

## McCARTHYISM AND THE SECOND RED SCARE

The rise of the Cold War had serious effects on life inside the United States. Americans became concerned about the possibility of a communist threat at home. To make matters worse, it seemed like the Soviets might be winning the Cold War. In 1949, Communists seized power in China, the world's most populous country. The following year, the Soviet Union successfully tested an atomic device of its own, and in 1950 troops from North Korea (a communist ally of the Soviet Union) launched a war of aggression against South Korea.

Americans became concerned about the possibility of a communist threat at home. Some people were accused of “un-American” acts. In 1950, **Julius and Ethel Rosenberg** were arrested and charged with selling atom bomb secrets to the Soviet Union. They were brought to trial, found guilty and *executed* as spies. Although the Rosenbergs were guilty of being communist spies, most people who were accused were not. Many accusations were based on little to no evidence. This increased fear of communism in the United States came to be known as the second **Red Scare**.



1. Why do you think fear of communism in the United States increased after 1949?

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In 1950, a Senator from Wisconsin, **Joseph McCarthy**, shocked the nation by claiming that he knew the names of hundreds of communists working in the State Department and other federal agencies. Although McCarthy never proved any of his claims, he frightened Americans and destroyed the careers and reputations of many people whom he accused of being communists. During the next four years, McCarthy led hearings in which he bullied witnesses and made exaggerated charges. The term **McCarthyism** has come to mean *making charges against a person's loyalty without having any supporting evidence or proof*.

McCarthy finally lost support in 1954 when a television audience of millions saw him make false accusations against the United States Army. Unfortunately, many lives had been ruined by McCarthy's wild charges. Soon after, the U.S. Senate voted to censure, or condemn, him. McCarthy died three years later.

2. Why do you think McCarthy was able to destroy the lives and careers of so many Americans with so little evidence?

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