

# Cold war fears essay

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What were the Cold War fears of the American people in the aftermath of the Second World War? How successfully did the administration of President Dwight D. Eisenhower address these fears? In the years following the end of World War II, the American population's attention was diverted to one threat: that of a Communist takeover by Soviet Russia. The Eisenhower Administration responded to the crisis by promoting government investments into defense systems and education; such responses did not completely eliminate the fear of a Communist takeover. As a whole, communism was the direct antithesis of the American principles of democracy and free-enterprise. Communism promoted social, political, and global equality under the rigid control of a central government. Specific reactions both by the general American population and the Eisenhower Administration will help identify the effects of the threat of communism in the United States. The fears of communism in the United States can be best demonstrated in McCarthyism, a time period in the United States consisting of fears of a communist takeover from the inside.

Senator Joseph McCarthy argued that the threat of communism arose not from the presence of the Soviet Union, but from “communists” living in America. The role of McCarthy as a demagogue aroused Americans to suspect even slight criticism of the American government as a form of communism. Several so-called “communists” were deported to the Soviet Union despite being legal American citizens. Document A notes additional fears that fed into McCarthyism.

For example, the people “fear[ed] the men in the Kremlin... and] what they [would] do to [their] friends around them”. Eisenhower conceded to the fact

that the fear of communism had indeed delved into the core of American society. In his press conference (Doc. A), Eisenhower further noted that the American people were “fearing what unwise investigators [would] do.

.. here at home as they [tried] to combat subversion or bribery or deceit within”. Evidently, the fear of communism in the years following the end of WWII were so strong that Americans were even afraid of the neighbor (i. e. anyone was capable of searching and deporting them), a fear that was taken advantage of by McCarthy.

In the response to the fear of a communist takeover, the Eisenhower Administration sought to reassure Americans that America would be able to defend itself. One of Eisenhower’s direct responses to communism was promoting investments into the national defense, an action that unfortunately did not help completely soothe the people’s fears. The political cartoon in Document F demonstrates that much of the national budget during the Eisenhower years was being funneled into missile programs.

The cartoon does appear to be accurate in depicting the era as it acknowledges other sectors of national spending that were thrown aside, such as space development and welfare programs, the latter having been of relatively high priority since the days of the New Deal. Undoubtedly, an increased production of missiles would effectively represent the military potential of the United States, perhaps even scaring the Soviet Union away in the process. The chart featured in Document E expounds on the (hypothetical) need for a greater missiles program. The document states: “Push a button in Russia, and 35 minutes later much of [the] U. S. could be

laid waste – with power to retaliate limited”. Document E goes on further to suggest that “ a growing question whether a policy of accepting the first blow may be the best one”. In his message on education to Congress, Eisenhower noted that “ if [America] [was] to maintain [her] position of leadership, [Americans] must [have] [saw] to it that.

.. young people [were] prepared to contribute the maximum to... uture progress”. Clearly, an importance on military defense was valued by the Eisenhower Administration. Despite its effort, the Eisenhower Administration was not particularly successful in addressing the fears of the people.

In his inaugural address (Doc. I), John F. Kennedy discussed the threat of communism and how he vowed to essentially response to a takeover with diligence. Of course, Kennedy was not the only one to admit that the Cold War (and the fears associated with it) continued to drag on.

During the Cuban Missile Crisis, people responded with much fear when they learned that the Soviet Union was storing missiles only a few hundred miles away from the US itself. Evidently, Eisenhower’s investments into military defense did not convince Americans that they could readily take on Soviet Russia and communism. In short, the fears of the Cold War dragged on until the breakup of the Soviet Union in the late 1980s.