

# The New McCarthyism

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By Michael  
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Back in the  
year 1947,  
the House  
Select

Committee began an investigation into the Motion Picture Industry. Ostensibly the goal was to ferret out communists working in the film industry. But in actuality the US Government was concerned that Hollywood

was no  
longer as  
blindly  
supportive  
of

government

policy as it had been only a few years earlier at the height of WW2. In particular, J. Edgar Hoover had long held the opinion that the entertainment industry should be the propaganda arm for the government in peace time as well as war.

However, as WW2 had ended, the defense establishment had lobbied for the creation of a "Cold" war against the Soviet Union, a war not actually to be fought, but constantly to be prepared for at huge cost to the taxpayers. This cost was the visible manifestation of the "Military Industrial Complex" President Eisenhower referred to in his farewell address, and many in Hollywood openly wondered just why so much more money had to be thrown into the war machine during a time of peace, and more to the point, just why we were supposed to be so afraid of the communists.

Hoover's desire to remake Hollywood into a gigantic propaganda machine had started at the end of WW1 when Hoover tried to persuade Charlie Chaplin to cease making films that portrayed authority figures as oafish buffoons. Chaplin refused, laughed at Hoover. Years later, as head of the FBI, Hoover was instrumental in having Charlie Chaplin's citizenship revoked in retaliation.

Hoover's mania with Hollywood was a seldom reported but constant factor in show business. The 1959 film, "The FBI Story" starring Air Force General Jimmy Stewart was reportedly directed by Mervyn LeRoy, but in actuality J. Edgar Hoover was personally supervising the film (and briefly appears in it, shown only from the back) to make certain the "correct" image of the FBI was shown.

In later years, FBI informants became permanent fixtures at movie studios, and spied for the FBI. When Disney Studios made "That Darned Cat", a pre-production copy of the screenplay "somehow" made its way to the FBI, which promptly sent Disney a memo expressing concern at how the FBI was to be portrayed.

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Likewise, when Paramount Pictures produced, "Skidoo", starring Jackie Gleason, it featured a single scene in which Gleason's character is seen fleeing a building marked, "FBI" carrying a file cabinet on his back. That one single scene prompted the following four page memo.

Along with "nudging" the film studios to portray certain things certain ways, the FBI did not hesitate to wreck the careers of those people it felt posed a dangerous threat to the government's public image. During the height of the FBI's COINTELPRO program, the FBI destroyed the career of actress Jean Seberg

Jean Seberg was considered a threat to the US Government because of her public support for civil rights at a time when the Civil Rights movement was starting to point out the racial bias in the draft system that placed a disproportionate percentage of black kids on the front lines of Vietnam. Seberg was also a supporter of the Black Panthers in their pre-militant days when their agenda was breakfasts for the ghetto kids, local control of school curriculum, and ending the draft.

Jean Seberg, a [well known actress](#) in the 60s, became pregnant and the FBI sent out letters to the gossip columnists identifying the baby's father as a Black Panther, in order to cheapen Seberg's image. Keep in mind that the 60s was an era in which sexual relations between blacks and whites was still considered taboo by most Americans.

The scans below are of the official FBI letter from Los Angeles to Washington D.C. asking permission for the scam.

[letter requesting permission for the smearing of Jean Seberg.](#)

[page two of request for permission to smear of Jean Seberg](#)

The text of the letter:

*"Bureau permission is requested to publicize the pregnancy of Jean Seberg, well-known movie actress by (name deleted) Black Panther (BPP) (deleted) by advising Hollywood "Gossip-Columnists" in the Los Angeles area of the situation. It is felt that the possible publication of Seberg's plight could cause her embarrassment and serve to cheapen her image with the general public.*

*" 'It is proposed that the following letter from a fictitious person be sent to local columnists:*

*"I was just thinking about you and remembered I still owe you a favor. So ---- I was in Paris last week and ran into Jean Seberg, who was heavy with baby. I thought she and Romaine [sic] had gotten together again, but she confided the child belonged to (deleted) of the Black Panthers, one (deleted). The dear girl is getting around!*

*" 'Anyway, I thought you might get a scoop on the others. Be good and I'll see you soon.*

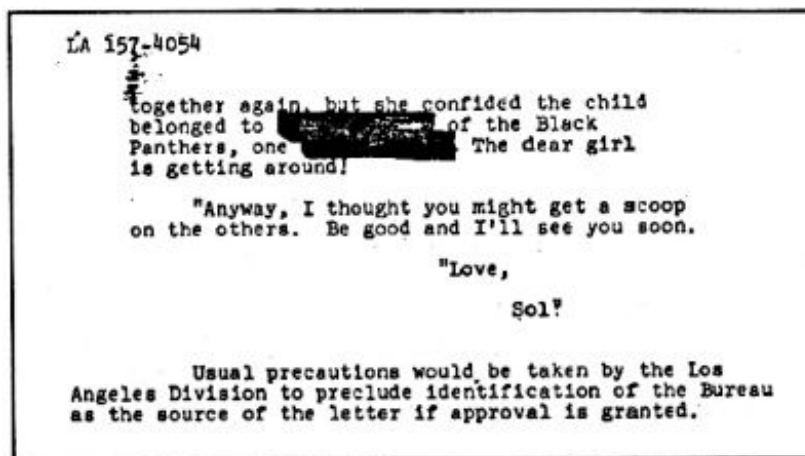
*'Love, " 'Sol.,*

*"Usual precautions would be taken by the Los Angeles Division to preclude identification of the Bureau as the source of the letter if approval is granted."*



Permission to use the fake letter was granted, but with the suggestion that the smear be delayed until Jean Seberg's pregnancy was in a very obvious condition.

