Internal Outsiders in the Domestic Cold War: The Impact of Engineering U.S. Culture and Citizenship in Early Cold War America on Black and Jewish Identities

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INTERNAL OUTSIDERS IN THE DOMESTIC COLD WAR:
THE IMPACT OF ENGINEERING U.S. CULTURE AND CITIZENSHIP IN EARLY COLD WAR AMERICA ON BLACK AND JEWISH IDENTITIES

by

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SUBMITTED TO SCRIPPS COLLEGE IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE DEGREE OF BACHELOR OF ARTS

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I cannot express enough thanks to Professor Alemu for her guidance and insight throughout this process as my primary reader. Her confidence in my ability to complete a thesis that I would be proud of meant so much to me. Writing this thesis challenged me to ask for help and share my thought process in a way that I’ve previously avoided, and I so appreciated her patience and enthusiasm. This paper originated as a research project in her Black International Politics course last fall. The texts we studied in that class and the discussions we had taught me to pay attention to the silences and gaps in archives and popular narratives. I learned so much from working with Professor Alemu over the course of this semester and can say that I truly am proud of the piece of writing that I have produced.
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I. Introduction

As the United States government worked to export a carefully constructed image of American liberal democracy, this propaganda effort clashed with expanding social movements, particularly the struggle for Civil Rights. At the same time as the cultural Cold War picked up steam, the NAACP’s Legal Defense and Educational Fund was slowly working to build a case to challenge school segregation and the precedent set by *Plessy v. Ferguson*. As minority groups pushed to expand their equal participation in American society, the growing movement to combat communism both globally and domestically provided an outlet for a white, Christian America that was losing its power over American culture. Anti-communism and pro-Americanism became synonymous as early Cold War rhetoric bolstered paranoia toward anyone who did not fit the traditional notion of “American”. Federal scrutiny thus directed its focus toward high-profile figures and organizations who were not white or not Christian and were influential in the production of film and literature.

Though federal surveillance was by no means limited to these two groups, this paper focuses specifically on how Black and Jewish individuals and organizations’ identities were constructed in opposition to Americanism during this period. These two groups provide an interesting lens through which to analyze the domestic Cold War and its cultural implications, especially given the complex solidarities that existed between them during this period. This paper is the culmination of over a year of archival research which pulled heavily from organizational archives. While some of the content, such as political pamphlets, was publicly available at the time, many of the primary sources I am using come from dense files of previously classified correspondence and related information. This brief period during which Jewish and Black Americans’ citizenships were constructed alongside one another saw the
production of a rich archive, with contributions both from minority organizations such as the NAACP, ADL, and AJC, and from within federal institutions including the FBI and Congress.

The end of World War II found a nation that was vastly different from how it had been when it entered the war four years earlier. While this post-war period brought economic opportunities and rapid population growth, it also marked a reshaping of American society that bred new tensions. In what is known as the Second Great Migration, millions of African Americans moved from the South to other regions of the country beginning in the 1940s.¹ Wartime necessity had also given women and Black Americans opportunities to fill jobs that previously were reserved for white men. Experiences during deployment overseas also offered groups like Latine and Black Americans insight into the hypocrisy of the United States’ battle against fascism abroad. As the federal government struggled to upstage communism globally, social unrest on the home front threatened the simple narratives of democracy and freedom that the United States attempted to maintain.

This period of growing awareness and solidarity between marginalized groups opened new avenues to understanding their own complex citizenships and what was possible going forward. United States culture was in a malleable state, and previously disempowered groups increasingly found themselves in a position to shape it. The end of World War II saw the increasing popularity and influence of identity-based affinity groups such as the Anti-Defamation League (ADL), the American Jewish Congress (AJC), and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). These institutions helped to centralize activism and organizing at a time when many Black and Jewish Americans were becoming involved in a growing fight for Civil Rights.

The international element to much of this activism further complicated the situation as the world divided itself between Western Bloc and Eastern Bloc and the U.S. government increasingly regarded engagement in political internationalism as suspicious and subversive.\(^2\) W.E.B. Du Bois, an influential activist, and writer with a turbulent history in the NAACP, addressed the United Nations in his 1947 “Appeal to the World”, airing the reality of Jim Crow America on the world stage while also calling out Western imperialism.\(^3\) He argued:

> Because of caste custom and legislation along the color line, the United States is today in danger of encroaching upon the rights and privileges of its fellow nations. Most people of the world are more or less colored in skin; their presence at the meetings of the United Nations as participants and as visitors, renders them always liable to insult and to discrimination; because they may be mistaken for Americans of Negro descent.

Du Bois’s own internationalisms coupled with accusations of communism led to him leaving the NAACP two separate times as anti-communist measures in the United States painted Black radicalism as un-American. While some, but certainly not all of these activist internationalisms were communist, the two began to be overly conflated in the national imagination.

The early Cold War shaped a political climate in the United States with limited space for any ideologies that challenged the nation’s global image. Thus, while the rapidly growing Black internationalist opposition to global colonialism had meaning beyond a Cold War context, to the United States government it mainly represented a threat to expose the false foundations that the United States presented itself to the world. While tensions heated up globally, federal agencies such as the CIA and FBI grew more influential not only in terms of surveillance capacity but also in direct meddling with cultural production in Europe and the United States. These internationalisms, unlike those orchestrated by the CIA, were beyond the government’s control.


They threatened to limit the effectiveness of U.S. Cold War propaganda on the world stage, and the domestic response to influential international figures thus targeted minorities whose experiences and activism exposed American hypocrisy.

Through an investigation of political pamphlets, FBI documents, Congressional transcripts, and organizational correspondence this thesis investigates how the duality of “Americanism” and “Un-Americanism” in the early Cold War and associated paranoia also shaped complex citizenships for Jewish and Black Americans. Federal surveillance of activists and organizations that represented minority interests positioned these identities in opposition to a straightforward white, Christian American ideal. Red-baiting against Jewish and Black organizations and individuals who engaged in activism and the label of “subversive” had a significant impact on the position of these groups within American society. The consolidation of an American identity and defensive reconstruction of U.S. culture within both a national and international Cold War context still has repercussions today.

With this paper, I aim to put into conversation a collection of primary sources that evidence the breadth and implications of the domestic Cultural Cold War in the United States. The cultural element of the Cold War is often implied but rarely given the same weight that military, political, and economic tensions receive. Frances Stonor Saunders makes a significant intervention in Cold War historiography by focusing on the calculated export of American culture and the growth of the CIA’s influence following World War II.4 In The Cultural Cold War, Saunders analyzes the export of American culture and focuses primarily on the international side of this cultural battleground. In expanding on this notion of the cultural Cold War, I argue that the domestic front of this culture-shaping moment is also incredibly significant.

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and worth further investigation. While the Cold War overall was characterized by international conflicts and ideological rifts, its impacts on American culture at home are seldom explored. As the United States painted itself as the poster child for free speech and democracy, the Cold War played out domestically in a way that limited free speech and framed calls for equality as “subversive”. In the shadow of the threat of communism, containment measures within the United States attempted to hinder flourishing new movements for social change and solidified a restrictive definition of Americanism.

I will begin by investigating Hollywood as a site for cultural clashes in the late 1940s. The Hollywood Blacklist and the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) hearings offered a space for establishing a definition of “subversive” that applied largely to Americans whose expressions and experiences of citizenship did not align with the United States’ popular narrative. This surveillance and censorship in Hollywood set the stage for the cultural Cold War’s progression over the next decade.

I then pull back and look at the growth of internationalisms, both performed by the federal government and by Black and Jewish individuals and organizations, during this period, and how these different modes of engaging with the international bolstered tensions around cultural production. An analysis of Langston Hughes’ trial before McCarthy’s Congressional subcommittee pairs with the content of a pamphlet about the ADL by two vehement

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anti-communists\textsuperscript{7} to identify the reciprocal relationship between international and domestic cultural construction.

