

The Blacklist Propaganda Never Stops



The other day, as part of my constant effort to find non-political content to vary my daily cultural diet, I started listening to a new series of YouTube podcasts about the life of Lucille Ball. Produced by Turner Classic Movies, it's narrated by Ben Mankiewicz, the late Robert Osborne's successor as TCM host. The series was pleasantly diverting – right up until [Episode 7](#), “Red Scare,” which, having some familiarity with Lucy's life story, I should have seen coming.

You see, Lucy's maternal grandfather, Fred Hunt, was a communist. In biographies, he comes off as being rather like Arthur Spooner on *King of Queens* – a lovable eccentric with happy memories of socialist summer camp and of Broadway agitprop by Clifford Odets. At 24, at Fred's urging, Lucy – who knew nothing about politics – registered to vote as a

communist. It was the mid-1930s; Lucy wasn't yet famous and communism wasn't yet taken seriously in the corridors of power.

Two decades later, however, everything had changed. Lucy was a TV star, and the communist backgrounds of many celebrities were coming back to haunt them. Wisconsin Sen. Joseph McCarthy, says Mankiewicz, "believed communists had infiltrated the U.S. government at all levels, even intelligence agencies." The implication is that McCarthy was delusional. But McCarthy was right. For example, State Department official Alger Hiss, accused in 1948 of being a Soviet spy, was proven in 1995 to have been one. But the Left continued to deny his guilt. Mankiewicz doesn't mention Hiss.

From McCarthy, Mankiewicz moves on to the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC), about which we hear the following from Aaron Sorkin, the leftist writer-director behind *The West Wing*, *The Newsroom*, and an upcoming Lucy and Desi biopic, *Being the Ricardos*: "There was a tremendous fear that communists had infiltrated both our government and the entertainment industry and that they were seeking to brainwash our children through movies and television."

Again, there's no acknowledgment here that communists *had* infiltrated the entertainment industry – and that, as Allan H. Ryskind recounts in his 2015 book [Hollywood Traitors](#), they were under Kremlin orders to work communist ideas into their scripts. Indeed, from the 1930s through the late 1940s, Hollywood communists dominated the Screen Actors Guild and helped smooth the advance of their fellow believers while trying to stall the professional progress of non-communists. But none of this makes it into Mankiewicz's account.

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Next stop in Mankiewicz's selective history: the HUAC hearings and the Blacklist. A group of screenwriters known as the Hollywood Ten, Sorkin tells us, were imprisoned for refusing to name names or to answer the question "Are you now or have you ever been a member of the Communist Party?" Mankiewicz encourages us to see them as noble heroes of freedom. In fact, they were all Communist Party members, sworn to destroy freedom.

After all this, we finally get back to Lucy. A year or so into the run of *I Love Lucy*, HUAC grew interested in her long-ago Communist Party registration, and columnist Walter Winchell broke the news. Sorkin: "Winchell was a communist-hunter. A very irresponsible communist-hunter." What made him irresponsible? The fact that he reported the facts? If being a "communist-hunter" made Winchell "irresponsible," what word would Sorkin use to describe actual Hollywood communists?

Lucy had a few anxious hours, thinking HUAC and/or the FBI would bring down her career, but within days, everything was straightened out. Sorkin comments that it wouldn't surprise him if CBS and Philip Morris (*Lucy's* sponsor) "exerted influence" to make her problems go away and thus keep the profits flowing. Again, cynical words about capitalists – but not a negative word about Stalinism.

I'd hardly finished watching "Red Scare" when I stumbled upon another new [video](#), this one a profile of the superb Oscar-winning actress Lee Grant by a popular (but anonymous) YouTuber whose knowledge of film is as pronounced as her leftist bias. Like Lucy, Grant had problems with HUAC; unlike Lucy, she had them for 12 years. The reason: Grant's then husband, Arnold Manoff, was a Communist Party member; Grant wasn't, but her marriage to him was enough to keep her off the silver screen.

No, it wasn't fair. But watching this video, like TCM's, you'd think the Blacklist was the moral equivalent of the Gulag,

Holodomor, and Stalin's show trials all rolled into one – when in fact the Blacklist's whole point was to protect American liberty from traitors who fully and blindly supported those acts of supreme Soviet evil. Grant is presented as a victim, but we're invited to admire her vicious 1955 campaign to oust the non-communist leaders of AFTRA, the American Federation of Television and Radio Artists. While we're invited to deplore Ronald Reagan, then an anti-communist Hollywood actor, for communicating with the FBI, Hollywood communists' regular contacts with their Kremlin handlers go unmentioned.

“Reagan worked so tirelessly to silence liberal voices,” we're told in the Lee Grant video, as if “liberal” were equivalent to “communist.” In fact, it was communists like the screenwriter Dalton Trumbo who labored to check the influence of non-communist members of Hollywood unions, cynically manipulating naive Hollywood liberals into supporting Kremlin-backed initiatives, giving pro-Moscow speeches, and mouthing dialogue drenched in Leninist ideology. As Ryskind notes, Reagan, far from silencing liberals, was in his movie-star days a liberal himself – one of a handful of smart anti-communists in Hollywood ([Olivia de Havilland](#) was another) who recognized what Trumbo and company were up to and stood up bravely to their attempts to make the Dream Factory a tool of Stalin.

None of this pro-communist propaganda is new. For decades, the movie industry has encouraged us to weep over the Hollywood Blacklist, in films like [The Way We Were](#) (1973), [The Front](#) (1976), [Guilty by Suspicion](#) (1991), [The Majestic](#) (2001), and [Good Night and Good Luck](#) (2005). Online, you can find innumerable articles hailing these movies and bemoaning the Blacklist. Almost invariably, the actual communism of the “victims” is airbrushed away, like a party apparatchik in a Soviet photo. One such article, for instance, laments that Trumbo “went to jail for eleven months for refusing to answer the HUAC committee's questions about his alleged communist

involvement.” No “alleged” about it: even [Trumbo](#), the hagiographic 2015 biopic, admits – and celebrates – his communism.

Of course, today’s Hollywood loves the Blacklist because it enables filmmakers to depict its “victims” as noble and thereby to contradict the image of Tinseltown as a community of spoiled, narcissistic fluffheads. But you never hear from Hollywood about the prewar and wartime years during which it was non-communists whose politics could get them into trouble at the studios. And you’ll certainly never get any member of Hollywood’s current left-wing establishment to acknowledge that, for decades now, it’s the conservatives in La-La Land who’ve had to stay in the closet or face career suicide. When, one wonders, will we get a movie about *this* Blacklist, which has lasted far longer and affected many more lives than the Blacklist of 70-odd years ago? Don’t hold your breath.

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