



The 1950's and the Cold War

An Online Professional Development Seminar



Ellen Schrecker

Professor of History

Yeshiva University

National Humanities Center Fellow

AMERICA *in* CLASS[®]

from the National Humanities Center



GOALS



- To show that the anticommunist political repression of the 1940s and 1950s was a widespread and long-lasting phenomenon that involved much more than the career of Senator Joseph McCarthy and involved all three branches of the government as well as the collaboration of the private sector.
- To explore the different aspects of McCarthyism and its long-term impact on American politics and society.



From the Forum

- Did the Cold War take politicians by surprise, or had they seen it coming for a long time?
- How was the Soviet Union's experience of the Cold War different or similar to the experience of citizens in the United States?
- Why did the US win the Cold War?
- How did the fear of nuclear war affect life in America?
- How real was the nuclear threat? Was it propaganda reserved for Americans?
- Did people in the Soviet Union share the same fear?



From the Forum

- How did Sen. McCarthy come to have so much power in this country?
- Was McCarthyism rooted in American culture, or was it something new in the 1950s?
- Who were the targets of McCarthyism?
- What role did government institutions, like the FBI, play in the repression of the 1950s?
- Did private organizations, like corporations, play a role?



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*The Lost Soul of Higher Education: Academic Freedom,
Corporatization, and the Assault on the University*
(2010)

*Cold War Triumphalism: Exposing the Misuse of History
after the Fall of Communism*
(2004, ppb. ed. 2006)

Many Are the Crimes: McCarthyism in America
(1998, ppb. ed. 1999)

The Age of McCarthyism: A Brief History with Documents
(1994, rev. ed. 2002)



Introduction

- McCarthyism, the anticommunist furor of the late 1940s and 1950s, was the longest-lasting and most widespread episode of political repression in the history of the United States.
- In many respects the homefront of the Cold War, McCarthyism became powerful because it was the product of a collaborative effort by just about every sector of American society – from the Supreme Court and the U.S. Congress to local school boards and private corporations.
- Before the Red Scare ended two people were unjustly executed, over a hundred went to prison, and thousands lost their jobs and were blacklisted, while a political chill settled over the country, limiting the range of acceptable political expression and action.



The Communist Party

- The political repression of the 1940s and 1950s was primarily directed against the American Communist party (CP) and all the individuals, organizations, and ideas associated with it.
- Founded in 1919 after the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia and closely associated with the Soviet Union, the CP became the most important organization on the American left during the 1930s and 1940s.
- People joined the party during the Depression because it seemed to offer answers to the economic crisis.

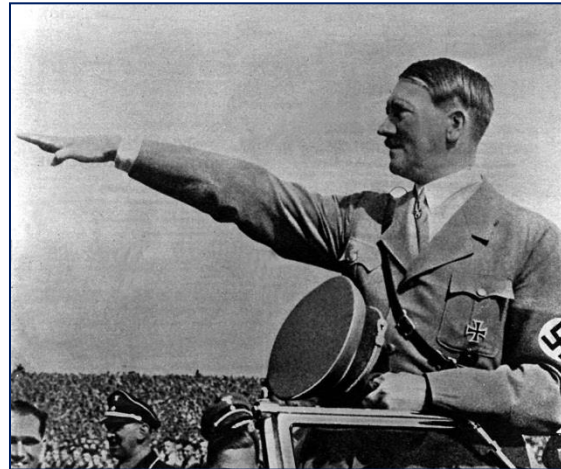


“Communism Is the Americanism of the 20th Century” (1936) Earl Browder was a CP spokesman and James Ford was a CP answer to balancing the ticket.



The Communist Party

- The CP's early opposition to Hitler also attracted members.
- The CP had no more than 100,000 members at its peak in the late 1930s and 1940s, American Communists were active in many left-wing causes, forming dozens of so-called "front groups" that engaged in a all kinds of political and cultural activities – and even sold life insurance.
- Even before the Cold War, American communism was unpopular. Its devotion to the USSR alienated many liberals as well as conservatives, especially when it switched its positions to accord with Soviet foreign policy.



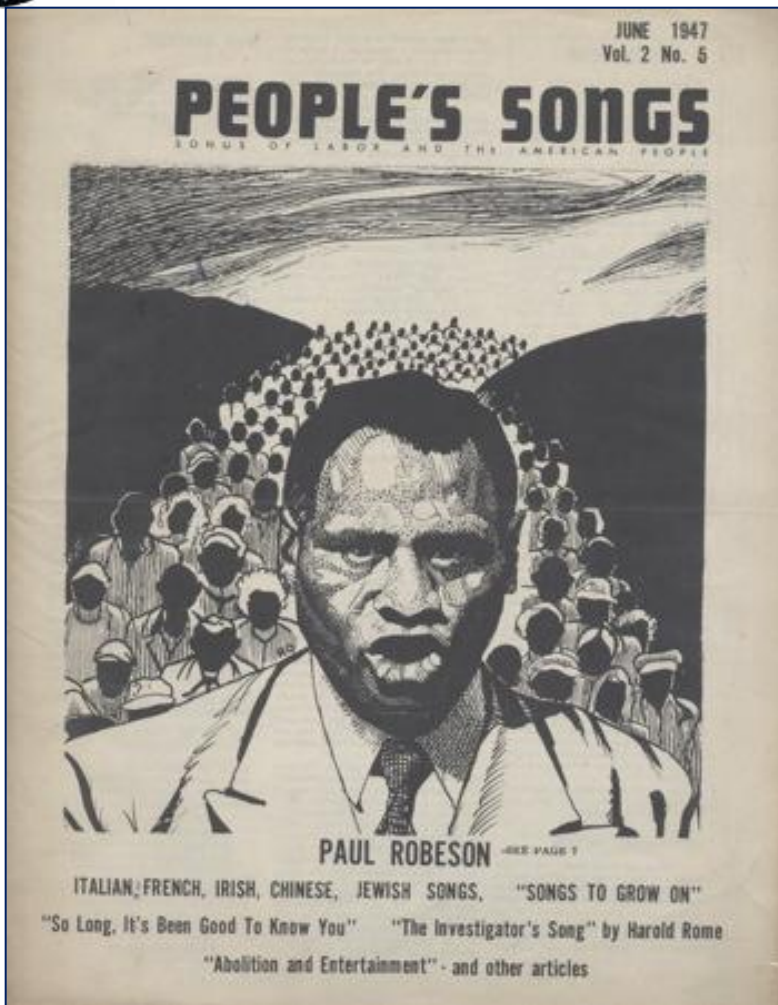
Communists' May Day parade in New York City, 1934.
CSU Archives/
Everett Collection.

