

**IT WALKS AMONG US**



**JOIN HUAC NOW AND  
HELP ROOT OUT COMMIES**

## Background Essay: House Un-American Activities Committee

---



Truman Presidential  
Museum & Library

After World War II the United States and the Soviet Union found themselves on opposite sides of a “Cold War”, which pitted the democratic United States against the Communist Soviet Union. As the Cold War intensified, the frenzy over the perceived threat posed by Communists in the U.S. became known as the Red Scare. The United States government responded by creating the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC), which was charged with identifying Communist threats to the United States. HUAC often pressured witnesses to surrender names and other information that could lead to the apprehension of Communists and Communist sympathizers. Committee members branded witnesses as "red" if they refused to comply or hesitated in answering committee questions.

HUAC was created in 1938 to investigate alleged disloyalty and rebel activities on the part of private citizens, public employees and organizations suspected of having Communist ties. Citizens suspected of having ties to the communist party would be tried in a court of law. Also during this time, Senator Joseph McCarthy started a campaign against alleged communists in the U.S. government and other institutions. From 1950-1954 “McCarthyism” described the practice of making accusations against Federal Government employees who were suspected of having affiliations to communism and leaking information. Government employees could be blacklisted (viewed as untrustworthy or someone to avoid) and could lose their job. The threat of Communism was a driving force that was creating a wedge in between society and the United States government.

During this time period the lines of civil liberties and national security began to blur, and U.S. citizens felt a sense of uncertainty. Some Americans felt that their personal freedoms were being taken away, while others believed HUAC and McCarthyism were necessary to secure national security. Government officials felt the same type of pressures on the home front - were they overstepping government powers or just keeping America safe from outsiders that wanted to cause harm within the system?

## Word Bank:

**Communism**- a political theory derived from Karl Marx, advocating class war and leading to a society in which all property is publicly owned and each person works and is paid according to their abilities and needs.

**Soviet Union**- officially the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, abbreviated as the USSR, was a socialist state in Eurasia that existed from 1922 to 1991

**The Red Scare**- a time in history when a group or government promoted a fear of communism that spread widely through the country

**McCarthyism**- the practice of accusing someone of being a Communist and therefore avoiding or not trusting them: McCarthyism is named after the American politician Joseph McCarthy, who in the 1950s accused many Americans of being Communists

**Hysteria**- exaggerated or uncontrollable emotion or excitement, especially among a group of people

**Witch hunt**- an attempt to find and punish a particular group of people who are being blamed for something, often simply because of their opinions and not because they have actually done anything wrong

**Espionage**- the practice of spying or of using spies, typically by governments to obtain political and military information

**Blacklist**- a list of persons who are disapproved of or are to be punished or boycotted.

## Source 1

Source Information: President's News Conference - June 16, 1949, Public Papers Harry S. Truman 1945-1953,

Note: Harry S. Truman is responding to a reporter's question during a press conference.

[8.] Q. Mr. President, the **House Un-American Activities Committee** has requested a number of educational institutions to turn in lists of schoolbooks, and a California university has asked for an oath for all its faculty members. Do you see any threat to educational freedom in this general trend?

THE PRESIDENT. I think that question is pretty well answered in a cartoon in the Washington Post this morning. Look at that cartoon, it will entertain you.

4The cartoon appeared in the Washington Post of June 16, 1949. It depicts two members of the House Committee on Un-American Activities surveying a huge pile of textbooks that had been sent to the Committee while one says, "Okay now to find somebody that can read."

