

McCarthyism: a brief summary

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The term McCarthyism is based on the actions of Wisconsin Senator **Joseph McCarthy** during the 1940s and 1950s. McCarthyism signifies **the extreme anti-Communist movement that occurred in the United States**.

1. An 'Age of Anxiety'

The period of McCarthyism began in the late 1940s and ended in the mid to late 1950s. McCarthyism came to be synonymous with the term **witch-hunt**, the act of making serious but unsubstantiated charges against people in public life. McCarthyism is also used today as a more all-purpose term to describe the general practice of making false allegations, specifically of pro-Communist activity and most often based on irrelevant evidence.

McCarthyism is associated with **the Red Scare** and often referred to as the Second Red Scare. The Red Scare is the applied term given to a time in which Americans feared Communist influence in the United States from 1917 to 1920. McCarthyism brought about the Second Red Scare in the United States in the late 1940s. Americans not only feared the Soviet Union, but they worried that communists were infiltrating the government in an attempt to overthrow America. McCarthy was the man most responsible for **reinforcing such fears**.

2. Victims of McCarthyism

There were many innocent victims of McCarthyism and hundreds were imprisoned. Most of the victims however, did have some connection to the Communist party at some point in their lives. Lots of victims were **blacklisted** including several **actors, authors, civil rights activists and physicists**.

McCarthy's witch-hunt began in 1950 when he announced he had a list of 205 known communists employed by the state department. His charges led to years of senate and house investigations and were responsible for many people losing their jobs. The Rosenberg (wife and husband) were accused to be spies for the USSR and to deliver the secret of the nuclear bomb: they were found guilty during a political trial and condemned to the electric chair in 1953.

3. The end of McCarthyism

McCarthy's own undoing began when he leveled his accusations against the United States Army. On February 25, 1954, McCarthy insulted the Army and the American public. These accusations led to the decline of McCarthy's popularity. The hearings of his Army accusations were for the first time televised nationally so that the American public could see the Senator in action.

The United States Army was outraged by McCarthy's accusations. McCarthy even accused President Eisenhower or General Marshall of treason. After almost a month of proceedings, the senate found that fellow Senator McCarthy acted in a manner they called contemptuous and reprehensible. On December 2, the senate voted 67 to 22 to censure McCarthy for inappropriate conduct of a senator.

HOLLYWOOD UNDER McCARTHYISM : A DEFENSE AGAINST A LIBERTY KILLER POLICY ?

Source 1: The HUAC

1938: The House of Representatives decided to create The House of Un-American Activities Committee (The HUAC) to fight any nazi, fascist or communist influence in the USA.

1947: The HUAC, led by J.Parnell Thomas, decided to launch into Hollywood and the movie industry in order to track down anyone supposed to be communist. Actors such as Ronald Regan or directors such as Jack Warner accused some people who were blacklisted, but the evidences were not always relevant.

Source 2: The Hollywood Ten

10 writers, scholars, directors who refused the hearings of the HUAC as a symbol of protest. Put into jail in 1950.



Donald Trumbo (a film director), one of the Ten, refused to testify, stating: « It's the beginning of the American concentration camps! »-
1947

Source 3: Some famous blacklisted



Charles Spencer Chaplin (actor and film director) and Julius Dassin (film director) were blacklisted and compelled to exile. Chaplin came back to London and definitely settled in Switzerland up until his death while Julius Dassin went to France.

Source 4: A resistance backed by the US Constitution

The Committee for the First Amendment led by Humphrey Bogart and his wife Lauren Bacall, in a demonstration against the HUAC (1947).



First Amendment of the American Constitution (1791)

'Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble (...)'

Tool Box

A producer: un producteur

A film director: un réalisateur

A film actor/actress: un acteur

A star: une vedette

A major company: une grande société de production cinématographique

to disapprove of sthg: désapprouver qqch

to oppose sthg: s'opposer à qqch

to challenge: contester, remettre en question