

The Second Red Scare: Science, Liberalism and Anti-Communism

HIS 605

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As World War II drew to a close, a split formed in the allied nations that had won the war. The Communist Soviet Union became the new adversary of the Western European nations and the United States. Back in the United States, as the Cold War heated up a fever took the country—or perhaps retook the country—in the form of the anti-communist hysteria of the Second Red Scare. Beginning in earnest with Truman administration, conservatives succeeded in pressuring Congressional investigations and federal agencies to conduct loyalty investigation of government officials, both in and out of the military, seeking past communist affiliations, party membership, membership in so-called communist front organization, labor organizations and other left-leaning groups.<sup>1</sup> In time, these loyalty investigation led to ruined careers and increased the level of panic on the right, who further expanded the investigations, leading eventually to the House Unamerican Activities Committee (HUAC) and the rise of Joe McCarthy.<sup>2</sup> In time, McCarthy was disgraced, and liberals were able, in some cases to rejoin the government, but many were transformed by their experiences. Once prominent feminists, civil rights advocates, labor advocates and admitted socialists, were all forced to adopt far more moderate, incrementalist social policy positions, and far more strident and militant anti-communist stances in order to find work again in the Kennedy and Johnson administrations.<sup>3</sup> This shift had profound impacts of domestic and military policy, to the point that it could even be argued that it was necessary to go to war in Vietnam in order to permit the domestic Civil Rights legislation to go forward without serious charges of communist sympathy derailing the domestic liberal agenda.

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<sup>1</sup> Storrs, Landon R. Y. *The Second Red Scare and the Unmaking of the New Deal Left*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2012.

<sup>2</sup> Bentley, Eric, ed. *Thirty Years of Treason: Excerpts from Hearings Before the House Committee on Un-American Activities 1938 -1968*. New York: Viking, 1971.

<sup>3</sup> Storrs, Landon R. Y. *The Second Red Scare and the Unmaking of the New Deal Left*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2012.

This historiographic essay will focus on the attacks leveled against a particular subset of those under attack by the Second Red Scare: scientists and educators. We will examine not only the impact on prominent national voices like Robert Oppenheimer, but also on scientific anthropologists whose work was used to support civil rights, as well as the impact on other university-level disciplines. We will also examine the impacts on curricula in the public schools and the impact on instruction, and teachers themselves, at the local level. We will also examine, the related impact of the Red Scare on the inability of academic scholars to work in or with the government because of their left-leaning views, and the harm excluding these scholars did to public policy. One of the most well-known aspects of the Second Red Scare is the direct impact on Hollywood, through the silencing of writers, producers, directors and actors, and the Black List. While this is an important public-facing aspect of the Second Red Scare, it is not the focus of this essay.

To put the discussion in context, it's important to put the Red Scare in the appropriate sociological context: it is a prime example of a moral panic and was first identified as such in early 1970s.<sup>4</sup> A moral panic is essentially a fear, spread among a large number of people, that some particular evil is befalling society and must be countered with extraordinary force. An example of a moral panic in pre-industrial times would be an event like the Salem Witch Hunt. In modern times, moral panics can include things like fear of Satanic rituals. They can be local panics, like the Salem Witch Hunt, or continental in size, like the Inquisition. Sometimes they can be based on small, real events that get blown out of all proportion, or they can be entirely imaginary.

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<sup>4</sup>Wark, Colin, and John F. Galliher. *Progressive Lawyers Under Siege: Moral Panic During the McCarthy Years*. Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2015, 8.

Moral panics can be perpetuated by the spreading of a stigma associated with the object of the public's fear. In the case of the Red Scare, the stigma was initially being a member of the Communist Party. However, as time went on, being a member of the Party was not the only criteria for being blacklisted or accused of disloyalty and deemed a security threat. Being a former member of the party, even decades in the past, associating with members or former members of the Party, supporting causes supported by the Party, or even refusing to denounce family members who were affiliated with the Party was enough. Indeed, even legal experts hired to defend the accused were themselves assumed to be tainted by their affiliation.<sup>5</sup> While there were some people arrested and convicted of actual crimes, such as spying for the Soviets, during this period, most of the people called before Congress, detained or investigated by Hoover's FBI for alleged communist sympathies were never convicted of any crime whatsoever.

