Why I Wrote The Crucible: An Artist's Answer to Politics  
By Arthur Miller

As I watched The Crucible taking shape as a movie over much of the past year, the sheer depth of time that it represents for me kept returning to mind. As those powerful actors blossomed on the screen, and the children and the horses, the crowds and the wagons, I thought again about how I came to cook all this up nearly fifty years ago, in an America almost nobody I know seems to remember clearly. In a way, there is a biting irony in this film's having been made by a Hollywood studio, something unimaginable in the fifties. But there they are -- Daniel Day-Lewis (John Proctor) scything his sea-bordered field, Joan Allen (Elizabeth) lying pregnant in the frigid jail, Winona Ryder (Abigail) stealing her minister-uncle's money, majestic Paul Scofield (Judge Danforth) and his righteous empathy with the Devil-possessed children, and all of them looking as inevitable as rain.

I remember those years -- they formed The Crucible's skeleton -- but I have lost the dead weight of the fear I had then. Fear doesn't travel well; just as it can warp judgment, its absence can diminish memory's truth. What terrifies one generation is likely to bring only a puzzled smile to the next. I remember how in 1964, only twenty years after the war, Harold Clurman, the director of Incident at Vichy, showed the cast a film of a Hitler speech, hoping to give them a sense of the Nazi period in which my play took place. They watched as Hitler, facing a vast stadium full of adoring people, went up on his toes in ecstasy, hands clasped under his chin, a sublimely self-gratified grin on his face, his body swivelling rather cutely, and they giggled at his overacting.

Likewise, films of Senator Joseph McCarthy are rather unsettling -- if you remember the fear he once spread. Buzzing his truculent sidewalk brawler's snarl through the hairs in his nose, squinting through his cat's eyes and sneering like a villain, he comes across now as nearly comical, a self-aware performer keeping a straight face as he does his juicy threat-shtick.

McCarthy's power to stir fears of creeping Communism was not entirely based on illusion, of course; the paranoid, real or pretended, always secretes its pearl around a grain of fact. From being our wartime ally, the Soviet Union rapidly became a expanding empire. In 1949, Mao Zedong took power in China. Western Europe also seemed ready to become Red -- especially Italy, where the Communist Party was the largest outside Russia, and was growing. Capitalism, in the opinion of many, myself included, had nothing more to say, its final poisoned bloom having been Italian and German Fascism. McCarthy -- brash and ill-mannered but to many authentic and true -- boiled it all down to what anyone could understand: we had "lost China" and would soon lose Europe as well, because the State Department -- staffed, of course, under Democratic Presidents -- was full of treasonous pro-Soviet intellectuals. It was as simple as that.

If our losing China seemed the equivalent of a flea's losing an elephant, it was still a phrase -- and a conviction -- that one did not dare to question; to do so was to risk drawing suspicion on oneself. Indeed, the State Department proceeded to hound and fire the officers who knew China, its language, and its opaque culture -- a move that suggested the practitioners of sympathetic magic who wring the neck of a doll in order to make a distant enemy's head drop off. There was magic all around; the politics of alien conspiracy soon dominated political discourse and bid fair to wipe out any other issue. How could one deal with such enormities in a play?
The Crucible was an act of desperation. Much of my desperation branched out, I suppose, from a typical Depression -- era trauma -- the blow struck on the mind by the rise of European Fascism and the brutal anti-Semitism it had brought to power. But by 1950, when I began to think of writing about the hunt for Reds in America, I was motivated in some great part by the paralysis that had set in among many liberals who, despite their discomfort with the inquisitors' violations of civil rights, were fearful, and with good reason, of being identified as covert Communists if they should protest too strongly.

In any play, however trivial, there has to be a still point of moral reference against which to gauge the action. In our lives, in the late nineteen-forties and early nineteen-fifties, no such point existed anymore. The left could not look straight at the Soviet Union's abrogations of human rights. The anti-Communist liberals could not acknowledge the violations of those rights by congressional committees. The far right, meanwhile, was licking all the cream. The days of "J'accuse" were gone, for anyone needs to feel right to declare someone else wrong. Gradually, all the old political and moral reality had melted like a Dali watch. Nobody but a fanatic, it seemed, could really say all that he believed.

President Truman was among the first to have to deal with the dilemma, and his way of resolving itself having to trim his sails before the howling gale on the right-turned out to be momentous. At first, he was outraged at the allegation of widespread Communist infiltration of the government and called the charge of "coddling Communists" a red herring dragged in by the Republicans to bring down the Democrats. But such was the gathering power of raw belief in the great Soviet plot that Truman soon felt it necessary to institute loyalty boards of his own.

The Red hunt, led by the House Committee on Un-American Activities and by McCarthy, was becoming the dominating fixation of the American psyche. It reached Hollywood when the studios, after first resisting, agreed to submit artists' names to the House Committee for "clearing" before employing them. This unleashed a veritable holy terror among actors, directors, and others, from Party members to those who had had the merest brush with a front organization.

The Soviet plot was the hub of a great wheel of causation; the plot justified the crushing of all nuance, all the shadings that a realistic judgment of reality requires. Even worse was the feeling that our sensitivity to this onslaught on our liberties was passing from us -- indeed, from me. In Timebends, my autobiography, I recalled the time I'd written a screenplay (The Hook) about union corruption on the Brooklyn waterfront. Harry Cohn, the head of Columbia Pictures, did something that would once have been considered unthinkable: he showed my script to the F.B.I. Cohn then asked me to take the gangsters in my script, who were threatening and murdering their opponents, and simply change them to Communists. When I declined to commit this idiocy (Joe Ryan, the head of the longshoremen's union, was soon to go to Sing Sing for racketeering), I got a wire from Cohn saying, "The minute we try to make the script pro-American you pull out." By then -- it was 1951 -- I had come to accept this terribly serious insanity as routine, but there was an element of the marvelous in it which I longed to put on the stage.

In those years, our thought processes were becoming so magical, so paranoid, that to imagine writing a play about this environment was like trying to pick one's teeth with a ball of wool: I lacked the tools to illuminate miasma. Yet I kept being drawn back to it.

