

## ■ “ARE YOU NOW OR HAVE YOU EVER BEEN . . . ?”

As the Cold War got hotter, a kind of anti-Communist fever gripped the United States. Many Americans wondered: Were Communist agents living in the United States? What if Soviet spies were lurking among them, planning to overthrow the U.S. government?

These questions were not so far-fetched. In fact, some Americans *were* Communists. Many were members of the American Communist Party. Others had once been party members but had quit the party after learning about Joseph Stalin's brutal form of Communism in the Soviet Union. Still others had no connections to Communist organizations but were nevertheless interested in Communist theory. Many backed the Communist philosophy that everyone should share equally in society's riches. For many years in the early and mid-twentieth century, Americans freely explored Communism just as they did many other ideas.

But once the Cold War began, it was no longer acceptable for Americans to have Communist leanings. U.S. leaders said that anyone with Communist connections was automatically disloyal to the United States. In 1947 President Truman established loyalty boards. These agencies investigated federal government workers. Those with Communist ties lost their jobs. Even people who weren't Communists sometimes got in trouble. Sometimes the government fired people simply for having left-wing or radical political views.

The attack on Communism in the United States was called the Red Scare, because red was the color associated with Communism and the Soviet Union. Although HUAC actually did find a few Communist spies, most of its targets were innocent of any wrongdoing. What's more, the investigators often violated suspects' constitutional rights, such as the right to a fair trial, freedom of speech, and freedom of assembly. As the 1940s came to a close, the Red Scare was just getting started. It would reach new levels of hysteria in the 1950s.

From *America in the 1940s*

## The Second Red Scare – Excerpt from Freckle

The Soviet Union wanted to extend its communist ideology across the globe, just as the United States wanted to spread capitalism and contain the communist expansion. The Cold War was a battle of these ideologies. Because the Soviet Union had gained control of large sections of Eastern Europe, the United States feared they were looking to reach the west. They were afraid that the Soviets would forcibly take over other countries. These fears were not new to United States citizens; back in the early 1920s, the First Red Scare occurred, during which many Americans were afraid that communism would spread to the United States after the Russian Revolution. The Second Red Scare, which occurred between 1947 and approximately 1957, was fueled by these same fears, as well as some national events that stoked the fire.

# McCarthy Era

**“A**re you now or have you ever been a Communist?”

This was a question many Americans feared in the early 1950s. America was a nation living in fear. Americans feared Communists – and they feared being *called* Communists.

Some people used this fear to help their careers. Most successful at this was U.S. Senator Joseph R. McCarthy from Wisconsin. Because of him, the early 1950s are often called the McCarthy Era.

### How the Fear Began

Fear of Communists did not begin with McCarthy. The U.S. Congress began to worry about Communists in the late 1930s. Congressman Martin Dies thought that some members of the government were Communists. In 1938, Dies helped form a special House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC). Its purpose was to find Communists and other “un-American” people across the nation.

HUAC would hound Americans well into the 1960s. It ran on “guilt by association”: if you knew people who were under suspicion, you were under suspicion too. HUAC didn’t care how weak the evidence was. It didn’t care who gave the evidence. It spread rumors about people who were under suspicion. These rumors ruined the lives of many innocent people.

During World War II, Americans and Soviet Communists were allies. The Nazis were their common enemy. After the war, however, the Communists set up governments in the countries of Eastern Europe. Anti-Communist feelings grew strong again in the United States. In 1947, President Harry S. Truman created the federal employee loyalty program. Under this program, people could lose their jobs – not for anything they’d done, but for how they thought and who they knew. Americans’ fear of communism seemed to be spreading.

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and private  
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**Julius and Ethel Rosenberg are taken from court in a U.S. marshal's van after being convicted of spying. Both were later executed.**

### Senator McCarthy Swoops Down

Wisconsin's senator Joseph R. McCarthy smelled the fear – and made the most of it. McCarthy, who began his first term in the Senate in 1947, had done little in his time in office. He had not written any important laws. Other senators thought he was a fool. McCarthy needed a hot issue to help his career. Communism was it.