Colin Wark and John Galliher's book *Progressive Lawyers Under Siege* examines the events of the Red Scare from this precise perspective. They examine the law firm Gladstein, Anderson and Leonard, and its role in defending those accused of being communists by the FBI and HUAC, and the charges laid against the lawyers themselves for defending those that the anti-communist panic had singled out for its attentions. The documents they gathered showed that a number of groups were singled out for attention, including Jews, academics, artists and labor union organizers. In addition, diplomats were recalled, security clearances cancelled, teachers and professors fired for refusing the sign loyalty oaths. This firm was one of the few firms that was willing to defend accused communists. In addition to files obtained from families of the lawyers involved, the authors reprint the FBI files collected on the attorneys to show how they were targeted in retaliation for their work defending victims of the Red Scare.<sup>6</sup> This source lays

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<sup>5</sup>Ibid., 9.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

the groundwork for how we can best put the Red Scare into context, including a broad overview of the groups targets, many of which overlap significantly, the far-reaching consequences throughout society. Given the depth of that reach, it should be little wonder that we still encounter the effects of the Red Scare today in the continued attempts to demonize “socialism” in the media and on the right. Only now, six decades after the Red Scare, is that term finally starting to lose its edge.

Many sources on the Red Scare naturally focus on Joseph McCarthy, and there is certainly good reason for this, but we miss a lot when we only consider HUAC and McCarthy. The Red Scare began long before McCarthy became its face. Storrs' *The Second Red Scare and the Unmaking of the New Deal Left* takes on this earlier period and serves to put the more public face of the Red Scare into its political context, and helps us to understand the insidiousness of the decades of suspicion that was the foundation of the Red Scare. Storrs looks at government employees beginning with the close of World War II working in the Roosevelt and Truman administrations, and how conservatives created committees and investigative processes to target leftist employees for their political views. Accusing them of disloyalty, repeatedly, the committees investigated senior officials on the accusations of disgruntled employees, rumor, association and inuendo. Feminists, civil rights and labor activists were especially targeted. The target list wasn't limited to the arts, but also to government economists, diplomats and researchers. Men were accused of disloyalty because of their wives' political activism, sister's because of brothers, and children because of parent's views. Decades-old trips to the Soviet Union. Even war-time positive comments about allies could be held against employees. And even when proved false, the mere accusation and investigation was enough to make them suspicious, and future committees would reinvestigate, as subsequent committees would deem

even more tenuous associations as disloyal than had earlier ones. And when disloyalty could not be proved, the committees would often settle for the lesser standard of a possible security threat to deprive government employees or their families of jobs.<sup>7</sup> These loyalty investigations were eventually taken over by various Congressional committees, including HUAC.

As Storrs makes clear, the consequences for public policy was damaging. Talented people were forced out of the government. The right used the opportunity to purge qualified liberals from the government, and steered policy rightward. The effects impacted domestic policy, forcing liberals to adopt far more modest, incrementalist policy proposals that in decades past they would have rejected as too cautious. But perhaps the greatest impact was in the foreign policy arena where many who had previously been disposed toward improving relations with the Soviet Union were forced to adopt a “cold warrior” hardline position in order to defend themselves from further charges of disloyalty. The transformations from the 1940s to the early 1960s when they reemerged after HUAC’s demise are striking, and many, even decades later, refused to even admit they had been investigated—seeing it as a stain on their own honor—or to admit the degree to which they had been forced to protect themselves by adopt more a more militant, anti-communist stance.<sup>8</sup>

Hoover’s role in the Red Scare is examined in several sources. O’Reilly’s book *Hoover and the Un-Americans* from 1983 is an early example of this type of examination. As the subtitle makes clear, by referring to the “Red Menace,” early books that examined Hoover’s role sought to defend him from charges of violating civil rights and abusing the investigative powers of the FBI. This tendency is quite typical of early books on the Red Scare, particularly in the

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<sup>7</sup> Storrs, Landon R. Y. *The Second Red Scare and the Unmaking of the New Deal Left*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2012.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

1970s and 1980s when Nixon and Reagan were ascendent and conservatives sought to defend both of their actions during the Red Scare: Nixon having been on HUAC, and Reagan having been a supportive witness before the committee who condemned his fellow actors. O'Reilly seeks to argue that Hoover wasn't so bad because liberals, who had been intimidated into silence by threats of investigation, went along with and supported the FBI in public.<sup>9</sup> Despite this, more recent sources, and FBI reforms, belie the truth of these early defenses of Hoover's abuse of his power, particularly his subsequent investigations of left-leaning political figures well into the 1960s.

