Communism and National Security: The Menace Emerges

by Ellen Schrecker

from chapter 3 of THE AGE OF MCCARTHYISM: A BRIEF HISTORY WITH DOCUMENTS (Boston: St. Martin's Press, 1994)

The restored tolerance for American communism that grew out of the wartime alliance with the Soviet Union did not long survive the victory over Hitler in the spring of 1945. Though there was an ostensible revival of the Popular Front collaboration between Communists and liberals during the war, it was a temporary and essentially superficial phenomenon. The party's patriotism did little to overcome the hostility of its traditional enemies or make it any more popular with the general public. And once World War II ended and the cold war began, the Communist party again came under attack.

This time, however, because of the struggle against the Soviet Union, anticommunism moved to the ideological center of American politics. The cold war transformed domestic communism from a matter of political opinion to one of national security. As the United States' hostility toward the Soviet Union intensified, members of the Communist party came increasingly to be viewed as potential enemy agents. Since that perception was to provide the justification for so much that happened during the McCarthy period, it is important to examine its development in some detail.

The cold war began even before the fighting stopped. At the Yalta Conference in February 1945, Roosevelt had tried to negotiate an amicable postwar settlement with Stalin, but after FDR's death in April, American policymakers became concerned about the Soviet Union's obvious attempt to dominate the areas of Eastern Europe that its army controlled. As crisis followed crisis over the next few years, the world hovered on the verge of war. Each emergency heightened the tension. First came disagreements over the composition of the Polish government in 1945, then Soviet pressure on Turkey and Iran in 1946, the Greek Civil War in 1947, the Communist coup in Czechoslovakia and blockade of Berlin in 1948, the Communist takeover in China and the Soviet detonation of an
atomic bomb in 1949, and, finally, the outbreak of the Korean War in 1950. At first Truman and his advisers vacillated between hoping to conciliate the Soviets and trying to strong-arm them, but by the beginning of 1946 most of the nation's policymakers had come to see the Soviet Union as a hostile power committed to a program of worldwide expansion that only the United States was strong enough to resist. This may not have been the case. Though there is no question about the horrendous repression Stalin imposed on his own people, his foreign policy may well have been motivated by a desire for security rather than conquest. Whether or not it was, American policymakers never tried to find out, assuming on the basis of the Nazi experience that totalitarian states by definition threatened the stability of the international system.

Similar assumptions pervaded the growing consensus about the dangers of American communism. Part myth and part reality, the notion that domestic Communists threatened national security was based on a primarily ideological conception of the nature of the Communist movement. The sense of urgency that surrounded the issue of communism came from the government's attempt to mobilize public opinion for the cold war. But the content, the way in which the Communist threat was defined, owed much to formulations that the anti-Communist network had pushed for years. J. Edgar Hoover's 1947 testimony before the House Un-American Activities Committee, is an example of this type of thinking, of the vision of communism that came to shape most people's perceptions of the Red Menace. It conformed to the similarly demonized view of the Soviet Union held by the Truman administration and its supporters. Though distorted in many ways, the perception of an internal Communist threat had just enough plausibility to be convincing--especially to the vast majority of Americans who had no direct contact with the party or its members. Above all, it legitimated the McCarthy era repression by dehumanizing American Communists and transforming them into ideological outlaws who deserved whatever they got.

Communist party members were believed to be part of a secret conspiracy, fanatics who would automatically do whatever Stalin told them to do. Though a wildly exaggerated caricature, the image did have some basis in reality. After all, the American Communist party was a highly disciplined organization that did have a connection to the Soviet Union. Whether or not it actually got orders from
Moscow, its leaders certainly tried to ensure that the party's policies would be in accord with those of the Kremlin, at least on major issues. It was thus possible to view the congruence between the party's line and the Soviet Union's positions as evidence of dictation. The notion that individual Communists were under Moscow's control had less basis in reality. True, some party members did display a Stalinist rigidity, following every zig and zag of the party line with unquestioning devotion. And many Communists did behave in what could be seen as a conspiratorial fashion, especially when they tried to conceal their political affiliation. Nonetheless, most party members were neither so rigid nor so secretive. They did not see themselves as soldiers in Stalin's army, but as American radicals committed to a program of social and political change that would eventually produce what they hoped would be a better society. Even at its peak, the Communist party had a high turnover rate; and by the early 1950s, most of the people who had once been in the party had quit, proving that they were hardly the ideological zombies they were commonly portrayed as. Nonetheless, the assumption that all Communists followed the party line all the time was to structure and justify the political repression of the McCarthy period.

Just as there was a kernel of plausibility in the demonized image of the American Communist, so too was it conceivable that individual Communists, acting as subversives, spies, and saboteurs, could threaten American security. Protecting the nation from these alleged dangers was to become the primary justification for much of what happened during the McCarthy period. The dangers were enormously exaggerated, but they were not wholly fictitious. Ironically, even though the party's leaders were to go to jail in the 1950s because they had supposedly advocated the violent overthrow of the American government, no one in any position of responsibility seriously worried that the party would mount a successful revolution. A far more tangible danger was the possibility that individual Communists in sensitive positions could subtly influence the nation's foreign policy or undermine its ability to defend itself. There was no evidence that this had happened. But conspiracy theories blossomed, circulated primarily by Republican politicians and their allies who wanted to discredit the Democratic party and the New Deal. Most of these theories involved charges that Communists had infiltrated the State Department, where they induced FDR to give Poland to Stalin.
at the Yalta Conference in 1945 and then betrayed China to the Communists. Though these allegations had no basis in reality, there were enough tidbits of circumstantial evidence for people like Joe McCarthy to build their careers (and ruin those of others) by creating apparently convincing scenarios.

Communist spies were, however, a genuine threat. Though never powerful enough to influence government policy, individual Communists could easily have stolen secrets--and some of them did. The notorious spy cases of the early cold war bolstered the contention that, as J. Edgar Hoover maintained, "every American Communist was, and is, potentially an espionage agent of the Soviet Union." The ramifications of these cases were considerable, even though exactly what Elizabeth Bentley, Alger Hiss, or Julius and Ethel Rosenberg did or did not do may never be known.

Nonetheless, there is enough evidence, mainly from people who either confessed or were caught in the act, to make it clear that some American, British, and Canadian citizens in or near the Communist party did spy for the Soviet Union and did so for political reasons. Most of them were active during World War II at a time when Russia and the United States were on the same side, and they apparently believed that they were helping the Allied cause. It is unlikely that the Soviet Union recruited spies from the party during the cold war once communism had become anathematized and the government had eliminated its left-wing employees.