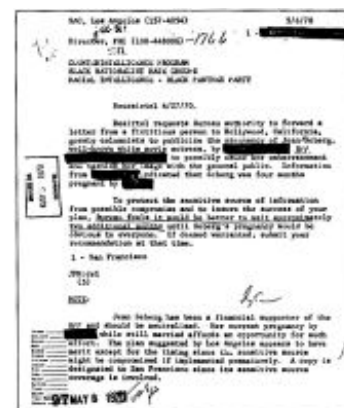
[letter granting permission for the smearing of Jean Seberg.](#)



The story was then run by Los Angeles Times propagandist Joyce Haber.

[Click for full size picture of the Haber Article that launched the smear.](#)

The story was picked up by Newsweek and the international press. The shock of the story was so severe that Jean Seberg suffered a miscarriage. The funeral for the child was held with an open casket, so that the lie stood revealed in its most tragic form. Jean Seberg, her baby dead and her career shattered by this outright lie, attempted suicide several times, finally succeeding in a French Hotel.



[memo that accompanied copy of the Haber story sent to FBI files.](#)

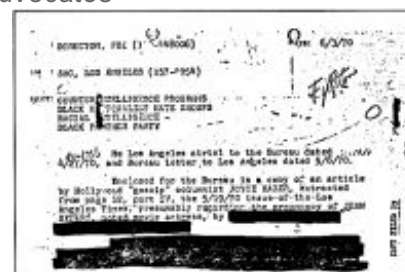
(The name which was redacted from the memo during the FOIA process is thought by many to have been Raymond Hewit, a Black Panther leader. His "outright lie" was far more direct. The FBI typed up a letter on official FBI stationery identifying Hewit as an informant and planted it where other Black Panthers would find it in the hopes that Hewit would then be killed.)

Following Seberg's death, the Los Angeles Times, the key instrument of her torment, issued a statement by the FBI.



*"The days when the FBI used derogatory information to combat advocates of unpopular causes have long since passed. We are out of that business forever."*

The Senate committee that looked into COINTELPRO disagreed, however.



*"Cointelpro activities may continue today under the rubric of 'investigation.'"*

Finally, no single celebrity filled the government with more fear than did ex-Beatle John Lennon. Lennon's

popularity, and hence his ability to influence popular opinion, coupled with his strong anti-war stance, made him a real threat in the event the United States decided it had to go to war. For this reason, Lennon was one of the most watched celebrities, and according to Lennon's youngest son, the victim of a government assassination plot.

Having documented the FBI's willingness to destroy anyone they feel represents a threat to the government, let us return to the days of the House Select Committee on UnAmerican Activities.

While Senator Joseph McCarthy grabbed headlines with his shouts of "Communist", Hoover set about his self-appointed task of purging Hollywood of any he viewed as "disloyal" to the United States, which meant anyone unwilling to make the movies they were told to make, when and how they were told to make them. Senator McCarthy's screed of "Communist" provided Hoover with a bludgeon he could and did use with impunity on Hollywood's creative talents. Careers were ruined. Some 400 people, mostly innocent of any actual wrongdoing, were destroyed. Some, like Jean Seberg would later do, committed suicide. Ten men (the famous Hollywood Ten), Alvah Bessie, Herbert Biberman, Lester Cole, Ring Lardner jr., John Howard Lawson, Albert Maltz, Samuel Ornitz, Adrian Scott, Dalton Trumbo, and eminent director Edward Dmytryk were jailed for contempt of Congress.

Others punished for refusing to cooperate included Larry Adler, Stella Adler, Leonard Bernstein, Marc Blitzstein, Joseph Bromberg, Charlie Chaplin, Aaron Copland, Hanns Eisler, Carl Foreman, John Garfield, Howard Da Silva, Dashiell Hammett, E. Y. Harburg, Lillian Hellman, Burl Ives, Arthur Miller, Dorothy Parker, Philip Loeb, Joseph Losey, Anne Revere, Pete Seeger, Gale Sondergaard, Louis Untermeyer, Josh White, Clifford Odets, Michael Wilson, Paul Jarrico, Jeff Corey, John Randolph, Canada Lee, Orson Welles, Paul Green, Sidney Kingsley, Paul Robeson, Richard Wright and Abraham Polonsky. Lee Grant was registered on the black list because she refused to give evidence against her husband Arnold Manoff.