A number of sources address the impacts of the Red Scare on science and scientists explicitly. David Price's book *Threatening Anthropology* is one such book that examines the impact of the McCarthy Era and FBI investigations on Anthropologists, especially those that used their scientific findings to support civil rights for non-whites. In some cases, social activists for racial justice were targeted as alleged communists even when no evidence of communist member was found. In addition to subjecting academics and researchers to surveillance, they made it more difficult for them to obtain passports and travel, made it more difficult to access government documents, or even to keep their jobs in academia.<sup>10</sup> Published in the aftermath of 9/11 and the beginning of the War on Terror, the authors hope to draw attention to the kind of loyalty oaths and academic persecutions that were prevalent at the time, and invoked the era of the Red Scare to fight back against these violations of their academic freedom.

Scientists that were associated with the hard sciences were also under increased scrutiny during the Red Scare because of their stands against nuclear weapons or nuclear technology

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<sup>9</sup> O'Reilly, Kenneth. *Hoover and the Un-Americans: The FBI, HUAC and the Red Menace*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1983.

<sup>10</sup> Price, David H. *Threatening Anthropology: McCarthyism and the FBI's Surveillance of Activist Anthropologists*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2004.

generally. Linus Pauling and J. Robert Oppenheimer were two prominent examples of scientists called before HUAC.<sup>11</sup> McMillan's biography of Oppenheimer, written the year after Price's book, examines the impact of McCarthyism on the career of Oppenheimer and other arms control advocates. While McMillan does not lay the blame for Oppenheimer's trial at the feet of McCarthy directly, nonetheless, she makes clear that Republican partisans saw opportunity, and the destruction of the career of the father of the atomic bomb paved the way for the nuclear arms race that soon would engulf the Cold War.<sup>12</sup>

No academic field was safe from harassment during the Red Scare. Academics were perceived as liberal, and open to new ideas, and they were particular objects of scrutiny. Ellen Schrecker notes that academics and others were subject to deportation proceedings and even revocation of naturalized status.<sup>13</sup> John McCumber looks at the impacts on Philosophy Departments.<sup>14</sup> Though I find some of McCumber's specific conclusions not particularly compelling, nonetheless, he makes clear that the Red Scare also had a wide impact in university circles, even if the impacts are not always entirely transparent. The absence of Marxist arguments and the break with continental philosophy can be traced to the influence of McCarthy Era investigations.<sup>15</sup> Even during the McCarthy Era and shortly thereafter, the impact of the anti-communist crusade of HUAC was having an impact on the academic world. Lazarsfeld and Thielens book *The Academic Mind* from 1958 notes the early impacts of the Red Scare, not just

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<sup>11</sup> Wark, Colin, and John F. Galliher. *Progressive Lawyers Under Siege: Moral Panic During the McCarthy Years*. Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2015.

<sup>12</sup> McMillan, Priscilla J. *The Ruin of J. Robert Oppenheimer and the Birth of the Modern Arms Race*. New York: Viking, 2005.

<sup>13</sup> Schrecker, Ellen. "Immigration and Internal Security: Deportations During the McCarthy Era." *Science and Society* 60, no. 4 (Winter 1996): 393-426.

<sup>14</sup> McCumber, John. *The Philosophy Scare: The Politics of Reason in the Early Cold War*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2016.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*



from Congressional and FBI scrutiny, but also from college boards, students, local governments and the public caught up in the moral panic that gripped the nation.<sup>16</sup>

Several sources examine the impact of the McCarthy Era and anti-communist fervor around the country, and especially in public education. Selcraig looked at the impact of the Red Scare in the Midwest, from Wisconsin to Ohio, including state politics, local schools and libraries and universities. Loyalty oaths were demanded of public school teachers in Cleveland and Chicago.<sup>17</sup> Teachers were targeted for investigation by HUAC in Detroit.<sup>18</sup> When textbooks were questioned, school officials would consult with local conservative groups to help police their selections and many were rejected because they were “tainted” with “New Dealism, and socialism.”<sup>19</sup> Students at universities were subjected to administrative control, including banning certain leftist organizations or requiring administrative control of supposedly student-run newspapers. Left-leaning faculty were questioned about their loyalty and objectivity, even when they kept their political views out of the classroom. In some cases, administrators initiated their own local purges.<sup>20</sup>

