

# Creative Activities for Teaching About the 1940's & 50's SS127

## Introduction

The activities in this set are designed to do three things: involve students in the study of history, stimulate students to think, and provide information that is not usually available in history textbooks. Our overall goal is to encourage an interest in the study of history. We believe that there are lessons and skills to be learned from the study of history and that the study of history can be involving and interesting. 30 pages.

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### *The 1940's and 50's*

by Lawrence Stevens

ISBN: 0-89550-276-3

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P.O. Box 794, Stockton, CA 95201

(209) 465-1880

[www.stevensandshea.com](http://www.stevensandshea.com)

### Background

At the end of World War II, the United States faced another problem – the spread of communism. In 1948, the Russians attempted to blockade Berlin which was surrounded by communist-controlled territory. Also in 1948, the communists took control of Czechoslovakia. In 1949, the Russians exploded their first atomic bomb and the communists won control of China. In 1950, communist North Korea invaded South Korea. The American people were afraid of the increasing power of communism.

Many Americans were fearful that there were communists in our own government. The United States Congress tried to deal with the problem of making sure that there were no communists directing our government.

If you were in Congress, what kind of laws, if any, would you try to pass to protect America against communism, and what would you do to eliminate any communists who were already in government service?

### Directions

Below are several proposals. Choose the ones that you think are most desirable. Make a choice in each category. You may make more than one choice.

#### Communists Already Serving in the Government

1. Immediately fire any person who is currently a member of the Communist Party.
2. Immediately fire any person who was at any time a member of the Communist Party.
3. Immediately fire any person who belongs to an organization that also has communists as members.



4. Immediately fire any person who has ever expressed an opinion that might also be shared by the Communist Party.
5. Immediately fire any person who ever belonged to an organization that also had communists as members.
6. Allow communists to hold any job in government that does not require handling secret documents.
7. Do nothing except when a person has been found to be passing secrets to the Russians or to the Communist Party.
8. Require everyone working for the government to sign a "Loyalty Oath" swearing to uphold the laws of the United States.
9. Require everyone working for the government to sign an oath saying that he or she is not communist.



### **How To Deal With The Communist Party**

1. Make the Communist Party illegal and put in jail any person who is a member.
2. Allow the Communist Party to exist but require all members to register with the United States government as agents of a foreign power (Russia).
3. Publish a list of all the members of the Communist Party so that everyone in the country will know who they are.
4. Publish a list of all people who shared some of the same ideas with the communists.
5. Establish a special branch of government to find out who are members of the Communist Party.
6. Establish a special branch of government to find out who are members of the Communist Party and what people and organizations might share the same or similar ideas with the Communist Party.
7. Do nothing.

### **How To Deal With Communists In Other Areas of Employment**

1. Publish lists of Communist Party members and encourage businesses and labor unions to fire them.
2. Publish lists of people who were once Communist Party members and encourage businesses and labor unions to fire them.
3. Publish lists of people who have ideas that are shared by the communists and encourage businesses and labor unions to fire them.
4. Make it illegal to hire a member of the Communist Party.
5. Make it illegal to hire a person who has ever been a member of the Communist Party.
6. Make it illegal to hire a person who has ideas that are similar to the communists.
7. Do nothing.

**McCarthyism**

During the 1930's leftist causes were fashionable. Many people belonged to the Socialist Party and some college students joined the Communist Party or one of its affiliate groups. A large number of Americans thought that our government should do more for human welfare than it was doing. For most, belonging to a socialist club or a "communist front" organization was a passing thing, done when they were young and idealistic. Some did not belong to any organization but clung to their ideals.

With the beginning of the Cold War, President Harry Truman took the lead in getting "leftists" out of the government. Labor unions, where communists were strongest, purged themselves of any left-leaning leaders. However, the most famous "communist hunter" was Senator Joseph McCarthy. McCarthy claimed there were large numbers of communists in the U.S. State Department and Army. It is his name that is used to describe the anti-communist hysteria that swept the country.

McCarthy was not the only one seeking to root out communists. The Senate had its Internal Security committee and the House had the Un-American Activities Committee. There was also the FBI and there was a Federal Employee Loyalty Program that checked on the loyalty of 4,750,000 federal employees. As the result of this program 560 people were fired or denied employment. However, not one instance of espionage was uncovered. It should be pointed out that Senator McCarthy, in spite of his claims of communists in the government, never found one single communist.

There were some spies uncovered by the FBI. The most famous were the Rosenbergs who were executed for passing atomic bomb secrets to the Russians.

The committees, such as McCarthy's and HUAC, called people to testify about their supposed communist affiliations. Many of these people lost their jobs in private industry because they were investigated by the government even though they were not communists. In Hollywood, a list of people who were suspected was drawn up and distributed to movie producers. These people were not hired to make movies.

The Federal Government and most state governments required employees to sign a loyalty oath.

Communist Party members were also required to register with the Department of Justice.