Though the threat of espionage gained national attention, sabotage was the prime concern of policymakers. They feared that Communist-led unions might go on strike or otherwise impede the operations of the nation's vital defense industries. Here, too, the fear was wildly exaggerated. But there were just enough elements of reality to give it plausibility. Although a party-dominated union like the Fur and Leather Workers posed little threat to national security, the United Electrical, Radio, and Machine Workers of America (UE) and the various maritime unions were more strategically positioned. During the Nazi-Soviet Pact period, Communist labor leaders had been involved in several highly publicized strikes in the nation's defense industries. Part of a nationwide organizing drive mounted by unions of all political persuasions, the work stoppages were triggered by economic grievances, not a desire to impede the nation's war effort. Nonetheless, because Communists had been active, these strikes were cited during the early years of the cold war as evidence...
that the party had tried to sabotage American rearmament. The possibility of similar job actions in the event of a conflict with the Soviet Union could easily justify cracking down on the left-led unions.

http://www.writing.upenn.edu/~afilreis/50s/menace-emerges.htmlLast modified: Monday, 02-Aug-2004 09:28:49 EDT

"Congressional Committees and Unfriendly Witnesses"

Ellen Schrecker

The institutions that most typified the McCarthy era were congressional investigating committees. They were also the most important vehicle for extending the anti-Communist crusade throughout the rest of society. Their activities and the publicity they generated transformed what had initially been a devastating but nonetheless narrowly focused attack on a small political party and its adherents into a wide-ranging campaign that touched almost every aspect of American life.

In many respects, the operations of these committees paralleled those of the executive branch. They publicized the dangers of the Communist threat, their hearings often producing the same scenarios as trials, with many of the same charges, witnesses, and defendants. But because congressional hearings were immune from the due process requirements that accompanied criminal prosecutions, the committees had more leeway to denounce and accuse. They came to specialize in punishing individuals by exposing their alleged Communist connections and costing them their jobs. So effective had the committees become that by the height of the McCarthy era, in the mid-1950s, people were often fired simply for receiving a subpoena from HUAC or one of the other committees.

Investigating committees served more partisan functions as well. Conservatives in and outside of the Republican party used them to attack the liberalism of the New Deal and the Truman administration. On the local level, the committees often functioned as hired guns for
their allies within the anti-Communist network. Conveniently timed hearings, with their highly publicized and damaging charges of Communist affiliation, could target specific groups and individuals at crucial moments like strikes, union elections, or sessions of state legislatures. The committees also collected information and did research for the rest of the anti-Communist network. Their published reports and hearings were reference tools for the professional anti-Communists. HUAC was one of the network's main repositories, and, unlike the FBI, it shared its files openly with members of Congress and their constituents.

HUAC was the trailblazer, the oldest and most influential of the anti-Communist committees. Established in 1938 as part of the conservative backlash against FDR's New Deal, it developed the most successful techniques and rationales for exposing political undesirables. By the mid-1950s there were dozens of similar bodies at every level of government emulating HUAC's operations and procedures. The most important were Senator McCarthy's Permanent Investigating Subcommittee of the Government Operations Committee and Pat McCarran's powerful Senate Internal Security Subcommittee (SISS), both of which conducted exactly the same kinds of investigations as HUAC. More than a dozen states and even a few cities had also established their own Un-American Activities Committees or authorized other investigators to make similar types of probes. *(For more on SISS, see "The Rise of the Anticommunist Network". The McCarran Act created SISS, which had a certain way of outing reluctant witnesses.)*

HUAC had not always been so influential. During the 1930s and early 1940s, the committee had a reputation for irresponsibility. Few members of Congress considered it a prestigious assignment and many of its mainly southern or rural members were ineffectual or worse. It recruited its staff from former FBI agents or professional ex-Communists whose ideological fervor or desire for publicity occasionally brought them into conflict with the more sedate mores of the congressional establishment. The committee's tendency to publicize unsubstantiated charges of Communist influence did not bolster its credibility. But for all its fecklessness, nothing HUAC did seriously threatened its existence or interfered with the success of its mission. The publicity it attracted as well as its solid support from the American Legion and like-minded conservative groups ensured that few members of Congress would openly dare to oppose it or vote
against its annual appropriations.

Even so, it was not until the late 1940s that HUAC gained respectability and consolidated its power. The shift in national priorities that accompanied the cold war brought the nation's political elites closer to HUAC's anti-Communist worldview. The committee thus became less marginal and got support from other institutions. This support—whether it took the form of the Supreme Court's failure to intervene against the committee's violations of civil liberties or the willingness of private employers to fire unfriendly witnesses—legitimized HUAC and increased its power. The Hiss case of 1948 was equally important (see Chapter 5). It convinced the public of the effectiveness of congressional investigations for uncovering Communist subversion and it showed Republicans and other conservatives how useful those investigations could be for harassing the Truman administration.

By the early 1950s, HUAC and the other committees had refined the business of exposing Communists into a science. The often frenzied improvisations that characterized HUAC's investigations during Nixon's attempt to fortify Chambers's charges against Hiss yielded to increasingly stylized rituals that all participants adhered to. The committees' basic objectives remained unchanged: They were looking for Communists—and they found them. The committees did not randomly select the subjects of their investigations. Their staff members made sure that most people questioned during the public hearings in the late 1940s and 1950s were or had been members of the party or within its political orbit.

It was not always easy for the committees to find suitably vulnerable witnesses. After all, most Communists hid their party ties. But the committees had many allies. The rest of the anti-Communist network assisted committee staffers in identifying appropriate witnesses. The FBI was especially helpful, routinely supplying the committees with information from its supposedly sacrosanct files. State and local police forces and their Red squads gave similar cooperation. The committees' staffers and their consultants also pulled names from the memories of informers and from the documents that they and other anti-Communist experts like J. B. Matthews had amassed. And, of course, the committees pressed the people they had subpoenaed to
cooperate and supply further leads. (For more on the FBI's role, see "The State Steps In: Setting the Anti-Communist Agenda").

Most committee hearings revolved around a symbolic ritual designed to expose someone as a member or former member of the Communist party. By the early 1950s these unmasking ceremonies had become almost routine. First, a cooperative ex-Communist or expert witness described the pattern of Communist infiltration in the area of American life the committee was supposedly exploring and listed the alleged infiltrators by name. Then the committee interrogated those people one by one, invariably asking them the crucial question "Are you now or have you ever been a member of the Communist party?" Witnesses who answered in the affirmative then had to name names. Although some witnesses produced the required names without assistance, the usual procedure was for the committee's counsel or another member of the staff to read out a list of alleged Communists and ask the witnesses to confirm whether or not these people had been members of the party. Since the committee already knew the names it was asking its witnesses to identify, it was clear that exposure, not information, was the goal.

Most of the time, these rituals took place in private, in a preliminary executive session. Witnesses who refused to answer the committee's questions were then called for a second hearing in public, while more cooperative witnesses or those who were politically spotless were sometimes excused from further testimony. The committees justified their practice of requiring witnesses to name names by explaining that it was the only way the witness could prove that he or she had really broken with the party. It was a crude political test—and one that caused enormous anguish for the committees' witnesses.