Pennsylvania experienced similar issues, as described by Jenkins. If anything, Pennsylvania suffered far worse under the Red Scare than even neighboring Ohio. Pennsylvania judges went after lawyers they deemed too left-leaning and accused them of subversion, and in some cases, prevented them from entering the bar. As a consequence, teachers caught up in these investigations could often find difficulty obtaining a qualified attorney.<sup>21</sup> Anti-communist ordinances against teachers were often left deliberately vague, catching up many teachers in

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<sup>16</sup> Lazardsfeld, Paul F., and Wagner Jr. Thielens. *The Academic Mind*. Glencoe, Illinois: The Free Press, 1958.

<sup>17</sup> (Selcraig 1982), 71.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 72.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 79.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 123.

<sup>21</sup> (Jenkins 1999), 101.

investigation and dismissal on the basis of allegations that lacked credibility. State laws attempted to make taking the Fifth Amendment grounds for dismissal.<sup>22</sup> As Foster's book makes clear, sometimes conservative critics were just taking advantage of the political situation to attack progressive education in general.<sup>23</sup> State governments around the country used the Red Scare as an excuse to censor books, alter curricula and undermine teacher's unions. The National Education Association attempted to defend teachers caught up in Red Scare tactics, but often met with limited success in light of the greater resources of HUAC, not to mention the lack of clear definitions for much of what the teachers were accused of.<sup>24</sup>

While the entirety of the Second Red Scare was neither public nor done live on television, the McCarthy Era where both were true marked the climax of the moral panic and its downfall. This part of the Red Scare has been extensively written about, including some defenders on the far right. Ellen Schrecker is the author or coauthor of extensive research into the McCarthy era, including publishing some primary sources with annotations with Philip Deery: *The Age of McCarthyism*; and her own book *Many are the Crimes: McCarthyism in America*, as well as numerous articles. Like several historians working on this period, she was influenced by the personal experience of beloved grade-school teachers mysteriously disappearing or losing their jobs. *Many are the Crimes* recounts the development of the Red Scare leading to McCarthy and the forces that made the moral panic function, from the red baiters, to exaggerated claims about national security, the role of the FBI, and the culmination with McCarthy. She emphasizes that McCarthy cannot be examined in isolation as a phenomenon of the early 1950s, but as part of the larger Red Scare that extended for the better

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 125.

<sup>23</sup> (Foster 2000)

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

part of three decades. Schrecker documents McCarthy's willingness to use misrepresentation, threats or outright lies to achieve his political ends.<sup>25</sup> The Republican Party, while not entirely supporting McCarthy, sometimes went along with him, and even when they objected, did not always want to confront him publicly. While McCarthy was ruined publicly by attacking a young law clerk named Fisher, efforts to root out anti-communism didn't end with McCarthy's downfall: they only dropped back under the radar.<sup>26</sup>

McCarthy's anti-communism was deeply rooted in his Catholicism, and hatred of communism stemmed from their repression of Catholics in Eastern Europe, and the Soviet's professed atheism: a sentiment common among American Catholics since the First Red Scare.<sup>27</sup> But McCarthy proved to be deeply controversial among Catholics. Based on research done in the 1970s, Crosby's book on McCarthy's Catholicism concludes that his followers among Catholics were primarily less educated, and/or had made a successful climb out of the working classes.<sup>28</sup> These *nouveaux riches* Catholics would continue pursuing Communists, and support Nixon, who was also a member of HUAC in this period, when he ran for President.<sup>29</sup>

HUAC's techniques proved to be deeply destructive of science and scientists. Paranoia around the Soviet's own nuclear tests put many scientists in the crosshairs of the committee, on the assumption that the Soviet's could only have acquired the atomic bomb via a spy.<sup>30</sup> A number of organizations that dependent on the work of scientists were attacked in the search for

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<sup>25</sup> Schrecker, Ellen. *Many are the Crimes: McCarthyism in America*. New York: Little, Brown and Company, 1998, 242.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 262-265.