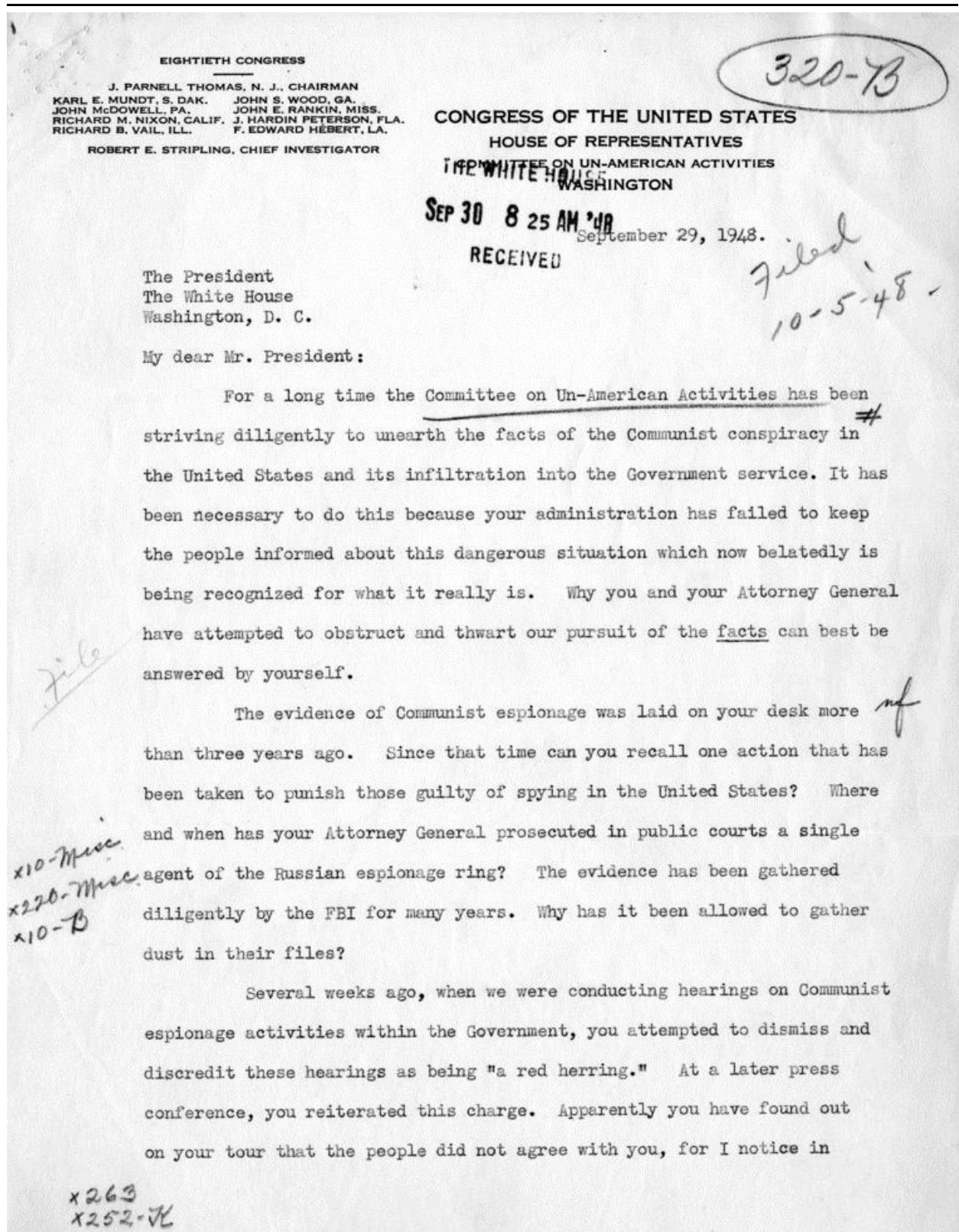


1. Who was the creator of the cartoon?
2. Who is the intended audience? (Who was is meant for?)
3. When was the cartoon created?
4. Why did the artist create it? What was their purpose?
5. Does the artist support national security or personal freedom? What evidence from the cartoon supports that?
6. Why did Truman refer to this cartoon instead of just answering the question?

Source 2

Source Information: J. Parnell Thomas to Harry S Truman September 29, 1948, Truman Papers, Official File. OF 320-B: Un-American Activities, House Committee on.

Note: J. Parnell Thomas was the chairman of HUAC.



reading the text of your speech which you gave yesterday in Oklahoma City, that you stated as follows:

"The FBI has been quietly and efficiently assembling this evidence for several years. The evidence was being presented to the Grand Jury long before the Republican Congressional Committees began their recent hearings. Now these Committees are trying to win credit for digging up evidence. They are trying to cash in on the work of the FBI, and to usurp the functions of the Grand Jury and the Federal Courts."

I assume from the above statement that you have concluded that it was not a "red herring" after all. Further in your speech you made some ridiculous accusations against the Committee on Un-American Activities--accusations which I call upon you now to substantiate by the facts:

1. You stated that this Committee "has made confidential information available to the intelligence services of foreign countries." What information are you referring to? Please name it.
2. You state that this Committee has "injured the reputations of innocent men by spreading wild and false accusations." Who are the innocent men? Please name them.
3. You state that "the Committee has also deprived the Government of the services of a number of atomic scientists." Who are they. Please name them.

