

IT WALKS AMONG US



**JOIN HUAC NOW AND
HELP ROOT OUT COMMIES**

Background Essay: House Un-American Activities Committee



Truman Presidential
Museum & Library

After World War II the United States and the Soviet Union found themselves on opposite sides of a “Cold War”, which pitted the democratic United States against the Communist Soviet Union. As the Cold War intensified, the frenzy over the perceived threat posed by Communists in the U.S. became known as the Red Scare. The United States government responded by creating the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC), which was charged with identifying Communist threats to the United States. HUAC often pressured witnesses to surrender names and other information that could lead to the apprehension of Communists and Communist sympathizers. Committee members branded witnesses as "red" if they refused to comply or hesitated in answering committee questions.

HUAC was created in 1938 to investigate alleged disloyalty and rebel activities on the part of private citizens, public employees and organizations suspected of having Communist ties. Citizens suspected of having ties to the communist party would be tried in a court of law. Also during this time, Senator Joseph McCarthy started a campaign against alleged communists in the U.S. government and other institutions. From 1950-1954 “McCarthyism” described the practice of making accusations against Federal Government employees who were suspected of having affiliations to communism and leaking information. Government employees could be blacklisted (viewed as untrustworthy or someone to avoid) and could lose their job. The threat of Communism was a driving force that was creating a wedge in between society and the United States government.

During this time period the lines of civil liberties and national security began to blur, and U.S. citizens felt a sense of uncertainty. Some Americans felt that their personal freedoms were being taken away, while others believed HUAC and McCarthyism were necessary to secure national security. Government officials felt the same type of pressures on the home front - were they overstepping government powers or just keeping America safe from outsiders that wanted to cause harm within the system?

Word Bank:

Communism- a political theory derived from Karl Marx, advocating class war and leading to a society in which all property is publicly owned and each person works and is paid according to their abilities and needs.

Soviet Union- officially the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, abbreviated as the USSR, was a socialist state in Eurasia that existed from 1922 to 1991

The Red Scare- a time in history when a group or government promoted a fear of communism that spread widely through the country

McCarthyism- the practice of accusing someone of being a Communist and therefore avoiding or not trusting them: McCarthyism is named after the American politician Joseph McCarthy, who in the 1950s accused many Americans of being Communists

Hysteria- exaggerated or uncontrollable emotion or excitement, especially among a group of people

Witch hunt- an attempt to find and punish a particular group of people who are being blamed for something, often simply because of their opinions and not because they have actually done anything wrong

Espionage- the practice of spying or of using spies, typically by governments to obtain political and military information

Blacklist- a list of persons who are disapproved of or are to be punished or boycotted.