I had read about the witchcraft trials in college, but it was not until I read a book published in 1867 -- a two-volume, thousand-page study by Charles W. Upham, who was then the mayor of Salem -- that I knew I had to write about the period. Upham had not only written a broad and thorough investigation of what was even then an almost lost chapter of Salem's past but opened up to me the details of personal relationships among many participants in the tragedy.
I visited Salem for the first time on a dismal spring day in 1952; it was a sidetracked town then, with abandoned factories and vacant stores. In the gloomy courthouse there I read the transcripts of the witchcraft trials of 1692, as taken down in a primitive shorthand by ministers who were spelling each other. But there was one entry in Upham in which the thousands of pieces I had come across were jogged into place. It was from a report written by the Reverend Samuel Parris, who was one of the chief instigators of the witch-hunt. "During the examination of Elizabeth Procter, Abigail Williams and Ann Putnam" -- the two were "afflicted" teen-age accusers, and Abigail was Parris's niece -- "both made offer to strike at said Procter; but when Abigail's hand came near, it opened, whereas it was made up, into a fist before, and came down exceeding lightly as it drew near to said Procter, and at length, with open and extended fingers, touched Procter's hood very lightly. Immediately Abigail cried out her fingers, her fingers, her fingers burned..."

In this remarkably observed gesture of a troubled young girl, I believed, a play became possible. Elizabeth Proctor had been the orphaned Abigail's mistress, and they had lived together in the same small house until Elizabeth fired the girl. By this time, I was sure, John Proctor had bedded Abigail, who had to be dismissed most likely to appease Elizabeth. There was bad blood between the two women now. That Abigail started, in effect, to condemn Elizabeth to death with her touch, then stopped her hand, then went through with it, was quite suddenly the human center of all this turmoil.

All this I understood. I had not approached the witchcraft out of nowhere or from purely social and political considerations. My own marriage of twelve years was teetering and I knew more than I wished to know about where the blame lay. That John Proctor the sinner might overturn his paralyzing personal guilt and become the most forthright voice against the madness around him was a reassurance to me, and, I suppose, an inspiration: it demonstrated that a clear moral outcry could still spring even from an ambiguously unblemished soul. Moving crabwise across the profusion of evidence, I sensed that I had at last found something of myself in it, and a play began to accumulate around this man.

But as the dramatic form became visible, one problem remained unyielding: so many practices of the Salem trials were similar to those employed by the congressional committees that I could easily be accused of skewing history for a mere partisan purpose. Inevitably, it was no sooner known that my new play was about Salem than I had to confront the charge that such an analogy was specious -- that there never were any witches but there certainly are Communists. In the seventeenth century, however, the existence of witches was never questioned by the loftiest minds in Europe and America; and even lawyers of the highest eminence, like Sir Edward Coke, a veritable hero of liberty for defending the common law against the king's arbitrary power, believed that witches had to be prosecuted mercilessly. Of course, there were no Communists in 1692, but it was literally worth your life to deny witches or their powers, given the exhortation in the Bible, "Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live." There had to be witches in the world or the Bible lied. Indeed, the very structure of evil depended on Lucifer's plotting against God. (And the irony is that klatches of Luciferians exist all over the country today, there may even be more of them now than there are Communists.)

As with most humans, panic sleeps in one unlighted corner of my soul. When I walked at night along the empty, wet streets of Salem in the week that I spent there, I could easily work myself into imagining my terror before a gaggle of young girls flying down the road screaming that somebody's "familiar spirit" was chasing them. This anxiety-laden leap backward over nearly three centuries may have been helped along by a particular Upham footnote. At a certain point, the high court of the province made the fatal decision to admit, for the first time, the use of "spectral evidence" as proof of guilt. Spectral evidence, so aptly named, meant that if I swore that you had sent out your "familiar spirit" to choke, tickle, poison me or my cattle, or to control thoughts and actions, I could get you hanged unless you confessed to having had
contact with the Devil. After all, only the Devil could lend such powers of visible transport to confederates, in his everlasting plot to bring down Christianity.

Naturally, the best proof of the sincerity of your confession was your naming others whom you had seen in the Devil company -- an invitation to private vengeance, but made official by the seal of the theocratic state. It was as though the court had grown tired of thinking and had invited in the instincts: spectral evidence -- that poisoned cloud of paranoid fantasy -- made a kind of lunatic sense to them, as it did in plot-ridden 1952, when so often the question was not the acts of an accused but the thoughts and intentions in his alienated mind.

The breathtaking circularity of the process had a kind of poetic tightness. Not everybody was accused, after all, so there must be some reason why you were. By denying that there is any reason whatsoever for you to be accused, you are implying, by virtue of a surprisingly small logical leap, that mere chance picked you out, which in turn implies that the Devil might not really be at work in the village or, God forbid, even exist. Therefore, the investigation itself is either mistaken or a fraud. You would have to be a crypto-Luciferian to say that -- not a great idea if you wanted to go back to your farm.

The more I read into the Salem panic, the more it touched off corresponding ages of common experiences in the fifties: the old friend of a blacklisted person crossing the street to avoid being seen talking to him; the overnight conversions of former leftists into born-again patriots; and so on. Apparently, certain processes are universal. When Gentiles in Hitler's Germany, for example, saw their Jewish neighbors being trucked off, or rs in Soviet Ukraine saw the Kulaks sing before their eyes, the common reaction, even among those unsympathetic to Nazism or Communism, was quite naturally to turn away in fear of being identified with the condemned. As I learned from non-Jewish refugees, however there was often a despairing pity mixed with "Well, they must have done something." Few of us can easily surrender our belief that society must somehow make sense. The thought that the state has lost its mind and is punishing so many innocent people is intolerable. And so the evidence has to be internally denied.

I was also drawn into writing The Crucible by the chance it gave me to use a new language -- that of seventeenth-century New England. That plain, craggy English was liberating in a strangely sensuous way, with its swings from an almost legalistic precision to a wonderful metaphoric richness. "The Lord doth terrible things amongst us, by lengthening the chain of the roaring lion in an extraordinary manner, so that the Devil is come down in great wrath," Deodat Lawson, one of the great witch-hunting preachers, said in a sermon. Lawson rallied his congregation for what was to be nothing less than a religious war against the Evil One -- "Arm, arm, arm!" -- and his concealed anti-Christian accomplices.