The final section of this paper centers around declassified FBI documents\textsuperscript{8} as well as correspondence between the NAACP and AJC\textsuperscript{9} to examine how the federal government’s attention toward Black and Jewish individuals and organizations during this period shaped their role as internal outsiders. Accusations of being “communist fronts” held immense weight amidst Cold War paranoia. As the nation pushed to export American values, it was dangerous for citizens whose experiences complicated this narrative to be in places of cultural power. Primary source material direct from the FBI helps to reinforce how these federal ethnologies weaponized Black and Jewish experiences with marginalization to further position their identities as un-American and a threat to national security.


II. Tensions in Post-War Hollywood

On the 6th of November 1947, Walter White, the Executive Secretary of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), drafted a letter to Nicholas Schenck, a film executive of Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Studios (MGM). In the letter, White appealed to this Jewish film mogul as he tried to convince him of the anti-Black and anti-Jewish bigotry that underlay the House Un-American Activities Committee Trials which had just recently dragged the Screenwriters’ Guild to the forefront of domestic Cold War tensions.

In the estimation of certain members of the Committee and of Congress itself the “Communist” issue is used as a means of expressing vicious anti-Semitism, just as in 1941 it was the chief motivation of the Senate probe of the motion picture industry for making anti-Nazi pictures …. This type of smear and intimidation is the inevitable product of the decades-long use of such tactics against minorities like the Negro …. What was done to the motion picture industry in the recent hearings and what will be done in those future hearings which Congressmen Thomas threatens to hold in Hollywood is the logical development of this pattern of bigotry.

This letter came only weeks before a secretive meeting of film industry executives at the Waldorf Astoria in New York City. The past two years had seen Hollywood under scrutiny by Congress and the FBI as Cold War paranoia transformed the entertainment industry into a key domestic battleground, and the decisions of the top members of the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) would have profound impacts on further escalations of these tensions. For Walter White to write such a bold letter to such an influential figure in all of this was no small risk to the NAACP. White had walked the tightrope of representing Black America’s interests without being dubbed excessively subversive for years by this point in time. Thus, this risky appeal to Schenck offers valuable evidence as to how the NAACP understood the crisis in

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Hollywood as a racial issue and saw Jewish and Black Americans as connected victims of this bigotry. Such an endeavor had the potential to further incriminate both organizations and draw more federal attention. Even in the letter, White made a point to emphasize his opposition toward communism and fascism, adding that he was “unalterably opposed to any and all totalitarian philosophies.”

Just weeks later, at a meeting of the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) in late November, film industry executives deliberated behind closed doors at the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel in New York City. After two days of these secretive meetings, Eric A. Johnston issued a statement on November 25th that the individuals known as the Hollywood Ten would be immediately fired. Cultural historian Thomas Doherty explains this well in a 2017 article.

The studios pledged never again to employ a known Communist or unrepentant fellow traveler. At the studios and the networks, hundreds of artists were shown the door — or had it shut in their faces. Johnston’s declaration marked the formal onset of the blacklist era, a two-decade-long purgatory during which political allegiances, real or suspected, determined employment opportunities in the entertainment industry.

This “Waldorf Statement” established the groundwork for a silencing of free speech in Hollywood that would continue into the early 1960s. The MPAA’s action may have helped keep industry executives away from federal scrutiny, but it also affirmed the growing anti-communist anxiety directed toward the film industry.

While the film industry might not initially come to mind as a primary site for such social and political upheaval, the attention given to Hollywood during the early years of the Cold War makes sense within the context of how rapidly American culture was changing and developing.

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during this period. With all these cultural and political reckonings, Hollywood seemed a particularly vulnerable location from where American ideals could either be bolstered or eroded under the influence of industry executives, writers, and actors. As the mid-1940s saw new seeds of social change sown across the United States at the same time as the McCarthy Era picked up steam, these tensions over American culture and the struggle to define whose citizenship had value exploded in a very public showdown. With many of its biggest names coming from first-generation or immigrant Jewish backgrounds, often with origins in what now comprised the Soviet Union, federal officials were already on high alert for subversion in Hollywood.

From a government stance, it was dangerous for people who saw the inequity in the US to be at the helm and shaping its cultural discourses, and an investigation into now-declassified FBI documents from this period through the 1950s supports this understanding. It is important to note that Jewish Americans’ position within the United States and the film industry was also in flux at this time following decades of conspiracies about Jewish control over the motion picture industry. By 1946, Hollywood had become a setting for heavy surveillance that spared no one from its threats. While certain portions of the motion picture industry certainly fought back, the existential threat of being accused of communism put executives in a precarious position. The culmination of the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) hearings in late 1947 met an industry already exhausted from being put on trial and from the pressure to take an active stance against communism.


Contextualizing the Blacklist

While the focus of my research is on the late 1940s into the 1950s, it is important to establish a basis for the explosive events that preceded and created the environment for the Blacklist Era. In *J. Edgar Hoover Goes to the Movies*, John Sbardellati offers a historical analysis of the events that spawned the Blacklist, beginning by contextualizing FBI interest in Hollywood beginning in the 1920s and then moving on to a more in-depth exploration into the formative years of the Hollywood Blacklist.\(^{16}\) He argues that while the FBI’s fear of communist infiltration into American institutions such as the film industry originated in the interwar period, the more intensive period of FBI surveillance emerged in the wake of WWII.\(^{17}\) He also cites heavily from FBI reports and other records to argue that the FBI under J. Edgar Hoover was a significant force in defining what was and what wasn’t American during this period, offering an important contribution to scholarship by framing Hollywood as a battleground for American culture.\(^{18}\) In an analysis that intertwines historical inquiry and media studies, later chapters of the book contextualize the Hollywood blacklist within a broader period of American culture wars and a struggle for social control via mass media.

One particularly significant intervention that Sbardellati introduces is the role that antisemitism, racism, and broader xenophobia played in fueling Hoover’s special concerns with suspected communist ideology in Hollywood. In Chapter 3, entitled “Producing Hollywood’s Cold War,” he focuses on the Motion Picture Alliance for the Preservation of American Ideals and its basis in fear of Hollywood as a vulnerable space to Communist ideologies that was also a

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powerful force for shaping American culture. Sbardellati highlights how the MPA positioned Americanism in direct opposition to communism, fascism, and totalitarianism and established itself as the protector of it in the film industry. However, the fixation on what it meant to be a true American necessarily singled out certain minority groups in Hollywood, and Sbardellati reveals how criticisms of anti-communist practices ironically pushed the FBI even farther toward associating communism with leftism or any accusations of bigotry. This “conservative backlash” after World War II came from a place of genuine fear that communists in Hollywood were a threat to this country, yet this fear had powerful implications for its targets.

One common understanding that underscores all of the texts analyzed in this section is how incredibly significant the rapidly growing film industry was for constructing an American identity. The Hollywood Blacklist was only one small but crucial piece in a larger puzzle of efforts to define American culture and identity against communist and international identities. In investigating this period through the lens of two different minority groups who were especially targeted by the ongoing Blacklist, the cultural reckonings in American society become more clearly defined. While Black Americans and Jewish Americans experienced marginalization in distinct ways that are difficult to compare because of vastly different contexts, the Blacklist and theHUAC Trials redefined understandings of American citizenship by establishing what it meant to be “Un-American.” As the United States performed a calculated effort to construct an anti-communist culture globally and present itself as a model democratic nation, social unrest at home complicated these federal narratives.

On page 100, Sbardellati quotes an FBI statement which alleged that “identifying all criticism of Russia with anti-Semitism, Jim Crowism, [and] Ku Kluxism” is “a trick taught to all

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young writers in Communist indoctrination schools.” Sbardellati thoroughly examines how the FBI and other anti-communists in the film industry understood the power of motion pictures to indoctrinate and influence culture and politics, laying out a complex argument regarding how Hollywood became such a hot spot for domestic Cold War tension. He establishes a strong basis for an argument about the way that fear of minority groups influencing popular culture disproportionately implicated Jewish and Black figures in the film industry, yet this element is not the central focus of his book. In examining how white supremacy intertwined with anti-communist paranoia as a means of vying for influence over American culture, there is the potential to explore the reverberations of this within the affected communities that this book neglects to follow up on.