By the 1950s, many of the people who appeared before HUAC and the other committees had already dropped out of the Communist party and were no longer politically active. A few of them had decided to defy the committees for political reasons, because that seemed the best way to oppose what the investigators were doing. Others would have been willing to reveal their own past activities, even their past membership in the party, but they would not name names. They would not, as one witness explained, "crawl through the mud to be an informer." Naming names was an issue of personal
morality. Playwright Lillian Hellman spoke for these witnesses when she told HUAC in a statement that "I cannot and will not cut my conscience to fit this year's fashions." Their own scruples against informing as well as their political opposition to the investigations forced these people into a legal bind. The Supreme Court had left them no alternative but to refuse all cooperation with the committees.

When HUAC intensified its anti-Communist investigations in the early years of the cold war, it was by no means clear that it had the constitutional right to question people about their political beliefs and activities. The First Amendment's strictures against congressional interference with the right of free speech and assembly could easily be interpreted as preventing the committee from probing the politics of its witnesses. During 1946 and 1947, most of the men and women who refused to answer HUAC's questions assumed that they had First Amendment protection. They knew that they were taking risks. They could be cited, indicted, and tried for contempt of Congress and could well end up in prison if the Supreme Court did not overturn their convictions on constitutional grounds. But they and their lawyers expected that they would avoid that outcome.

The experiences of the Hollywood Ten were emblematic. Though their cases did not set legal precedents, these screenwriters and directors became the most notorious group of HUAC witnesses to rely on the First Amendment. They had all been in the party and, when subpoenaed to appear before the committee in October 1947, they took a confrontational stand. Like many of HUAC's other unfriendly witnesses of the period, they and their attorneys assumed that the Supreme Court would probably vindicate them; also, like the Smith Act defendants, they used their public hearings as a forum to expound their own political views. Witnesses and committee members yelled at each other, and several of the Ten were literally pulled away from the witness stand by federal marshals. A month later the full House of Representatives overwhelmingly voted to cite them for contempt. They were tried and convicted in the spring of 1948. Two years later, the Supreme Court's refusal to hear their case upheld the lower court decisions and confirmed their convictions. Had they known at the time of their hearings that they would actually go to prison, many of the Ten might have been more restrained--though probably no more cooperative.
In 1947, when the Ten appeared before HUAC, the Supreme Court had not yet ruled on the First Amendment rights of unfriendly witnesses and HUAC was still considered slightly disreputable. Because the justices at first refused to hear these cases, it was not clear how they would handle the substantive constitutional issues that the committee's activities presented. But as the official campaign against American communism intensified and public sympathy for the uncooperative witnesses began to erode, it became increasingly unlikely that the majority of the justices would take an unpopular position on any case that involved the politically sensitive issue of communism. Unlike in the Dennis case, there was no question of national security involved, so the Court based its reluctance to challenge what it perceived to be the will of the people—or at least of Congress—on the doctrine of judicial restraint. That meant that the Court would not overturn the clearly expressed policies of other branches of government. Most of the justices disapproved of HUAC's heavy-handed tactics, but, as Justice Robert Jackson explained in 1949, they felt "it would be an unwarranted act of judicial usurpation to strip Congress of its investigatory power or to assume for the courts the function of supervising congressional committees." In short, HUAC had a free hand.

The Hollywood Ten were among the last major group of unfriendly witnesses to invoke the First Amendment. By 1948, most of the people who wanted to avoid having to answer the committee's questions had begun to rely on the Fifth Amendment's privilege against self-incrimination. Among the first group of witnesses to use the Fifth in this way were the alleged members of the spy ring identified by Elizabeth Bentley. Although the privilege of not having to testify against oneself had developed in England during the seventeenth century expressly to shield dissidents and had been incorporated in the Bill of Rights along with other guarantees for criminal defendants, such as trial by jury, its use before congressional committees was relatively new and it was unclear just how much protection the Supreme Court would allow it to provide. Still, by the end of 1948, most witnesses had few alternatives. The federal courts...
were not upholding the First Amendment and people who denied the committee's charges, like Alger Hiss, were being indicted for perjury.

It took a few years for the Fifth Amendment cases to reach the Supreme Court. Once they did, the justices, who had refused to protect the First Amendment rights of unfriendly witnesses, were more willing to intervene in the apparently less sensitive terrain of procedure and uphold a witness's privilege against self-incrimination. Ironically, the Court's own decision upholding the constitutionality of the Smith Act in the Dennis case enabled it to extend the protection offered by the Fifth Amendment. Although the privilege ostensibly applied to criminal proceedings, not congressional hearings, the Court admitted that witnesses' answers to questions about their Communist ties could become "a link in the chain" of evidence that might make them liable for prosecution under the Smith Act. Over the next few years the federal judiciary continued to expand the protection granted by the Fifth Amendment so that eventually unfriendly witnesses did not even have to answer questions about where they lived or worked.

But the Court would not protect people who refused to name names. The main problem here was the so-called waiver rule, under which witnesses who talked about themselves were assumed to have automatically waived their privilege against self-incrimination. Although the Supreme Court granted protection to witnesses under the Fifth Amendment, it did not allow witnesses who waived the Fifth to invoke it to avoid answering questions about other people. This rule, and their attorneys' understandable caution about it, forced many witnesses into a more uncooperative stance than they might have taken had their refusal to name names been accepted. It made it impossible, for example, for many ex-Communists to give a public explanation of their experiences in the party and thus counter the demonized picture of the party that so pervaded the public discourse.

Though a legal godsend for uncooperative witnesses, the Fifth Amendment became a public relations disaster. The committees exploited the waiver doctrine to the hilt, knowing full well that few Americans understood its legal technicalities. Witnesses invoked the Fifth Amendment, the committees and their supporters claimed,
because they were trying to hide something. Since many of the people who refused to testify were or had been in the party, the committees pushed the notion that everybody who took the Fifth was a "Fifth Amendment Communist." For Senator McCarthy, "A witness's refusal to answer whether or not he is a Communist on the ground that his answer would tend to incriminate him is the most positive proof obtainable that the witness is a Communist." Insisting that the people who took the Fifth were guilty of whatever it was they refused to talk about, the committees plied reluctant witnesses with damaging questions in the confident expectation that they could not answer them. Scientists could not deny outlandish charges that they had spied for the Soviet Union; teachers could not rebut similarly exaggerated allegations that they had brainwashed their students.