Stars such as Larry Parks were destroyed because they refused to "name names" of other actors who were party members. Actor Philip Loeb committed suicide. Edward G. Robinson, never a communist, was put on a "grey list," and spent the rest of his life making B movies (except for his final role opposite Charlton Heston in "Soylent Green"). Sam Jaffe, formerly a well-known actor and Oscar winner in 1950 was registered on the black list because he refused to cooperate with the committee. He spent the next 6 years working as a math teacher and living at his sister's until he was able to return to films in 1957.

Of course, what was really involved was money. War is good for business. Business had been great during WW2 and the newly created "Cold War" was just a way to keep business good. The Military Industrial Complex NEEDED Hollywood to demonize the Soviets. Otherwise, too many people were going to ask why we were being told to be so afraid of them, and few in the government had a really convincing answer for that question. So, in order to perpetuate the Cold War, those in Hollywood who might sympathize with the designated villains had to be removed; their ruined lives a small price to pay for unending access to the taxpayers' wallets.

But that was then and this is now.

Once again vast sums of money are being spent on a war, this time a hot one and getting hotter. Once again parties with a vested interest are out to smear and destroy anyone who dares ask if the wars are worth the sacrifice of our young people (not to mention the money), indeed if there really is any point at all to the wars aside from justifying the flow of money to defense contractors.

But the Soviet Union has gone out of business. The word "communist" doesn't carry the same psychological impact it used to, so the war hawk smear squad has come up with a new one, "Anti-Semite." Like "Communist", "Anti-Semite" is used to ruin the lives of people who have not actually done anything wrong other than to challenge the war profiteers. It is a new word for an old trick, and I am amazed that



they are still playing the same old game, but I guess the FBI can always find some dumb-assed idiot to fall for it and do their dirty work of wrecking a career for them.

Of course, it really isn't that new a word. Oddly enough, Charles Lindbergh the famous aviator commented in a [speech in Des Moines in 1941...](#)

*Our theaters soon became filled with plays portraying the glory of war. Newsreels lost all semblance of objectivity. Newspapers and magazines began to lose advertising if they carried anti-war articles. A smear campaign was instituted against individuals who opposed intervention. The terms "fifth columnist," "traitor," "Nazi," "**anti-Semitic**" were thrown ceaselessly at any one who dared to suggest that it was not to the best interests of the United States to enter the war. Men lost their jobs if they were frankly anti-war. Many others dared no longer speak.*

Today we are seeing once again the heavy hand of the war profiteers trying to reshape the film industry into a tool to propagandize the public into a high war-fever such that they will gladly trade their own blood for gold to line the pockets of the defense establishment. And those individuals who have the courage to speak out are attacked, and once again they are smeared to silence them. In the 1940s it was "Communist", today it is "Anti-Semite", but aside from the particular label used, the methods, goals, and morality are little changed from the days of Joseph McCarthy.

If there is a difference today it is that the American people are better educated. No longer dependent on the state schools, or controlled media, the public understands the tactics used to silence those who speak out. As a result, those who speak out are more and more not only accorded the sympathetic ear that their message deserves, but the effects of the smearing are far less ruinous than in times past.

Thus, when we see people like Willie Nelson, Sean Penn, and Marion Cotillard speak out and survive, or when people like Tom Shadyac (or myself) voluntarily walk away from Hollywood because speaking the truth matters more to them, it sends a message that it is now permissible, indeed imperative to speak out. This is not to say that there are not risks. Rosie O'Donnell lost her spot on "The View", but the majority of Americans understand exactly why, and understand that Rosie sacrificed a great deal trying to get the truth out. Rosie is and will be remembered as a hero for truth long after her co-hosts on "The View" are properly forgotten.

In contrast, of course, we look back at those who aided the "Commie" witch-hunts of the 1940s with deserved contempt. No doubt many aided Hoover purely to rid themselves of competition, and then tried to lull themselves to sleep with the idea that in some way they had actually done something good for the nation by wrecking their neighbors' careers. I have no doubt strong liquor played a role in this grossest of self-deception. But if the informants and smear artists of the 1940s are remembered in a poor light, that should serve as a reminder to the informants and smear artists of today. It does not matter what you do with the rest of your life, aiding the new version of McCarthyism is how history will remember you. While people like Charlie Sheen, Willie Nelson, Sean Penn, and Marion Cotillard (and to step out of entertainment, former President Jimmy Carter) will be remembered and honored for their courage, history will lump the smear artists together with Stalin's "Useful idiots", little more than no-talent opportunists for whom ratting out someone was the fastest path to advancement.

They say that history repeats itself, and indeed that is the major thing wrong with history. We are seeing history repeat itself again. We have been down this path before, in the 1940s. Whether the word is "Communist" or "Anti-Semite", Hollywood is making the same mistake all over again. And Hollywood will have to live with that image in the coming decades.

