

The Red Scare

By Sharon Fabian

During the Cold War years, Americans feared communism. We were afraid that communists would sneak in and take over our government. Recent events had given us reasons to be afraid. Communists were taking over in another large country - China. They were gaining ground in Korea and other places too. Then, some American citizens were found guilty of spying for the Communists. Soon, whenever people heard a neighbor talking about communism, they listened closely. Could this neighbor be a communist too?

Suspicious spread until, soon, people everywhere were being accused. A reasonable fear had turned into an unreasonable witch-hunt. People were accused of being a communist, of helping communists, of spying for the communists, of meeting with communists, and of agreeing with communist ideas. These suspicions and accusations had serious results. People suspected of having communist beliefs were called in to testify before the government. Many lost their jobs and their good reputations.

The Red Scare really took hold in Hollywood. Employers in the entertainment industry there had a list of people who might have some ties to communism. It was called a blacklist. Anyone whose name appeared on the blacklist would not be hired to work in the entertainment industry. After the blacklist came out, hundreds of actors, musicians, and writers could not find work.

Leonard Bernstein was one of them. He was a famous orchestra conductor. He wrote music for great films like *West Side Story* and *To Kill a Mockingbird*. That did not keep his name from appearing on the blacklist.

Another famous musician on the list was Pete Seeger. Pete Seeger's songs had been a big part of the anti-war movement. One of his most famous is "Where Have All the Flowers Gone?" It talks about young men who go to war and countries that participate in wars. It asks, "When will they ever learn?"

Pete Seeger had to testify before the government. He said that his beliefs were different from the beliefs of some other Americans, but that he loved his country.

The Red Scare also spread into government offices. In 1950, Senator Joseph McCarthy made a speech. In this speech, he accused 57 people in the government of belonging to the American Communist Party. Others in the government were afraid to speak out against McCarthy. Maybe they were afraid of being accused too. One of the worst insults that you could say about a person at that time was to accuse them of being "soft on communism."

Thankfully, the communist witch-hunt finally ended. McCarthy and others who had used blacklists were forced to stop. The Supreme Court passed down rulings that protected the rights of people with differing points of view.

Even in a good, democratic system of government, bad things like the Red Scare can happen. Then it is especially important to have good leaders, lawmakers, and judges: people who can prevent the problem from getting out of control. Like the folk singer Pete Seeger said, we can be proud of our country because it took care of the problem.



Name _____



Date _____

The Red Scare

Questions

- _____ 1. The Red Scare was a fear of _____.
 - A. war
 - B. democracy
 - C. entertainers and politicians
 - D. communism

- _____ 2. People were put on a blacklist based on _____.
 - A. suspicions
 - B. confessions
 - C. court decisions
 - D. evidence

- _____ 3. From the information in the article, you can infer that all of the people blacklisted were guilty of being communist spies.
 - A. true
 - B. false

- _____ 4. Joseph McCarthy was a/an _____.
 - A. Songwriter
 - B. entertainer
 - C. Supreme Court Justice
 - D. senator

- _____ 5. From the information in the article, we know that Pete Seeger was a _____.
 - A. senator
 - B. singer
 - C. criminal
 - D. communist

- _____ 6. Pete Seeger wrote a song that criticized _____.
 - A. war
 - B. the president
 - C. communists
 - D. all American citizens

- _____ 7. *West Side Story* is a/an _____.
 - A. play about communism
 - B. movie
 - C. anti-war song
 - D. government report

- _____ 8. Much of the blacklisting took place in Hollywood. This may have been because _____.
 - A. the Senate and the House of Representatives meets in Hollywood
 - B. the president lives there
 - C. entertainers are important because they influence many people
 - D. all of the actors had joined the Communist Party.

