

his grave, a hoary corpse, followed by Faith, an aged woman, and children and grandchildren, a goodly procession, besides neighbors, not a few, they carved no hopeful verse upon his tomb-stone; for his dying hour was gloom.

The Great Fear

by J. Ronald Oakley

During the 1950s, Senator Joseph McCarthy and others led a campaign to make sure that there were no Communists in government or in any other positions of influence in the United States. This period of terror and persecution has been compared to the witch-hunt of the 1690s. However, instead of the dozens of people hurt by the witch trials, thousands of people had their lives ruined during the "Red" scare.

The atmosphere of fear and suspicion settling over the land in 1950 was skillfully exploited by many men, but none was more adept at the politics of fear than Senator Joseph R. McCarthy of Wisconsin, who in the first few months of the year would rise from obscurity to become one of the most admired, hated, and powerful men in America.

When the year began, few people in America knew much about the senator. Born in 1908 in Wisconsin to poor Irish-American parents, he was a graduate of Marquette University, a former circuit judge, and a former marine who was elected to the Senate in 1946 after using smear tactics to defeat veteran Senator Robert M. La Follette, Jr., in the primary election and Democrat Howard McMurray in the general election. His first three years in the Senate were undistinguished. Although a junior senator, he refused to follow Senate rules and customs, specialized in malicious attacks on his colleagues, and frequently thwarted committee work by trying to inject trivial and extraneous matters into committee discussions. A lazy and ineffectual

senator, he was an easy captive for any lobbyist willing to put a few extra bucks into his personal or political bank accounts. He fought so vigorously and effectively for the sugar and soft drink industries that he became known around Washington as the Pepsi Cola Kid, and his shameless efforts for the real estate industry earned him the nickname Water Boy of the Real Estate Lobby. But none of these activities had brought him the fame and power he so desperately sought, and early in 1950 he was anxiously looking for some issue to enhance his reputation and guarantee his reelection in 1952.

Then, at a dinner meeting at the Colony Restaurant in Washington on January 7, an acquaintance suggested that the communists-in-government issue would attract national publicity and enhance his chances for reelection. Like other conservative Republican senators, McCarthy had occasionally raised this issue before in his speeches, but he now saw that in the charged political atmosphere of the new year, it could become the salvation of his fading political career. "That's it," he told his companions. "The government is full of Communists. We can hammer away at them." McCarthy left the dinner party excited about his new issue, and his ruthless exploitation of it would catapult him to national fame and, eventually, to disgrace.

Having "discovered" the communists-in-government issue, McCarthy asked the Senate Republican Campaign Committee to schedule several speaking engagements for him around the time of Lincoln's birthday. The committee obliged, and on February 9, McCarthy found himself speaking before the Ohio County Women's Republican Club in Wheeling, West Virginia. This was not quite the forum McCarthy had wanted, but he made the best of it. In a rambling, largely extemporaneous speech, he told the good Republican ladies gathered there that the United States had been the strongest nation in the world at the end of World War

II but had since fallen from that pinnacle of power through the incompetence and treason of men high in the government, particularly in the State Department. Then, waving a sheaf of paper, he said that "I have here in my hand a list of 205—a list of names that were made known to the Secretary of State as being members of the Communist Party and who nevertheless are still working and shaping policy in the State Department." The audience was stunned, and so was the rest of the nation when it read of these accusations on the front pages of the newspapers. McCarthy had found the issue he had been looking for.

McCarthy's Wheeling speech came at just the right time for maximum exposure and impact. Just a few months before, Russia had acquired the atomic bomb. Just a few weeks before, China had been "lost." Just three weeks before Hiss had been convicted of perjury. Just ten days before Truman had decided to build the H-bomb. And just six days before, Fuchs had confessed. McCarthy was as surprised as anyone at the national reaction to the Wheeling speech, but he quickly and skillfully capitalized on the issue. He could not remember what figure he had quoted at Wheeling—whether it was 205 or 209 or 57 or whatever—and his staff tried in vain to find someone who had recorded the speech so as to pinpoint the exact figure. But it did not matter to McCarthy. In Denver on February 10 he spoke of 205 "security risks," but in Salt Lake City the next day he transformed them into "57 card-carrying Communists," and in subsequent speeches the number of people involved and the nature of their crime continued to vary widely. By February 20, when he kept the Senate in session from late afternoon to around midnight with a rambling six-hour performance that embarrassed and outraged some senators, caused others to doze, and sent still others heading for the nearest exit, McCarthy was repudiating

all his previous figures, talking about “81 cases,” and bragging that he had penetrated “Truman’s iron curtain of secrecy.”

