Kennedy held hearings on organized crime and its connection with labor.

Estes Kefauver suffered a heart attack on the floor of the senate August 8, 1963 and died two days later. Kefauver was buried in the family cemetery in Madisonville, Tennessee.

Sources: "Estes Kefauver." *Tennessee Encyclopedia and History and Culture* 1st edition. 1998. Print.

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Brown, Theodore, Jr. and Robert Allen. "Remembering Estes Kefauver." *Populist.com*. The Progressive Populist, 1996. Web 8 Aug. 2014. <<http://www.populist.com/96.10.kefauver.html>>

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Design a postage stamp in honor of Estes Kefauver. Afterwards, write a paragraph explaining why Kefauver deserves to have a stamp made in his honor. Use the text to provide specific examples of his accomplishments.