*J. Edgar Hoover Goes to The Movies* concludes with the infamous 1947 House Un-American Activities Committee trials, which brings us to where the focus of this paper begins. Sbardellati argues that “theHUAC’s investigation marked an opening salvo in the cultural cold war” as he describes the public spectacle of the hearings that placed Hollywood squarely at the center of domestic threats to national security. While the trials primarily dealt with ten confrontational witnesses from the film industry, they marked a transition into outward condemnation of suspected communists in Hollywood. The Hollywood Ten came to represent the beginning of something much bigger, pressuring the industry to take a more deliberate stance regarding the threat of communism. The ensuing Waldorf Statement that officially kickstarted the Blacklist established a commitment from within the industry to not only prevent communism but also to stop anything “subversive or un-American” from being produced. Beyond its direct implications for Hollywood itself, this focus on defining which kinds of behaviors and beliefs

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were antithetical to American culture infiltrated American society in more covert ways. In framing all radicalism as subversive, this set the stage for what would prove to be a dark decade in Hollywood.

Although the FBI and HUAC acted out of genuine fear for American culture, documents from later years expose how such attempts at cultural damage control fixated on racial and ethnic minorities. In taking action to eliminate what they deemed as potential threats to a specific cultural narrative, these federal organizations targeted influential figures and groups with complex citizenships. “outsiders.” The same fears of minority groups and immigrants that motivated Hollywood’s Cold War would also shape the identities of those who were labeled “subversive”. In his chapter on the HUAC, Sbardellati points briefly to an example of antisemitism in writing that “FBI agents freely included [antisemitic] assessments in their reports, though bureau officials themselves did not adopt overly anti-Semitic rationales.”24

I intend to build upon Sbardellati’s work by investigating the impact of this period on racial and ethnic groups especially implicated by the blacklist, paying special attention to the vault of declassified FBI documents that reflect the bureau’s assessment of Jewish Americans and Black Americans as particularly susceptible to communism. By using this book and the context it provides about the foundations of the Blacklist Era, I hope to look closely at documents from after its scope to explore how these domestic ethnologies were defined alongside American culture. The contents of these files, paired with other archival records produced by community organizations, provide the basis for exploring the consequences of singling out certain minorities and how these practices reveal domestic tensions that may have remained more concealed without the Cold War as a stage for them to perform upon. The third section of this paper will explore these files more in-depth.

“Un-American” Citizenships On Trial

Looking back at this period, we can study the HUAC Trials alongside FBI records that were previously classified. It is important to note that while the HUAC and the FBI worked toward similar goals against communism in the motion picture industry, their partnership was highly inconsistent throughout the Blacklist Era, and at times they even were in conflict. Still, reading the extensive FBI files from during the HUAC Trials helps reveal the role that xenophobic fears played in the motivations for such surveillance. Within the ProQuest History Vault, there is an extensive collection of declassified FBI files specific to communist activity in the motion picture industry from 1942 to 1958, in addition to an overwhelming quantity of documents addressing communism in the United States more generally. The database summarizes this collection in a way that provides valuable context for its contents, and the phrasing is useful to help characterize the environment of fear that shaped the Red Scare in Hollywood:

This collection reflects the political paranoia that marred an important area of our culture in the late 1940s and early 1950s. The FBI files are useful, however, not only for what they tell us about the agency's actions, its director's concerns, and the people and groups subject to FBI surveillance. These files are an index to fear, and to fear's creation. The first series contains FBI correspondence that touches on subjects such as the HUAC hearings, CSU strikes, and films accused of Communist propaganda. The second series is composed of news clippings compiled by the FBI .... This section contains a series of newspaper clippings about the "Hollywood Ten," and pamphlets such as "Red Treason Over Hollywood." The final series contains miscellaneous items such as FBI reports on the activities of alleged Hollywood Communists, transcripts of HUAC hearings, and transcripts of recorded telephone conversations.

The expansiveness of the collection reflects how influential both individuals and the federal government deemed the motion picture industry, and it was indeed a vulnerable location as the nation scrambled to consolidate an international image of democracy and unity. Having acknowledged all of this, however, this collection of records specific to Hollywood plays only a
supporting role within the larger body of primary source material I will be analyzing. The vastness of this database makes it difficult to engage meaningfully with all of the material within a limited focus. However, the range of sources included in the collection reflects how anti-communist sentiment toward certain individuals in Hollywood came from a variety of locations.

While figures such as J. Edgar Hoover and Senator Joseph McCarthy were certainly especially influential in shaping the Red Scare in post-World War II America, attributing this massive cultural and political phenomenon in the United States to one particular organization or individual would be deeply reductionist. Although this paper will pull heavily from federal and organizational documents, this caveat also explains my inclusion of some narratives of individual actors (some in both the literal and historical sense) as well. As the country’s population grew rapidly larger and more diverse following World War II, the longstanding white, Anglo-Saxon conception of American identity began to lose its influence over shaping American culture. Hollywood offers a significant entry point into these cultural tensions given the growing prominence of Jewish and Black filmmakers and actors at this time. Thus, understanding Hollywood as a setting for surveillance and suppression of pro-minority perspectives helps establish a basis and connection for exploring the domestic cultural Cold War more broadly.

In a 1947 pamphlet entitled “What Is Happening in Hollywood,” Dan Gilbert presented an argument for a communist conspiracy in the motion picture industry. In 45 pages, he outlines in detail the multiple levels of alleged Soviet propaganda targeted toward the American public. Gilbert asserts that there is “an insidious process is under way to Sovietize the film industry, and through it, the thought and life of an estimated ninety million ‘moviegoing Americans.”’

Though extreme in nature, this pamphlet reflects a shared sentiment among many concerned Americans during the early years of the Cold War. It expresses similar fears to those driving government anti-communist policy. Though my primary focus is on federal fears, it is important to acknowledge that Cold War fears were bred within a broader popular culture of paranoia which also included ordinary civilians. The domestic front of the cultural Cold War relied heavily upon a trend of heightened societal paranoia which many Americans shared. This phenomenon is apparent in Dan Gilbert’s pamphlet, and its fixation on “aliens” as the vessels of “Sovietizing” American popular culture speaks to the construction of minority identities as subversive and un-American amidst Cold War fears.

Despite my best efforts, all I was able to uncover about Gilbert was that he wrote several pamphlets that were published by the Jewish Hope Publishing House in Los Angeles. While the name suggests Gilbert might be Jewish, the content of his writing as well as other publications from the same publishing house characterize him as more likely Christian and perhaps even a part of the Messianic movement. Though his origin and positionality are unclear, Dan Gilbert’s pamphlet speaks to the central tension that underscores much of the domestic cultural Cold War. He expressed the fear that the film industry was more powerful than public education in shaping American culture and educating the next generation. In a section on “Movieland's Alien-Born Aristocracy,” Gilbert wrote that “America cannot remain American if the thought and outlook of her youth are brought into conformity with an alien pattern.” This sentiment echoes the federal anxiety around ethnic and racial minorities gaining influence or control over Hollywood.

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26 Messianic “Judaism” is a fringe movement of Protestant Christians who identify as Jewish and appropriate Jewish traditions while worshiping Jesus as the savior and messiah. “Jews for Jesus,” as they are colloquially called, are almost unanimously viewed as non-Jewish by members of the Jewish community. If you are interested in learning more, I recommend being very mindful of who sponsors and publishes the articles you find, and suggest looking at a range of perspectives. The explanation I have provided here is based on my own knowledge, which is supported by this article: https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/messianic-judaism/. From my position, however, I cannot speak fairly to the perspective of how Messianic Jews define themselves.