Hoping to restore confidence in the Truman administration by disproving McCarthy’s allegations, the Senate Foreign Relations Committee established a subcommittee headed by Democratic Senator Millard E. Tydings of Maryland to investigate McCarthy’s charges. The Tydings Committee began its hearings on March 8, and finally on July 14, after bitter partisan infighting aggravated by the trauma surrounding the outbreak of the Korean War, it issued a majority report dismissing all of McCarthy’s allegations and condemning them as “a fraud and a hoax perpetrated on the Senate of the United States and the American people.” However, Republican members of the subcommittee and of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee condemned the majority report and the Democrats who had signed it. Senator William E. Jenner accused Tydings of chairing “the most scandalous and brazen whitewash of treasonable conspiracy in our history.” As for McCarthy, he showed his ability to turn defeat into victory through the great publicity he received and through his charges that the report was “a green light to the Red fifth column in the United States” as well as “a signal to the traitors, Communists, and fellow travelers in our Government that they need have no fear of exposure.” In contrast to the Truman administration, which found itself in a no-win situation with the communists-in-government issue, McCarthy was, at least for the time being, in a no-lose situation. Many people were willing to believe his charges without any evidence or in the face of contrary evidence, and he profited from every bit of publicity—good or bad—that came his way.

Joe McCarthy was now one of the most famous men in America. He had made the front covers of

Time and *Newsweek* and many other magazines, and pictures of him and accounts of his Red-hunting activities appeared almost daily on the front pages of the newspapers. He was one of the most sought-after public speakers in the land, he was constantly pursued by reporters and photographers and autograph-seekers, he was widely touted as one of the most eligible bachelors in Washington, and his office was inundated with mail, mostly favorable, and often containing donations that totaled close to \$1,000 a day. A Gallup poll on May 21 showed that 84 percent of the American people had heard of his charges against the State Department and that 39 percent of those who had heard of them felt that they were a good thing for the country. The outbreak of the Korean War on June 25 would force the senator to share the headlines with events from that far-off land, but it also added fuel to his charges and gave him a new issue to use against the Truman administration, which he could blame for encouraging the North Korean attack and for mishandling the conduct of the war that was killing so many American boys. World events seemed to be playing into McCarthy’s hands.

McCarthy would be in the spotlight for the next four years, gaining a power and influence usually beyond the reach of most senators and demagogues. He was a tireless campaigner for right-wing Republican candidates and was credited—probably erroneously—with securing the election of anywhere from six to twelve congressmen. He constantly harassed the Truman administration with his wild charges of incompetence and treason, with his brutal attacks on the State Department for losing China and giving Eastern Europe and the bomb to the Russians, with his attempts to block the president’s nominees to State Department posts, and with his allegations of government bungling and treason in the conduct of the Korean war.

As McCarthy's fame grew, he became more vituperative and reckless, and instead of hinting at nameless "lists" and changing numbers of "communists in government," he began to name names—speaking always from the Senate floor, of course, so he could not be sued for libel. He branched out to attack and intimidate not just government officials but journalists, professors, and many other private citizens. He successfully resisted all attempts by the Senate and his own party to restrain him, cleverly manipulated the media, and gained even more power when the Republican victories of 1952 enabled him to assume the chairmanship of the Senate Committee on Government Operations and of that committee's Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations. In these positions he would overreach himself and bring about his own dramatic fall from power, but until then he basked in the publicity showered upon him by his supporters and critics, relished the myths of his political invincibility, and enjoyed the turmoil he was creating. . . .

