

The red scare, and how it relates to the crucible

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Arthur Miller's *The Crucible*, a partially fictionalized play interpretation of the Salem witch trials, was written to resemble the American government's actions during the Red Scare, McCarthy's "witch hunts" for communists committing traitorous acts within the government.

As *The Crucible* began with an actual witchery incident, The Red Scare began with accounts of real communism and treason within the American government. John McCarthy's speech, which began the Communist hunt, states facts about government workers who held obvious communism traits, such as one man he mentioned, Gustave Duran, who was labeled "a notorious international communist" but nonetheless, was "assistant secretary of state in charge of Latin American affairs", and once he was convicted of communism, he left for "chief of Cultural Activities Section in the office of the assistant secretary general of the United Nations"(McCarthy). This occurrence was paralleled in *The Crucible* when the court dubbed Abigail Williams as a member, even though she was part of a witchery incident and her reputation was skewed. This false power allowed Abigail to assume the position of "God's finger"(Williams, Act 2) within the courtroom in Salem. In *The Crucible*, Reverend Parris, the head of Salem church and the head of the village, used the witch trials to work in his political favor, allowing the fear to escalate for the sake of his place in office.

Abigail was Parris' niece, and if his enemies discovered anything wrong with Abigail's name, "they [would] ruin [him] with it"(Parris, Act 1), therefore he choose to continue adding coal to the metaphorical fire. The Red Scare escalated to uncomfortable heights because of people who "manipulated communist paranoia for their own political purposes" (Bjournlund, 56) as

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Parris did. In the 1950's, Parris represents the American government, and Abigail, who represents traitors such as Gustave and the corrupt in power like McCarthy, was a threat to the system of governing. Fear rose for government officials when there were constant threats of job loss with the slightest conviction of communism, so the government attempted to deny accusations for the preservation of their men in office, causing them to cover their real traitors as well as themselves. Myra Immel, a girl who wrote personal accounts of the Red Scare, in which her parents were involved with the convictions, stated that "The biggest fear, though, was whether your father would lose his job.

" (149) In *The Crucible*, because of the connections in the town, everyone was affected by the witch trials, and in America, everyone was affected by the Red Scare. McCarthy gathered "57 cases of individuals who would appear to be either card-carrying members or certainly loyal to the communist party" (McCarthy), which relates to Reverend Hale from *The Crucible* demonstrating his power by flaunting the death warrants he had signed for previous witches, and to flaunt his power. McCarthy represents Reverend Hale on many levels as well, considering he set off the idea of communism as Hale had set off the idea of a town full of devil workers. Hale was a "broken minister" (Proctor, Act 2), McCarthy was a broken senator, "a revolutionist without any revolutionary vision" (Rovere); his witch hunts were an unconquerable task. A political cartoon from 1949 drawn by Herbert Block which depicted a metaphorical vehicle titled "Committee On Un-American Activities" driven by members of HUAC who ran over men and women in the streets, sending the citizens into a panic. The cartoon's caption is "It's okay

— “We’re Hunting Communists”, which represents how they attempted to justify their actions.

McCarthy and his group of followers, including the ruthless J. Edgar Hoover, a “powerful force behind the anti communist fever [who] took advantage of public fears to build on his career” (Bjornlung, 56), ran down innocent American citizens for a crime that couldn’t be defended, couldn’t be proved, and was the bedrock of fear at the time. America’s enemy shifted from communists to the anti-communists. HUAC was like the group of girls who joined forces with Abigail to save themselves from the accusations of witchcraft. At this point, the world was beginning to recognize the corruption behind McCarthy’s communist hunt, just as how in *The Crucible*, the court in Salem recognized that the devil was not woven into Abigail’s accusation. In both settings, the ordeals kept on for the sake of the government and court’s name.

In *The Crucible*, as Mary Warren testified against the group of girls convicting the town of witchcraft, Reverend Parris, who acts in an unfair, unjust manner, tells her to “faint. Prove to us how you pretended in the court so many times.” (Act 3), which she cannot because she is not succumbing to delusions of mass hysteria. Evidence was shown, the court should have dropped charges, that would have been justice, but they didn’t. As McCarthy would call it, Parris was a “red herring” just as Alger Hiss, who supposedly had “contacts with the Russian spy ring” (McCarthy). In *The Crucible* as well as in the Red Scare, the government began to turn from the heroes to the villains, lying hypocrites, more dangerous than the witches and communists they searched for, and the public began to notice, but whoever spoke up

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would be convicted; in *The Crucible* as a witch, and in America as a Communist.

Hungerford's political comic titled "Boiling over", establishes an example of America's realizations of how the Communist witch hunt was affecting America. The comic depicts Uncle Sam, a metaphorical representation of America's patriotic traditions, inside of The Melting Pot, which was boiling over into the United States. The melting pot represents how "American society was considered to be a "melting pot"" (James Withers, Demand Media) of different cultures, and tending the fire beneath the pot was a Bolshevik Agitator, a supporter of communism. The comic illustrates how the McCarthy would blame the mixes of religions and customs for communism. McCarthy gave the citizens of America an either-or fallacy by asking them whether or not they'd prefer "democratic Christian world" or "communistic atheistic world" (McCarthy) which is similar to *The Crucible*, where the government's unjustified accusations of anything neglecting religion is deemed evidence of witchery.

In Act 2 of *The Crucible*, Reverend Hale enters John Proctor's house to try to search for signs of witchcraft. Hale states that "theology, sir, is a fortress; no crack in a fortress may be accounted small." (67), imposing that all unusual behavior must be accounted for as witchcraft, because you cannot see into one's mind. In *The Crucible*, "Not long after the fever died, Parris was voted from office, walked out on the highroad, and was never heard of again" (Arthur Miller, *Echoes Down the Corridor*), proving that the majority of the town knew that Reverend Parris had been corrupt, and cast him out of office. When Abigail convicted the Proctors, Rebecca Nurse, and Reverend Hale's

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wife, that's when the government knew enough was enough, yet they still wanted to preserve their names, so they continued with the executions. During the McCarthyism era, McCarthy tried to accuse the army on televised hearings, which " gave the American public their first view of McCarthy in action, and his recklessness, indignant bluster, and bullying tactics" (A&E Television Network, The History Channel), which was what ended McCarthy's popularity and concluded the Red Scare.

Joseph McCarthy's " Spark", his plan to get rid of communists, blossomed into destructive flames, as did the witchery convictions in *The Crucible*.