By the early 1950s, the disadvantages of using the Fifth encouraged some witnesses to seek alternatives. Lillian Hellman tried unsuccessfully to have HUAC allow her to talk about herself but not about others. Other witnesses searched for other ways to avoid naming names. Some took what came to be known as the "diminished Fifth" and denied present involvement with the party but invoked their privilege against self-incrimination with regard to the past. Others offered new technical reasons for their refusal to answer the committees’ questions and, in a few cases, even reverted to the First Amendment in the hopes that the Supreme Court might reconsider its earlier position. It did a bit. Though the Court did not restore the protection of the First Amendment until the mid-1960s, it did whittle away at the committees' powers to compel testimony, usually on procedural grounds.

But the protection the Court granted to unfriendly witnesses was only legal. It did not shield them from the notoriety that their refusal to cooperate with the committees ensured or from the extralegal sanctions that their employers applied. Nor did it protect them from all the unpleasantness that simply appearing before Congress entailed. Because the committees often had subpoenas served to people at their workplaces, some witnesses lost their jobs even before their hearings began. Committee procedures were intentionally disorienting. Witnesses rarely got more than a few days to prepare for a hearing. As Document 20 reveals, finding an attorney was often difficult, especially for people who did not want to name names.
Many witnesses usually ended up relying on the same small handful of left-wing and civil liberties lawyers whose identities alerted the investigators to the probable testimony their clients would give.

Even the friendly witnesses suffered. Though they were often spared the exposure of a public session if they agreed to name names, they usually testified under duress with the knowledge that to defy the committee would destroy their careers. Having left the party, they had no desire to martyr themselves for a cause they did not support. Still, many of them did not like becoming informers. It was, a Connecticut professor recalled, "a traumatic experience" that left him "ashamed and embarrassed."

For the unfriendly witnesses and their families the experience was, of course, even more unwelcome. Their lives were disrupted. They and their spouses often lost their jobs. People ostracized them, sometimes crossing the street to avoid an encounter. One college teacher recalled how his "old friends, fellow students, former colleagues, fled to the hills, in fact behaved like a bunch of frightened rabbits." The witnesses' children suffered too, losing playmates and even being tormented in school. The social isolation was particularly devastating for people who lived outside large cities like New York or San Francisco, where there were supportive left-wing communities. But even with such assistance, it took considerable courage to defy a committee.

What happened to the unfriendly witnesses had enormous implications. No aspect of the McCarthy era has received as much attention as the predicament that confronted the men and women subpoenaed by anti-Communist investigators. Yet all too often these people's experiences have been portrayed in both the media and the scholarly literature as individual conflicts, moments of intense personal struggle in which each witness wrestled with his or her own conscience. While not disparaging the agonizing moral dilemmas these people faced, we must recognize that their experiences had an equally important political dimension. The committees' investigations, while directly affecting the lives of their targets, indirectly affected the rest of the nation. The unfriendly witnesses were the most prominent dissenters in early cold war America. By punishing them, the committees seriously narrowed the range of
political debate.

http://www.writing.upenn.edu/~afilreis/50s/congcomms.html

Last modified: Monday, 02-Aug-2004 09:28:43 EDT

"Blacklists and Other Economic Sanctions"


Even at the height of the McCarthyist furor in the early 1950s, the anti-Communist crusade was relatively mild. Many prosecutions faltered on appeal and only a few foreign-born radicals were actually deported. Only Julius and Ethel Rosenberg were put to death; and of the roughly 150 people who went to prison, most were released within a year or two. Certainly compared to the horrors of Stalin's Russia, McCarthyism was not a drastic form of political repression. But it was an effective one.

The punishments were primarily economic. People lost their jobs. The official manifestations of McCarthyism--the public hearings, FBI investigations, and criminal prosecutions--would not have been as effective had they not been reinforced by the private sector. The political purges were a two-stage process that relied on the imposition of economic sanctions to bolster the political messages conveyed by public officials. The collaboration of private employers with HUAC and the rest of the anti-Communist network was necessary both to legitimate the network's activities and to punish the men and women identified as politically undesirable. Without the participation of the private sector, McCarthyism would not have affected the rank-and-file members of the Communist movement or so effectively stifled political dissent.

It is hard to come up with accurate statistics for the number of politically motivated dismissals during the McCarthy period, for both the employers and the people they fired tried to conceal what was happening--the former to protect themselves against charges of violating civil liberties, the latter to obtain future jobs. Yale Law School professor Ralph Brown, who conducted the most systematic
survey of the economic damage of the McCarthy era, estimated that roughly ten thousand people lost their jobs. Such a figure may be low, as even Brown admits, for it does not include rejected applicants, people who resigned under duress, and the men and women who were ostensibly dismissed for other reasons. Still, it does suggest the scope of the economic sanctions.

The two-stage nature of McCarthyism, in which political undesirables were first identified by one agency and then fired by another, increased its effectiveness. By diffusing the responsibility, the separation of the two operations made it easier for the people who administered the economic sanctions to rationalize what they were doing and deny that they were involved in the business of McCarthyism. This was especially the case with the essentially moderate and liberal men (few women here) who ran the nation's major corporations, newspapers, universities, and other institutions that fired people for their politics. Many of these administrators sincerely deplored McCarthy and HUAC and tried to conceal the extent to which their own activities bolstered the witch-hunt.

Most of the time the first stage of identifying the alleged Communists was handled by an official agency like an investigating committee or the FBI. In some areas, such as the entertainment industry, private entrepreneurs entered the field. The bureau and the congressional committees expected that the people they exposed would lose their jobs; and the evidence we have suggests that about 80 percent of the unfriendly witnesses did. The investigators often greased the wheels by warning their witnesses' employers or releasing lists of prospective witnesses to the local press. Sometimes recalcitrant witnesses who kept their jobs were recalled for a second hearing. The FBI was also involved in the unemployment business. Throughout the late 1950s, agents routinely visited Junius Scales's employers to ensure that he could not keep a job. Naturally, the bureau operated with greater stealth than the committees, for it was not supposed to release material from its files to anyone outside the executive branch. But not only did the FBI leak selected tidbits to sympathetic journalists and members of Congress, it also inaugurated a systematic flow of information called the "Responsibilities Program." The program began in 1951 when a group of liberal governors, who were worried that they might be vulnerable to right-wing charges of harboring Communists on their payrolls, asked the bureau to give them information about state
employees. Deniability was the program's hallmark; FBI agents usually conveyed the requisite information to the governors or their representatives in oral reports or in the form of what the bureau called "blind memoranda," typed on plain unwatermarked paper that gave no evidence of its origins. During the four years of the program's existence, it transmitted 810 such reports, most of which resulted in the intended action.

It is important to realize that the dismissals were usually in response to outside pressures. Most of the firings of the McCarthy era occurred after someone had refused to cooperate with an investigating committee or was denied a security clearance. Major corporations like General Electric and U.S. Steel announced that they would discharge any worker who took the Fifth Amendment, and other employers made it equally clear that they would do the same. Some of these employers may well have welcomed and even actually arranged for a HUAC hearing, especially when it enabled them to fire left-wing union leaders. Left to their own devices, however, most of the other employers would not have initiated political dismissals, though they were usually willing to acquiesce in them once they were apprised of the identities of their allegedly subversive employees.