McCarthy carried his lies to the floor and committee rooms of the Senate and to news conference and public events that were reported to audiences running into the millions. Most men would shrink from telling obvious lies under such public scrutiny, but not McCarthy. He lied about the backgrounds of his opponents, distorted their statements, and assassinated their characters with wild allegations. One of his favorite techniques was to pull a stack of papers from his old briefcase and, claiming that he held the evidence in his hand, taken from his files, to read from imaginary documents about imaginary people and imaginary events, making up names and numbers and events as he went along. Sometimes the "documents" were worthless sheets of paper, old government reports, or copies of legislation being deliberated by the Senate. It did not matter to McCarthy, who skillfully

paraphrased and lied as he went along and warmed to his topic and audience. He denied requests to see the documents by claiming that they were secret documents given to him by his network of informants, parried requests for clarification by claiming that it was not his fault that the inquiring senator was too stupid to understand what he was saying, and evaded attempts to pin him down on his inconsistencies in the number of communists he had found by claiming that he was tired of this silly numbers game and wanted to get on to the heart of the matter. When backed into a corner and confronted with an obvious lie, he responded by attacking his adversary or dropping that line of investigation and going on to another. He would attack any person or organization as long as he got good publicity from it or until he ran into strong opposition; then he would drop that cause and pick up another.

McCarthy was a master at using inflammatory rhetoric that obscured his lack of facts, stuck in the minds of his listeners, and made newspaper headlines. For four years Americans were accustomed to hearing McCarthy lambast "left-wing bleeding hearts," "egg-sucking phony liberals," "Communists and queers who sold China into atheistic slavery," and "Parlor Pinks and Parlor Punks." He frequently talked of the "Yalta betrayal," the "sellout of China," and a State Department that was full of homosexuals and traitors "more loyal to the ideals and designs of Communism than to those of the free, God-fearing half of the world." He called Owen Lattimore (a Far Eastern expert and former part-time State Department consultant) "the top Russian espionage agent" in the United States, and the "principal architect of our far-eastern policy" that had led to the communist takeover of China. He habitually referred to Truman and Acheson as the "pied pipers of the Politburo," called Truman a "son of a bitch" after he fired General MacArthur, called

Acheson the Red Dean and the Red Dean of Fashion, and characterized General George C. Marshall, the highly revered army chief of staff during World War II and the secretary of state and then secretary of defense under Truman, as “a man steeped in falsehood” who was part “of a great conspiracy, a conspiracy on a scale so immense as to dwarf any previous such venture in the history of man.” He said that Senator Ralph Flanders of Vermont was “senile” and that “they should get a man with a net and take him to a quiet place,” and he described Senator Robert C. Hendrickson of New Jersey as “a living miracle in that he is without question the only man in the world who has lived so long with neither brains nor guts.”

These malicious attacks went on and on for four years, as did his pledge to continue his battle against communism “regardless of how high-pitched becomes the squealing and screaming of those left-wing, bleeding heart, phony liberals.” He was a ruthless, clever wordsmith. No wonder he became known as Low-Blow Joe, or that Joseph and Steward Alsop could write that “McCarthy is the only major politician in the country who can be labeled ‘liar’ without fear of libel,” or that President Truman, when accused by Senator Robert A. Taft of libeling McCarthy, would ask a reporter, “Do you think that is possible?”

McCarthy was as dishonest in his financial affairs as he was in his rhetoric and his “investigations” and “exposés” of communists and other traitors. As Senate investigations later revealed, he received thousands of dollars in cash or unsecured loans from lobbyists in return for his vote on crucial issues. A large amount of the donations he received for his “fight for America” crusade went not into the fight against communism but into his personal checking account, where it was used to pay off gambling debts, to play the stock market, and buy soybean futures. He also violated several federal and state laws and

regulations in the area of bribery, taxes, banking, and commodity trading.

What were the motives of this incredibly unscrupulous man? Many of his contemporary opponents compared him to Hitler and saw him as the leader of a right-wing totalitarian movement that was using the communist issue to establish a totalitarian state. McCarthy was like Hitler in his ruthlessness, his complete disregard for the truth, and his shrewd manipulation of the fears of the people. But here the comparison stops. Hitler was the leader of an ideological movement designed to take over the state and run it along totalitarian principles. McCarthy, however, had no social or economic program and did not seek control of the military or the government. He was not a fanatic or a fascist, and he never tried to organize or lead any movement. As historian Richard Hofstadter later wrote in his *The Paranoid Style in American Politics*, the slovenly senator “could barely organize his own files, much less a movement.”

