

Estes Kefauver
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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.

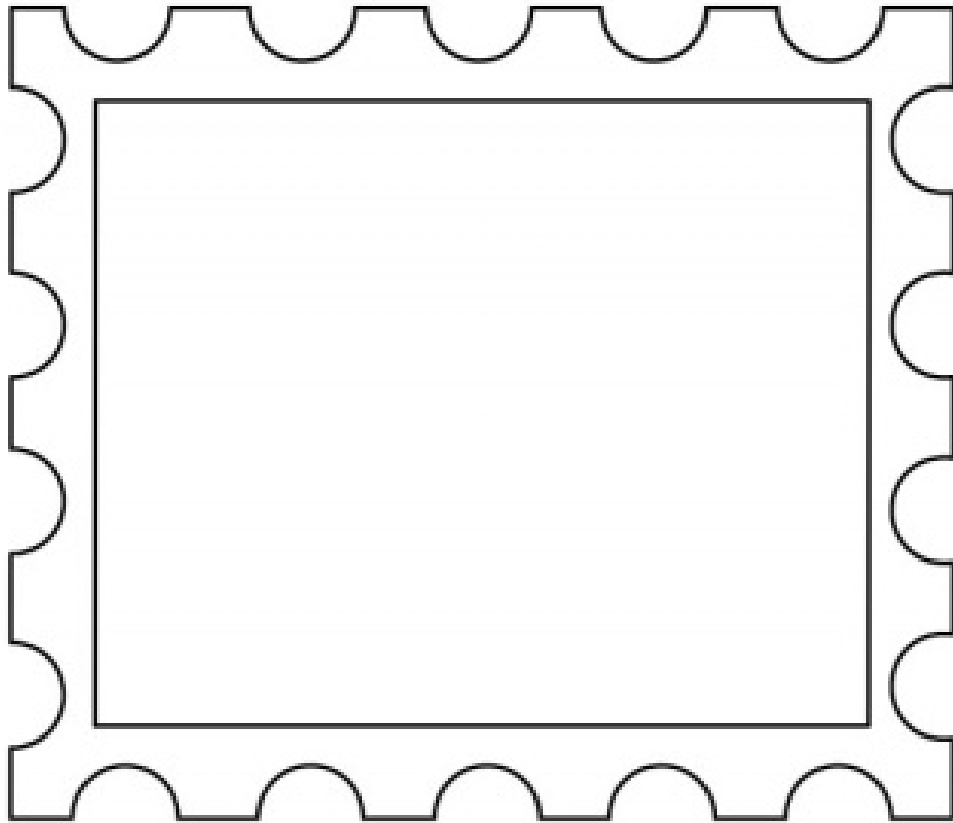
Sources: "Estes Kefauver." *Tennessee Encyclopedia and History and Culture* 1st edition. 1998. Print.

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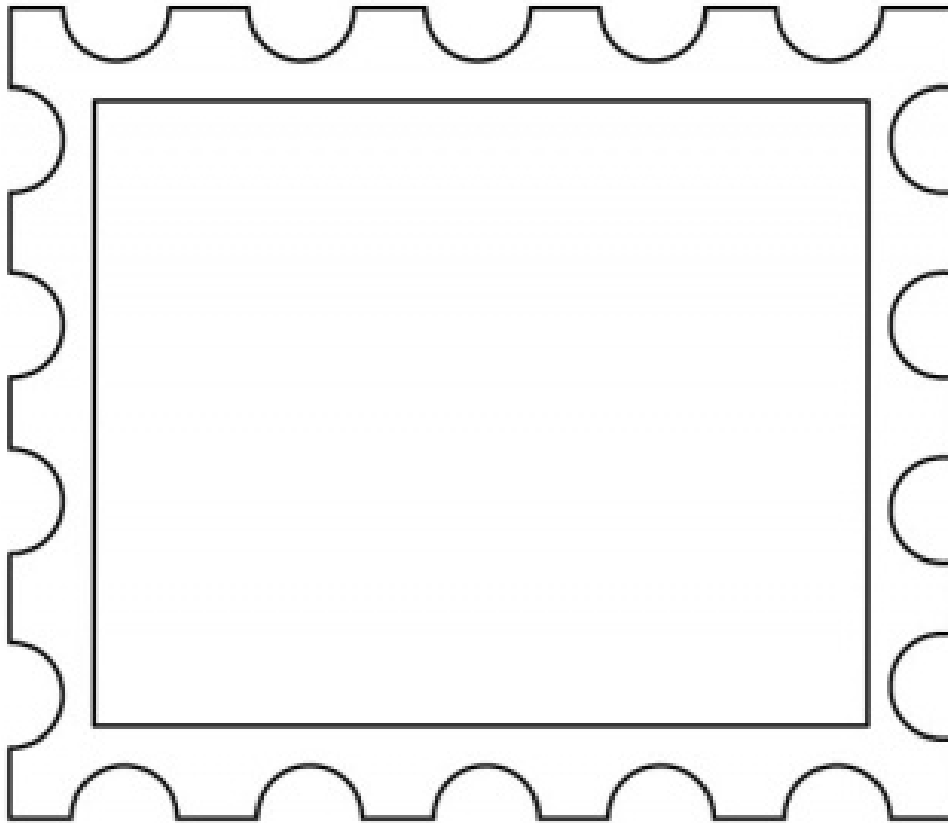
Estes Kefauver

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.



Estes Kefauver

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. **Answers will vary.**



Estes Kefauver and the Red Scare

These sources can be found at the Tennessee State Library and Archives Virtual Archive. Click on the link to the TeVA site. You can download jpegs of the files by clicking the download icon in the upper right hand corner.



[Estes Kefauver Assumes The Role of a Pet Coon](#)



[Estes Kefauver](#)

Estes Kefauver and Organized Crime

*Estes Kefauver was a little known Southern Senator in 1950 when he became chairman of the Senate Special Committee to Investigate Organized Crime in Interstate Commerce. Kefauver established a reputation as fair and thorough during the hearings. Although the hearings were not the first to be televised, they were the first to gain a large national audience and advanced Kefauver's 1952 presidential bid. In 1951, Kefauver published a book, *Crime in America*, based on the hearings. An excerpt from page 314 of *Crime in America* can be found below.*

Admittedly the question of "live" telecasting of congressional committee inquires has both good and bad features, but in my opinion the benefits tremendously outweigh the drawbacks. I liked the ring of a letter- and it was typical of thousands received- from a St. Louis man who wrote: "I think that television has contributed greatly as the means whereby the people can be the brazen arrogance of these carrion and through their testimony note their disregard for all law and decency."

Furthermore, to my mind, there is ample precedent for our decision to permit television, the latest media of public information, to join its sister media, the press, radio and newsreels, at our public hearings. A public hearing is a public hearing, and it makes no sense to say that certain types of information-gathering agencies may be admitted but that television may not, simply because it lifts the voices and faces of the witnesses from the hearing rooms to the living rooms of the people of America. I recognize the right of the individual not to be unduly held up to ridicule, but I cannot see where testifying before a television camera violates that right. After all, the question of whether or not a person exposes himself to ridicule depends on demeanor, candor and basic honesty of the witness himself- not on whether he is being televised. In my opinion, the Constitution is a living, growing organism which must keep abreast and take cognizance of all new technological developments that operate for the benefit of the country of which the same Constitution is our proudest document.

Source: Kefauver, Estes. *Crime in America*. Garden City , NY: Doubleday, 1951. Print