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Hope for America: Performers, Politics and Pop Culture

A Climate of Fear

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The entertainment industries suffered greatly during the Cold War from pressure to purge their ranks of communists, former communists, and those who had endorsed causes that communists also supported. As a result of hearings by the House Committee on Un-American Activities, ten Hollywood screenwriters and directors were imprisoned and hundreds more in the industry were blacklisted. Radio and television networks succumbed to intimidation from advertisers and civic organizations during a period in which China went communist, the Soviets tested an atomic bomb, the Korean War broke out, and a Soviet spy ring was exposed. The period became identified with the term "McCarthyism," as the televised hearings of Senator Joseph R. McCarthy nourished a climate of fear and intimidation throughout the United States.



But Eisenhower isn't really worried about Russia using the atomic bomb. He's got an ace up his sleeve. . . . One false move and he'll drop Senator McCarthy on Moscow.—Bob Hope, 1953

House Committee on Un-American Activities

During the Cold War, polarization of the Hollywood community reached a peak. In October 1947, Gary Cooper (1901–1961), a member of the right-wing Motion Picture Alliance for the Preservation of American Ideals, was welcomed to a House Committee on Un-American Activities (HUAC) hearing as a "friendly" witness. In May 1953, blacklisted actor Lionel Stander (1908–1994), testified about a "fanatic group of subversives [who] have blacklisted artists and are attempting to impose censorship," but was silenced. Stander remained blacklisted until 1965.

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[Gary Cooper testifying before the House Committee on Un-American Activities in Washington, D.C.](#), October 23, 1947. Acme Photo. New York World-Telegram and Sun Newspaper Photograph Collection, [Prints and Photographs Division](#), Library of Congress (063.00.00) [Digital ID# pmsca-24369]

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Blacklisting in Radio and Television

In June 1950, three former FBI agents who had created American Business Consultants, a vigilante organization to combat communism, issued *Red Channels*, a booklet listing 151 people connected with the broadcasting industry whom they suspected of subversive activities. The publication listed organizations and activities with which each individual had "reported" associations. Along with in-house private lists, *Red Channels* was adopted by the radio and television industries as a blacklist to deny employment to those named.



Red Channels: The Report of Communist Influence in Radio and Television. New York: Counterattack, 1950. Reproduction. [General Collections](#), Library of Congress (065.00.00) [Digital ID# bhp0065_01]

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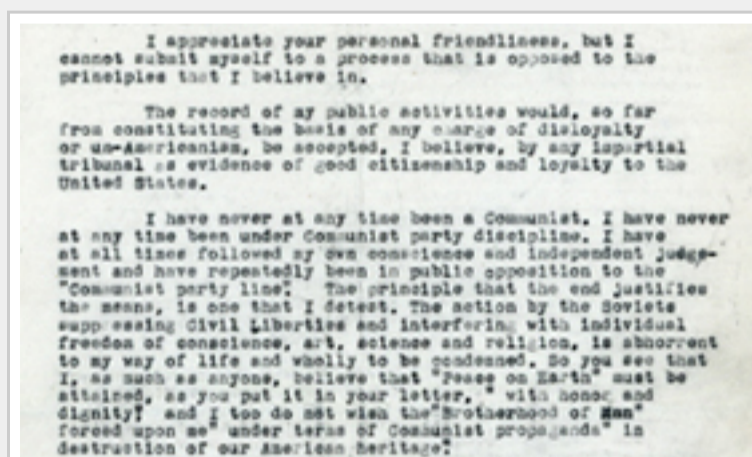
An Actor Protests Blacklisting

Actor Sam Jaffe (1891–1984) was subpoenaed to appear before HUAC after he had been listed in *Red Channels*. Although the subpoena later was discharged, Jaffe was not allowed to work in radio, television, or motion pictures for seven years. In a letter to Nate Spingold (1886–1958), Columbia Pictures executive vice president who was responsible for vetting suspected subversives, Jaffe vigorously condemned the blacklisting process. Previously, R. Lawrence Siegel, a prominent attorney for victims of the blacklist, pled Jaffe's case in a letter to Edward Cheyfitz (1914–1959), the Motion Picture Association of America labor adviser and himself a former Communist. In another letter, Siegel discussed Jaffe's situation and that of his blacklisted friend, Philip Loeb (1891–1955), with HUAC counsel, Frank S. Tavener, Jr. (1895–1964). Loeb committed suicide in 1955, and those who knew him bel . . .

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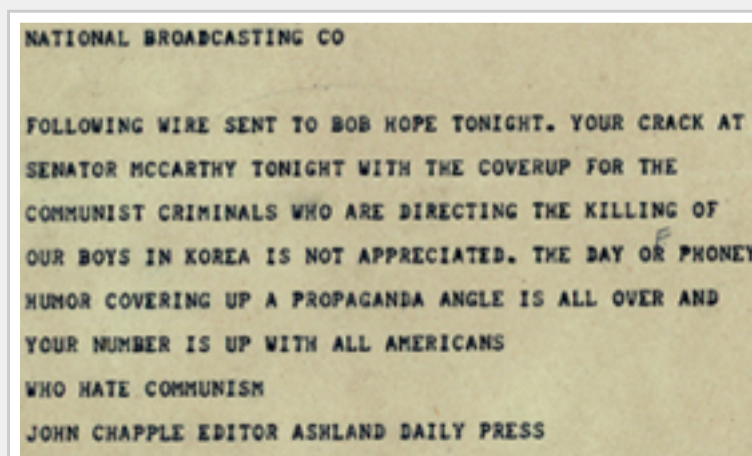


Letter from Sam Jaffe to Nate Spingold, May 22, 1953. Sam Jaffe Papers, [Manuscript Division](#), Library of Congress (066.00.00) [Digital ID# bhp0066]

Bob Hope Jokes about McCarthy

As a comedian relying on topical material, Bob Hope joked about HUAC—"Everybody's afraid of being called a 'Red.' I cut myself shaving and was afraid to bleed"—but hesitated when Senator Joseph McCarthy (1908–1957) began his crusade accusing the Truman administration of harboring communists. When Hope later did joke about McCarthy, a Wisconsin newspaper deemed Hope a "communist." McCarthy seemed not to have minded, as he wished Hope luck when he opened at London's Palladium. Hope's approach to lampooning McCarthy was mild, as these jokes about the televised Army-McCarthy hearings indicate. Hope nevertheless received angry mail from disappointed viewers.

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Letter from John Chapple to NBC, November 27, 1951. Bob Hope Collection, [Motion Picture, Broadcasting and Recorded Sound Division](#), Library of Congress (067.00.00) [Digital ID# bhp0067]

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