What McCarthy sought was publicity, fame, and reelection to the Senate. He loved to manipulate people, to create turmoil and confusion, to be able to swagger into a room and command the attention of everyone there, to see his name and picture in the paper. There is little evidence that he ever believed his own lies, that he ever really thought that communism was boring from within to destroy the American republic. Everything he did and said was calculated to bring maximum publicity and the fame he thirsted for. His wild charges, his tantrums, his staged walkouts from committee hearings, his badgerings of witnesses, his taunts, his sneers, his roughhouse language—all were shrewdly calculated to put him at the center of attention and gather headlines and votes. Communism in government was a convenient tool for him to use to further his own glory-seeking. Had the circumstances been different, he could

just as easily have ridden the fears of a fascist, Jewish, or black “menace” to the top of the glory pole. He was a man without principles, scruples, beliefs, or proof of his sensational allegations. He never uncovered a single communist in the government, yet he had the support of millions. . . .

McCarthy was the most famous of the witchhunters, but he was certainly not the only one, for throughout the country many individuals, organizations, and government agencies were working for the same hysterical cause. It began at the top, with the federal government. From 1947 until 1954, when the hysteria began to decline, federal employees under both the Truman and Eisenhower administrations were subjected to a series of executive orders, laws of Congress, and Supreme Court rulings on loyalty and security regulations. During this period federal employees were investigated, prosecuted, and dismissed for a wide range of activities, including subversion, espionage, sabotage, belonging to the Communist party or some other totalitarian organization, “furthering” the interests of a foreign power, having “questionable” loyalty to the United States, taking the Fifth Amendment during loyalty hearings or trials, being a “security risk” in a “sensitive” job, having “dangerous” associations, and for a variety of activities that were believed (whether true or not) to lay federal employees open to blackmail, such as homosexuality, sexual promiscuity, and immoral conduct of various kinds.

The loyalty issue put the whole federal service under a cloud of suspicion and subjected thousands of employees to investigations by the loyalty boards within their departments, by the Justice Department, by the FBI, HUAC, and other government agencies. “An ugly, sinister, and completely stupid process of intimidation is undermining the morale of completely loyal government workers,” wrote A. Powell Davies

in *The New Republic* in early 1952. Federal employees were afraid to speak out on controversial topics, join organizations that might be tainted with the slightest suspicion of radicalism, subscribe to unusual periodicals, or associate with “suspicious” people. Employees under investigation quickly learned that they would be subjected to a whole range of questions and checks on their private beliefs and habits, such as what books do you read? Do you believe in God? Do you ever entertain black people in your home? Do you have any of Paul Robeson’s records in your home? Do you believe that blood from white and black donors should be segregated in blood banks? In one silly incident, a Negro bootblack in the Pentagon was interviewed seventy times by the FBI before it finally decided that he was not a security risk and should be allowed to continue shining shoes there. The cause of this expensive and time-consuming investigation was the bootblack’s \$10 donation years before to a defense fund for the Scottsboro boys.

The results of the loyalty and security programs and investigations certainly never justified the cost in dollars, man hours, or damages to the reputations and careers of innocent people. Thousands of people were investigated, but under Truman only 1,210 were dismissed and another 6,000 resigned rather than submit to the indignities and publicity of a hearing or trial. During Eisenhower’s first administration, around 1,500 were dismissed, while another 6,000 resigned. The Truman and Eisenhower administrations also deported 163 alien “subversives,” far fewer than the 900 deported during the Red Scare of 1919–1920. In neither administration did the investigations turn up a genuine spy or saboteur—the dismissals were for being a “security risk” or for engaging in some form of “misconduct,” such as alcoholism, adultery, or homosexuality. Many of those who resigned were valuable

federal employees. The State Department was especially hard hit by the resignations, losing many of its foreign policy experts, especially those in the area of Far Eastern Affairs, who fell under the most suspicion because of the "loss" of China.

