

The Cold War at Home in the United States – Analyzing Perspectives

Introduction: *In the early years of the Cold War, many Americans believe that there was good reason to be concerned about the security of the United States. The Soviet domination of Eastern Europe and the Communist takeover of China shocked the American public fueling a fear that Communism would spread around the world. In addition, at the height of World War II about 100,000 Americans claimed membership in the Communist Party. Some people feared that the first loyalty of these American communists was to the Soviet Union.*

Source A: From James F. O’Neil, “How you can fight Communism,” printed in *American Legion Magazine*, 1948. *The American Legion was an organization of veterans, many of whom fought in World War II.*

Communists always appear before the public as “progressives.” Yesterday they were “20th century Americans,” last week they were “defenders of all civil liberties,” tonight they may be “honest, simply trade unionists.” They are “liberals” at breakfast, “defenders of world peace” in the afternoon, and “the voice of the people” in the evening. These artful dodges and ingenious dissimulations obviously make it difficult for the average trusting citizens to keep up with every new Communist swindle and con game. Here is how the American Legion can serve exactly the same important public service that Better Business Bureaus have done in the past in warning and protecting the public against all manner of swindles and rackets. It does not require four years of college to be able to sport new commie fronts and keep abreast of the ever-changing party line. But it does require a few hours of serious study and reading each week plus consultation with recognized experts. Legionnaires cannot devote themselves to any more valuable public service.

Source B: From David Friedman, “A New York City Schoolteacher in the Party,” 1979. *This is David Friedman’s account of how he got involved in a union led by Communists.*

I began to teach in 1926 and I started as a substitute. I was a substitute for maybe two or three months in various schools in Harlem, where I was appalled at the fact that some of the schools has as much as one-third or almost one-half substitute teachers – regularly assigned substitute teachers that you paid a fraction of the salary that you would a regular. In other words, these were inexperienced teachers. The Harlem schools were considered a place where you didn’t worry too much about the quality of education. Only the teachers’ union brought to my attention the extensive nature of this phenomenon. The textbooks we had – some of them were thirty years old, they were falling apart. I know there were ships that had inadequate materials, lavatories with practically no equipment, old run-down buildings that still had outside toilets. There was a group in the union that wanted to deal with these issues and bring them before the Board of Education and to mobilize parents and other trade unions to try to change these conditions. There must have been Communists in that group because I knew some of them were militant and they talked about not just the issue of what was happening in the Harlem schools, but related it to the broader question of discrimination and prejudice against the blacks in general throughout the history of the country.

They were stimulating, and they got me thinking. I got involved in the group in the trade union that was trying to oust leadership and get a new leadership that would not be willing to cooperate with the Board of Education and would be willing to raise issues such as the condition in the Harlem Schools.

Why were Americans afraid of Communism?

Directions: Complete the chart, and then answer the three questions on the back.

Questions	O'Neil <i>How you fight Communism, 1948</i>	Friedman <i>A New York City Schoolteacher in the Party, 1979</i>
1. What do we know about the author? 2. Why is he writing? 3. Does he think the Nazis are good or bad? 4. Are Nazis and Communists alike or different? 5. How do you recognize a Communist? 6. What can be done to help the community? 7. How are the Communists trying to accomplish their goals? 8. When was the source written? 9. What time period is the author describing?		

Why were Americans afraid of Communism?

1. What would O'Neill have thought of Friedman's explanation of why he joined the Communist Party?
2. How might Friedman have responded to O'Neil's description of the Communist Party members?
3. What might the two authors have agreed on?