<http://www.picturesfromourpast.com/detail/23102.html>





Cover of People's Songs Magazine



Paul Robeson, Volume 2, Number 5, June 1947.
<http://folkmusichistory.com/outline/13.shtml>



Lil Marcus and Pete Seeger, Volume 2, Number 10, November 1947.
<http://folkmusichistory.com/outline/13.shtml>



Paul Robeson

Paul Robeson in Kinderland
August 14, 1949

<http://www.kinderland.org/sylvanlake/pictures/hopnobbing/1949paulrobeson1.htm>



Paul Robeson and the Civil
Right Congress picketing at
the White House in 1948.





The Cold War and the Domestic Communist Threat



- Soon after the defeat of the Third Reich, the alliance between the Soviet Union and the United States broke down and the Cold War began.
- The American Communist party now came to be seen as a threat to national security because of its ties to the new Soviet enemy.
- That threat was vastly exaggerated; The party was too small, weak, and unpopular to foment a revolution or sabotage defense efforts.



Prime Minister Winston Churchill, President Franklin D. Roosevelt, and Marshal Joseph Stalin at the palace in Yalta. U.S. Signal Corps photo. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division. LC-USZ62-7449
<http://www.loc.gov/pictures/resource/cph.3a10098/>



The Cold War and the Domestic Communist Threat

- Espionage, however, had occurred. There seem to have been at least one hundred Communist agents within the federal government during the New Deal and World War II. Their most important achievement was to provide the Soviet Union with information about the atomic bomb project.
- Most of that espionage ended after World War II, as the federal government implemented increased security procedures.



Soviet Espionage

- First the U.S. Government learned about Soviet espionage from former Communist spies as well as from the top-secret VENONA project that deciphered intercepted telegrams between Soviet intelligence officials in America and Moscow.
- Ex-Communist witness Whittaker Chambers identified former State Department official Alger Hiss.



Alger Hiss

Whittaker
Chambers

VENONA and Soviet Espionage

5
VENONA

~~TOP SECRET~~



3. "MLAD"[xi]

[51 groups unrecoverable]

II] Further

[14 groups unrecovered].

Both are FELLOWCOUNTRYMEN[ZEMLYAKI][xii]. Both are helping us and both meet LIBERAL and ARNO [3 groups unrecovered]. Kh'YuS[xiii] handed over 17 authentic drawings relating to the APQ-7[xiv] (postal despatch No.9)[.] He can be trusted. The transfer of Kh'YuS alone to SVET[xv] is no way out of the situation. It will be necessary to put SVET in touch with KALISTRAT[xvi] in order to bring material for photography into the PLANT [ZAVOD][xvii]. I cannot carry material in and out of the PLANT late in the evening. I insist on bringing Kh'YuS and METR[xviii] together, putting the latter in touch with KALISTRAT or SVET and separating both from LIBERAL.

In TYRE[TIR][xix]

[14 groups unrecoverable]

round the clock. There are no major contradictions between letters 5 and 7 about LIBERAL. They complement each other. LIBERAL's shortcomings do not mean that he will be completely useless for photography. He is gradually getting used to photography.

No. 957[i]

[Signature unrecoverable]

- The VENONA decrypts revealed that a few physicists in the atomic bomb project at Los Alamos spied for the Russians.
- VENONA also provided information about an espionage ring run by Julius Rosenberg that included his brother-in-law who also worked at Los Alamos.

Decryption of Soviet Diplomatic Telegram Relating to the Code Name "Enormous" and Photography of Material, 12/13/1944

<http://research.archives.gov/description/595374>



VENONA and Soviet Espionage

- Because Rosenberg refused to confess and reveal the other members of his ring, his wife Ethel was also arrested. The couple were eventually executed, although the FBI knew that Ethel was not a spy.

Memorandum to the Attorney General -- July 19, 1950

In my memorandum to you dated July 17, 1950, I brought to your attention additional information with respect to the espionage activities of David and Ruth Greenglass and Julius and Ethel Rosenberg. I asked for your opinion as to the institution of prosecutive action against Ethel Rosenberg and Ruth Greenglass.

In connection with the above, I desire to bring to your attention the fact that United States Attorney Everett Grantham has expressed the desire to include in the indictment in Santa Fe, New Mexico, both Julius Rosenberg and Ruth Greenglass. It would appear that it might also be possible to proceed against Ethel Rosenberg under such an indictment on the basis of her having urged Ruth Greenglass to approach David Greenglass to act as an espionage agent.

There is no question but that if Julius Rosenberg would furnish the details of his extensive espionage activities it would be possible to proceed against other individuals. In the fact of Rosenberg's refusal I believe that you may desire to seriously consider instituting additional process against him in New Mexico. This might result in a change in his attitude. I also feel that **proceeding against his wife might serve as a lever in this matter....**



VENONA and Soviet Espionage

Discussion Question

Was the execution of the Rosenbergs justified?