But it was not yet my language, and among other strategies to make it mine I enlisted the help of a former University of Michigan classmate, the Greek-American scholar and poet Kimon Friar. (He later translated Kazantzakis.) The problem was not to imitate the archaic speech but to try to create a new echo of it which would flow freely off American actors' tongues. As in the film, nearly fifty years later, the actors in the first production grabbed the language and ran with it as happily as if it were their customary speech.

The Crucible took me about a year to write. With its five sets and a cast of twenty-one, it never occurred to me that it would take a brave man to produce it on Broadway, especially given the prevailing climate, but Kermit Bloomgarden never faltered. Well before the play opened, a strange tension had begun to build. Only two years earlier, the Death of a Salesman touring company had played to a thin crowd in Peoria, Illinois, having been boycotted nearly to death by the American Legion and the Jaycees. Before that, the Catholic War Veterans had prevailed upon the Army not to allow its theatrical groups to perform, first, All My Sons, and then any play of mine, in occupied Europe. The Dramatists Guild refused to protest attacks on a new play by Sean O'Casey, a self-declared Communist, which forced its producer to cancel
his option. I knew of two suicides by actors depressed by upcoming investigation, and every day seemed to bring news of people exiling themselves to Europe: Charlie Chaplin, the director Joseph Losey, Jules Dassin, the harmonica virtuoso Larry Adler, Donald Ogden Stewart, one of the most sought-after screenwriters in Hollywood, and Sam Wanamaker, who would lead the successful campaign to rebuild the Old Globe Theatre on the Thames.

On opening night, January 22, 1953, I knew that the atmosphere would be pretty hostile. The coldness of the crowd was not a surprise; Broadway audiences were not famous for loving history lessons, which is what they made of the play. It seems to me entirely appropriate that on the day the play opened, a newspaper headline read "ALL 13 REDS GUILTY" -- a story about American Communists who faced prison for "conspiring to teach and advocate the duty and necessity of forcible overthrow of government." Meanwhile, the remoteness of the production was guaranteed by the director, Jed Harris, who insisted that this was a classic requiring the actors to face front, never each other. The critics were not swept away. "Arthur Miller is a problem playwright in both senses of the word," wrote Walter Kerr of the Herald Tribune, who called the play "a step backward into mechanical parable." The Times was not much kinder, saying, "There is too much excitement and not enough emotion in The Crucible." But the play's future would turn out quite differently.

About a year later, a new production, one with younger, less accomplished actors, working in the Martinique Hotel ballroom, played with the fervor that the script and the times required, and The Crucible became a hit. The play stumbled into history, and today, I am told, it is one of the most heavily demanded trade-fiction paperbacks in this country; the Bantam and Penguin editions have sold more than six million copies. I don't think there has been a week in the past forty-odd years when it hasn't been on a stage somewhere in the world. Nor is the new screen version the first. Jean-Paul Sartre, in his Marxist phase, wrote a French film adaptation that blamed the tragedy on the rich landowners conspiring to persecute the poor. (In truth, most of those who were hanged in Salem were people of substance, and two or three were very large landowners.)

It is only a slight exaggeration to say that, especially in Latin America, The Crucible starts getting produced wherever a political coup appears imminent, or a dictatorial regime has just been overthrown. From Argentina to Chile to Greece, Czechoslovakia, China, and a dozen other places, the play seems to present the same primeval structure of human sacrifice to the furies of fanaticism and paranoia that goes on repeating itself forever as though imbedded in the brain of social man.

I am not sure what The Crucible is telling people now, but I know that its paranoid center is still pumping out the same darkly attractive warning that it did in the fifties. For some, the play seems to be about the dilemma of relying on the testimony of small children accusing adults of sexual abuse, something I'd not have dreamed of forty years ago. For others, it may simply be a fascination with the outbreak of paranoia that suffuses the play -- the blind panic that, in our age, often seems to sit at the dim edges of consciousness. Certainly its political implications are the central issue for many people; the Salem interrogations turn out to be eerily exact models of those yet to come in Stalin's Russia, Pinochet's Chile, Mao's China, and other regimes. (Nien Cheng, the author of "Life and Death in Shanghai," has told me that she could hardly believe that a non-Chinese -- someone who had not experienced the Cultural Revolution -- had written the play.) But below its concerns with justice the play evokes a lethal brew of illicit sexuality, fear of the supernatural, and political manipulation, a combination not unfamiliar these days. The film, by reaching the broad American audience as no play ever can, may well unearth still other connections to those buried public terrors that Salem first announced on this continent.

One thing more -- something wonderful in the old sense of that word. I recall the weeks I spent reading testimony by the tome, commentaries, broadsides, confessions, and accusations. And always the crucial
damning event was the signing of one's name in "the Devil's book." This Faustian agreement to hand over one's soul to the dreaded Lord of Darkness was the ultimate insult to God. But what were these new inductees supposed to have done once they'd signed on? Nobody seems even to have thought to ask. But, of course, actions are as irrelevant during cultural and religious wars as they are in nightmares. The thing at issue is buried intentions -- the secret allegiances of the alienated hearts always the main threat to the theocratic mind, as well as its immemorial quarry.
Quick Facts

- NAME: Arthur Asher Miller
- OCCUPATION: Playwright
- BIRTH DATE: October 17, 1915
- DEATH DATE: February 10, 2005
- EDUCATION: University of Michigan
- PLACE OF BIRTH: New York City, New York
- PLACE OF DEATH: Roxbury, Connecticut
- AKA: Arthur Miller

Best Known For

Arthur Miller was an American playwright whose biting criticism of societal problems defined his genius. His best known play is *Death of a Salesman*.

Arthur Miller biography

Synopsis

Born in Harlem, New York in 1915, Arthur Miller attended the University of Michigan before moving back east to produce plays for the stage. His first critical and popular success was *Death of a Salesman*, which opened on Broadway in 1949. His very colorful public life was painted in part by his rocky marriage to Marilyn Monroe, and his unwavering refusal to cooperate with the House of Un-American Activities Committee. He was married three times and died in 2005, at the age of 89.