Regardless of what their actual citizenship status may be, this pamphlet painted people who do not fit the traditional expectations of Americanism as outsiders because of their family background. The focus on immigrants and first-generation Americans obscures any antisemitism within such paranoia, though it is notable that Gilbert pointed out how “The Hollywood movie industry is ruled by three family clans, the Schencks, the Warners, and the Mayers.” All three of these families were Jewish, and he also emphasized that both Schenks were born in Russia. Though not explicitly making this final jump, Gilbert still notably tapped into paranoia about Jewish control over Hollywood that had already been cemented in the minds of many Americans over the past several decades.

Even as accusations of communist conspiracy and subversion ripped apart the motion picture industry and threatened the careers of the so-called “Hollywood Ten”, the accused demonstrated an awareness of the ethnic and racial element of the government’s cultural construction. In directing their scrutiny toward individuals and organizations that spoke out about inequality and oppression in American society, movements for social change were increasingly positioned as antithetical to Americanism. In early Cold War America, it quickly became clear that there was little room for those with complicated relationships with the United States in the idealized cultural construction of American life.

In their testimonies, some of the Hollywood Ten boldly chose to call out the thinly veiled antisemitism and racism within theHUAC accusations. One such screenwriter and producer, Adrian Scott, prepared a bold statement to be read before the House Committee on Un-American Activities. This statement, which Chairman Thomas deemed too inflammatory to be read aloud,

addressed what he called “the ‘cold war’ now being waged by the Committee on Un-American Activities against the Jewish and Negro people.”

A statement by Samuel Ornitz, another of the Hollywood Ten, gets at a striking conclusion that expands upon Scott’s testimony.

I wish to address this committee as a Jew. Is it mere coincidence that you chose to subpoena and characterize as ‘unfriendly’ the men who produced, wrote, and directed or acted in” Hollywood films “which attacked antisemitism or treated Jews and Negroes sympathetically? Therefore, I ask, as a Jew, based on the Jewish Questions 255 record, is bigotry this committee’s yardstick of Americanism, and its definition of subversive? This accusation that bigotry was theHUAC’s “yardstick of Americanism” is powerfully accurate to what would unfold over the next decade or so of the Hollywood Blacklist. This understanding of the fragile citizenship that Black Americans and Jewish Americans rested upon during the early years mirrors Walter White’s observations in his letter to Schenck. While communist ideology had existed in the United States prior to the Cold War, rising tensions with the Soviet Union expanded the implications of holding communist beliefs to include an allegiance to a foreign government. It is no coincidence that the Americans whose identities contradicted the image of Americanism that the United States wanted to display to the world were also some of the first to be dubbed subversive or “un-American”. This is especially pertinent given the increased awareness and critique of inequalities in cultural discourse in the years following the Second World War.

The Hollywood Blacklist was only one small but crucial piece in a larger puzzle of efforts to define American culture and identity against communist and international identities. In investigating this period through the lens of two different minority groups who were especially

targeted by the ongoing Blacklist, the cultural reckonings in American society become more clearly defined. Following the precedents for wrangling communism in the film industry that were established by the HUAC Trials and subsequent Waldorf Statement in 1947, Hollywood remained a central location for the battle over American cultural construction well into the late 1950s. While the industry in general drew close attention from the FBI during this period, there were distinct assumptions made and further defined about the threat posed by influential Jews and Black Americans in Hollywood. The big screen offered a newfound form of power as directors, writers, and actors had the ability to communicate values and messages to the masses. In the case of Cold War Hollywood, the Blacklist opened space for influential minority groups’ power within American society to be curtailed through accusations of subversion and communism. While the Hollywood Blacklist was a fight against communist infiltration, it was also a powerful façade for shaping Black and Jewish Americans’ position as internal outsiders with limited power in American society.
III. Dangerous Internationalisms

Though the domestic front of the Cold War was certainly focused on constructing American culture within its borders, it remained closely intertwined with the international struggle between communism and capitalism. An analysis of how ideas of Americanism and Un-Americanism shaped minority identities that did not establish a reciprocal impact between both the domestic and international theaters of the Cold War would be grossly limited. While this paper focuses primarily on the Cold War as it relates to red-baiting and surveillance within the United States, it is important to also explore how the United States’ international interests shaped the domestic cultural construction of this period. A central theme of this paper is the consequences of U.S. federal paranoia on both a local and global scale. The early years of the Cold War were characterized by rapid expansions in internationalisms of all kinds which resulted from the Second World War. While some of these internationalisms served United States strategic interests, others hindered federal efforts to fortify a carefully-curated image of Americanism.

While Europe struggled to rebuild a fractured continent in the wake of World War II, the United States found itself deeply embroiled with the consequences of its military empire. Though the country had pursued a more isolationist approach to foreign policy in the interwar period, the period of the “Good Neighbor Policy” was short-lived within a longer history of United States economic imperialism in Latin America and the Philippines.32 Having amassed public support for the war effort on the premise of fighting fascism and imperialism, the United States’ hypocrisy became evident following the Allied victory. Policies enabling university students to avoid the draft meant minority groups such as Black and Latinx Americans were overrepresented

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overseas, and their experiences abroad during the war solidified new international solidarity between oppressed groups worldwide.

Following the end of World War II, global anticolonial movements such as Pan-Africanism grew and put pressure on colonial governments. The United States positioned itself in support of these anti-imperial efforts in order to distract from racist policies at home. The systemic inequalities in the United States and the limited rights of Black Americans attracted criticism from the Communist Party in the United States, as well as communist world powers such as the Soviet Union. Racist policies of segregation and violence in the Jim Crow South exposed the fragility of the United States’ reputation as the pinnacle of the “free world”. In *Satchmo Blows Up The World*, Penny M. von Eschen notes how “despite the government’s complacency on domestic race relations, even Eisenhower was profoundly affected by the widely shared sense that race was America’s Achilles heel internationally.”

This is not to say, however, that American expansion and intervention declined from here. Instead, the early years of the Cold War saw a shift in the modes of maintaining power from the overt use of military force to a more subtle form of cultural and political manipulation. In order to preserve its public image as a liberating democratic force, the United States invested in a more covert form of maintaining United States influence abroad that relied heavily on the use of intelligence operatives, both within and outside of its borders.

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In *The Cultural Cold War*, Frances Stonor Saunders examines CIA strategies to influence post-war cultural construction in Europe in order to stop the spread of communism. As the Cold War picked up steam in the late 1940s and early 1950s, the United States expanded its international intelligence and demonstrated an understanding of the significance of the nation’s global image in consolidating allies against communism. The Truman Doctrine and Marshall Plan established a new era of American neoimperialism that sanctioned intervention which was characterized by political, military, economic, and cultural containment measures abroad. Saunders notes how the CIA expanded its presence in global affairs through “owning airlines, radio stations, newspapers, insurance companies, and real estate.” *The Cultural Cold War* brings a groundbreaking analysis of the strategic cultural shaping that the United States performed internationally. American Cold War policy relied heavily on carefully constructed internationalisms that worked to dispel criticisms of racial inequality and minimize the significance of social unrest at home. Saunders notes how Soviet propaganda exploited the problem of race relations in the United States in order to sway Europeans toward communism.

The U.S. government thus felt immense pressure to successfully perform its professed American values on the world stage and sway global audiences toward capitalism and democracy. As international movements for social change grew in the post-war period, individuals and organizations with actual or suspected connections abroad drew attention from

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Von Eschen analyzes the export of American culture in the form of jazz tours in Europe during the first decade of the Cold War, and emphasizes how spotlighting Black musicians served to dispel criticism of racial inequality that tarnished the United States’s global reputation.
39 Saunders.“Chapter 1: Exquisite Corpset,” 12.
anti-communists in the United States. These internationalisms threatened to limit the effectiveness of U.S. Cold War propaganda on the world stage, and the domestic response to influential international figures necessarily targeted minorities whose experiences and activism exposed American hypocrisy.