<sup>27</sup> Crosby, Donald F. *God, Church and Flag: Senator Joseph R. McCarthy and the Catholic Church, 1950-1957*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1978.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 237.

<sup>29</sup> Bentley, Eric, ed. *Thirty Years of Treason: Excerpts from Hearings Before the House Committee on Un-American Activities 1938 -1968*. New York: Viking, 1971.

<sup>30</sup> Fariello, Griffith. *Red Scare: Memories of the American Inquisition: An Oral History*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1995, 176.

spies, including the Atomic Energy Commission. Given the so many of people investigated were scientists, educators, and overwhelmingly Jewish, the interrogations and investigations often took on an overtly anti-scientific, anti-intellectual, and anti-Semitic twinge.<sup>31</sup>

Despite the overwhelming evidence that McCarthyism produced wide-spread violations of civil liberties, catching up many innocent people in the process, ruining lives and careers on the slimmest of accusations, and finally, the censure and condemnation of McCarthy by both the House and the Senate, there are still authors that try to defend McCarthy and the entire Red Scare. They argue that the Red “Menace” was real and see McCarthy as a man who just loved his country.<sup>32</sup> However, these sources are, by comparison, few in number.

Since the Red Scare was largely a domestic phenomenon, looking at it in the light of American Empire is a challenge; however, it seems clear to me that the international power derived from success in World War II, combined with the technological advancement of the atomic bomb, led many Americans, like McCarthy, to see the United States as the premier world power and to jealously guard that power by resisting real and perceived threats both at home and abroad. Moreover, the impact of the anti-communist campaigns against the left which required them to adopt a more militantly anti-communist stance, made the enactment of an international interventionist, imperialist strategy possible. Without the support of survivors of the Red Scare in the Eisenhower and Kennedy administrations, intervention in Vietnam would not have been possible.

The Second Red Scare can be a difficult area to research because so many of its victims felt shame and destroyed papers that tracked the investigations into them, suggesting to me that

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<sup>31</sup> Fried, Albert. *McCarthyism, the Great American Red Scare: A Documentary History*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1997.

<sup>32</sup> Haynes, John E. *Red Scare or Red Menace?: American Communism and Anticommunism in the Cold War Era*. Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1996.

they suffered from a kind of post-traumatic stress, for surely years of repeated investigations is traumatic. As a consequence, much of the work has been done on the very public aspects of the HUAC hearings, and less so on the decades preceding it, as well those years following McCarthy's downfall. Storrs book goes so way toward opening up this work, but given the difficulties here, he's only just scratched the surface. The psychological and cultural impacts of the Red Scare also deserve greater attention. While some books exist on the impact of the Red Scare in various regions or states, a comprehensive look at the impacts brought to light in these sources would be important, including the impact on research funding, university faculty, students and teachers in the public schools, the impact on state and local curricula modifications. A better understanding of how the Second Red Scare continued the First Red Scare through understanding how it was suppressed during the war would be improve our understanding of both Red Scares, as well as the war. The aftermath of McCarthyism also needs to be more closely examined to better understand what became of the anti-communist crusaders. Tracing their legacy into later conservative movements such as Nixon's Southern Strategy, and the rise of the religious right would help put these later movements into better context and answer a fundamental question: were they connected, and what, if anything, did they learn from McCarthyism? Finally, the religious question should be addressed. While McCarthy's Catholicism has attracted some attention, the conservative religious reaction to "atheist communism" could be examined more broadly, and what role, if any, Jews and Jewishness played in the period. Many of the left-leaning scientists and lawyers were Jewish, but that factor has only been suggested as a factor in various sources, but there does not seem to be any one source that examines this particular question in detail.

The Second Red Scare was a deeply impactful period in American history and was far more extensive than just the McCarthy Era which epitomizes it. The anti-communist moral panic played out on the national level as well as the local level, and it appears to be that local impact that prompted many scholars of the period to seek to understand it better. Interest was renewed after 9/11 because historians saw clear parallels in the anti-terrorist panics that followed, particularly with the resurrection of loyalty oaths and the threats to civil liberties. As more people deep at the heart of the Red Scare pass away, more materials are made available for research, but, for those that were made to be ashamed and fearful, the destruction of papers means that the true scope of the Red Scare may never be truly known.

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