Early Life

Born in Harlem, New York on October 17, 1915, Arthur Miller was raised in a moderately affluent household until his family lost almost everything in the Wall Street Crash of 1929. They subsequently fired the chauffeur and moved from the Upper East Side in Manhattan to Gravesend, Brooklyn. After graduating high school, Miller worked a few odd jobs to save enough money to attend the University of Michigan. While in college, he wrote for the student paper and complete his first play, *No Villain*. He also took courses with the much-loved playwright professor Kenneth Rowe, a man who taught his students
how to construct a play in order to achieve an intended effect. Inspired by Rowe's approach, Miller moved back east to begin his career.

**Playwriting Career**

Things started out a bit rocky: His 1940 play, *The Man Who Had All the Luck*, garnered precisely the antithesis of its title, closing after just four performances and a stack of woeful reviews. Six years later, however, *All My Sons* achieved success on Broadway, and earned him his first Tony Award (best author). Working in the small studio that he built in Roxbury, Connecticut, Miller wrote the first act of *Death of Salesman* in less than a day. It opened on February 10, 1949 at the Morosco Theatre, and was adored by nearly everyone. *Salesman* won him the triple crown of theatrical artistry: the Pulitzer Prize, the New York Drama Critics' Circle Award and a Tony.

In 1956, Miller left his first wife, Mary Slattery. Shortly thereafter, he married famed actress [Marilyn Monroe](http://www.biography.com/people/arthur-miller-9408335). Later that year, the House of Un-American Activities Committee refused to renew Miller's passport, and called him in to appear before the committee—his play, *The Crucible*, a dramatization of the Salem witch trials of 1692 and an allegory of McCarthyism, was the foremost reason for their strong-armed summons. However, Miller refused to comply with the committee's demands to "out" people who had been active in certain political activities.

In 1961, Monroe starred in *The Misfits*, a film for which Miller supplied the screenplay. Around the same time, Monroe and Miller divorced.

Within several months, Miller married Austrian-born photographer Inge Morath. The couple had two children, Rebecca and Daniel. Miller insisted that their son, Daniel, who was born with down syndrome, be completely excluded from the family's personal life. Miller's son-in-law, actor [Daniel Day-Lewis](http://www.biography.com/people/arthur-miller-9408335), visited his wife's brother frequently, and eventually persuaded Miller to reunite with his adult son.

**Final Years**

In his final years, Miller's work continued to grapple with the weightiest of societal and personal matters. His last play of note was *The Price* (1968), a piece about family dynamics. In 2002, Miller's third wife, Inges, died. The famed playwright promptly took a fourth wife, 34-year-old minimalist painter Agnes Barley. The two planned to marry, but on February 10, 2005 (the 56th anniversary of *Death of a Salesman*'s Broadway debut), Arthur Miller, surrounded by Barley, family and friends, died of heart failure. He was 89 years old.

**Red Scare**

As the Cold War between the Soviet Union and the United States intensified in the late 1940s and early 1950s, hysteria over the perceived threat posed by Communists in the U.S. became known as the Red Scare. (Communists were often referred to as "Reds" for their allegiance to the red Soviet flag.) The Red Scare led to a range of actions that had a profound and enduring effect on U.S. government and society. Federal employees were analyzed to determine whether they were sufficiently loyal to the government, and the House Un-American Activities Committee, as well as U.S. Senator Joseph R. McCarthy, investigated allegations of subversive elements in the government and the Hollywood film industry. The climate of fear and repression linked to the Red Scare finally began to ease by the late 1950s.

**Cold War Concerns about Communism**

Following World War II (1939-45), the democratic United States and the communist Soviet Union became engaged in a series of largely political and economic clashes known as the Cold War. The intense rivalry between the two superpowers raised concerns in the United States that Communists and leftist sympathizers inside America might actively work as Soviet spies and pose a threat to U.S. security.

Such ideas were not totally unfounded. The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) had long carried out espionage activities inside America with the aid of U.S. citizens, particularly during World War II. As apprehension about Soviet influence grew as the Cold War heated up, U.S. leaders decided to take action. On March 21, 1947, President Harry S. Truman (1884-1972) issued Executive Order 9835, also known as the Loyalty Order, which mandated that all federal employees be analyzed to determine whether they were sufficiently loyal to the government. Truman's loyalty program was a startling development for a country that prized the concepts of personal liberty and freedom of political organization. Yet it was only one of many questionable activities that occurred during the period of anticommunist hysteria known as the Red Scare.

**Probing Red Influence**

One of the pioneering efforts to investigate communist activities took place in the U.S. House of Representatives, where the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) was formed in 1938. HUAC's investigations frequently focused on exposing Communists working inside the federal government or subversive elements working in the Hollywood film industry, and the committee gained new momentum following World War II, as the Cold War began. Under pressure from the negative publicity aimed at their studios, movie executives created blacklists that barred suspected radicals from employment; similar lists were also established in other industries.

Another congressional investigator, U.S. Senator Joseph R. McCarthy (1908-57) of Wisconsin, became the person most closely associated with the anticommunist crusade--and with its excesses. McCarthy used hearsay and intimidation to establish himself as a powerful and feared figure in American politics. He leveled charges of disloyalty at celebrities, intellectuals and anyone who disagreed with his political views, costing many of his victims their reputations and jobs. McCarthy's reign of terror continued until his colleagues formally denounced his tactics in 1954.

The FBI and its longtime director, J. Edgar Hoover (1895-1972), aided many of the legislative investigations of communist activities. An ardent anticommunist, Hoover had been a key player in an earlier, though less pervasive, Red Scare in the years following World War I (1914-18). With the dawning of the new anticommunist crusade in the late 1940s, Hoover's agency compiled extensive files on
suspected subversives through the use of wiretaps, surveillance and the infiltration of leftist groups.

The information obtained by the FBI proved essential in high-profile legal cases, including the 1949 conviction of 12 prominent leaders of the American Communist Party on charges that they had advocated the overthrow of the government. Moreover, Hoover's agents helped build the case against Julius Rosenberg (1918-53) and his wife, Ethel Rosenberg (1915-53), who were convicted of espionage in 1951 and executed two years later.