As the CIA worked internationally to export favorable elements of American culture, Black American activists such as W.E.B. DuBois, Paul Robeson, and Langston Hughes practiced a different form of internationalism that promoted a more complex understanding of racial politics in the United States. Such internationalisms bolstered paranoia among anti-communists at home, contradicted the American propaganda effort, and the federal treatment of these individuals demonstrates just how intertwined the domestic and international fronts of the cultural Cold War were. Though the CIA and FBI operated independently with different focuses, the two federal agencies played meaningful roles in surveillance and cultural shaping which bolstered fear of people with international ties, particularly when those people’s experiences and activism revealed the limits of racial and ethnic equality in the United States.

**Race Prejudice and Black Internationalisms**

In Chapter 13 of *The Cultural Cold War*, Saunders lists some of the many American writers and artists whose works were removed from several American libraries in Europe beginning in 1953. Among the names in the State Department order were Langston Hughes and W.E.B. Du Bois. She notes that “most of the living authors banned under State Department directives were also the subjects of voluminous – and often ridiculous – files at J. Edgar Hoover’s FBI.” The parallel surveillance and censorship enacted by the FBI and State

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Department toward these creatives reflects how important the federal government deemed cultural production to be in the battle against communism. It is also no coincidence that many of the targets of federal scrutiny were Black internationalists. In limiting the autonomy of artists deemed “subversive”, the government greatly reduced the export of American cultural content abroad, leaving only works that supported their desired narrative.

Such attention to regulating cultural construction thus also impacted cultural production within the United States. Saunders brings in the example of how “owning a Paul Robeson record could be considered an act of subversion.” Yet scrutinizing such influential Black creatives also meant implicating broader movements for Civil Rights and racial equality as associated with communism. Even as organizations such as the NAACP repudiated communist beliefs and clearly aligned themselves with the American Cold War cause, red-baiting blurred the line between outspoken communists and racial activists. Regardless of whether organizations or individuals were indeed affiliated with the Communist Party, the label of “communist front” restricted social progress in framing any kind of radicalism as adjacent to communism.

As this association between Black radicalism and communism grew, the NAACP was forced to distance itself from controversial figures such as Paul Robeson and W.E.B. Du Bois.

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While the NAACP website today celebrates Du Bois, he actually stepped away from the organization two separate times during his career with them. He first resigned in 1934 over disagreements regarding the concept of “separate but equal”. He then returned 10 years later, but left in 1948 due to his support for communism and focus on internationalism and globalism. The page on the site dedicated to him does acknowledge this history, but mainly glosses over his turbulent relationship to the NAACP. Instead, it emphasizes a more positive narrative about the organization’s relationship with Du Bois. It is interesting how the divisiveness around communism and internationalism that was so significant during the early Cold War plays a much smaller role in our popular memory. A similar phenomenon occurred with how the NAACP remembers Langston Hughes. It is interesting to consider how organizational memory and acknowledgement (or lack thereof) of these complex histories plays into a broader national narrative that largely leaves out the Red Scare (and certainly does not get into racialization, racism, antisemitism, and xenophobia as a part of it) and its significance in shaping American culture.
Though both of these men were influential in the growing Civil Rights movement, their sympathy toward communist ideology put the whole movement at risk. In Walter White’s statement denouncing Robeson’s assertion that Black Americans will not fight against Soviet Russia, he spoke quite fondly of Robeson.\(^4\) Though he made clear that Robeson did not represent all Black Americans, he also emphasized how much of Robeson’s activism aside from his communist stance still resonated with the masses. He wrote:

> It will be no comfort to white America to learn that although the overwhelming majority of Negroes will repudiate Mr. Robeson’s proposal to refuse to fight against Russia, many Negroes will be glad he spoke as he did if it causes white Americans to wake up to the determination of Negroes to break the shackles which race prejudice fastens upon them.

It is incredibly significant that White chose to distance the NAACP from Robeson without entirely condemning his work. This statement reflects an understanding of the ways in which the federal government was attempting to silence Black activism by placing it all under the umbrella of un-Americanism and communism. Even if the FBI and Congress did not intend to weaken minority cultural influence and activism during the early years of the Cold War, their policies reflect that this impact was an acceptable sacrifice in protecting national security and containing the spread of communism.

While the House Un-American Activities Committee was a longer-term Congressional structure that interrogated suspicious individuals, the infamous Senator McCarthy briefly chaired his own subcommittee shortly before his political downfall\(^4\). As in the situation of the Hollywood Ten, many of the individuals accused of communism were intellectuals and creatives who played influential roles in shaping American culture through the arts. Such was the case.

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\(^4\) While McCarthy was a significant figure in shaping the Red Scare of the 1940s and 50s, this paper predominantly focuses on other structures of surveillance and paranoia, such as the HUAC and FBI. I make an exception in bringing in Langston Hughes’s testimony before McCarthy’s subcommittee.
with the poet and writer Langston Hughes, who testified before Senator Joseph McCarthy’s Subcommittee on Investigations in March 1953. Hughes was a prolific writer and activist whose work was incredibly influential in shaping the Harlem Renaissance. Today, his name is well known, and his poetry is associated with the Civil Rights Movement, but his interest in communism and brushes with McCarthyism are far less publicized.

In a 29-page long document detailing Hughes’s testimony, the transcript offers a direct glimpse into the public hearing before McCarthy’s subcommittee. While Hughes did confer with his counsel, Frank D. Reeves, on several occasions, he took much of the defense himself. It is almost entertaining to read as Hughes employed his masterful use of language to confuse and irritate his interrogators. What makes the entire situation all the more comical is the fact that Langston Hughes did indeed align himself with the communist cause, especially earlier in his career. Despite this, Hughes’s roundabout responses to senators’ questions exposed the weaknesses in their accusations. He demanded that the senators explain and contextualize their questions and refused to respond when they took lines of his writing out of context.

Langston Hughes’s connection to international organizations and time spent in Russia are two topics that come up in the Subcommittee’s examination. Even as Mr. Cohn attempted to paint the League of American Writers as a Soviet front, Hughes avoided direct admission of belonging to any organized communist groups. Hughes’s own unique position within popular American literary culture and Black radical imagination made this hearing a particularly powerful one. In the face of government red-baiting, he used McCarthy’s Subcommittee as a platform for sharing his own experiences growing up as a Black man in the Jim Crow South, which brings a valuable jumping-off point for further analysis of how racialization and white fear

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around an expanding notion of Americanism connected to American xenophobia during the Red Scare. One of the most striking portions of this transcript occurs on page 17, in which Hughes insisted on sharing his life story in order to properly interpret one of his poems that drew federal scrutiny. The following is an excerpt from this portion of the hearing:46

**Mr. Hughes:** All right, sir. To give a full interpretation of any piece of literary work one has to consider not only when and how it was written, but what brought it into being. The emotional and physical background that brought it into being. I, sir, was born in Joplin, Missouri. I was born a Negro. From my very earliest childhood memories, I have encountered very serious and very hurtful problems. One of my earliest childhood memories was going to the movies in Lawrence, Kansas, where we lived, and there was one motion picture theater, and I went every afternoon. It was a nickelodeon, and I had a nickel to go. One afternoon I put my nickel down and the woman pushed it back and she pointed to a sign. I was about seven years old.

**Mr. Cohn:** I do not want to interrupt you. I do want to say this. I want to save time here. I want to concede very fully that you encounter oppression and denial of civil rights. Let us assume that, because I assume that will be the substance of what you are about to say. To save us time, what we are interested in determining for our purpose is this: Was the solution to which you turned that of the Soviet form of government?

**Mr. Hughes:** Sir, you said you would permit me to give a full explanation.

**Mr. Cohn:** I was wondering if we could not save a little time because I want to concede the background which you wrote it from was the background you wanted to describe.