Self-defense was the primary motivation. Even when not threatened with direct reprisals, the leaders of the nation's major corporations, universities, and other private institutions seem to have decided that good public relations demanded the dismissal of someone openly identified as a Communist or even, in many cases, of people who were merely controversial. In retrospect, it is clear that the fear of retaliation for retaining a Fifth Amendment witness or other political undesirable was probably exaggerated. Those few institutions that kept such people in their employ did not suffer in any noticeable way. Alumni did not withhold their donations; moviegoers did not desert the theaters. But perception in this case was more important than reality.

Ideology shored up the dismissals. The cautious college presidents and studio heads who fired or refused to hire political undesirables shared the anti-Communist consensus. They were patriotic citizens who, however squeamish they may have been about the methods of McCarthy and the other investigators, agreed that communism threatened the United States and that the crisis engendered by the cold war necessitated measures that might violate the rights of
individuals. By invoking the icon of national security, they were able to give their otherwise embarrassing actions a patina of patriotism. Equally pervasive was the belief that Communists deserved to be fired. Because of their alleged duplicity, dogmatism, and disloyalty to their nation and employers, Communists (and the definition was to be stretched to include ex-Communists, Fifth Amendment Communists, and anybody who associated with Communists) were seen as no longer qualified for their jobs. Since these disqualifications usually appeared only after the until-then qualified individuals were identified by part of the anti-Communist network, these rationalizations obviously involved considerable deception and self-deception.

There were few legal restraints. The Supreme Court's refusal to interfere with the firings of public servants prefigured its attitude toward similar dismissals within other institutions. Again, the Court, which initially acquiesced in the firing of unfriendly witnesses and other political dissidents, began to change its position by the mid-1950s. But the reversals were never complete and they occurred after much of the damage had been done. In 1956, for example, the Court invalidated the dismissal of a Brooklyn College literature professor who had taken the Fifth Amendment, but since it admitted that there might be other reasons why he should be fired, he never got his job back. A few people whose careers had been destroyed by the entertainment industry blacklist tried to sue for damages, but federal judges did not even recognize the existence of the blacklist until the mid-1960s.

No doubt because of the glamour of the entertainment industry, the anti-Communist firings and subsequent blacklisting of men and women in show business are well known. The movies had been a target of the anti-Communist network since the late 1930s. Investigating show business was a sure way to attract publicity. There were plenty of potential witnesses, for the film industry had a lively radical community with an active core of some three hundred Communists. In 1947, the Hollywood Ten hearings precipitated the blacklist. At first it was not clear that employers would punish unfriendly witnesses. But when the indictment of the Ten showed that the federal government's law enforcement machinery was backing HUAC, the situation changed. At the end of November, the heads of the major studios met at the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel in New York City and released a statement announcing that they had fired
the Ten and would not rehire them until they recanted and cleared themselves with the committee. Over the next few years many of the film industries more prominent leftists found it increasingly harder to get work. By 1951 when HUAC returned to Hollywood to resume the hearings it had begun four years before, the blacklist was in full operation. There was, of course, no official list and the studios routinely denied that blacklisting occurred. Still, writers stopped getting calls for work; actors were told they were "too good for the part."

The rise of television exacerbated the film industry's already serious financial slump and reinforced the major studios' reluctance to offend any segment of their audience. Threats of boycotts by the American Legion and other right-wing groups terrified the moviemakers and their Wall Street backers. Imposing an anti-Communist blacklist seemed an obvious way to avoid trouble at the box office for an industry that had, after all, long been subject to considerable self-censorship with regard to sexual as well as political issues.

The blacklist spread to the broadcast industry as well. Here, the process became public in June 1950 with the publication of Red Channels, a 213-page compilation of the alleged Communist affiliations of 151 actors, writers, musicians, and other radio and television entertainers. The book, which appeared three days before the start of the Korean War, was published by American Business Consultants, an outfit established in 1947 by a trio of former FBI agents who wanted to make the public aware of the information about communism that the bureau had collected. Initially funded by Alfred Kohlberg and the Catholic Church, the group became one of the anti-Communist network's main enterprises, offering its services in exposing and eliminating Communists to corporations, foundations, and government agencies. Red Channels was a special show business supplement to the exposes of individuals and organizations that appeared in the group's regular newsletter, Counterattack.

The listings in Red Channels were compiled, so J. B. Matthews claimed, from his collection of front group letterheads, congressional and California Un-American Activities Committee reports, and old Daily Workers. They were not always accurate, but they were devastating. By 1951, the television networks and their sponsors no longer hired anyone whose name was in the book, and the prohibition soon spread to anyone who seemed controversial. A tiny
group of true believers enforced the blacklist by deluging networks, advertising agencies, and sponsors with letters and phone calls whenever someone they disapproved of got hired. One of the blacklist's most ardent enforcers was Laurence Johnson, a supermarket owner in Syracuse, New York, who threatened to place signs in his stores warning customers not to buy the products of any company that sponsored a program featuring one of "Stalin's little creatures." Although Johnson represented no one but himself and his employees, some of the nation's largest corporations capitulated to his demands.

Broadcasters scrambled to ensure that they did not hire the wrong kinds of talent and often enlisted professional anti-Communists to check the backgrounds of prospective employees. One of the authors of Red Channels charged five dollars a name; the ex-FBI agents of American Business Consultants provided similar services, sometimes, it was said, after threatening further exposures in Counterattack. CBS inaugurated a loyalty oath and, like the other networks and big advertising agencies, put full-time "security officers" on its payroll. In Hollywood the studios worked closely with the American Legion and the film industry's own anti-Communists and informers. The criteria for the blacklists varied. People who were cleared by one network or studio were banned by others. Even within a single network or agency, some shows hired performers that other shows refused to touch. The blacklists' targets extended far beyond the Communist party and sometimes seemed to encompass almost every liberal in show business. One producer found that a third of the performers he wanted to hire were turned down by his superiors—including an eight-year-old girl.