**Hysteria and Growing Conservatism**

Public concerns about communism were heightened by international events. In 1949, the Soviet Union successfully tested a nuclear bomb and communist forces led by Mao Zedong (1893-1976) took control of China. The following year saw the start of the Korean War (1950-53), which engaged U.S. troops in combat against the communist-supported forces of North Korea. The advances of communism around the world convinced many U.S. citizens that there was a real danger of “Reds” taking over their own country. Figures such as McCarthy and Hoover fanned the flames of fear by wildly exaggerating that possibility.

As the Red Scare intensified, its political climate turned increasingly conservative. Elected officials from both major parties sought to portray themselves as staunch anticommunists, and few people dared to criticize the questionable tactics used to persecute suspected radicals. Membership in leftist groups dropped as it became clear that such associations could lead to serious consequences, and dissenting voices from the left side of the political spectrum fell silent on a range of important issues. In judicial affairs, for example, support for free speech and other civil liberties eroded significantly. This trend was symbolized by the 1951 U.S. Supreme Court ruling in Dennis v. United States, which said that the free-speech rights of accused Communists could be restricted because their actions presented a clear and present danger to the government.

Americans also felt the effects of the Red Scare on a personal level, and thousands of alleged communist sympathizers saw their lives disrupted. They were hounded by law enforcement, alienated from friends and family and fired from their jobs. While a small number of the accused may have been aspiring revolutionaries, most others were the victims of false allegations or had done nothing more than exercise their democratic right to join a political party. Though the climate of fear and repression began to ease in the late 1950s, the Red Scare has continued to influence political debate in the decades since and is often cited as an example of how unfounded fears can compromise civil liberties.

Senator Joseph McCarthy

Senator Joseph McCarthy was the leading American anticommunist figure in the late 1940s and early 50s. McCarthy himself was a product of Wisconsin. He left school at 14 years of age to tend to a farm. Six years later he returned and completed High School. The following year he was a student at Marquette University. He received his law degree from that institution in 1935. Eleven years later, he was elected to the Senate.

McCarthy first began his witch hunt in February of 1950 in Wheeling, West Virginia. This is when he waved a piece of paper and claimed it had the names of 205 Communist Party members who held high positions in the State Department. A special committee looked into the accusations, and then denounced them all as false, and attacked McCarthy for unethical tactics. For the next couple of years these attacks continued, on several people, no one was safe.

After winning reelection in 1952, McCarthy had guaranteed himself a position of chairman of the Permanent Investigations Subcommittee of the Senate Government Operations Committee. His first attack was on Charles E. Bohlen. This was the man who President Eisenhower had nominated for the ambassador to the Soviet Union. This accusation put quite a distance between the President and the Senator.

Each new investigation into McCarthy's accusations drove him into further excess. In November of 1953, he attacked President Eisenhower on national television of not acting to eliminate subversives from the federal government and that America had been "reduced to a state of whining and whimpering appeasement."

In December of 1953, McCarthy accused one person too many. This time the communist was supposed to be Major Irving Peress, who was a member of the left-wing American Labor Party. In November of 1953 Peress had been routinely promoted to the rank of major under the Doctor Draft Law, although he invoked the 5th Amendment when asked about loyalty. A few weeks later the Pentagon learned of his background, and ordered a discharge. McCarthy called Peress before his subcommittee on January 30, 1954. When McCarthy asked about the loyalty of Peress, he again took the 5th. McCarthy then demanded that Peress be court-martialed, but the process of the discharge had already started. Immediately after his appearance before McCarthy, Peress was given an honorable discharge.

From this point on, the public image of McCarthy dwindled. Politicians and comedians everywhere took part in the bashing. Perhaps the most damaging of attack came from then Vice President Richard Nixon, who speaking on behalf of the administration on March 13th, 1954, he denounced "reckless talk and questionable methods" of McCarthyites. From here it was only a matter of time. On December 2, 1954, the Senate voted to censure McCarthy by a vote of 67 to 22. McCarthy responded with a bitter attack on the Eisenhower administration, and apologized to the American people for urging them to vote for Eisenhower. His health deteriorated, and he began to drink. McCarthy died on May 2, 1957. The official cause of death was acute hepatitis. However, according to a number of sources, it was due to liver cirrhosis.

http://library.thinkquest.org/10826/mccarthy.htm
McCarthyism

http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/USAmccarthyism.htm

The Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) was originally established in 1937 under the chairmanship of Martin Dies. The main objective of the HUAC was the investigation of un-American and subversive activities. Soon after his appointment Dies received a telegram from the Ku Klux Klan:
"Every true American, and that includes every Klansman, is behind you and your committee in its effort to turn the country back to the honest, freedom-loving, God-fearing American to whom it belongs."

The HUCA originally investigated both left-wing and right wing political groups. Some called for the leaders of the Ku Klux Klan to be interrogated by the HUAC. Martin Dies however was a supporter of the Klan and had spoken at several of its rallies. Other members of the HUAC such as John Rankin and John S. Wood were also Klan sympathizers. Wood defended the Klan by arguing that: "The threats and intimidations of the Klan are an old American custom, like illegal whisky-making."

Eventually Ernest Adamson, the HUAC's chief counsel, announced that: "The committee has decided that it lacks sufficient data on which to base a probe." John Rankin added: After all, the KKK is an old American institution." Instead, the HUAC concentrated on investigating the possibility that the American Communist Party had infiltrated the Federal Writers Project and other New Deal projects.

Martin Dies soon came under attack from those who saw the HUCA as a method of blocking progressive policies being advocated by Franklin D. Roosevelt. This was reflected in the comments made by Vito Marcantonio. "It has become the most convenient method by which you wrap yourselves in the American flag in order to cover up some of the greasy stains on the legislative toga. You can vote against the unemployed, you can vote against the W.P.A. workers, and you can emasculate the Bill of Rights of the Constitution of the United States; you can try to destroy the National Labor Relations Law, the Magna Carta of American labor; you can vote against the farmer; and you can do all that with a great deal of impunity, because after you have done so you do not have to explain your vote."

