

Masthead Logo

---

Archives Alive

---

4-1-2016

# Edna Griffin FBI Investigation

Allison Schollmeyer  
*University of Iowa*

---

Copyright © 2016 Allison Schollmeyer

Hosted by [Iowa Research Online](http://Iowa Research Online). For more information please contact: [lib-ir@uiowa.edu](mailto:lib-ir@uiowa.edu).

# Edna Griffin FBI Investigation

By: Allison Schollmeyer

During the time of Edna Griffin's life there was tension going on with both The Red Scare and racial issues. African Americans were still being treated unfairly and did not have very many rights compared to white Americans. In Des Moines, Iowa, Edna Griffin and her daughter were refused service at Katz Drug Store because the store stated that they did not serve African Americans (Lawrence, 2005, p. 1). The civil rights movement officially ran from 1954-1968 and the document was written on May 2, 1952. The events that transpired that the FBI investigated all took place shortly before the civil rights movement, which proves that there was a lot of racial tension in The United States during that time. Although Griffin lived in Iowa and not in a southern state, she still had multiple issues with racial inequality in her life. She eventually led a movement against the Katz drug store that gathered a fairly large amount of support in Iowa. Although it was likely that Martin Luther King Jr. would not have heard about her fight in Iowa, he and other prominent social rights activists also used many of her tactics during that time (Lawrence, 2005 p. 40). The racial tensions, the current state of the FBI, and the intense fear of Communism all are what lead to the investigation of Edna Griffin and the FBI agent that wrote this report hoped to prove Griffin guilty of involvement with the Communist party.

The Red Scare hysteria ran throughout the 1940's and 1950's in the United States and the Cold War was also during this time period and created tensions that eventually lead to Griffin's investigation. The Red Scare had to do with the fear of Communism and the spread of Communism in The United States. Many people were afraid of what Communism would do to The United States and

persecuted those that were believed to be a member of the Communist Party. If individuals were suspected of participating in this party, they often were under investigation by the FBI or other government officials. The Communist Party appealed to many African Americans because many of the things that it fought for involved Equal treatment of African Americans (Pecinovsky, 2014, para. 1). Edna Griffin was suspected of being a member of this party and that was part of what lead to her investigation by the FBI. Her involvement with the Katz Drug Store case and other civil rights issues also contributed.

The FBI leadership during this time period played a role in the investigation of Griffin and the fear of Communism. John Edgar Hoover was the director of the FBI from May 10, 1924 to May 2, 1972, therefore his leadership was in full swing at the time of Griffin's investigation. Hoover was known for his intense focus on preventing the spread of Communism to the United States in the 1950s. He believed that Communism was one of the biggest threats to the United States and was quoted in an interview from an issue of US News and World Report stating that, "The teachings of Communism are directed toward one final result-world revolution and the triumph of international Communism" (How Communists Operate, 1950, para. 10). Hoover's intense fear and paranoia about the spread of Communism would have made the FBI as a whole want to prevent the spread of Communism as well. The FBI agent that wrote this report would have had a great motivation to eradicate communism based on the leadership within the FBI.

Edna Griffin's FBI file as a whole was utilized to gather evidence for her involvement in The Communist Party. The author mentions specific informants multiple times and expresses that they are of "known reliability" throughout the entire document (FBI Omaha Field Office, 1952). The author also explains that Griffin was

potentially involved with The American Peace Crusade and describes how this group was also heavily involved with Communism and established by known Communists. The member of the FBI that wrote this report on the activities of Edna Griffin was attempting to prove that she may be involved with The Communist Party by gathering evidence from a variety of informants about possible Communist meetings that Griffin attended and other members of the Communist party that she was involved with. Throughout the entire document, the author makes use of the rhetorical device of disinterest because they never actually mentioned their own beliefs about Griffin. The author strictly included evidence and reports given by other individuals that witnessed the events discussed. Because their own beliefs are not shared, this makes the audience more susceptible to believing that Griffin was guilty.

Directly in the beginning of the report the author begins providing evidence in an attempt to prove Griffin's guilt. The agent starts by explaining that Griffin's car was found parked outside of an individual's home that was "known to be a member of the Communist party from approximately 1946 until at least September 1950" (FBI Omaha Filed Office, 1952, para. 2-3). The author is utilizing the rhetorical device of deduction to explain that because Griffin's car was parked outside of this individual's home, she must also be involved with The Communist Party. Even though there could be multiple reasons that Griffin's car was there and that does not necessarily mean that she was involved with the known Communist, the author implies that this means that Griffin is a member of the Communist party. The agent also mentions a meeting held in Cedar Rapids where Russia, the Chinese government, and the Korean War were being discussed. The author indicates that an individual that attended was also a member of the American Peace Crusade (FBI Omaha Field Office, 1952, para. 4). In

the next paragraph it is expressed that the American Peace Crusade is an organization that was actually established by the Communists and was “a new instrument for their Peace Offensive of the United States” (FBI Omaha Field Office, 1952, para. 5). The author is providing more evidence against Griffin and is also now including evidence against the American Peace Crusade as well.

The mixture of the civil rights movement and issues with the fear of Communism lead to Griffin’s investigation. Griffin being an African American and her activism against the inequalities for African Americans contributed to the fear that she was participating in Communist activities. During this time period, the general population was made to fear Communism and the potential spread of it. Because Griffin fought for equal treatment, the FBI thought that she was trying to spread Communism and this is what led to her investigation.