It is not clear exactly why the entertainment industry's blacklist had such a broad reach. Although most of the people affected by it had once been in or near the Communist party, the blacklist also encompassed some genuine innocents, people who had merely signed letters supporting the Ho of true believers enforced the blacklist by deluging networks, Hollywood Ten's petition for a Supreme Court hearing or attended Popular Front gatherings during World War II. No doubt the visibility of the industry played a role, as did the reluctance of studios and networks to become involved in anything that seemed controversial. As one industry executive explained, "We're a business that has to please the customers; that's the main thing we have to do, keep people happy, and, to do that, we
have to stay out of trouble." Finally, the professional anti-
Communists seem to have been more directly involved in
administering the entertainment industry blacklist than they were
with the sanctions in other fields and could thus impose their own
more stringent ideological criteria.
It was possible to get removed from the blacklist. The clearance
procedure was complicated, secretive, and for many people morally
repugnant. The people who initiated the blacklists, such as the
authors of Red Channels, charged a few hundred dollars to shepherd
someone through the process. A loose network of lawyers, gossip
columnists, union leaders, and organizations like the American
Legion, Anti-Defamation League, and, it was rumored, the Catholic
Church provided similar services. Naming names was required, of
course. Ex-Communists usually had to purge themselves with
HUAC and the FBI before they could work again. The better known
among them often had to publish articles in a mass-circulation
magazine explaining how they had been duped by the party and
describing its evils. For Humphrey Bogart, whose main offense was
his public support for the Hollywood Ten, rehabilitation required an
article in a fan magazine confessing, "I'm no Communist," just an
"American dope." It was also helpful to take some kind of overtly
anti-Communist actions such as opposing the antiblacklist factions
within the talent unions or circulating petitions against the admission
of Communist China to the United Nations. The film industry
required more than three hundred people to clear themselves by
writing letters, which then had to be approved by James O'Neil, the
former American Legion national commander, and such anti-
Communist professionals as J. B. Matthews and Benjamin Mandel.
Clearance was not routine. Even people who had no party ties had to
write two or three drafts of their letters until they showed the
appropriate degree of contrition.
The show business people who couldn't or wouldn't clear themselves
soon became unemployable and ostracized. Some left the country---
if they could get passports. Others used subterfuges. Blacklisted
writers worked under pseudonyms or hired "fronts" who were
willing to pass off the blacklisted writers' scripts as their own. It was not a
lucrative business. The aliases and fronts could not command the fees
that the more established blacklisted writers had once earned.
Producers knew what was going on and unscrupulous ones took
advantage of it. The more principled ones began to chip away at the
ban and hire some blacklisted writers. In 1956, the embarrassed silence that accompanied the failure of screenwriter "Richard Rich" (Dalton Trumbo, one of the Hollywood Ten) to claim his Academy Award began the process. By the mid-1960s, some of the blacklisted screenwriters were back in Hollywood.

Actors, of course, could not use fronts. Even the most talented of them had a tough time on the blacklist. Broadway, with its smaller clientele, did let them perform, but work in the legitimate theater was sporadic and much less remunerative than in movies or TV. Ultimately, many of the blacklisted actors had to abandon their careers and take whatever jobs they could find. More than one blacklistee ended up waiting tables. The blacklist took a personal toll as well. Broken health and broken marriages, even suicides, were not unknown. When the blacklist lifted in the 1960s, its former victims were never able to fully resuscitate their careers. They had simply lost too much time.

The entertainment industry's blacklist was the most visible of the economic sanctions of the McCarthy era, but it was hardly unique. Most of the politically motivated dismissals affected Communists and ex-Communists and tended to be concentrated in industries where Communist-led unions had been active or in sectors of society that harbored the middle-class intellectuals and professionals who had gravitated to the party during the Popular Front. Steelworkers, teachers, sailors, lawyers, social workers, electricians, journalists, and assembly line workers were all subject to the same kinds of political dismissals and prolonged unemployment as show business people. And the experience was just as devastating.

Considerable irony invests the McCarthy era dismissals within the academic community, for the nation's colleges and universities allegedly subscribed to the doctrines of academic freedom and to the notion that professors should not be punished for their political activities outside of class. But academia was not immune to McCarthyism, and by the late 1940s most of the nation's academic leaders believed that professors who were members of the Communist party had surrendered their intellectual independence and so were unqualified to teach. Significantly, no university administrators acted on these convictions unless pressured to do so by a state or congressional investigation or other outside agency. Until HUAC came to town or the FBI slid a "blind memorandum" across the college president's desk, there were no questions about the
academic competence of the alleged subversives. At no point were any of them charged with recruiting their students or teaching the party line. Most of them were former Communists who, though hostile to the committees, were not especially active at the time. The first important academic freedom case of the cold war arose in July 1948 at the University of Washington, where the state legislature's Un-American Activities Committee forced the issue by questioning a handful of faculty members. Six defied the committee and the administration filed charges against them. The faculty committee that dealt with the case in the fall recommended the retention of all but one, a professor who refused to answer any of its questions about his politics. The regents fired two others as well, since they had admitted to being members of the Communist party and were therefore, so the university's president explained, "incompetent, intellectually dishonest, and derelict in their duty to find and teach the truth." The rest of the academy agreed: Communists could not be college teachers. The academic community backed up its words with action or, rather, inaction; none of the dismissed professors was able to find a teaching job. Within a few years the ban in academia extended to Fifth Amendment Communists. Concerned about the unfavorable publicity that unfriendly witnesses would draw to their institutions, the nation's academic leaders urged faculty members to cooperate with HUAC and the other committees. Because of the tradition of academic freedom, university administrators clothed their responses to McCarthyism in elaborate rationalizations about the academic profession's commitment to "complete candor and perfect integrity." The most authoritative such statement was released by the presidents of the nation's thirty-seven leading universities in the spring of 1953, just as the main congressional committees were about to investigate higher education. It stressed the professors' duty "to speak out"--that is, name names--and warned that "invocation of the Fifth Amendment places upon a professor a heavy burden of proof of his fitness to hold a teaching position and lays upon his university an obligation to reexamine his qualifications for membership in its society." The message was clear. College teachers subpoenaed by a congressional committee knew that if they took the Fifth Amendment or otherwise refused to testify they might lose their jobs. The main academic purges occurred from 1952 to 1954 when the congressional committees had run out of more glamorous targets and
turned to the nation's colleges and universities. Dismissals were not automatic; an academic hearing usually followed the congressional one. Though the faculty committees that mounted the investigations did not normally demand that their colleagues name names, they did expect them to cooperate and discuss their past political activities. People who refused, who felt that such questions were as illegitimate as HUAC's, were invariably fired. So were most of the others, especially at schools where conservative or politically insecure administrators and trustees refused to accept the favorable recommendations of faculty committees. In a few cases, if a professor had tenure, taught at a relatively less vulnerable private university, and cooperated fully with the institution's investigation, he or she could retain his or her job. But these were exceptional cases and they often masked the less publicized dismissals of junior professors, who were invariably let go when their contracts expired. By the time the McCarthyist furor subsided, close to a hundred academics had lost their jobs for refusing to cooperate with anti-Communist investigators. Several hundred more were probably eased out under the FBI's Responsibilities Program and similar measures. Once fired, the politically tainted professors could rarely find other academic jobs. Like the Hollywood blacklistees, they were confronted with an unacknowledged but thoroughly effective embargo. Some emigrated, some switched fields, and some went to teach in small southern Negro colleges that were so desperate for qualified faculty members they asked no questions. The university blacklist began to subside by the early 1960s. Most of the banned professors returned to the academic world, but their careers had suffered in the interim.