Your Attorney General, in a speech given on September 22, in Washington, D. C., in defending your loyalty program, stated:

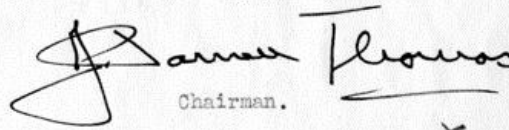
"The President's program has not ended with the investigation of Federal employees. Thirty-four persons have been convicted in the Federal Courts in Washington, D. C., since July 1, 1945."

Let me have the facts on this also, Mr. President, because I am sure that you will find that most of them resulted directly from the work of this Committee and were cases of subversives who had been certified to the United States Attorney by the House of Representatives, after exposure by our Committee.

I realize, Mr. President, that this is a blunt request, but your attack upon this Committee cannot be left unchallenged.

As Chairman of the Committee on Un-American Activities, I do not intend to be deterred or intimidated by personal attacks upon me by the President of the United States, or by political-serving announcements by the Attorney General, for I shall continue to expose the participants in this communist conspiracy whether they be Government employees, scientists, diplomats, labor leaders, or movie stars.

Sincerely yours,

  
Chairman.

x

xPP7200-A "T"

1. Who was the author of the document?
2. Who is the intended audience? (Who was it meant for?)
3. When was the document written?
4. Why did the author write it? What was their purpose?
5. Does the author support national security or personal freedom? What evidence from the text or source supports that?

Source 3

Source Information: "[It's okay – We're hunting Communists](#)," October 31, 1947. Ink, graphite, and opaque white over graphite underdrawing on layered paper. Published in the Washington Post (18) [LC-USZ62-127327](#)

---



1. Who was the creator of the cartoon?
2. Who is the intended audience? (Who was is meant for?)
3. When was the cartoon created?
4. Why did the artist create it? What was their purpose?
5. Does the artist support national security or personal freedom? What evidence from the cartoon supports that?

## Source 4

**Source Information:** Harry S. Truman's Executive Orders 1945-1953.

Note: President Harry S. Truman signed United States Executive Order 9835, sometimes known as the "Loyalty Order", on March 21, 1947. The order established the first general loyalty program in the United States, designed to root out communist influence in the U.S. federal government. This is an excerpt of the Executive Order for the Loyalty Program.

---

### EXECUTIVE ORDER 9835

#### PRESCRIBING PROCEDURES FOR THE ADMINISTRATION OF AN EMPLOYEES LOYALTY PROGRAM IN THE EXECUTIVE BRANCH OF THE GOVERNMENT

WHEREAS each employee of the Government of the United States is endowed with a measure of trusteeship over the democratic processes which are at the heart and sinew of the United States; and

WHEREAS it is of vital importance that persons employed in the Federal service be of complete and unswerving loyalty to the United States; and

WHEREAS, although the loyalty of by far the overwhelming majority of all Government employees is beyond question, the presence within the Government service of any disloyal or subversive person constitutes a threat to our democratic processes; and

WHEREAS maximum protection must be afforded the United States against infiltration of disloyal persons into the ranks of its employees, and equal protection from unfounded accusations of disloyalty must be afforded the loyal employees of the Government:

NOW, THEREFORE, by virtue of the authority vested in me by the Constitution and statues of the United States, including the Civil Service Act of 1883 (22 Stat. 403), as amended, and section 9A of the act approved August 2, 1939 (18 U. S. C. 61i), and as President and Chief Executive of the United States, it is hereby, in the interest of the internal management of the Government, ordered as follows:

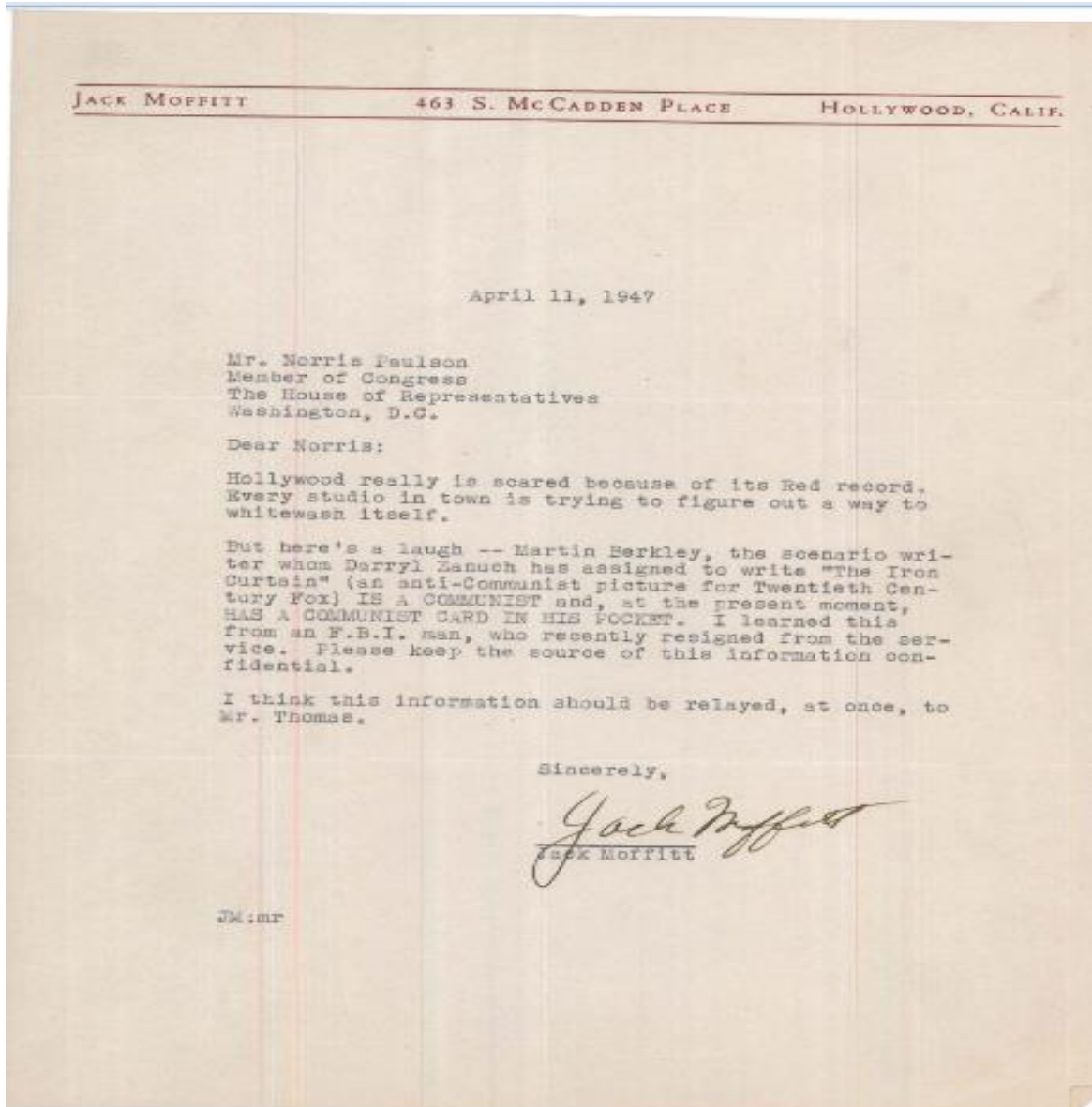
1. Who was the author of the document?
2. Who is the intended audience? (Who was is meant for?)
3. When was the document written?
4. Why did the author write it? What was their purpose?
5. Does the author support national security or personal freedom? What evidence from the text or source supports that?



## Source 5

**Source Information:** Letter from Jack Moffitt to Norris Paulson (a member of Congress). Written on April 11, 1947 in regards to Twentieth Century Fox promoting communism within Hollywood.

**Note:** Jack Moffitt was a screenwriter and movie critic in Hollywood. Moffitt had recently testified before a HUAC subcommittee and may have provided the names to bolster his testimony. Moffitt likely wrote to Poulson because Poulson represented the district that included Los Angeles. A document accompanied Moffitt's letter to Poulson, perhaps written by Moffitt himself that appears to be an anti-Communism screed intended to blacklist people in Hollywood.