It was not just government employees who suffered. HUAC reached out to investigate and ruin the reputations of private citizens from all walks of life, and in December of 1950 the Senate, fearful of being left out in the crusade against communism, established its own version of HUAC, the Internal Security Subcommittee of the Committee of the Judiciary. And just a few months before, in September, the Senate and the House had joined to pass over Truman's veto the most restrictive of all the internal security measures, the McCarran Internal Security Act. Named for its major sponsor, Democratic Senator Pat McCarran of Nevada, this act required all communist organizations and communist-front organizations to register with the attorney general's office, banned communists from working in defense plants, prohibited government employees from contributing money to any communist organization or from being a member of any organization conspiring to set up a totalitarian state in the United States, and gave the government the power to halt the immigration of subversive aliens and to deport those already in this country. The bill also gave the president the power to declare a national security emergency, during which the government could arrest and detain in special concentration camps anyone suspected of conspiracy, espionage, or sabotage until they had been given a hearing before a Detention Review Board. No one was ever put in these camps, but many critics found it astonishing that they were established in a country claiming to be the freest nation in the world and to be the free world's leader in the battle against international communism.

During the Great Fear the states followed the example of the federal government and joined in the anticommunist crusade. By the time Eisenhower took office in 1953, thirty-nine states had passed laws making it a criminal offense to advocate the violent overthrow of the government or join any organization advocating the violent overthrow of the government, twenty-six had passed laws prohibiting communists from running for public office, twenty-eight had closed civil service ranks to communists, thirty-two had enacted loyalty oaths for teachers, and most states had outlawed the Communist party. A Connecticut sedition law made it illegal to criticize the United States government, the army, or the American flag, while Texas made membership in the Communist party a felony punishable by twenty years' imprisonment. In many states laws were passed making the taking of the Fifth Amendment automatic proof of Communist party membership and automatic grounds for summary dismissal from government service. And at the local level, in municipal and county governments, authorities often tried to rival the state and federal government in the zeal with which they enacted antsubversive laws and regulations. Many towns passed their own loyalty oaths for public employees and ordered communists to register with the police, or simply ordered them to get out of town.

It was virtually impossible in this atmosphere for accused communists to get a fair trial. The most publicized example of this was the fate of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg, arrested in 1950 for allegedly passing atomic secrets to the Russians. The trial of the Rosenbergs and several of their codefendants for violation of the Espionage Act of 1917 began on March 6, 1951, at the federal courthouse at Foley Square in New York, during some of the darkest days of the Korean War. During the two-week trial Ethel's brother

and sister-in-law, David and Ruth Greenglass, testified that the Rosenbergs had recruited them as accomplices in a vast conspiracy to transmit secrets of the atomic bomb to Russia during the Second World War, when Julius had worked as a civilian engineer in the Brooklyn supply office of the Army Signal Corps before being dismissed by the army in March of 1945 on the grounds that he was a communist. According to the Greenglasses, the Rosenbergs were motivated by the belief that, if both Russia and America had the bomb, it would never be used, and world peace would be assured. The Rosenbergs denied all allegations, claimed that they had been framed by the government, and took the Fifth Amendment when asked if they were or had ever been communists. They steadfastly argued that they were the victims of American fascism, anti-Semitism, and the anticommunist hysteria of the time.

But the jury believed otherwise, and on March 29 it pronounced the Rosenbergs guilty of a conspiracy to commit espionage. On April 15, Judge Irving Kaufman sentenced the Rosenbergs to die in the electric chair. Their crime, he told the court, was "worse than murder," because it had helped the Russians acquire the atomic bomb much earlier than they would have otherwise, had encouraged communist aggression in Korea, and furthered the goal of world communism. "It is not in my power, Julius and Ethel Rosenberg, to forgive you," he said. "Only the Lord can find mercy for what you have done." The Rosenbergs' coconspirators were convicted of lesser degrees of conspiracy and given lighter sentences, ranging from fifteen to thirty years.

All across the country people kept up with the Rosenberg trial, read their published letters, followed the newspaper stories of their two little sons' visits with their parents at Sing Sing prison, and debated their guilt and their death sentence. Many felt that the

Rosenbergs were guilty and deserved their fate, others accepted their guilt but believed that the punishment was too harsh, others believed that they were probably guilty but had not received a fair trial in Judge Irving Kaufman's court, and some felt that they were innocent victims of the anticommunist hysteria of the time and of a long-standing willingness by some to believe in an international Jewish conspiracy. Many were disturbed by the fact that the Rosenbergs were tried and convicted by the press long before they entered the courtroom, that most of the testimony against them came from confessed spies trying to reduce their sentence by turning witnesses for the prosecution, and that they were convicted of conspiring to pass secrets to Russia at a time when Russia was an ally of the United States, not an enemy. At home and abroad, the case was frequently compared to the Sacco and Vanzetti case of the twenties in America and to the Dreyfus case in France in the latter part of the nineteenth century. It would be a big headline-getter until the couple's execution in the early months of the Eisenhower administration.