Hundreds of elementary and high school teachers also lost their jobs, sometimes after an appearance before HUAC and sometimes as the result of a local loyalty probe. Social workers were similarly affected, especially in the welfare agencies of cities like New York and Philadelphia where they had formed unions and agitated on behalf of their clients. Again, a combination of outside investigations and loyalty programs cost these people their jobs. Journalists were another group of middle-class professionals who were fired when they defied congressional committees. There were only a handful of such people, their dismissals an embarrassment in an industry that presumably required so much freedom itself. The New York Times justified its firing of a copyreader in the foreign news department as a
matter of national security; had he worked on the sports desk, the
Times explained, he could have kept his job.
Industrial workers also faced dismissals and blacklists, especially if
they were active in the locals of left-wing unions. Again, outside
pressures precipitated the firings. Although alleged Communists
were sometimes dropped outright (especially if found leafleting or
circulating petitions outside plant gates), most of the time they lost
their jobs as a result of a congressional investigation or the denial of
a security clearance. Companies with defense contracts were under
pressure to remove recalcitrant witnesses and other political
undesirables from their payrolls; in several instances the government
threatened to withdraw a contract if an offending worker was not
fired. The most massive wave of dismissals occurred in the maritime
industry, where the imposition of a port security program after the
outbreak of the Korean War screened about fifteen hundred sailors
and longshoremen off their jobs. Nor were employers and federal
authorities the only agencies to impose sanctions within a factory.
Unfriendly witnesses were sometimes subjected to "run-outs"
organized by co-workers who beat them up and physically forced
them off their jobs.
Occasionally the fired workers were reinstated. Successful litigation
forced major revisions in the port security program, for example. In
other instances, if--and this was an increasingly big if--their unions
were willing to back up their grievances, some people got their jobs
back. In the late 1940s, arbitrators hearing these cases were
sometimes willing to restore the jobs of people who clearly could not
endanger the national security. But after the outbreak of the Korean
War, neither their unions nor the arbitrators would support such
people's claims. In addition, workers who were fired for political
reasons were often deprived of unemployment benefits.
Economic sanctions affected independent professionals and
businesspeople in different ways. Being self-employed, they did not
have to worry about being fired, but they had to endure other
injuries. In some occupations, licensing requirements enabled the
states to impose political tests, usually by making applicants take
some kind of loyalty oath. Unfriendly witnesses could lose their
licenses or, if they did work for a state or local government have their
contracts canceled.
Lawyers were particularly affected, especially those who defended
people in anti-Communist proceedings. Whatever their own political
beliefs, such lawyers were perceived as sharing those of their clients. Of course, some attorneys were or had been Communists. Like other middle-class professionals, many lawyers had been attracted to the party during the 1930s and 1940s. Many of them belonged to the cohort of talented liberal and left-wing attorneys who had staffed the New Deal agencies or worked with the CIO. By the late 1940s most of them had left the government and the mainstream unions and were trying to establish themselves in private practice. The few members of the legal profession willing to handle the cases of Communists suffered economically. Their other clients, fearful of being stigmatized by attorneys who were publicly identified with the national enemy, went elsewhere. The political dissidents, deportees, and left-led unions that provided the core of their business were usually too forced major revisions in the port security program, for example. Insolvent to pay much, if anything. Worse than the loss of clients and income was the possibility that defending the party might land them in jail or get them disbarred. The lawyers who represented the Dennis defendants were not the only attorneys to be charged with contempt of court as the result of their efforts during a Communist trial. Nor were they the only lawyers threatened with disbarment because of their politics. As the testimony of a Bay Area attorney reveals, the problems such lawyers faced made it particularly difficult for the protagonists in anti-Communist proceedings to find legal representation, especially if they did not want a known left-winger. Some of the defendants in the second round of Smith Act trials were rejected by more than two hundred attorneys. Unlike the academic world and film industry, which were under outside pressure, the legal profession undertook to oust its tainted members on its own. The initiatives came from conservative attorneys associated with the anti-Communist network. The American Bar Association (ABA) set up a Special Committee on Communist Tactics, Strategy, and Objectives to ensure that alleged subversives did not penetrate the legal profession. The association also adopted resolutions against allowing Communists and, later, Fifth Amendment witnesses to practice law. These resolutions, coming as they did from the organized voice of a highly respected profession, carried considerable weight. To implement them, national and local bar associations worked closely with HUAC, the FBI, and the rest of the anti-Communist network to screen applicants and begin
disbarment proceedings against the more radical members. Few succeeded.
Important members of the legal establishment (and not just the targeted attorneys) opposed these ousters. After all, lawyers did have a traditional commitment to and understanding of civil liberties, as well as a professional responsibility to represent all types of clients. By the mid-1950s some eminent lawyers were concerned about protecting the public's right to counsel and refused to countenance political disbarments. Even more important, in a few instances local bar associations and attorneys from major law firms in cities like Philadelphia, Denver, and Cleveland had begun to take on Communist cases. Such gestures, coming from leading members of the bar, contributed to the lessening of the McCarthyist furor—even if they did not necessarily win their clients' acquittal.

http://www.writing.upenn.edu/~afilreis/50s/schrecker-blacklist.htmlLast modified: Monday, 02-Aug-2004 09:28:53 EDT

The Legacy of McCarthyism


In the late 1950s a group of graduate students at the University of Chicago wanted to have a coffee vending machine installed outside the Physics Department for the convenience of people who worked there late at night. They started to circulate a petition to the Buildings and Grounds Department, but their colleagues refused to sign. They did not want to be associated with the allegedly radical students whose names were already on the document. This incident and it is not unique exemplifies the kind of timidity that came to be seen, even at the time, as the most damaging consequence of the anti-Communist furor. Since political activities could get you in trouble, prudent folk avoided them. Instead, to the despair of intellectuals, middle-class Americans became social conformists. A silent generation of students populated the nation's
campuses, while their professors shrank from teaching anything that might be construed as controversial. "The Black Silence of Fear" that Supreme Court Justice William O. Douglas deplores in Document 22 seemingly blanketed the nation, and meaningful political dissent had all but withered away.

Was McCarthyism to blame? Obviously the congressional hearings, loyalty programs, and blacklists affected the lives of the men and women caught up in them. But beyond that, it is hard to tell. The statistics are imprecise. Ten thousand people may have lost their jobs. Is that few or many? It may well be useful to reflect on an earlier debate among historians about the application of sanctions in this case the apparently low number of whippings administered under slavery to realize that it may not be necessary to whip many slaves to keep the rest of the plantation in line.

