

Red Scare Analysis

Essential Question: Did Communism pose a genuine threat to the United States or was the Red Scare of the 1950s a case of paranoia?

Document A: New York Times (June 21, 1953)

The excerpts are based on the testimony of David Greenglass, Ethel's younger brother. Julius Rosenberg had worked as an engineering inspector for the Army Signal Corps.

In January David came home himself on a twenty-two day furlough (absence). Julius asked him to turn over everything he knew about the bomb that might be of value to the Soviets.

Rosenberg did not confine his professional interest to atomic information according to the evidence at his trial. He confided to Greenglass that he had stolen the proximity fuse while he was working at the Emerson Radio Company on a Signal Corps project. He simply slipped the fuse into the brief case in which he had brought his lunch and gave it to the Russians.

1. Explain the situation described in the document.

Document B: New York Times (January 11, 1953)

Below is an excerpt from a New York Times article from January 11, 1953 that presented the arguments for mercy for accused Soviet spies--Julius and Ethel Rosenberg.

"If they go to the electric chair, the Rosenbergs will be the first persons ever executed during peacetime in the United States on charges of espionage. All the other atom spies received sentences of less than 30 years in prison."

"The Rosenbergs committed their wartime espionage at a time when the United States was allied with the Soviet Union. The information they transmitted only complemented the information assembled by the Russians from other sources."

"Execution may turn the Rosenbergs into Communist martyrs. It will certainly close off the possibility of a future confession."

1. Explain the situation described in the document.

Document C: Alger Hiss Description

Below is a description of Alger Hiss from PBS Nova's "Secrets, Lies, and American Spies" series. Alger Hiss was a US State Department official.

In 1996, shortly after Hiss's death, a collection of Venona decrypts was declassified. One of the messages, dated March 30, 1945, refers to an American with the code name Ales. According to the message, Ales was a Soviet agent working in the State Department, who accompanied President Roosevelt to the 1945 Yalta Conference and then flew to Moscow, both of which Hiss did. The message goes on to indicate that Ales met with Andrei Vyshinsky, the Commissar for Foreign Affairs, and was commended for his aid to the Soviets. Analysts at the National Security Agency have gone on record asserting that Ales could only have been Alger Hiss.

1. Explain the events described in the document.

Document D: New York Times (December 12, 1948)

The following is an excerpt from a New York Times article from December 12, 1948 that reported on government documents that were alleged to have been given to Whittaker Chambers, a self-admitted Communist Spy.

Twelve documents produced by Whittaker Chambers to substantiate his charges that Government officials passed secret data to him while he was a Communist spy in the Nineteen Thirties were made public by the House Committee on Un-American Activities.

Along with copies of the papers, the committee gave out a Government handwriting expert's report that one of them a digest of a 1938 diplomatic message from Herschel V. Johnson then Charge d' Affaires of the United States Embassy at London was in the penmanship of Alger Hiss.

1. Explain the situation described in the document.

Document E: New York Times (July 18, 1950)

Below is an excerpt from a New York Times article from July 18, 1950 about Senator McCarthy, who had accused many government employees, U.S. army officials and others of being Communists. This lasted from 1950 until 1954.

Senator Joseph R. McCarthy charges of communism in the State Department were denounced (criticized) today as false and “contemptible” by the three Democratic members of a Senate investigating subcommittee.

Reporting their conclusions from a four-month inquiry, they attacked Mr. McCarthy, a Wisconsin Republican, in terms of harshness rarely used in the Senate’s history. They accused him on conscious falsehood and of serving the interests of the Communists by raising baseless suspicions among the people of the country.

They cleared every person who had been accused by Senator McCarthy.

1. Explain the situation described in the document.

Document F: History.com account of what happened to Owen Lattimore beginning on April 8, 1950,

Senator Joseph McCarthy labels Professor Owen Lattimore “extremely dangerous so far as the American people are concerned” in a carefully worded public speech, but stops short of calling him a Soviet spy. The speech was yet another example of McCarthy’s ability to whip up damaging Red Scare hysteria with no real evidence...

McCarthy declared that Professor Owen Lattimore was a “top Soviet spy.” Lattimore, an expert on Chinese history, had served as a special consultant about Chinese affairs during and after World War II and had been a consistent critic of the Nationalist Chinese regime of Chiang Kai-Shek. Word soon leaked out about McCarthy’s charge. Though Lattimore decried the senator’s statements as lies, there was nothing he could legally do, since McCarthy’s testimony was protected by congressional immunity.

On April 8, 1950, McCarthy gave a public speech in which he continued his attacks on Lattimore. He started by stating, “The reason we find ourselves in a position of impotency is not because our powerful potential enemy has sent men to invade our shores but rather because of the traitorous actions of those who have been treated so well by this nation.” He called Lattimore “extremely dangerous,” and declared that the professor had been “invaluable to Russia.”

McCarthy’s attacks on Lattimore continued for years. A congressional committee cleared Lattimore of McCarthy’s charges in 1950, but in 1951 the Senate reopened the investigation. This new investigation, spearheaded by McCarthy, claimed that Lattimore had perjured himself during his earlier testimony. In 1952, Lattimore was formally charged with perjury in connection to his 1950 testimony. A very long and costly legal battle ensued, and eventually Lattimore succeeded in having all charges dropped. His career in American academia, however, was ruined and he left the country in 1963. He later returned to the United States and died in 1989. Lattimore was just one of many people smeared by McCarthy’s reckless and unsubstantiated charges during the anticommunist hysteria of the Red Scare.

2. Describe the situation describe in the document above.

| Document | Does the document support the idea of Justified Fear or Paranoia | Supporting evidence from the text. |
|----------|--|------------------------------------|
| A | | |
| B | | |
| C | | |
| D | | |
| E | | |
| F | | |

“The Cold War heightened Americans’ fears about communism in American society. Many Americans worried that Communists—“Reds”—had penetrated all levels of American society and were weakening the government. This Red Scare led to a massive hunt to uncover Communists. In 1947 President Truman ordered an investigation into the loyalty of all federal employees.” Was there a genuine threat of Communist subversion, or was this a case of paranoia? 6-8 Sentences.