

The Red Scare

One of the defining aspects of the Cold War was known as the "Red Scare," or fear of communism. In a communistic society, there are no social classes and individuals do not own property. The government has ownership and control over whatever is required to make and transport products. This is in contrast to the American economic system, called capitalism, which emphasizes private property and privately owned businesses. Communists were sometimes called "Reds" because of the color of the Soviet flag.

Communism was a prominent ideology following World War II, spreading from the Soviet Union and China to Cuba, Vietnam, Nicaragua, Zimbabwe, Yugoslavia, and Eastern Germany, though none of these countries were able to successfully implement it. The "Red Scare" was the fear that communism would come to the United States.



There were actually two periods of Red Scare, one following World War I, and the other coinciding with the Cold War. This second Red Scare lasted from about 1947 to 1957, and it greatly influenced the U.S. government of the time. An anti-communist crusade was led by Senator Joseph McCarthy, who used intimidation and gossip to get information about who might be working for the Soviets. He often accused people on very little evidence, ruining many lives and careers. Another key U.S. player was FBI director J. Edgar Hoover. The FBI used wiretaps and spies to provide information to McCarthy and others like him. There was also the House Committee on Un-American Activities, who investigated suspected communists. This group accused some Hollywood executives, screenwriters, and directors of being pro-communist. There was supposedly a Blacklist of anyone associated with the American Communist Party. People whose names were on this list were not hired for work during the Red Scare. While all of these activities are generally remembered in a negative light, they did uncover some actual Soviet spies who had infiltrated the U.S. government.