Julius and Ethel Rosenberg, separated by heavy wire screen as they leave U.S. Court House after being found guilty by jury.
<http://www.loc.gov/pictures/resource/cph.3c17772/>



Klaus Fuchs, Manhattan Project scientist, spy for USSR
<http://www.nndb.com/people/565/000088301/>

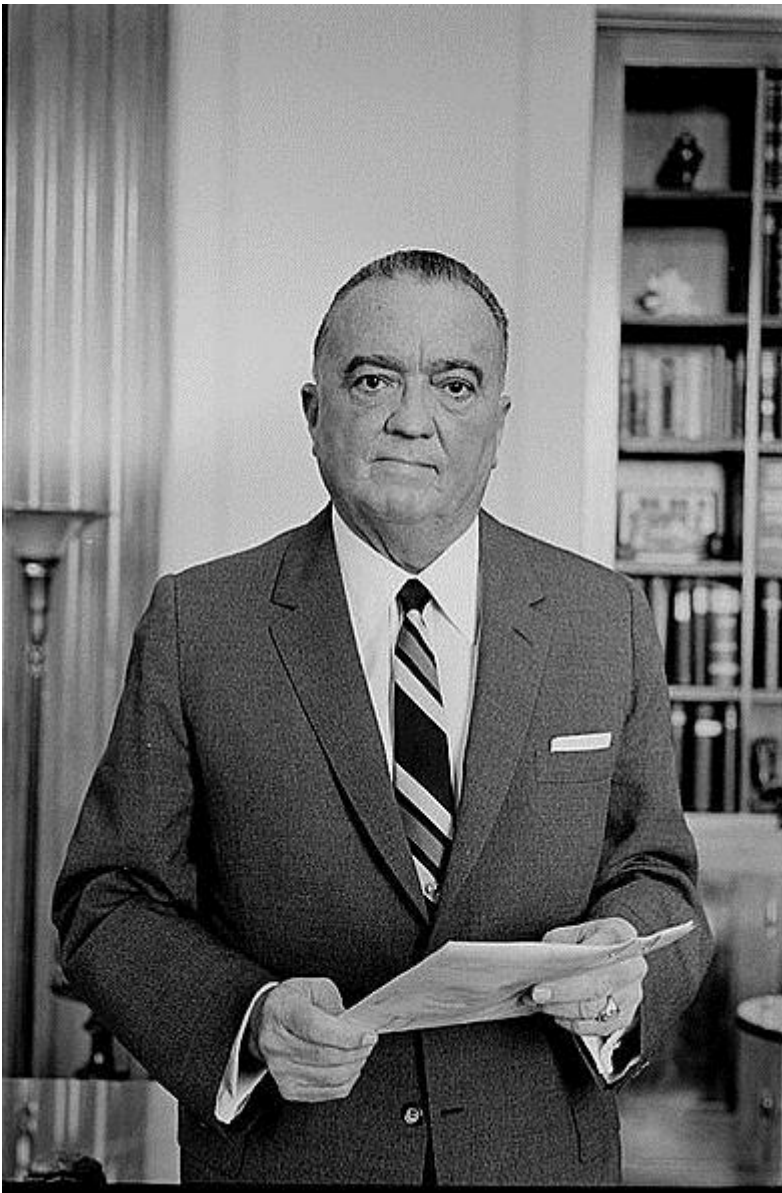


The Centrality of the FBI

- More than any other single individual, FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover was responsible for the Cold War Red Scare. It should have been called Hooverism, not McCarthyism.
- Hoover was obsessed with communism. Because he also wanted to expand his Bureau's power after World War II, he exaggerated the Communist threat and the FBI's indispensability in combating it.
- The FBI kept thousands of files on suspected Communists. It often—secretly and illegally—shared this information with congressional committees and public and private employers.
- Agents conducted illegal surveillance of targeted individuals and organizations, breaking into people's homes and offices to photograph documents and membership lists.
- In the late 1950s, the FBI inaugurated an illegal counterintelligence program (COINTELPRO) that harassed Communists, civil rights activists, and other left-wingers.



The Centrality of the FBI



“Hoover Planned Mass
Jailing in 1950,”

The New York Times, 2007

http://www.nytimes.com/2007/12/23/washington/23habeas.html?_r=1&

J. EDGAR HOOVER. Photograph by
Marion S. Trikosko. 1961 Sept. 28.
Location: U.S. News and World Report
Collection (6738-B, frame #16)
Reproduction Number: LC-U9-6738-B-16
<http://www.loc.gov/pictures/resource/ppmsc.03262/>



Political Tests for Employment: The Federal Loyalty-Security Program

- March 1947: President Harry Truman establishes a federal loyalty-security program with Executive Order 9835.
- The new program requires political checks for all federal employees and applicants. If any “derogatory” evidence appears, the FBI mounts a full investigation.
- Employees charged with disloyalty get hearings, but do not have the right to question the anonymous informants who supplied the information upon which the charges were based.
- Guilt by association became the main criteria for dismissal. Employees could lose their jobs for “affiliation with or sympathetic association with” any organization that had been listed by the Attorney General as “totalitarian, fascist, communist, or subversive.”



Political Tests for Employment: The Federal Loyalty-Security Program



- Many of the federal bureaucrats who administered the loyalty-security program took no chances and applied it in an ideologically narrow manner.
- Employees often undergo several investigations and hearings as the criteria for dismissal change over time.
- The federal loyalty-security program becomes a model for similar programs at the state and local level as well as within the private sector. Many such programs also included loyalty oaths.
- Truman was strongly, but not hysterically, anticommunist. By 1950 he becomes concerned about the excesses of the loyalty-security program and other aspects of the Cold War Red Scare.