The Alien Registration Act passed by Congress on 29th June, 1940, made it illegal for anyone in the United States to advocate, abet, or teach the desirability of overthrowing the government. The law also required all alien residents in the United States over 14 years of age to file a comprehensive statement of their personal and occupational status and a record of their political beliefs. Within four months a total of 4,741,971 aliens had been registered.

The main objective of the Alien Registration Act was to undermine the American Communist Party and other left-wing political groups in the United States. It was decided that the House of Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC), that had been set up by Congress under Martin Dies in 1938 to investigate people suspected of unpatriotic behaviour, would be the best vehicle to discover if people were trying to overthrow the government.

In 1947 the House of Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC), chaired by J. Parnell Thomas, began an investigation into the Hollywood Motion Picture Industry. The HUAC interviewed 41 people who were working in Hollywood. These people attended voluntarily and became known as "friendly witnesses". During their interviews they named nineteen people who they accused of holding left-wing views.
One of those named, Bertolt Brecht, a playwright, gave evidence and then left for East Germany. Ten others: Herbert Biberman, Lester Cole, Albert Maltz, Adrian Scott, Samuel Ornitz, Dalton Trumbo, Edward Dmytryk, Ring Lardner Jr., John Howard Lawson and Alvah Bessie refused to answer any questions.

Known as the Hollywood Ten, they claimed that the 1st Amendment of the United States Constitution gave them the right to do this. The House of Un-American Activities Committee and the courts during appeals disagreed and they all were found guilty of contempt of congress and each was sentenced to between six and twelve months in prison.

Larry Parks was the only actor in the original nineteen people named. He was also the only person on the list who the average moviegoer would have known. Parks agreed to give evidence to the HUAC and admitted that he had joined the Communist Party in 1941 but left it four years later. When asked for the names of fellow members, Parks replied: "I would prefer, if you would allow me, not to mention other people's names. Don't present me with the choice of either being in contempt of this Committee and going to jail or forcing me to really crawl through the mud to be an informer."

The House of Un-American Activities Committee insisted that Parks answered all the questions asked. The HUAC had a private session and two days later it was leaked to the newspapers that Parks had named names. Leo Townsend, Isobel Lennart, Roy Huggins, Richard Collins, Lee J. Cobb, Budd Schulberg and Elia Kazan, afraid they would go to prison, were also willing to name people who had been members of left-wing groups.

In June, 1950, three former FBI agents and a right-wing television producer, Vincent Harnett, published Red Channels, a pamphlet listing the names of 151 writers, directors and performers who they claimed had been members of subversive organisations before the Second World War but had not so far been blacklisted. The names had been compiled from FBI files and a detailed analysis of the Daily Worker, a newspaper published by the American Communist Party.

A free copy of Red Channels was sent to those involved in employing people in the entertainment industry. All those people named in the pamphlet were blacklisted until they appeared in front of the House of Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) and convinced its members they had completely renounced their radical past.

Edward Dmytryk, one of the original Hollywood Ten, had financial problems as a result of divorcing his wife. Faced with having to sell his plane and encouraged by his new wife, Dmytryk decided to try to get his name removed from the blacklist. On 25th April, 1951, Dmytryk appeared before the House of Un-American Activities Committee again. This time he answered all their questions including the naming of twenty-six former members of left-wing groups.

Dmytryk also revealed how people such as John Howard Lawson, Adrian Scott and Albert Maltz had put him under pressure to make sure his films expressed the views of the Communist Party. This was particularly damaging to those members of the original Hollywood Ten who were at that time involved in court cases with their previous employers.

If people refused to name names when called up to appear before the HUAC, they were added to a blacklist that had been drawn up by the Hollywood film studios. Over 320 people were placed on this list
that stopped them from working in the entertainment industry. This included Larry Adler, Stella Adler, Leonard Bernstein, Marc Blitzstein, Joseph Bromberg, Charlie Chaplin, Aaron Copland, Hanns Eisler, Carl Foreman, John Garfield, Howard Da Silva, Dashiell Hammett, E. Y. Harburg, Lillian Hellman, Burl Ives, Arthur Miller, Dorothy Parker, Philip Loeb, Joseph Losey, Anne Revere, Pete Seeger, Gale Sondergaard, Louis Untermeyer, Josh White, Clifford Odets, Michael Wilson, Paul Jarrico, Jeff Corey, John Randolph, Canada Lee, Orson Welles, Paul Green, Sidney Kingsley, Paul Robeson, Richard Wright and Abraham Polonsky.

It was now decided to use the Alien Registration Act against the American Communist Party. Leaders of the party were arrested and in October, 1949, after a nine month trial, eleven members were convicted of violating the act. Over the next two years another 46 members were arrested and charged with advocating the overthrow of the government. Other high profile spy cases at the time involving Alger Hiss, Julius Rosenberg and Ethel Rosenberg, helped to create a deep fear in the United States that a communist conspiracy was taking place.

On 9th February, 1950, Joseph McCarthy, a senator from Wisconsin, made a speech claiming to have a list of 205 people in the State Department that were known to be members of the American Communist Party (late he reduced this figure to 57). The list of names was not a secret and had been in fact published by the Secretary of State in 1946. These people had been identified during a preliminary screening of 3,000 federal employees. Some had been communists but others had been fascists, alcoholics and sexual deviants. If screened, McCarthy's own drink problems and sexual preferences would have resulted in him being put on the list.

McCarthy also began receiving information from his friend, J. Edgar Hoover, head of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI). William Sullivan, one of Hoover's agents, later admitted that: "We were the ones who made the McCarthy hearings possible. We fed McCarthy all the material he was using."

With the war going badly in Korea and communist advances in Eastern Europe and in China, the American public were genuinely frightened about the possibilities of internal subversion. McCarthy, was made chairman of the Government Committee on Operations of the Senate, and this gave him the opportunity to investigate the possibility of communist subversion.

For the next two years McCarthy's committee investigated various government departments and questioned a large number of people about their political past. Some lost their jobs after they admitted they had been members of the Communist Party. McCarthy made it clear to the witnesses that the only way of showing that they had abandoned their left-wing views was by naming other members of the party.