McCarthy made his move on February 9, 1950. He announced that he had a list of 205 Communists still working for the State Department. McCarthy had no list. He was making it up as he went along. Yet people began to believe McCarthy. Some people wanted to believe that Communists had taken over our

government. For them, that would explain the mess the world was in.

McCarthy began making dramatic speeches in the Senate. He used *slander* – lies to hurt someone's reputation – in these speeches. But by law, slander was not illegal on the Senate floor. McCarthy publicly accused people who were both in and out of the government. Another senator criticized him for doing this. McCarthy acted outraged. "Crocodile tears are being shed here for traitorous individuals . . .," he said. He then implied that traitors in the U.S. State Department had helped Communists gain control of China. People believed this slander. Those watching the debate in the Senate applauded.

### The Rosenbergs and the McCarran Act

Political events of 1950 added to Americans' fear of Communists.

That summer, married couple Julius and Ethel Rosenberg were accused of being Communist spies. The charge? Giving secrets about the atomic bomb to the Soviets during World War II. Today, the case against the Rosenbergs seems weak. It was based on the testimony of Ethel Rosenberg's brother, who testified against her to get a lighter sentence himself. The Rosenbergs were "lefties" – believers in communism – but many people did not believe they were spies. Others did not want the Rosenbergs to die for their crime. After a very public trial, the Rosenbergs were convicted of treason – betraying their country. Despite protests all over the world, they were put to death in 1953. They are the only non-military Americans ever executed for spying.

The U.S. Congress shared and added to Americans' fear of communism. In 1950, Congress passed the McCarran Internal Security Act. This act required all U.S. Communists to register on a list. It also set up detention camps to imprison traitors in an emergency. No one was ever put into these prisons, but knowing that the camps existed was enough to worry many. Fear of communism seemed out of control.

### **McCarthy Unleashes His Dogs**

Republicans won by a landslide in the 1952 elections. For the first time in 20 years, America had a Republican president. Senator McCarthy, whose career had seemed troubled until he discovered communism, was reelected as well.

McCarthy became chairman of the Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations in the Senate in 1953. Using this committee, he attacked dozens of people and organizations. Politicians and private citizens were afraid of him – he could ruin their reputations in one sentence. *McCarthyism* became the term used to describe the ways he slandered and frightened people.

### **Television Exposes McCarthy**

Respected newsman Edward R. Murrow helped America see the danger of McCarthyism.

During World War II, Murrow had often risked his life to cover the battles. Now, he risked his career as a TV newscaster. In late 1953, Murrow's show "See It Now" looked into McCarthyism. It told the story of U.S. Air Force lieutenant Milo Radulovich. The lieutenant had been discharged by the air force. Why? Because he refused to have nothing to do with his sister and father. They were thought to have

pro-Communist ideas, though even this was not certain. After Murrow's program, the air force let Radulovich back in.

On March 19, 1954, "See It Now" focused on McCarthy himself. It showed films and played tapes of his speeches. Viewers took a good look, and many didn't like what they saw. Public opinion began to turn against McCarthy.

### **McCarthy vs. the Army**

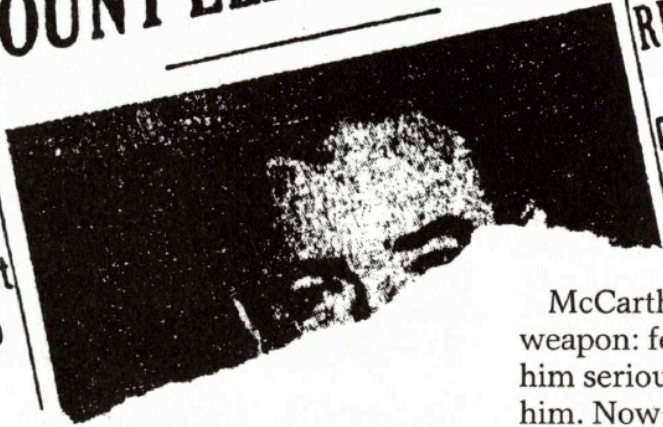
When McCarthy took on the United States Army, he lost even more public support. McCarthy began feuding with the army early in 1954.