Political Tests for Employment: The Federal Loyalty-Security Program

Memo, Harry S. Truman to Charles Murphy
May 24, 1951

“I have been very much disturbed with the action of some of these Boards and I want to find some way to put a stop to their un-American activities. I wish you would have one of our staff boys look into this situation very carefully and make a recommendation to me.”

http://www.trumanlibrary.org/whistlestop/study_collections/loyaltyprogram/documents/index.php?documentdate=1951-05-24&documentid=15-10&pagenumber=1

Discussion Question

Could the U.S. government have protected national security without the violations of individual rights that characterized the loyalty-security program?



The Criminalization of the Communist Party

- 1948: Truman administration prosecutes top party leaders under the 1940 Smith Act for “teaching and advocating” the overthrow of the federal government.
- Contentious New York City trial features government witnesses who testify about communist theory but cannot show any overt actions by the defendants to mount a revolution.
- 1951: Supreme Court upholds the conviction of Eugene Dennis and the other party leaders on national security grounds.
- Additional Smith Act prosecutions begin against so-called “second-string” communist leaders in New York, Denver, Boston, St. Louis, Philadelphia, Detroit, and other cities.
- State and federal authorities harass suspected Communists by charging them with, among other things, sedition, perjury, contempt of Congress, tax evasion, and immigration offenses.

Discussion Question

How do the criminal prosecutions of individual Communists contribute to the development of the Cold War Red Scare?

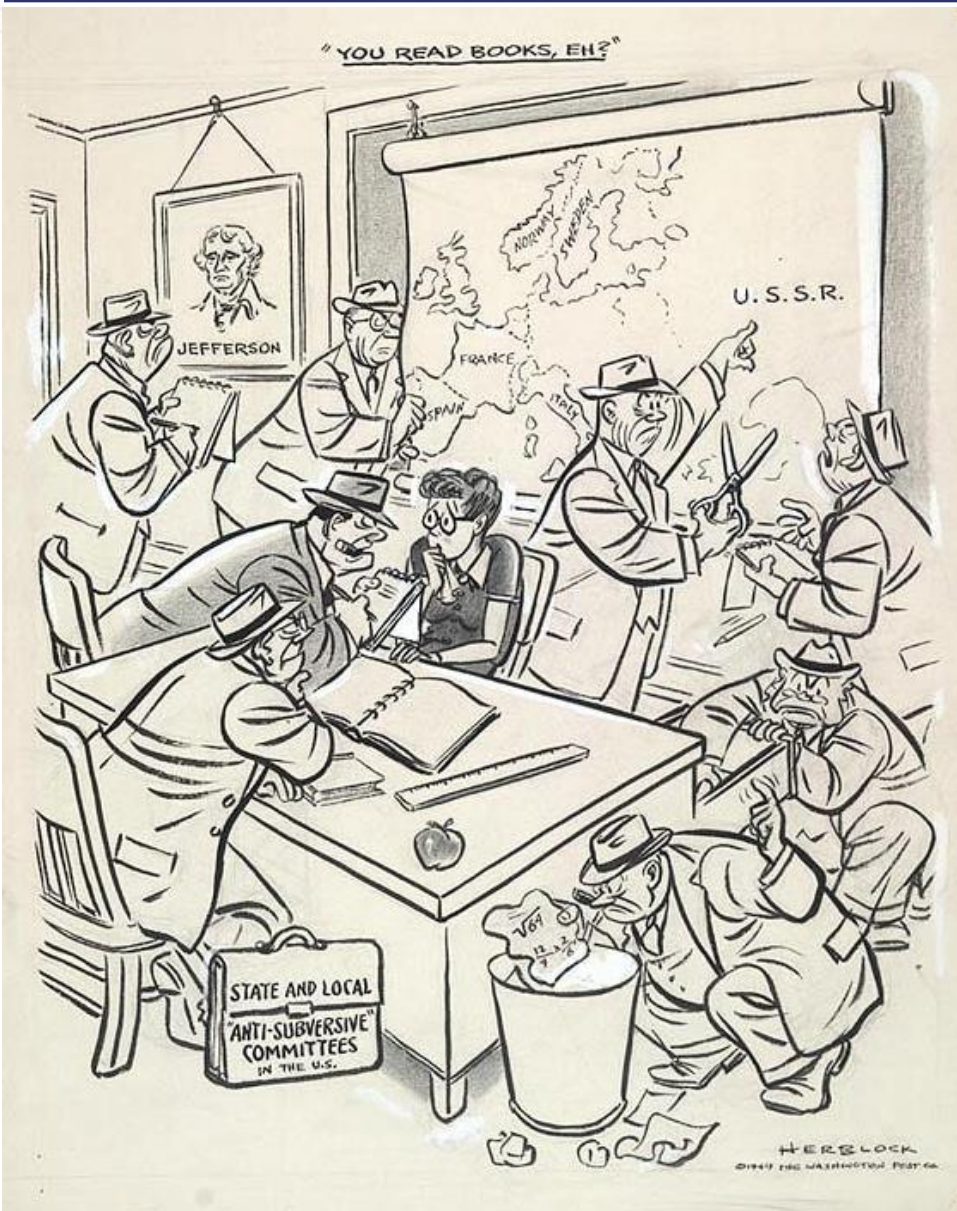


Congressional Investigating Committees

- Key institutions of the Cold War Red Scare.
- Committees disseminate anticommunist scenarios through public hearings that expose supposed Communists. Most of the committees' witnesses were, in fact, Communists or former Communists.
- Main committees are House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC), the Internal Security Subcommittee of the Senate Judiciary Committee, and Senator McCarthy's Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations of the Senate Committee on Government Operations.
- October 1947: HUAC's confrontational hearings on communism within the film industry are front page news and result in prison terms for the so-called Hollywood Ten— "unfriendly witnesses" who refused to answer the committee's questions and went to prison for contempt of Congress.
- The Ten believed that the First Amendment would protect them from having to answer questions about their political beliefs and associations.
- Summer 1948: FBI secretly helps the young congressman Richard Nixon use HUAC to expose Alger Hiss as a Communist.