**Mr. Hughes:** I would much rather preserve my reputation and freedom than to save time.

**Mr. Cohn:** Take as long as you want.

Much like the responses of some of the Hollywood Ten six years earlier, Hughes’s approach to being tried for un-Americanism emphasized how his experiences of systemic racial oppression shaped a complex relationship to his American identity. In drawing such a connection, Hughes destabilized the allegations against him by recognizing how his experience growing up as a Black man in the United States informed his work.

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His responses in later portions of this transcript also drew clear lines of solidarity with Jewish Americans as well as other oppressed groups. On page 21, he referenced the Holocaust and how attacks on one marginalized group can lead to a chain reaction that eventually impacts other groups. This comment echoed the message of a poem by Martin Niemöller about the risk of silence and inaction and the significance of understanding how oppressions are linked. It is telling how shortly after Hughes established this link, Mr. Cohn attempted to challenge Hughes’s solidarity with Jewish Americans. Hughes’s response reflected awareness of federal methods for weakening solidarity and coalition-building as he explained the context of the poem.

Even as the hearing attempted to investigate Langston Hughes’s time in Russia and his radical internationalisms, he responded in ways that prevented any simple conclusions or answers, playing off of the baselessness and subjectivity of many of the subcommittee’s accusations. His testimony is almost entertaining to read as he runs circles around Mr. Cohn intellectually while also subtly chipping away at the entire basis of this federal paranoia.

**The U.S. Security State Comes Home**

Though this paper primarily focuses on the FBI, the parallel establishment and growth of its international counterpart is valuable context for domestic cultural surveillance in the early Cold War. In Chapter 2 of *The Cultural Cold War*, Saunders details the creation of the Central Intelligence Agency that summer. She points out that the language denoting its responsibilities was intentionally vague in a way that enabled generous interpretation by agency officials. While the growing CIA attempted to combat Soviet propaganda globally, anti-internationalist rhetoric

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48 The poem can be found here: https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/martin-niemoller-first-they-came-for-the-socialists
flourished amidst rising paranoia at home. In later portions of her book, Saunders discusses how the CIA fed into the domestic cultural Cold War by inserting themes of freedom into films and even promoting certain American art movements that presented a more favorable representation of American society.\(^{51}\)

In what Saunders refers to as the “Soviet cultural offensive,” Soviet intelligence used race relations in the United States to spread a pro-communist narrative.\(^{52}\) Rather than addressing the root of these racial issues, the federal government clamped down on organizations and individuals who called attention to them during this period. The third section of this paper will go deeper into governmental awareness of the inequalities facing minorities in the United States, and how the FBI used this awareness to monitor activism and to identify individuals or groups who might be more susceptible to communism rather than addressing the legitimate criticisms they brought. Federal fear of how affinity-based organizations such as the NAACP and ADL could feed into pro-Soviet narratives helped construct a restrictive understanding of Americanism.

The significance of international politics in associating minority activism with communism is something that becomes apparent in reading a 1947 pamphlet by Brigadier General Robert H. Williams.\(^{53}\) The pamphlet aimed to inform readers about “The Anti-Defamation League and Its Use in the World Communist Offensive”. In his 44-page long manifesto, Williams built upon white Anglo-Saxon fears and antisemitic tropes to make a case

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\(^{52}\) Saunders. “Chapter 1: Exquisite Corpse,” 12.

for the ADL’s role in supporting world communism. He argued that the majority of those that the ADL accused of antisemitism were in fact just anti-communist.54

To analyze its entire contents could take up its own academic article, and so for my purposes, I want to focus on the narrative Williams constructed regarding Jewish internationalism in relation to communism, and who he presented as the victims of the ADL’s tactics. While Williams, despite allegedly working in military counterintelligence, was not directly involved in federal anti-communist efforts, his pamphlet reflects how ordinary Americans contributed to domestic Cold War paranoia. Furthermore, with the audience of the pamphlet being the general public, specifically concerned citizens who felt apprehensive toward the ADL, the content of this document reflects how Cold War tensions manifested on the home front. In portraying the Anti-Defamation League, an organization focused on challenging antisemitism, as a communist front, Williams fueled xenophobia and general fear of minority organizing.

Prior to diving into its specific content, however, the origin of this source is both interesting and relevant for interpreting its claims. Williams’s pamphlet is “Supplement No. 1” in a series called “Closer-Ups” which was edited by the reporter Upton Close. Close notoriously established himself in opposition to the Anti-Defamation League, and while he initially garnered praise from Joseph McCarthy, even the senator eventually relinquished support for Close and cited the latter’s blatant antisemitism as the reason for doing so55. Williams also had a notably complicated relationship with the ADL, and later brought a case against the League in 1950. While this was three years after the pamphlet was published, the court case exposed false claims

54 Williams, The Anti-Defamation League and Its Use in the World Communist Offensive, 3.
in the pamphlet which brought its reliability into question.\(^{56}\) In the trial, Williams sued the ADL for libel, but the court ruled against him and demonstrated that the League was truthful in asserting that Williams did not in fact ever serve as a military intelligence officer.

While both Close and Williams’s reliability is questionable, this source still offers a valuable example of the kinds of bigoted perspectives toward Jewish Americans and minorities more broadly which gained popularity in connection with federal scrutiny. It demonstrates the sort of logic employed by anti-communist crusaders during the early Cold War and evidences the political and cultural climate within the United States at the time. Williams’s analysis of the Anti-Defamation League’s role in the “world communist offensive” suggested a global Jewish conspiracy to suppress speech. He accused the League of conflating anti-communism with antisemitism, and also attacked the Fair Employment Practices Commission (FEPC), saying that the law forced “the employer to discriminate racially and religiously” by being required to hire and promote “negroes, Jews, and other minorities”.\(^{57}\) Williams’s pamphlet plays into the same racialization of the Red Scare that shaped the FBI ethnologies investigated in the following section, as he positioned criticism of racism and antisemitism as a threat to Christian Americanism. Though the earlier portions of the pamphlet were less explicit in this claim, Williams later asserted how “Communism makes Christianity its number one enemy”\(^{58}\) and worked to “fan race friction” and smear pro-Americanism.\(^{59}\) He went on to claim that internationalism and communism are necessarily linked and emphasized how Marx had Jewish ancestry in later sections.\(^{60}\) The pamphlet closed by suggesting ways to combat the ADL communist conspiracy, namely insisting “on a revival of pride in the historic rise of Western

\(^{57}\) Williams, The Anti-Defamation League and Its Use in the World Communist Offensive, 5.
\(^{58}\) Williams, The Anti-Defamation League and Its Use in the World Communist Offensive, 11.
\(^{59}\) Williams, The Anti-Defamation League and Its Use in the World Communist Offensive, 21.
\(^{60}\) Williams, The Anti-Defamation League and Its Use in the World Communist Offensive, 28.
peoples— including Anglo-Saxons, the watchdogs of freedom— from serfdom to self-reliance…. And whatever else we do, we must take our children and young people back to the churches.”

Though extreme, Williams’s pamphlet evidences the extent of white Anglo-Saxon Protestant fears regarding the need to maintain and shape a status quo for American identity. Despite Close’s that the pamphlet was addressing the ADL rather than the “Jewish question” in his editor’s note, the content of the pamphlet did in fact explore questions of Jewish Americans’ loyalty and “Americanism”. Such a focus on Black and Jewish internationalisms by individuals like Williams and Close and by Congress demonstrates how the early Cold War positioned minority Americanisms as precarious and suspicious. While the United States government engaged in its own internationalisms to strengthen its cultural Cold War offense, it also normalized scrutiny toward Black and Jewish American identities because of how their experiences complicated simple narratives of Americanism. The domestic manifestation of these externally focused policies marked these minority groups as at risk for communism and consequently associated them with un-Americanism.