Quantification aside, it may be helpful to look at the specific sectors of American society that McCarthyism touched. Such an appraisal, tentative though it must be, may offer some insight into the extent of the damage and into the ways in which the anti-Communist crusade influenced American society, politics, and culture. We should keep in mind, however, that McCarthyism's main impact may well have been in what did not happen rather than in what the social reforms that were never adopted, the diplomatic initiatives that were not pursued, the workers who were not organized into unions, the books that were not written, and the movies that were never filmed. The most obvious casualty was the American left. The institutional toll is clear. The Communist party, already damaged by internal problems, dwindled into insignificance and all the organizations associated with it disappeared. The destruction of the front groups and the left-led unions may well have had a more deleterious impact on American politics than the decline of the party itself. With their demise, the nation lost the institutional network that had created a public space where serious alternatives to the status quo could be presented. Moreover, with the disappearance of a vigorous movement on their left, moderate reform groups were more exposed to right-wing attacks and thus rendered less effective.

In the realm of social policy, for example, McCarthyism may have aborted much-needed reforms. As the nation's politics swung to the right after World War II, the federal government abandoned the unfinished agenda of the New Deal. Measures like national health insurance, a social reform embraced by the rest of the industrialized
world, simply fell by the wayside. The left liberal political coalition that might have supported health reforms and similar projects was torn apart by the anti-Communist crusade. Moderates feared being identified with anything that seemed too radical, and people to the left of them were either unheard or under attack. McCarthyism further contributed to the attenuation of the reform impulse by helping to divert the attention of the labor movement, the strongest institution within the old New Deal coalition, from external organizing to internal politicking.

The impact of the McCarthy era was equally apparent in international affairs. Opposition to the cold war had been so thoroughly identified with communism that it was no longer possible to challenge the basic assumptions of American foreign policy without incurring suspicions of disloyalty. As a result, from the defeat of third-party presidential candidate Henry Wallace in the fall of 1948 until the early 1960s, effective public criticism of America's role in the world was essentially nonexistent. Within the government, the insecurities that McCarthyism inflicted on the State Department lingered for years, especially with regard to East Asia. Thus, for example, the campaign against the "loss" of China left such long-lasting scars that American policymakers feared to acknowledge the official existence of the People's Republic of China until Richard Nixon, who was uniquely impervious to charges of being soft on communism, did so as president in 1971. And it was in part to avoid a replay of the loss-of-China scenario that Nixon's Democratic predecessors, Kennedy and Johnson, dragged the United States so deeply into the quagmire of Vietnam.

The nation's cultural and intellectual life suffered as well. While there were other reasons that TV offered a bland menu of quiz shows and westerns during the late 1950s, McCarthy-era anxieties clearly played a role. Similarly, the blacklist contributed to the reluctance of the film industry to grapple with controversial social or political issues. In the intellectual world, cold war liberals also avoided controversy. They celebrated the "end of ideology," claiming that the United States' uniquely pragmatic approach to politics made the problems that had once concerned left-wing ideologists irrelevant. Consensus historians pushed that formulation into the past and described a nation that had supposedly never experienced serious internal conflict. It took the civil rights movement and the Vietnam War to end this complacency and bring reality back in.
Ironically, just as these social commentators were lauding the resilience of American democracy, the anti-Communist crusade was undermining it. The political repression of the McCarthy era fostered the growth of the national security state and facilitated its expansion into the rest of civil society. On the pretext of protecting the nation from Communist infiltration, federal agents attacked individual rights and extended state power into movie studios, universities, labor unions, and many other ostensibly independent institutions. The near universal deference to the federal government's formulation of the Communist threat abetted the process and muted opposition to what was going on.

Moreover, even after the anti-Communist furor receded, the antidemocratic practices associated with it continued. We can trace the legacy of McCarthyism in the FBI's secret COINTELPRO program of harassing political dissenter in the 1960s and 1970s, the Watergate-related felonies of the Nixon White House in the 1970s, and the Iran-Contra scandals in the 1980s. The pervasiveness of such wrongdoing reveals how seriously the nation's defenses against official illegalities had eroded in the face of claims that national security took precedence over ordinary law. McCarthyism alone did not cause these outrages; but the assault on democracy that began during the 1940s and 1950s with the collaboration of private institutions and public agencies in suppressing the alleged threat of domestic communism was an important early contribution.

http://www.writing.upenn.edu/~afilreis/50s/schrecker-legacy.html

Hollywood and HUAC

by Eleanor Roosevelt

My Day column, New York, October 29, 1947

I have waited a while before saying anything about the Un-American Activities Committee's current investigation of the Hollywood film industry. I would not be very much surprised if some writers or actors or stagehands, or what not, were found to have Communist leanings, but I was surprised to find that, at the start of the inquiry, some of the big producers were so chicken-hearted about speaking up for the freedom of their industry.

One thing is sure--none of the arts flourishes on censorship and repression. And by this time it should be evident that the American public is capable of doing its own censoring. Certainly, the Thomas Committee is growing more ludicrous daily. The picture of six officers ejecting a writer from the witness stand because he refused to say whether he was a Communist or not is pretty funny, and I think before long we are all going to see how hysterical and foolish we have become.

The film industry is a great industry with infinite possibilities for good and bad. Its primary purpose is to entertain people. On the side, it can do many other things. It can popularize certain ideals, it can make education palatable. But in the long run, the judge who decides whether what it does is good or bad is the man or woman who attends the movies. In a democratic country I do not think the public will tolerate a removal of its right to decide what it thinks of the ideas and performances of those who make the movie industry work.

I have never liked the idea of an Un-American Activities Committee. I have always thought that a strong democracy should stand by its fundamental beliefs and that a citizen of the United States should be considered innocent until he is proved guilty.

If he is employed in a government position where he has access to secret and important papers, then for the sake of security he must undergo some special tests. However, I doubt whether the loyalty test really adds much to our safety, since no Communist would hesitate
to sign it and he would be in good standing until he was proved guilty. So it seems to me that we might as well do away with a test which is almost an insult to any loyal American citizen.

What is going on in the Un-American Activities Committee worries me primarily because little people have become frightened and we find ourselves living in the atmosphere of a police state, where people close doors before they state what they think or look over their shoulders apprehensively before they express an opinion.

I have been one of those who have carried the fight for complete freedom of information in the United Nations. And while accepting the fact that some of our press, our radio commentators, our prominent citizens and our movies may at times be blamed legitimately for things they have said and done, still I feel that the fundamental right of freedom of thought and expression is essential. If you curtail what the other fellow says and does, you curtail what you yourself may say and do.

In our country we must trust the people to hear and see both the good and the bad and to choose the good. The Un-American Activities Committee seems to me to be better for a police state than for the USA.