Congressional Investigating Committees



Similar investigations spread from Congress to state and local authorities.

“You read books, eh?”
Herb Block. Washington Post,
April 24, 1949.

<http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/00652196/>



The Hollywood Ten



<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F7W3XbDZqO4>

Testimony of Unfriendly Witness, John Howard Lawson, one of the Hollywood Ten



Alger Hiss



ca. August 1948, Washington, DC, USA — Alger Hiss, accused of Communist espionage, takes an oath during hearings before the House Committee on Un-American Activities. He denied Whittaker Chambers' accusation that he was a Communist. —
Image by © Bettmann/CORBIS



Unfriendly Witnesses and the Fifth Amendment



- The only way witnesses who do not want to cooperate with the committees can avoid contempt charges is to rely on the Fifth Amendment's privilege against self-incrimination.
- Witnesses who invoke the Fifth Amendment and refuse to answer the committees' questions look as if they are hiding something.
- The committees' demand that ex-Communist witnesses name other people creates a serious moral dilemma for people who do not want to be informers or go to prison.
- Supreme Court rules that witnesses who talk about their past political activities but not about those of others have "waived" their protection under the Fifth Amendment and are liable for contempt.
- Employers usually fire and blacklist the men and women who take the Fifth Amendment.



Lillian Hellman letter to HUAC, May 19, 1952



“I am most willing to answer all questions about myself. I have nothing to hide from your committee and there is nothing in my life of which I am ashamed. I have been advised by counsel that under that fifth amendment I have a constitutional privilege to decline to answer any questions about my political opinions, activities, and associations, on the grounds of self-incrimination. I do not wish to claim this privilege. I am ready and willing to testify before the representatives of our Government as to my own opinions and my own actions, regardless of any risks or consequences to myself.

But I am advised by counsel that if I answer the committee’s questions about myself, I must also answer questions about other people and that if I refuse to do so, I can be cited for contempt. My counsel tells me that if I answer questions about myself, I will have waived my rights under the fifth amendment and could be forced legally to answer questions about others. This is very difficult for a layman to understand. But there is one principle that I do understand: I am not willing, now or in the future, to bring bad trouble to people who, in my past association with them, were completely innocent of any talk or any action that was disloyal or subversive. I do not like subversion or disloyalty in any form and if I had ever seen any I would have considered it my duty to have reported it to the proper authorities. But to hurt innocent people whom I knew many years ago in order to save myself is, to me, inhuman and indecent and dishonorable. I cannot and will not cut my conscience to fit this year’s fashions, even though I long ago came to the conclusion that I was not a political person and could have no comfortable place in any political group.”



The Career of Joseph McCarthy

- February 1950: Republican senator from Wisconsin falsely accuses the State Department of harboring Communists.
- Republican leaders initially back McCarthy because his attacks on supposedly subversive federal employees support the party's charges that the Truman administration was "soft on communism" and had "lost" China to Mao Zedong.
- His reckless charges get enormous publicity.
- Becomes chair of Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations of the Senate Committee on Government Operations in the beginning of 1953.
- Finally brought down by the Army-McCarthy hearings on his attempts to pressure Army into giving favorable treatment to one of his aides. Censured by the Senate in November 1954.



The Career of Joseph McCarthy



Army-McCarthy hearings,
interchange between
McCarthy and Joseph Welch

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lAur_I077NA

Sen. Joseph McCarthy
March 8, 1954

<http://www.time.com/time/covers/0,16641,19540308,00.html>



The Supreme Court and the Cold War Red Scare



- Citing the demands of national security, the Supreme Court initially places few obstacles to the anticommunist measures of the early Cold War.
- Allows congressional committees to question witnesses about their political beliefs and associations.
- Does not interfere with federal government's loyalty-security program, despite its failure to allow employees to confront their accusers.
- Condone the prosecution of the CP's leaders under the Smith Act.



The Supreme Court and the Cold War Red Scare



“...Speech is not an absolute, above and beyond control by the legislature when its judgment, subject to review here, is that certain kinds of speech are so undesirable as to warrant criminal sanction....To those who would paralyze our Government in the face of impending threat by encasing it in a semantic straitjacket we must reply that all concepts are relative.

In this case we are squarely presented with the application of the ‘clear and present danger’ test, and must decide what that phrase imports. We first note that many of the cases in which this Court has reversed convictions by use of this or similar tests have been based on the fact that the interest which the State was attempting to protect was itself too insubstantial to warrant restriction of speech....”



The Supreme Court and the Cold War Red Scare



- By the mid-1950s, Supreme Court begins to offer more protection to defendants in anticommunist cases, though usually on procedural grounds.
- Political backlash presses majority of justices to revert to a more repressive stance until it finally reaffirms First Amendment rights during the 1960s.