This witch-hunt and anti-communist hysteria became known as McCarthyism. Some left-wing artists and intellectuals were unwilling to live in this type of society and people such as Joseph Losey, Richard Wright, Ollie Harrington, James Baldwin, Herbert Biberman, Lester Cole and Chester Himes went to live and work in Europe.
At first Joseph McCarthy mainly targeted Democrats associated with the New Deal policies of the 1930s. Harry S. Truman and members of his Democratic administration such as George Marshall and Dean Acheson, were accused of being soft on communism. Truman was portrayed as a dangerous liberal and McCarthy's campaign helped the Republican candidate, Dwight Eisenhower, win the presidential election in 1952.

After what had happened to McCarthy's opponents in the 1950 elections, most politicians were unwilling to criticize him in the Senate. As The Boston Post pointed out: "Attacking him is this state is regarded as a certain method of committing suicide." One notable exception was William Benton, the owner of Encyclopaedia Britannica, and a senator from Connecticut. McCarthy and his supporters immediately began smearing Benton. It was claimed that while Assistant Secretary of State, he had protected known communists and that he had been responsible for the purchase and display of "lewd art works". Benton, who was also accused of being disloyal by Joseph McCarthy for having much of his company's work printed in England, was defeated in the 1952 elections.

In 1952 McCarthy appointed Roy Cohn as the chief counsel to the Government Committee on Operations of the Senate. Cohn had been recommended by J. Edgar Hoover, who had been impressed by his involvement in the prosecution of Julius Rosenberg and Ethel Rosenberg. Soon after Cohn was appointed, he recruited his best friend, David Schine, to become his chief consultant.

McCarthy's next target was what he believed were anti-American books in libraries. His researchers looked into the Overseas Library Program and discovered 30,000 books by "communists, pro-communists, former communists and anti anti-communists." After the publication of this list, these books were removed from the library shelves.

For some time opponents of Joseph McCarthy had been accumulating evidence concerning his homosexual activities. Several members of his staff, including Roy Cohn and David Schine, were also suspected of having a sexual relationship. Although well-known by political journalists, the first article about it did not appear until Hank Greenspun published an article in the Las Vegas Sun in 25th October, 1952. Greenspun wrote that: "It is common talk among homosexuals in Milwaukee who rendezvouzes in the White Horse Inn that Senator Joe McCarthy has often engaged in homosexual activities."

Joseph McCarthy considered a libel suit against Greenspun but decided against it when he was told by his lawyers that if the case went ahead he would have to take the witness stand and answer questions about his sexuality. In an attempt to stop the rumours circulating, McCarthy married his secretary, Jeannie Kerr. Later the couple adopted a five-week old girl from the New York Foundling Home.

In October, 1953, McCarthy began investigating communist infiltration into the military. Attempts were made by McCarthy to discredit Robert Stevens, the Secretary of the Army. The president, Dwight Eisenhower, was furious and realised that it was time to bring an end to McCarthy's activities.

The United States Army now passed information about Joseph McCarthy to journalists known to be opposed to him. This included the news that McCarthy and Roy Cohn had abused congressional privilege by trying to prevent David Schine from being drafted. When that failed, it was claimed that Cohn tried to pressurize the Army to grant Schine special privileges. The well-known newspaper columnist, Drew Pearson, published the story on 15th December, 1953.
Dwight Eisenhower also instructed his vice president, Richard Nixon, to attack Joseph McCarthy. On 4th March, 1954, Nixon made a speech where, although not mentioning McCarthy, made it clear who he was talking about: "Men who have in the past done effective work exposing Communists in this country have, by reckless talk and questionable methods, made themselves the issue rather than the cause they believe in so deeply."

Some figures in the media, such as writers Freda Kirchway, George Seldes and I. F. Stone, and cartoonists, Herb Block and Daniel Fitzpatrick, had fought a long campaign against Joseph McCarthy. Other figures in the media, who had for a long time been opposed to McCarthyism but were frightened to speak out, now began to get the confidence to join the counter-attack. Edward Murrow, the experienced broadcaster, used his television programme, See It Now, on 9th March, 1954, to criticize McCarthy's methods. Newspaper columnists such as Walter Lippmann and Jack Anderson also became more open in their attacks on McCarthy.

The senate investigations into the United States Army were televised and this helped to expose the tactics of Joseph McCarthy. One newspaper, the Louisville Courier-Journal, reported that: "In this long, degrading travesty of the democratic process McCarthy has shown himself to be evil and unmatched in malice." Leading politicians in both parties, had been embarrassed by McCarthy's performance and on 2nd December, 1954, a censure motion condemned his conduct by 67 votes to 22.

Raymond Gram Swing, who had been forced to resign from the Voice of America because of McCarthy, argued in his autobiography, Good Evening (1964) that this did not mark the end of McCarthyism: "I am more than a little disquieted that McCarthy's condemnation by the Senate and his subsequent death have satisfied so many people that McCarthyism is over. For one thing, I consider that the condemnation by the Senate has given unwarranted satisfaction. It was based on an altogether peculiar sense of the importance of secondary matters. I am profoundly grateful that the committee went as far as it did. But I feel that it left out of account in its condemnation most of what Senator McCarthy had injuriously done. It ignored his roughshod disregard of civil rights and his irrepressible mendacity, and the fact that they existed while he was acting with the authority of the Senate. These transgressions were not specifically and helpfully rebuked at the time or ever. American principles and ethics were not strengthened by the Senate resolution of condemnation. The nation did not become healthier through it. It simply was rid of a menace because some Senate conservatives realized that their dignity was being sullied."

McCarthy lost the chairmanship of the Government Committee on Operations of the Senate. He was now without a power base and the media lost interest in his claims of a communist conspiracy. As one journalist, Willard Edwards, pointed out: "Most reporters just refused to file McCarthy stories. And most papers would not have printed them anyway." Although some historians claim that this marked the end of McCarthyism, others argue that the anti-communist hysteria in the United States lasted until the end of the Cold War.
A Brief History of the Salem Witch Trials- One town's strange journey from paranoia to pardon
By Jess Blumberg
Smithsonian.com, October 24, 2007,

The Salem witch trials occurred in colonial Massachusetts between 1692 and 1693. More than 200 people were accused of practicing witchcraft—the Devil's magic—and 20 were executed. Eventually, the colony admitted the trials were a mistake and compensated the families of those convicted. Since then, the story of the trials has become synonymous with paranoia and injustice, and it continues to beguile the popular imagination more than 300 years later.

