

The cold war and mccarthyism



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The paper "The Origins of the Social Movement Red Scare, the Cold War and McCarthyism" is a meaningful example of a term paper on history. Social movements are, for the most part, centered on ideological shifts in society. For instance, the Red Scare of the 1940s and 1950s came about through fear of radical ideologies emerging from the Soviet Union and around the world. At this point in history, the Cold War produced fear from Americans, who constantly contemplated the possibility of nuclear war with the philosophically corrupt Soviets: a nation that the United States saw as antithetical to American values like individualism and market economies. Paired with political pressure to root out Soviet spies in the government, the Red Scare erupted and played out in scenes all over the country. The interaction of this public force with the arts community of Hollywood, however, produced the most interesting social dynamic of the whole Red Scare experience. Politicians for possible affiliations with the socialist cause targeted film directors, playwrights, and other left-leaning artists of the era. This led to a portrayal of American society in a negative light in the artwork of these people, which has since surfaced as valuable and telling about this dark period in American history. As an example, the playwright Arthur Miller created a play in 1953 about the Salem Witch Trials called *The Crucible*, solely as an allegory to McCarthyism and as an attack on the Red Scare phenomenon (Blakesley, 1992, p. xv).

Joseph McCarthy, who is singled out more than any other figure in the history of the Red Scare, was a prominent Senator from the state of Wisconsin during the time. McCarthy rose to prominence by suggesting that there were copious amounts of Soviet spies and communist sympathizers in the government. These claims in the late 1940s led to widespread fear of a

Soviet takeover from the inside, which gave McCarthy license to begin employing scrupulous tactics to solve the problem. By 1954, however, McCarthy's claims were revealed sensationalist, his tactics unallowable, and the Senate censured him. His disregard for proof and his use of social psychology, however, are still a relevant case study (Caute, 1978).

Perhaps as influential as Joseph McCarthy during the Red Scare period was the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC), which was solely responsible for investigating "alleged disloyalty and subversive activities on the part of private citizens, public employees, and those organizations suspected of having Communist ties" (Black & Hopkins, 2003). Although created in 1938, a few years before the start of World War II, the HUAC gained most of its influence during the Cold War. The HUAC often wielded its power to subpoena witness and hold people in contempt of Congress, and it pressured witnesses to surrender names and other information that could lead to the apprehension of Communists and Communist sympathizers. The Committee would brand witnesses as the enemy should they ever refuse to comply in answering questions. Joseph McCarthy used this "redbaiting" style of questioning and punishment during his own investigative hearings.

Although these hearings lacked substantive proof or reason, not answering questions were treated as an admission of guilt. For this reason, countless numbers of people who appeared before the Committee during the 1940s and 1950s were "blacklisted" (Black & Hopkins, 2003).

The term "blacklisting" refers generally to the process of registering individuals who, for some reason, are being denied a particular privilege or right. During the Red Scare, members of the Hollywood artistic community were blacklisted for not complying with the HUAC. The public lost faith in

these towering figures in the movie industry. Parents did not want their children to see a movie in which the writer or the lead actor was a suspected communist. Some film directors, writers, and actors were put into financial ruin because of their inability to work. One of these figures was Arthur Miller, a famed playwright who wrote such works as *Death of a Salesman* and *All My Sons*. Miller found himself blacklisted when he refused to testify before the HUAC based on principled noncompliance.

Because Miller had gained such a large following through the 1940s with his world-famous plays, he continued to produce and see his plays acted on the stage. In 1953, Miller put together his latest creation, *The Crucible*, as an indictment of the Red Scare. Based on the 1692 Salem Witch Trials, Miller's play focuses on themes like unwarranted suspicious, groupthink in an ignorant community, and the influence that rumor has in a climate of fear. Some scenes in *The Crucible*, such as the trials, implicitly mirror the style of hearings held by Joseph McCarthy and the House Un-American Activities Committee. Miller's ability to tie the two times together is a wonderfully astute observation about the recurrence of themes in human society. For this reason, the literary works of Miller and others that draw upon contemporary experiences from this period are a particularly interesting area of research. One interesting point about Miller is that even though he held dangerous political beliefs for that time, he did not sacrifice these beliefs under pressure and that consequently his plays, from that point forward, centered on matters of social concern. Looking at the world from Miller's perspective during the Red Scare, it is understandable why his works would continue to take that direction.

The intersection of history and literary works is always a productive focus for <https://assignbuster.com/the-cold-war-and-mccarthyism/>

historians studying the ideological climates of certain periods. One can learn volumes more about the fear and ignorance of the Red Scare by reading a play by Arthur Miller than sifting through the transcripts of the HUAC hearings. For this reason, one should always seek to study history and explain the significance of certain historical events through first-person perspectives and the effects those events have on individuals. Because social movements are largely the result of ideas that societies develop over time, history might be best studied through the artistic works produced during that time, if for no other reason besides the fact that artistic works often convey the ethical, political, and aesthetic values of the artist.