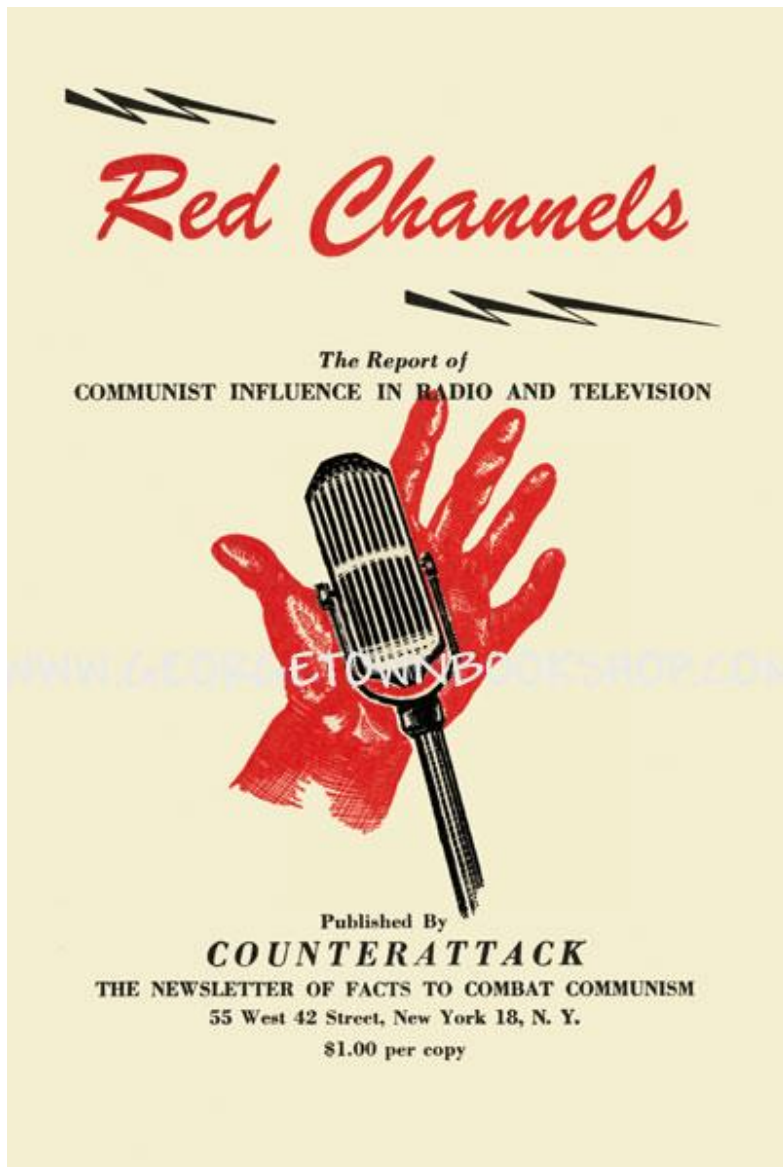
Blacklisting and the Collaboration of the Private Sector



- Economic sanctions, i.e. the dismissals and blacklisting of politically tainted individuals, are the Cold War Red Scare's most effective weapons.
- 1947: Movie studios fire the Hollywood Ten and vow not to hire Communists.



Blacklisting and the Collaboration of the Private Sector



Professional anti-Communists help the film industry and networks institute an unofficial blacklist. Booklet, *Red Channels*, lists the supposedly subversive affiliations of 151 people.

Image of cover of *Red Channels: The Report of Communist Influence in Radio and Television*, a pamphlet-style book issued by the journal Counterattack in 1950. Source: Authentic History Center

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:RedChannelsCover.jpg>



Blacklisting and the Collaboration of the Private Sector



- FBI puts pressure on employers in both the public and private sectors to fire and not hire Communists and other left-wingers.
- Organized labor ejects its left-led unions.
- Corporations, school systems, universities, and state and local governments implement their own anticommunist loyalty programs and blacklists.



- Because so many dismissals and blacklists remained secret, we do not know how many men and women lost their jobs during the 1940s and 1950s. There are estimates of between 12-15,000 people.



Human Toll of the Cold War Red Scare

- Execution of the Rosenbergs. Suicides and early deaths of men and women caught up in the Red Scare.
- A few deportations and many more threatened deportations of Communist leaders and their families.
- Over 100 people go to prison. High emotional and financial cost of defense against political charges, even when convictions overturned on appeal.
- Some blacklisted writers, directors, academics emigrate. Others work under pseudonyms or change fields.
- Disrupted families and friendships.



Dalton Trumbo and the Hollywood Blacklist



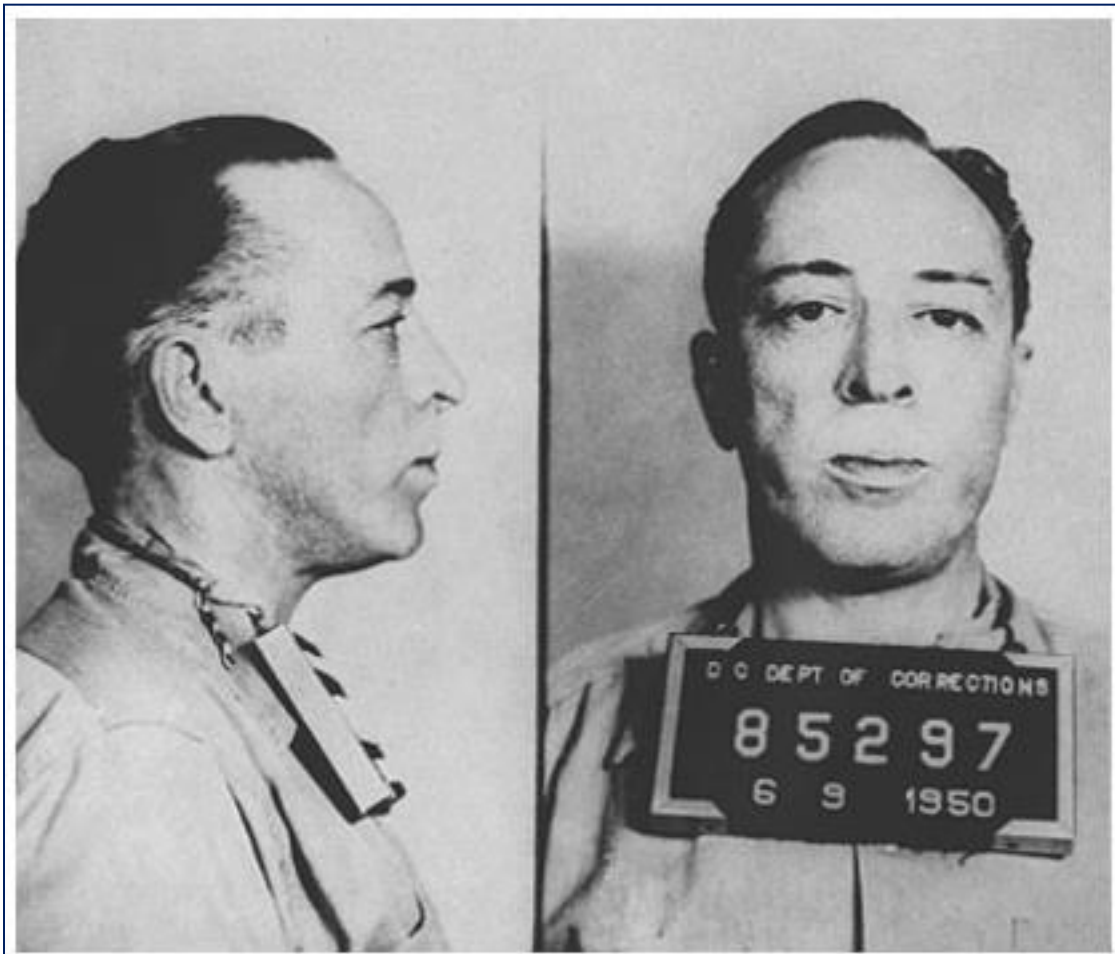
1947: Dalton Trumbo, one of Hollywood's most successful screenwriters, Ten, defies HUAC.