First, he accused an army general of protecting Communists in the army. He rudely insulted the general. That upset the army. Second, one of McCarthy's aides, G. David Schine, had been drafted in 1953. McCarthy's team had tried to "pull strings" so that Schine could have an easy ride in the army. Finally, the army exposed the McCarthy team's actions in the *New York Times*. In return, McCarthy accused the army of keeping Schine so that Schine could not expose army Communists. The Senate held hearings

OTE CONDEMNS M'CAR...  
USING SENATE AND COMMITTEE;  
ER COUNT ELIMINATED IN DEBATE

NTINUES

ises to Let  
Apology Go  
Record



REPUBLICANS SPLIT

Democrats Act Solidly  
in Support of Motion  
Against Senator

to sort out all of the accusations. The hearings were on TV. They showed more than 20 million viewers just how brutal and unfair McCarthy was. His dishonesty became clear to the nation. TV viewers saw that he would attack and slander people at the drop of a hat – and would pay little attention to the facts.

In an unforgettable moment, the army's lawyer, Joseph N. Welch, asked McCarthy, "Have you no sense of decency. . . ?" This scolding by the fatherly, well-respected Welch hit home with viewers. It may have led to McCarthy's downfall more than anything else.

McCarthy had lost his greatest weapon: fear. People no longer took him seriously, so they no longer feared him. Now the Senate felt safe in condemning McCarthy. They censured – officially disapproved of – him in December of 1954. He had been guilty of "conduct unbecoming a Senator." Most Americans still did not like Communists. But by the mid-1950s, calling someone a Communist could no longer ruin a person's life. The McCarthy Era was over. ■

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*The House Un-American Activities Committee no longer exists. Do you think such a committee is needed? What is an "un-American" activity? Who should decide what this means? Should people be punished for their political beliefs?*

From *Amazing Century 1945-1960*

## McCarthyism – Excerpt from Freckle

Most of McCarthy's victims were not communists at all. McCarthy accused people of all backgrounds, but he focused especially on high-profile celebrities, government officials, and other popular figures to publicize his campaign and his career. His hearings were often televised and broadcast on radio. Even Lucille Ball of "I Love Lucy" fame was not spared in his search to find and uproot every communist threat.

These communist "witch hunts" as they came to be called, ruined the reputations and careers of many Americans simply by accusing them in such a public forum. Many of the accused refused to testify before

HUAC for principled reasons, and this exercise of freedom was punished with blacklists. Blacklisting was a way to reprimand someone whose views were “unacceptable”.

To this day, the term “McCarthyism” is used to describe the practice of accusing others of treasonous activities with little or no evidence.

In the United States, the fear of communism created a panic that destroyed lives and careers. The use of propaganda fueled this fire on both sides of the Iron Curtain, further driving the U.S. and the Soviet Union into the Cold War.



This American comic book was used as propaganda to promote fear of communism.

### **Below is part of a speech on Communism that McCarthy delivered in 1950.**

“...we are now engaged in a showdown fight . . . not the usual war between nations for land areas or other material gains, but a war between two diametrically opposed ideologies. The great difference between our western Christian world and the atheistic Communist world is not political, gentlemen, it is moral. For instance, the Marxian idea of confiscating the land and factories and running the entire economy as a single enterprise is momentous. Likewise, Lenin’s invention of the one-party police state as a way to make Marx’s idea work is hardly less momentous. Stalin’s resolute putting across of these two ideas, of course, did much to divide the world. With only these differences, however, the east and the west could most certainly still live in peace...

Six years ago, . . . there was within the Soviet orbit, 180,000,000 people. Lined up on the anti-totalitarian side there were in the world at that time, roughly 1,625,000,000 people. Today, only six years later, there are 800,000,000 people under the absolute domination of Soviet Russia—an increase of over 400 percent. On our side, the figure has shrunk to around 500,000,000. . . . This indicates the swiftness of the tempo of Communist victories and American defeats in the cold war. As one of our outstanding historical figures once said, “When a great democracy is destroyed, it will not be from enemies from without, but rather because of enemies from within.” . . . I have here in my hand a list of 205 . . . a list of names that were made known to the Secretary of State as being members of the Communist Party and who nevertheless are still working and shaping policy in the State Department. . . .”

From *Upfront* magazine