One of the major victims of the Great Fear was the movie industry, a natural target since it dealt with the dissemination of ideas to a mass audience. From the mid-1930s to the mid-1950s perhaps as many as 300 Hollywood writers, directors, actors, set designers, and others connected with the movie industry had joined the Communist party, which always drew a large percentage of its membership from the intellectual and artistic class in America. But few if any communist ideas ever got into Hollywood's movies, for the conservative business interests that financed the making of movies shied away from supporting films with controversial themes, much less communist ones. No film was ever proved to be communist in origin or

content in spite of all the publicity surrounding the “communists in Hollywood” controversy. But this didn’t stop HUAC and other superpatriotic organizations from wreaking havoc on the industry.

The Great Fear began in Hollywood in 1947 when HUAC began a series of investigations and hearings on communist infiltration of the movie industry. Many people in Hollywood quickly caved in to HUAC and the Great Fear. Some appeared before HUAC and named names of colleagues who were communists or suspected communists or who had tried to recruit them for the cause. Blacklists were quickly circulated of communists or suspected communists or anyone else who did anything to arouse the kind of suspicion that might cause unwanted publicity and controversy for forthcoming pictures. According to some estimates, perhaps as many as 500 people—writers, directors, actors and actresses, and others associated with the making of films—found their name on the blacklists. Among the prominent names on the list could be found those of actors Will Geer and Jeff Corey, pantomime Zero Mostel, and writers Lillian Hellman, Ring Lardner, Jr., and Arthur Miller. Some were never able to work again, while others, like Will Geer, could find little or no work for over a decade—and often it was too late by then to resume an aborted career.

In addition to the infamous blacklists, Hollywood also reacted to the Great Fear by severely reducing the number of films dealing with serious social issues and controversial subjects and replacing them with escapist entertainment—westerns, cops and robbers, comedies, and musicals. And to show just how patriotic it was, Hollywood turned out more and more war films and anticommunist films. About forty anticommunist films were made, with titles like *I Was a Communist for the FBI*, *The Steel Fist*, and *The Red Menace*. Perhaps the best example of this genre was *My Son John* (1952), a

morality tale about a nice, small-town boy who went off to college and was duped into becoming a pacifist, an atheist, and perhaps even a homosexual and communist by his intellectual professors and liberal friends, and was then assassinated gangland style on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial after his corrupters discovered that he had repented of his errors and was going to the FBI with his confession. The effect that the suspicion was having on Hollywood can be also seen in the decision by Monogram Pictures in 1950 to cancel plans for a movie on Hiawatha because, according to studio executives, Hiawatha’s attempts to arrange peace with the Indians “might be regarded as a message of peace and therefore helpful to Russian designs.”

Like the movies, the radio and television industry was a natural target of the anticommunist hysteria, because it dealt with a wide variety of ideas and broadcast to a mass audience. The industry was under attack from 1947 onward, but the major blow came in 1950 with the publication of *Red Channels: The Report of Communist Influence in Radio and Television*, written by former FBI agents Kenneth M. Bierly, John G. Keenan, and Theodore C. Kirkpatrick. Fear of lawsuits prevented the authors from claiming that any of the people listed inside the book were communists, but it contained an alphabetical list of 151 prominent people in the radio and television industry along with a “citation” of each individual’s activities on behalf of various causes. These “citations” gave the unmistakable impression that these individuals had belonged to organizations and participated in activities that aided the communist cause. And what were they accused of, or “cited” for, in this literary smear? They were cited for fighting race discrimination, combatting censorship, criticizing HUAC, opposing Hitler and other fascists in the thirties and forties, advocating better Russian-American relations, favoring New Deal legislation,

signing petitions for “liberal” or “pacifist” causes, supporting the United Nations, and campaigning for Henry Wallace. Among those cited for these so-called subversive activities were Lee J. Cobb, Leonard Bernstein, Aaron Copland, Jose Ferrer, Will Geer, Gypsy Rose Lee, Burgess Meredith, Edward G. Robinson, and Orson Welles.