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61 Williams, The Anti-Defamation League and Its Use in the World Communist Offensive, 44.
IV. “Subversive” Fronts: Domestic Ethnologies and Federal Anxieties

“In many ways, Hoover’s fears were America’s fears”
- John Sbardellati, J. Edgar Hoover Goes to the Movies, 2012

For nearly half of the 20th century, the FBI was synonymous with its director, J. Edgar Hoover. Hoover initially served from 1924 as the director of the Bureau of Investigation, which eventually became the Federal Bureau of Investigation in 1935. He continued as the director until 1972 and played an instrumental role in its establishment and development into the surveillance organization it is today. In 1953, just six years into the Cold War, Hoover’s paranoia machine went into overdrive as the execution of the Rosenbergs brought international criticism. While the two were likely indeed guilty of espionage, the government had to take careful measures in an attempt to justify their punishment by death. Julius and Ethel Rosenberg being Jewish Americans further bolstered public association between Jewish radicals and communism, especially given that Julius was a first-generation American with Russian immigrant parents. As the Cold War progressed into the 1950s, certain citizenships increasingly became positioned as threatening to the idea of Americanism which organizations such as the FBI and CIA were working to construct.

The HUAC trials and the Waldorf Declaration were only the beginning of over a decade of federal paranoia and scrutiny that disproportionally targeted Black and Jewish individuals and organizations, and a great place to understand the fear-driven conspiracies is in the thousands of pages of FBI documents on the topic of domestic threats of communism. The same federal anxieties rooted in bigotry that motivated J. Edgar Hoover and the FBI played out beyond

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Hollywood as worldwide revolutionary movements were legally defined as a threat to national security. Although this issue was on a surface level a fight against communism, it was also a battle for defining American culture, citizenship, and by extension the position of minority groups. Through an investigation of some of the many declassified FBI documents from the early years of the Cold War, it becomes evident that tight surveillance of Black and Jewish activist organizations destabilized calls for social change by associating all criticisms of the United States or movements for equality with communism.

Though the United States government publicly denied race or ethnicity having any influence on who it flagged as subversive, declassified files from the Hollywood Blacklist era prove otherwise. In a series of in-depth reports on communism, both as it relates to the motion picture industry and more broadly in the United States, the FBI clearly implicates Jewish and Black organizations and individuals because of their identities. The fact that the FBI under J. Edgar Hoover believed it was so pertinent to investigate Communism in relation to these specific minority groups serves as evidence for how underlying bigotry informed the federal government’s suspicions during the first decade or so of the Cold War. What is perhaps more unnerving is the complex logic behind the increased suspicion. These documents reflect an awareness of the inequalities in American society and how the Communist Party might have appealed to marginalized groups as a result. The FBI’s fear of potential insurgency required acknowledging the reasons why the Communist Party might be particularly appealing to Black and Jewish Americans and by extension the inequalities and bigotry within American society that shape these more critical relationships to the United States.

The FBI Tackles Identity Politics

Two documents in particular offer thorough evidence that the federal government was aware of these problems. In a 100-page file from February 1953 entitled “The Communist Party and the Negro,” the authors of the document stated its purpose as “to set forth a brief analysis of the position taken at various times by the Communist Party in the United States on the Negro question in this country.”66 It went on to argue that the Communist Party had been working to “exploit legitimate Negro grievances for the furtherance of communist aims” yet had been not very successful as Black Americans had a “deep-rooted desire for total equality within the American society”. The second, from March 1957, followed a similar format and is called “Communism Versus the Jewish People.”67 Its purpose was “to focus the attention of all investigative personnel on the fundamental differences between communism and the religious, cultural, and political ideals of the Jewish people. It sought to show that the communist movement is thoroughly incompatible with everything the Jewish people stand for traditionally.”

These two now-declassified FBI documents from the decade after the HUAC Trials and the start of the Blacklist each attempted to perform an in-depth study of communism in relation to these identities. Both appear to be thoroughly researched as they explored many facets of the experiences of these two groups in American society.

What is especially intriguing about both documents is the train of logic they followed in arguing how the Communist Party takes advantage of minority groups. There are many parallels in the way they described the appeal of communism for minorities, with a strong emphasis on

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how the Communist Party supported equal rights and equal citizenship for all. Though the similarities point to broader systemic bigotry, the differences offer a more specific look into how exactly Hoover’s FBI defined these groups. The parallel domestic ethnologies established by the FBI in these documents do not negate the vastly different histories of Black and Jewish people in the United States but rather provide evidence of a brief yet significant period where these histories overlapped. The fact that the FBI’s actions toward these minority groups were informed by this research provides a clear pathway for investigating the construction of subversive citizenships during this period. These documents demonstrate the FBI’s understanding of Black and Jewish Americans as second-class citizens and how their discontentment with the state could make them vulnerable to communism. They acknowledge oppressive systems in the U.S. while classifying them as worthy sacrifices for maintaining a strong narrative around American culture and values.

Throughout these two FBI files and other related constructions of Black and Jewish Americans from earlier sections of this paper, Cold War fears and anti-communist scrutiny rendered the two groups’ citizenships as subversive and dangerous. As the Communist Party did indeed advertise itself as pro-minority while demonstrating an intention to address “the Negro question” and “Jewish question” that the federal government dare not respond to publicly, Black and Jewish identities became political objects within a larger cultural Cold War struggle.

Though organizations such as the NAACP and ADL existed prior to the Cold War, the construction of a more rigid and simplistic unified American identity restricted these movements for social change and equality by framing criticism of racial and ethnic oppression as un-American. Federal involvement in cultural production—both directly in terms of CIA

68 “FBI Report, ‘The Communist Party and the Negro,’” pg. 28
“FBI Report, ‘Communism Versus the Jewish People,’” pg. 1
influence domestically and abroad and indirectly through censorship and red-baiting of radical Black and Jewish creatives—met on a flourishing new era for minority influence in the arts and clamped down hard. The accusation of communism provided white, Christian America with a nearly foolproof facade through which to silence and delegitimize radicalism.69

**Internal Security Under Threat**

This phenomenon of constructing minority identities as un-American is something that defines the domestic Cold War beyond just Hollywood. Charisse Burden-Stelly offers a fascinating analysis of this idea of “deportable subjectivity”70, arguing that “the trifecta of foreignness, Blackness, and radicalism came to be understood [during the Cold War] as mutually constituting forms of subversion and sedition.” Following her claims, it becomes clearer how the FBI’s positioning of all these conditions as similarly un-American and denoting a lesser status of citizenship (regardless of actual legal status) had the potential to drastically shape the roles of Black and Jewish Americans to position them, in this case, as internal outsiders. This is further supported by the attention in both FBI documents paid to listing Black and Jewish organizations that are considered fronts for the Communist Party. The insinuation that these organizations served the primary purpose of supporting the Communist Party demonstrates just how deep federal paranoia went. It also reflects the reality of the threat such organizations faced in avoiding being labeled as such should their ethnic or racially based critiques draw government suspicion.

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Simply by existing in a complex space that revealed the United States’ flaws by nature of their identities, these internal outsiders seemed to the FBI as easy targets to become subversive agents for communism to infiltrate. It is easier to understand the origin of J. Edgar Hoover’s existential fear given this information. Along this vein, it is also notable that there was some truth to the FBI’s suspicions. Many of the Hollywood Ten, for example, were indeed affiliated with the Communist Party. While we as historians 70 years later can make our own judgments about whether this fact warranted such treatment, it would be gravely oversimplifying to suggest that the FBI’s suspicions arose out of nowhere. Still, while appreciating the context within which these events played out, the accusations of bigotry directed at the FBI and HUAC are equally if not more justifiable.