Excerpt of his testimony:
<http://cinematicfrontier.wordpress.com/2013/01/27/trumbo-2007/>

28 Oct 1947, Washington, DC, USA — Screenwriter Dalton Trumbo, one of the “Hollywood Ten” targeted by the Un-American Activities Committee, leaves the witness stand shouting “This is the beginning of American concentration camp.” He is the second Hollywood personality in two days to defy investigators questions regarding Communist affiliation. He is accompanied by his defense lawyers Robert Kenny and Bartley Crum. — Image by © Bettmann/CORBIS



Dalton Trumbo and the Hollywood Blacklist



All appeals exhausted, Trumbo goes to prison with the rest of the Hollywood Ten.

Dalton Trumbo mugshot. Image is in the public domain.



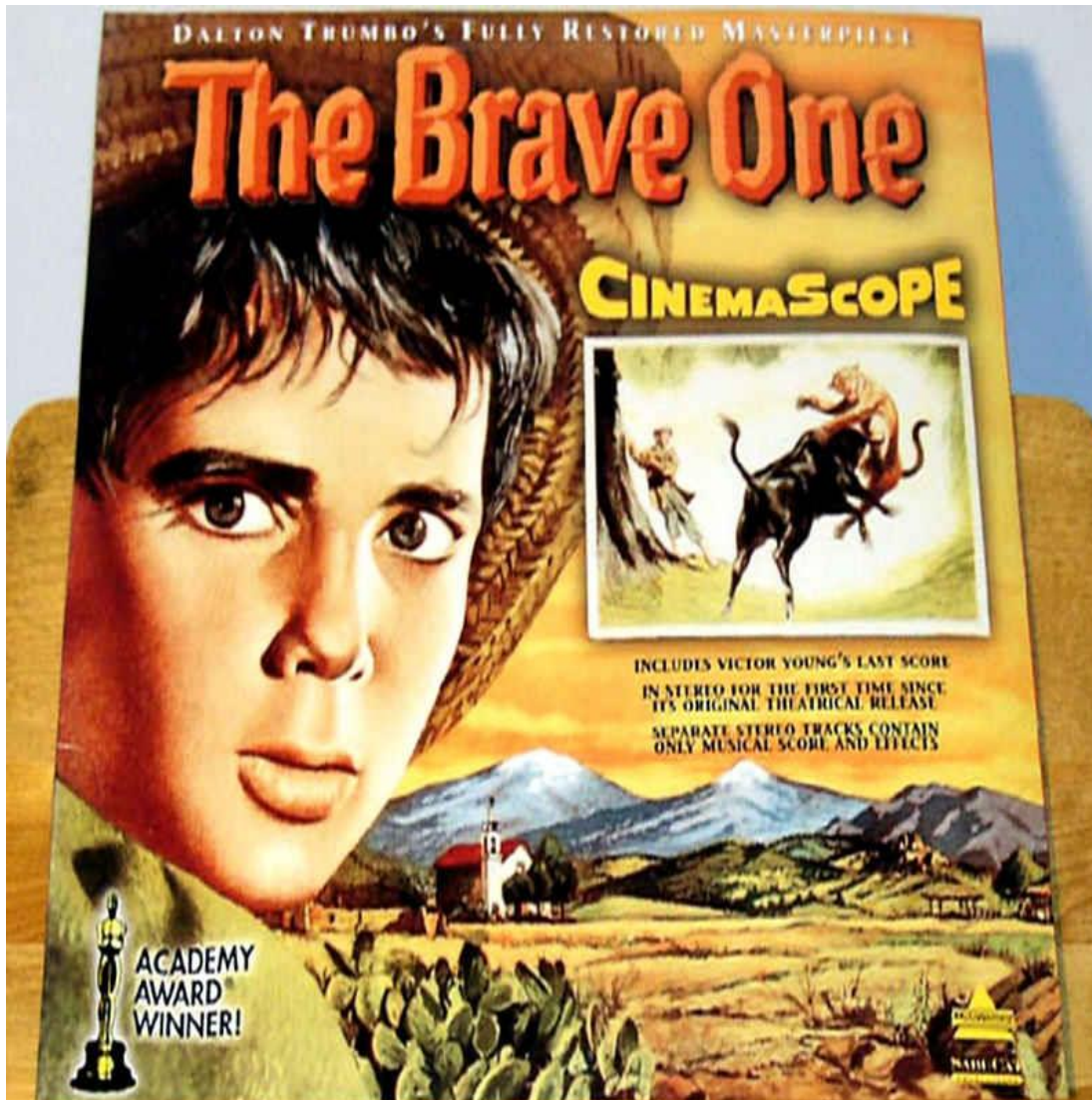
Dalton Trumbo and the Hollywood Blacklist



Blacklisted during 1950s, writes screenplays under pseudonyms for much less money than he previously earned.