Published on June 22, just three days before the outbreak of the Korean War, copies of *Red Channels* soon found their way to the desks of radio and television executives and sponsors, who in the hysterical climate of 1950 wanted no connection with controversial ideas or controversial individuals. Without being given the opportunity to defend themselves against the charges in the book, many actors, directors, writers, and others connected with the industry suddenly discovered that their services were no longer needed. Among those who lost their jobs were Philip Loeb, who played Jake on the *The Goldbergs*, accused by *Red Channels* of communist sympathies for sponsoring an “End to Jim Crow in Baseball Committee.” Banished from television and radio, he later died of a sleeping pill overdose. The blacklisting also led to many ridiculous, humorous incidents, such as the New York Yankees’ refusal to allow catcher Yogi Berra to appear on a television show with blacklisted actor John Gilford, even though a Yankee spokesman asserted that Berra did not know “the difference between communism and communion.”

Another major victim of the Great Fear was higher education. Communism in the United States had always drawn a large proportion of its followers and sympathizers from intellectuals, so it was not surprising that HUAC, state legislators, and other witchhunters would go after college professors. Many were deprived of their tenure, placed on probation, or fired for refusing to take state-imposed loyalty oaths, for taking

the Fifth Amendment during investigations or trials, for holding unconventional opinions, for refusing to testify against their colleagues, or for signing petitions protesting violations of civil liberties by governments and vigilante groups. At the University of Minnesota, a black professor of philosophy who admitted to being a socialist and vice chairman of the Minnesota Progressive party was harassed by the administration and the FBI, subjected to unsubstantiated rumors that he was a homosexual and had engaged in sexual affairs with white female students, and finally dismissed by the administration for “lack of scholarly promise.” At Kansas State Teachers College an economics professor lost his job for simply signing a petition urging the pardon of communists who had been arrested and imprisoned under the Smith Act.

By the time the Great Fear had run its course, six hundred college professors had been dismissed. No wonder many professors were afraid to discuss controversial subject matter, to subscribe to leftist publications, or even to be associated with liberal—much less socialist or communist—ideas, causes, or organizations. Understandably, most signed the loyalty oaths. Joseph Heller, an English professor at Penn State who was working on his novel *Catch-22*, probably spoke for many when he said that he regarded the oath “as an infringement of liberty, but it was only a tiny inconvenience compared with having no job.”

The public schools, like the colleges and universities, also suffered from the Great Fear. All across the country public school educators were subjected to loyalty oaths, dismissals with or without a hearing due to real or alleged affiliation with radical groups, bans on the teaching of radical ideas, and scrutiny of teaching materials by local censors. This national crusade against communism in the schools was promoted by McCarthy and other politicians in

Washington, by state legislatures, by state and local politicians, by superpatriotic organizations like the DAR and the American Legion, and by books and mass magazines. In the October 1951 edition of *Reader's Digest*, for example, author John T. Flynn warned in "Who Owns Your Child's Mind?" that social science teachers were spreading socialist propaganda in the public schools and urged parents to get actively involved in the surveillance of the teachers and books that were molding the minds of their children. Hundreds of similar articles appeared in other magazines and newspapers, combining with right-wing books and pamphlets with titles like "How Red Is the Little Red Schoolhouse?" to spread the idea that subversives would capture the minds of the nation's young children unless parents and other concerned groups joined hands to fight the conspiracy.

Libraries were also favorite targets of overzealous patriots. In many cities, librarians were forced to purge from their shelves not just copies of the *Daily Worker* or the *National Guardian* but also of *The New Republic*, *The Nation*, *The Negro Digest*, *The Saturday Review of Literature*, *National Geographic*, *Look*, *Life*, and *Time*. Books by communist, socialist, liberal, or black authors were often pulled from the shelves, as were books and other materials critical of American capitalism, government, religion, or other American values and institutions or favorable toward the United Nations, disarmament, world peace, integration, interracial marriage, and even the fluoridation of city water supplies. Books on sex education or birth control were usually taboo, along with novels with obscene or suggestive passages. Sometimes it seemed that the censors were trying to outdo one another in the lengths they went to in trying to protect the public from "dangerous materials." In 1952, the Los Angeles Board of Education banned all UNESCO publications from

the libraries and classes of the public schools, while in the winter of 1953 and 1954 one member of the Indiana State Textbook Commission tried to get books on Robin Hood expunged from the school curricula and libraries. His reason? The communists, he said, were trying "to stress the story of Robin Hood. They wanted to stress it because he robbed the rich and gave it to the poor. That's the Communist line. It's just a smearing of law and order."

