A social paranoia fueled by mccarthyism concepts: describing usa's fear of commun...

THE RED SCARE

One of the most interesting events to take place in American history was the Red Scare, also known as the McCarthy Era. It took place in the late 1940s and early 1950s. During this time many people were unfairly named communists and victimized. In many ways, it resembled the infamous Salem Witch Hunt and trials of the 1690's. Both were caused by hysteria without the facts and caused many people to lose their jobs and lives.

Joseph McCarthy was an American politician, who led a campaign against Communists in the early 1950s, called the Red Scare. In the late 1940's and early 1950's the Cold War and Communism were big things to talk about so exploiting the issue of communism helped McCarthy become senator. McCarthy and Hoover became top investigators of communists during the Red Scare. McCarthy would get all his suspects from Hoover and sometimes make false accusations to attract attention to his cause. Witnesses not overwhelmed with the hysteria of the time " saw McCarthy creating a climate in which reason gave way to hysteria, trust to suspicion and friendship to self-preservation."

As the United States' resentment toward the Soviet Union deepened, members of the Communist party started to be viewed progressively more as potential enemy agents and that view was what provided the justification for what happened during the McCarthy period. President Truman passed the Truman Doctrine which offered military aid to any country that was against communism. The U. S. felt threatened by Communism and believed it was spreading, and was likely to take over the world if not stopped quickly.

McCarthy and Truman believed that communists in the United States were part of a secret conspiracy against their country and followed all orders sent to them by Stalin. This belief had very little basis on reality although the communists were a highly disciplined organization that did have a connection to the Soviet Union.

Although many of the accused were shunned and made into outcasts, punishment for those found guilty in their trials were mostly economic. People lost their jobs and were not able to find new ones. The blacklist of Hollywood developed in the fall of 1947 after public hearings to investigate the influence of Communists in the motion picture industry were held by the House Committee on Un-American Activities (HUAC), an investigative committee of the United States House of Representatives. People accused of being communists were released if they agreed to become " friendly" witnesses and give the names of other communists and in 1950 Red Channels, the Report of Communist Influence in Radio and Television was published. It was a book that listed the names of 151 entertainers. Hollywood studios would not hire anybody whose name appeared in this book and they paid people to check up on the backgrounds of the people not in the book that they wanted to hire. They greatly feared " being accused of being soft on communism."

The entertainment industry blacklist went from just listing suspected Communists to listing anybody who had once supported the same causes as Communists. Entertainers with the same names as communists were

wrongly accused, and some people were blacklisted simply for opposing the idea of having a blacklist, claiming it violated their constitutional rights.

The blacklist lasted until the 1960s, destroying hundreds of careers. Actors suffered the most, losing their jobs and never being able to find work again. The only way for a writer that was accused of ties with communism to get another job was by using false names or finding other people to pretend that they had written their scripts. Many of the people that were blacklisted were forced to leave show business forever. One playwright that appeared before the House Committee on Un-American Activities was Arthur Miller, the author of such classics as The Crucible. He was convicted of contempt, but later the conviction was appealed and reversed.

The Red Scare was similar to the play the Crucible and the Salem Witch Trials of the 1700s because, although the facts were distorted in many ways, the perception of an internal Communist threat during the Red Scare had just enough plausibility to be convincing to the vast majority of Americans who had no direct contact with the party or its members. It dehumanized American Communists and transformed them into outlaws who deserved whatever they got. In the play by Arthur Miller, the girls make outrageous accusations of people calling them witches. This is much like McCarthy and Hoover's accusations of communists. Both groups did it for attention on the subject matter and to protect themselves. Communism, like witch craft, had become so feared by the people that anyone who was suspected of sympathizing with it, not to mention practicing it, could lose his or her job and in the case of the witch trials, their lives. The hysteria took over the

country in both cases, leading to the execution and/or persecution of many innocent people.

The Red Scare is a time that would rather be forgotten by many people. It was a time of constant fear and worry. People were wrongfully accused of being Communists and they lost their jobs over someone's wrong accusations, much like those accused of being witches in the late 1600s and early 1700s. People working in film, television, radio, and theater were fired from their jobs and could not get new ones as a result of the blacklist. Because the blacklisting was secret, no one knows how many people were actually affected, but it affected many.