Returning to Burden-Stelly's essay on “deportable subjectivity”, we can build upon these precarious internal outsider experiences and place them within the United States’ larger effort against internationalism. The Internal Security Act of 1950 serves as another foundational government action toward defining a limited and exclusionary notion of Americanism. The Act required that all communist organizations register with the government, including those that were a “communist front”72, an accusation that falsely labeled many liberal organizations as “subversive” and “Un-American.” Such legislation has major implications for freedom of expression and other liberties associated with American citizenship for Black and Jewish affinity organizations. Burden-Stelly argues that “Radical Black internationalism in particular reified the Black—irrespective of citizenship status—as an outsider that must be contained and circumscribed.” We find a related claim in the American Jewish Congress’s letter to Walter

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72 “American Jewish Congress Civil Rights Activities,” 114.
White in April 1951, in which they called the act an “unlawful conspiracy” that targeted minority groups as subversive. This letter is part of a much larger NAACP file from 1951 entitled “American Jewish Congress Civil Rights Activities”. The entire file is nearly 200 pages long and contains a multitude of documents, so I will be focusing specifically on the contents that the AJC sent to White. The aforementioned letter introduced an 8-page pamphlet detailing the AJC’s evaluation of the McCarran Internal Security Act and its implications for any “liberal non-communist organizations”.

It is a powerful testament to how the AJC understood the shared threat of state surveillance between itself as a Jewish organization and the NAACP as a Black organization. It is not obvious that, when faced with federal scrutiny and potential red-baiting, these advocacy groups would choose to strengthen their partnerships and recognize how the McCarran Act threatened them both. Especially in conversation with Burden-Stelly's 2018 analysis of how the McCarran Act further positioned Black radicalism as dangerous and un-American, this primary source serves as evidence as to how the minority groups who were targeted by McCarthyism understood it at the time.

It is especially significant that Leo Pfeffer, a lawyer for the AJC felt the need to write to the executive secretary of the NAACP and attempt to convince him to “undertake a comprehensive educational campaign to inform the community of the actual intent, operation and effect of the law”. Pfeffer’s letter and accompanying pamphlet reflect an awareness of how the McCarran Act could enable federal moves to restrict the liberties of minority activist groups under the pretense of protecting the nation from communist infiltration. As Burden-Stelly puts it well in her conclusion, “any method of organization that challenged the pedagogy of U.S. state

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74 “American Jewish Congress Civil Rights Activities,” 110.
and empire was considered subversive and un-American, and therefore fit for investigation, surveillance, and repression.”

As this paper attempts to analyze how federal positioning of internationalism and minority activism as a threat to national security through so-called “red-baiting” characterized certain citizenships as un-American, this letter from the AJC to the NAACP offers valuable primary evidence. In her book *Black Scare/Red Scare* which was released just last month, Burden-Stelly expands upon how the McCarran Act worked to preserve the capitalist, racist norms in American society by stifling movements for social change. She adds that the Internal Security Act “authorized the loss of American citizenship for naturalized citizens based solely on their political beliefs or activities.” These arguments (Burden-Stelly's and the AJC’s) serve as further evidence for the ways in which Jewish and Black citizenships in the United States were defined as subversive during the Cold War, both inside and outside of Hollywood. The domestic cultural Cold War saw non-white and non-Christian citizenships rendered as conditional upon adherence to an idealized narrative of Americanism.

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V. Conclusion

The so-called “McCarthy era” is something that is certainly touched on in many high school history curricula, yet far less attention has been paid to the specific ways that paranoia about communism at home met a post-war American culture that was still in flux. In fact, our popular memory of this period largely leaves out the domestic Cold War beyond McCarthyism. It’s a blind spot in U.S. history. This was an extremely significant period in shaping American culture as we know it today, the reverberations of this surveillance are ongoing. Though World War II had barely touched U.S. soil directly, its aftermath brought new questions to the forefront of American consciousness following a period that had expanded many Americans’ understandings of the world. The 1950s were a decade marked by tensions as society regressed in some ways at the same time as new social movements grew despite efforts to weaken them.

At a time when the federal government sensed how malleable American cultural identity was, the idea of individuals or organizations with more strained relationships with the United States steering this cultural construction instilled a deep sense of fear in the minds of men such as FBI director J. Edgar Hoover. As the FBI clamped down on radicalism and conflated the struggle for social change and equal citizenship with un-American subversion, minority groups found their freedom and mobility limited. Declassified FBI files along with statements from Jewish and Black individuals during the Blacklist Era corroborate the reality of the racial motivations and rationales that fueled federal anxieties. Not only did the FBI explicitly gather and analyze data on Black and Jewish organizations, but it also established narratives regarding these populations’ history and role within the United States that had enduring consequences.

As the nation scrambled to stop the spread of communism internationally, the
government clamped down on organizations and individuals who brought criticisms of this oversimplified notion of Americanism. The Hollywood Blacklist and ensuing surveillance constructed a space where Jewish and Black Americans existed alongside each other in opposition to Americanism. While the events that established the Blacklist primarily took place in 1946 and 1947, their impacts reverberated through American society well into the 1950s. This paper only scratches the surface of a largely unexplored intersection of American histories.

While the Cold War and even the Hollywood Blacklist have a place within mainstream United States history, the ways in which minority group histories interact with the dominant narrative of American history are less often explored despite their significance. If identities are shaped relationally, then the identity of “American” always necessitates that someone else will be considered “un-American” in contrast.

It is important to note that the later years of the early cultural Cold War coincided with the beginning of a critical period in the fight for civil rights for Black Americans. As the Civil Rights Movement solidified into the late 1950s, the solidarity established between Jewish and Black Americans in part through navigating these shared experiences with federal surveillance was challenged in many ways. This partial overlap in the experiences of oppression of these two minority groups did not negate the different contexts and forces that had defined Black and Jewish citizenships in the United States for centuries, yet it is still a valuable intersection to study when attempting to understand the historical relationship between these two communities. Even within the framing of federal suspicions are implicitly different racializations of these two groups, and it is essential to acknowledge how Black Americans and Jewish Americans’ experiences of citizenship and Americanism have been shaped by distinctly different histories.

While often covert, white supremacy was a major driving factor in shaping the domestic
front of the cultural Cold War. The conflation of Americanism with white, Anglo-Saxon Christianity dangerously limited freedom of speech and expression for Black and Jewish Americans in the 1940s and 50s, in addition to shaping their citizenships as delicate and conditional. Though not discussed directly, power–over cultural production, construction of identities, and expression of internationalisms–was a central motivator for anti-communists. As marginalized Americans gained power in the wake of World War II, accusations of un-Americanism limited their newfound ability to shape American national identity. What originated as a crisis in Hollywood expanded to encompass American culture more broadly, with the federal government establishing careful control over the production of film, art, music, literature, and political thought.

Even today, we experience the reverberations of this period of surveillance, censorship, and widespread paranoia. To acknowledge and incorporate these Cold War narratives into our popular histories would require that we reckon with just how deeply-rooted white supremacist ideologies are in our national culture and how impactful white Christian fears have been in shaping what constitutes an American citizen. In 2023, as Black Americans and Jewish Americans are routinely pitted against one another, it would be valuable if more people understood this complex shared history while also acknowledging how the solidification of Jewish Americans’ conditional whiteness within American society has contributed to this divide.

This thesis has argued that federal paranoia and associated policies for maintaining control over American cultural production and the United States’ image also shaped the position of Black and Jewish identities and citizenships in the domestic cultural Cold War. As the early Cold War saw fragile Americanisms meet growing movements for social change, anti-communism became a popular pretext for racial and ethnic exclusion and marginalization.
The designation of organizations such as the ADL, AJC, and NAACP as communist fronts stripped these affinity networks of their ability to shape American culture and society and combat systemic injustice. The solidification of the duality of “Americanism” and “un-Americanism” during this period through Congressional hearings, propaganda pamphlets, FBI records, and organizational correspondence positioned Black and Jewish Americans as subversive internal outsiders within American society and consolidated an American popular culture centered around white, Christian identities that persists to this day.
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