The Great Fear often reached even more ridiculous dimensions. Indiana required professional wrestlers to take a loyalty oath, while the District of Columbia refused to issue a retailers license to a secondhand furniture dealer who had taken the Fifth Amendment when questioned about communism. In New York one town required a loyalty oath for a license to fish from city reservoirs, and in another a court granted a woman an annulment of her marriage on the grounds that her husband was a communist. In Cincinnati, the Cincinnati Reds' baseball club tried to demonstrate its Americanism by changing the club's name to the Cincinnati Redlegs; however, the fans rejected this change in the name of the nation's oldest professional baseball team, stubbornly maintaining, as sportswriter Tom Swope put it, that "we were Reds before they were." In Wisconsin, when the *Madison Capital-Times* sent a reporter out on the city streets on July 4, 1951, to ask passersby to sign a petition made up of quotes from the Declaration of Independence and the Bill of Rights, only one out of over a hundred people who examined the petition agreed to sign it. The others declined on the grounds that the ideas in the petition were communist, un-American, or in some other way subversive. Newspapers in New Orleans and several other cities tried the same experiment that year and obtained basically the same results. No wonder that a few months later, in January of 1952,

Claude M. Fuess wrote in a *Saturday Review* article on the temper of the times that “we are dominated by a fear so pervasive that it approaches hysteria.”

Just how strong was the communist menace in America? Not very. Founded in 1919 after the Bolshevik Revolution, the American Communist party had always recruited most of its followers from a handful of urban intellectuals, idealists, and malcontents who joined the party because they were alienated from American society or saw communism as the best solution to the problems of American capitalism. The party had always suffered because of its close ties to Moscow, which made it seem like an agent of a foreign country, from its stigma as an alien ideology in a nation that was inherently suspicious of un-American isms, and from its own internal quarrels and power struggles. Furthermore, the weak class consciousness in the country robbed the party of its appeal to the working classes, labor unions, and blacks. Consequently, the party had always been only a minor irritant in American politics and communism a vastly overrated danger to the country's security. The communist presidential candidate William Z. Foster received fewer than 103,000 votes in 1932, when party leaders had expected the depression to bring them millions of followers, and his successor, Earl Browder, was able to garner only 80,000 votes in 1936 and some 46,000 in 1940. After this third loss to Roosevelt, the party did not even put forth its own candidates, supporting instead Roosevelt in 1944 and Progressives Henry Wallace in 1948 and Vincent Hallinan in 1952. Furthermore, not a single communist candidate for Congress ever got elected.

In terms of party membership, the party reached its peak during the days of Russo-American collaboration during the Second World War, when it numbered

perhaps as many as 60,000 to 80,000 official members. But in the postwar period Russian aggression, the rise of the Cold War and arms race, government repression, and rapid growth of domestic prosperity combined to cause a dramatic decline in the party's fortunes. Party membership fell to 43,000 in 1950, to 10,000 in 1957, and to around 5,000 (including FBI agents and informers) in 1960, while the circulation of the party's organ, *The Daily Worker*, dropped drastically as well, falling from 23,000 in 1945 to 10,433 in 1953 alone. In 1959 David Shannon was able to write in his history of the party, *The Decline of American Communism*, that “at this moment, the Communist Party seems destined to join a collection of other sects as an exhibit in the museum of American Left Wing Politics.”

Ironically, the greatest threat to American freedom in the fifties was not the communism that was feared by so many, but the spread of irrational anticommunism and the rise of right wingers and fascists who were willing to suspend civil liberties and other constitutional rights and freedoms in order to fight an overblown communist threat. As Truman and other critics tried to point out in the fifties, McCarthy and his type were the best friends the Soviet Union had in America, for they did much more to disrupt American foreign policy and domestic tranquility than American communists could ever hope to do. Truman was not just engaging in political rhetoric in his often-repeated assertion that “the greatest asset the Kremlin has is Senator McCarthy.”