Salem Struggling
Several centuries ago, many practicing Christians, and those of other religions, had a strong belief that the Devil could give certain people known as witches the power to harm others in return for their loyalty. A "witchcraft craze" rippled through Europe from the 1300s to the end of the 1600s. Tens of thousands of supposed witches—mostly women—were executed. Though the Salem trials came on just as the European craze was winding down, local circumstances explain their onset.

In 1689, English rulers William and Mary started a war with France in the American colonies. Known as King William's War to colonists, it ravaged regions of upstate New York, Nova Scotia and Quebec, sending refugees into the county of Essex and, specifically, Salem Village in the Massachusetts Bay Colony. (Salem Village is present-day Danvers, Massachusetts; colonial Salem Town became what's now Salem.)

The displaced people created a strain on Salem's resources. This aggravated the existing rivalry between families with ties to the wealth of the port of Salem and those who still depended on agriculture. Controversy also brewed over Reverend Samuel Parris, who became Salem Village's first ordained minister in 1689, and was disliked because of his rigid ways and greedy nature. The Puritan villagers believed all the quarreling was the work of the Devil.

In January of 1692, Reverend Parris' daughter Elizabeth, age 9, and niece Abigail Williams, age 11, started having "fits." They screamed, threw things, uttered peculiar sounds and contorted themselves into strange positions, and a local doctor blamed the supernatural. Another girl, Ann Putnam, age 11, experienced similar episodes. On February 29, under pressure from magistrates Jonathan Corwin and John Hathorne, the girls blamed three women for afflicting them: Tituba, the Parris' Caribbean slave; Sarah Good, a homeless beggar; and Sarah Osborne, an elderly impoverished woman.

Witch Hunt
All three women were brought before the local magistrates and interrogated for several days, starting on March 1, 1692. Osborne claimed innocence, as did Good. But Tituba confessed, "The Devil came to me and bid me serve him." She described elaborate images of black dogs, red cats, yellow birds and a "black man" who wanted her to sign his book. She admitted that she signed the book and said there were several other witches looking to destroy the Puritans. All three women were put in jail.

With the seed of paranoia planted, a stream of accusations followed for the next few months. Charges against Martha Corey, a loyal member of the Church in Salem Village, greatly concerned the community; if she could be a witch, then anyone could. Magistrates even questioned Sarah Good's 4-year-old daughter, Dorothy, and her timid answers were construed as a confession. The questioning got more serious in April when Deputy Governor Thomas Danforth and his assistants attended the hearings. Dozens of people from Salem and other Massachusetts villages were brought in for questioning.
On May 27, 1692, Governor William Phipps ordered the establishment of a Special Court of Oyer (to hear) and Terminer (to decide) for Suffolk, Essex and Middlesex counties. The first case brought to the special court was Bridget Bishop, an older woman known for her gossipy habits and promiscuity. When asked if she committed witchcraft, Bishop responded, "I am as innocent as the child unborn." The defense must not have been convincing, because she was found guilty and, on June 10, became the first person hanged on what was later called Gallows Hill.

Five days later, respected minister Cotton Mather wrote a letter imploring the court not to allow spectral evidence—testimony about dreams and visions. The court largely ignored this request and five people were sentenced and hanged in July, five more in August and eight in September. On October 3, following in his son's footsteps, Increase Mather, then president of Harvard, denounced the use of spectral evidence: "It were better that ten suspected witches should escape than one innocent person be condemned."

Governor Phipps, in response to Mather's plea and his own wife being questioned for witchcraft, prohibited further arrests, released many accused witches and dissolved the Court of Oyer and Terminer on October 29. Phipps replaced it with a Superior Court of Judicature, which disallowed spectral evidence and only condemned 3 out of 56 defendants. Phipps eventually pardoned all who were in prison on witchcraft charges by May 1693. But the damage had been done: 19 were hanged on Gallows Hill, a 71-year-old man was pressed to death with heavy stones, several people died in jail and nearly 200 people, overall, had been accused of practicing "the Devil's magic."

Restoring Good Names
Following the trials and executions, many involved, like judge Samuel Sewall, publicly confessed error and guilt. On January 14, 1697, the General Court ordered a day of fasting and soul-searching for the tragedy of Salem. In 1702, the court declared the trials unlawful. And in 1711, the colony passed a bill restoring the rights and good names of those accused and granted £600 restitution to their heirs. However, it was not until 1957—more than 250 years later—that Massachusetts formally apologized for the events of 1692.

In the 20th century, artists and scientists alike continued to be fascinated by the Salem witch trials. Playwright Arthur Miller resurrected the tale with his 1953 play *The Crucible*, using the trials as an allegory for the McCarthyism paranoia in the 1950s. Additionally, numerous hypotheses have been devised to explain the strange behavior that occurred in Salem in 1692. One of the most concrete studies, published in *Science* in 1976 by psychologist Linnda Caporael, blamed the abnormal habits of the accused on the fungus ergot, which can be found in rye, wheat and other cereal grasses. Toxicologists say that eating ergot-contaminated foods can lead to muscle spasms, vomiting, delusions and hallucinations. Also, the fungus thrives in warm and damp climates—not too unlike the swampy meadows in Salem Village, where rye was the staple grain during the spring and summer months.

In August 1992, to mark the 300th anniversary of the trials, Nobel Laureate Elie Wiesel dedicated the Witch Trials Memorial in Salem. Also in Salem, the Peabody Essex Museum houses the original court documents, and the town's most-visited attraction, the Salem Witch Museum, attests to the public's enthrallment with the 1692 hysteria.

*Editor's note - October 27, 2011: Thanks to Professor Darin Hayton for pointing out an error in this article. While the exact number of supposed witches killed in Europe isn't known, the best estimate is closer to tens of thousands of victims, not hundreds of thousands. We have fixed the text to address this issue.*