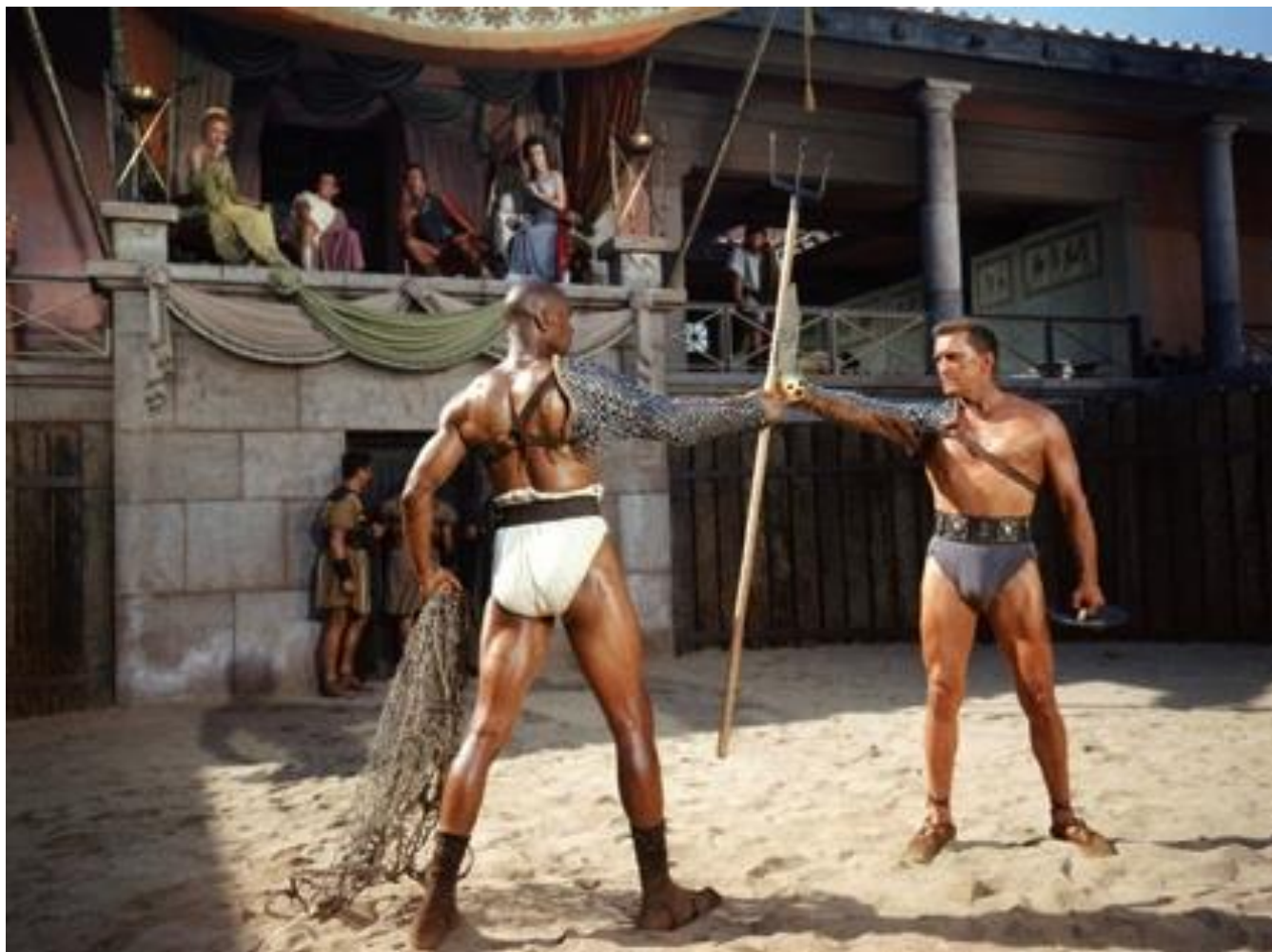
Dalton Trumbo and the Hollywood Blacklist



1956: *The Brave One*, written under name of “Robert Rich,” wins Oscar for best script.



Dalton Trumbo and the Hollywood Blacklist



1960: Trumbo breaks blacklist with credit under his own name for *Spartacus*, based on novel by blacklisted Communist author, Howard Fast.



McCarthyism Comes to an End

- Mainstream opposition to McCarthyism intensifies by mid-1950s as politicians, journalists, judges, and ordinary citizens recognize how seriously the anticommunist furor has violated individual rights.
- Army-McCarthy hearings destroy McCarthy's credibility outside of the far right.
- Supreme Court hesitantly reverses its earlier opinions condoning the Cold War Red Scare.
- Communist party, weakened by the Red Scare, falls apart after 1956 revelations of Stalin's crimes. Domestic communism no longer considered a major threat.
- Silent fifties end as peace and civil rights movements reenergize political activism on the left.
- Victims of blacklisting begin to get rehired.
- Anticommunist investigations, prosecutions, and blacklisting continue throughout the 1960s, but at a reduced level.



The Impact of the Cold War Red Scare

- Repression against individuals, groups, and ideas associated with communism creates a “chill.” Many liberals and others afraid to express unorthodox opinions or engage in political activities that might appear radical.
- Political spectrum narrows as left-wing voices silenced or marginalized.
- Demands for greater economic equality disappear from mainstream political discourse.
- Fear of a recurrence of McCarthyism contributes to Kennedy and Johnson's escalation of the war in Vietnam.
- Labor movement weakened by internal purges and becomes more conservative.
- Suffering and ruined careers of individuals and their families who were deported, prosecuted, or blacklisted.



Final slide.

Thank You