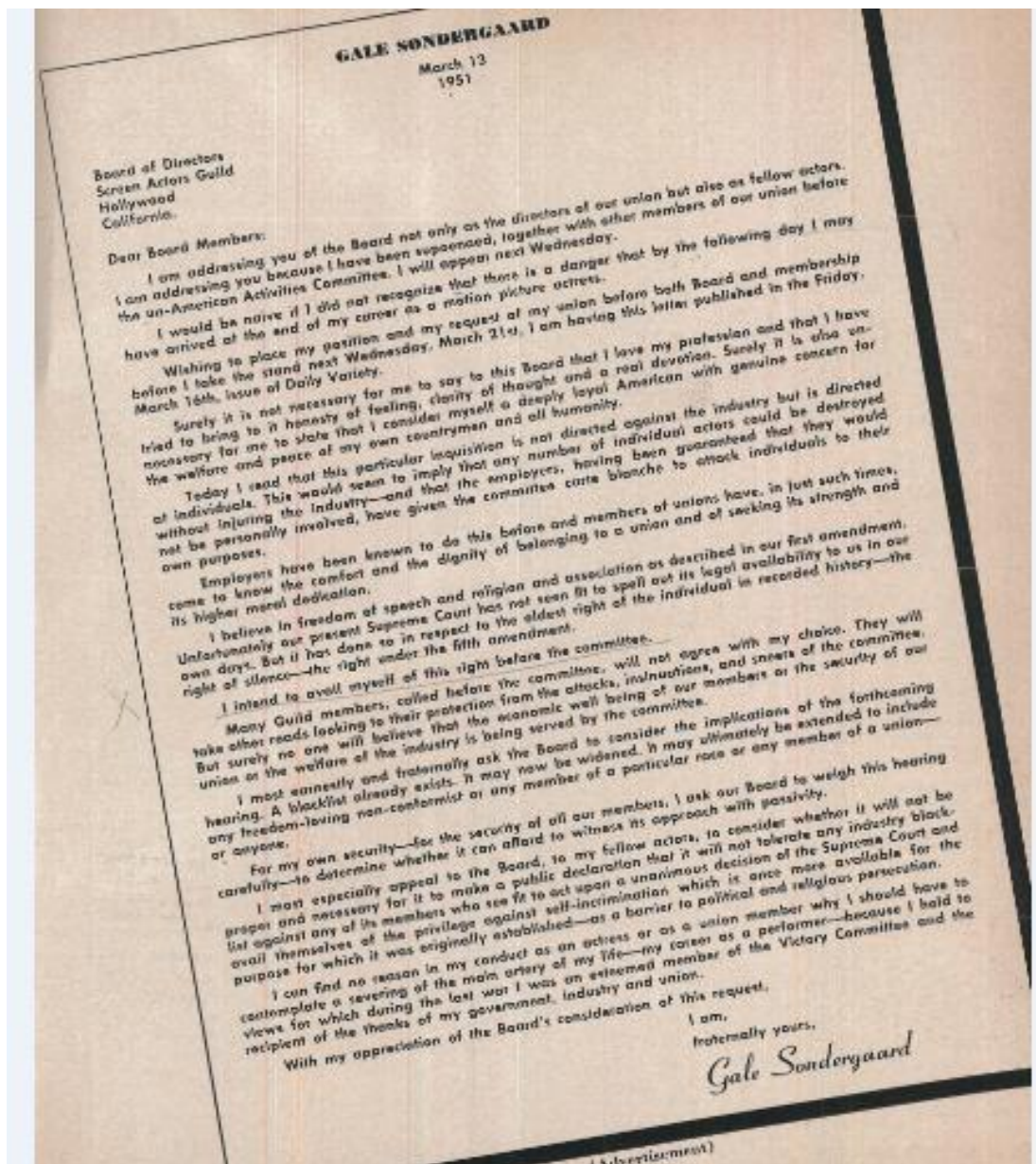


1. Who was the author of the document?
2. Who is the intended audience? (Who was it meant for?)
3. When was the document written?
4. Why did the author write it? What was their purpose?
5. Does the author support national security or personal freedom? What evidence from the text or source supports that?

## Source 6

**Source Information:** Letter from "An American" to the Chair of the House Un-American Activities Committee Regarding Gale Sondergaard; 3/16/1951; Committee Papers, 1945 - 1975; Records of the U.S. House of Representatives, Record Group 233; Center for Legislative Archives, Washington, D.C..

Note: Gale Sondergaard was an American actress. She was married to the director Herbert Biberman, Sondergaard supported him when he was accused of communism and named as one of the Hollywood Ten in the early 1950s

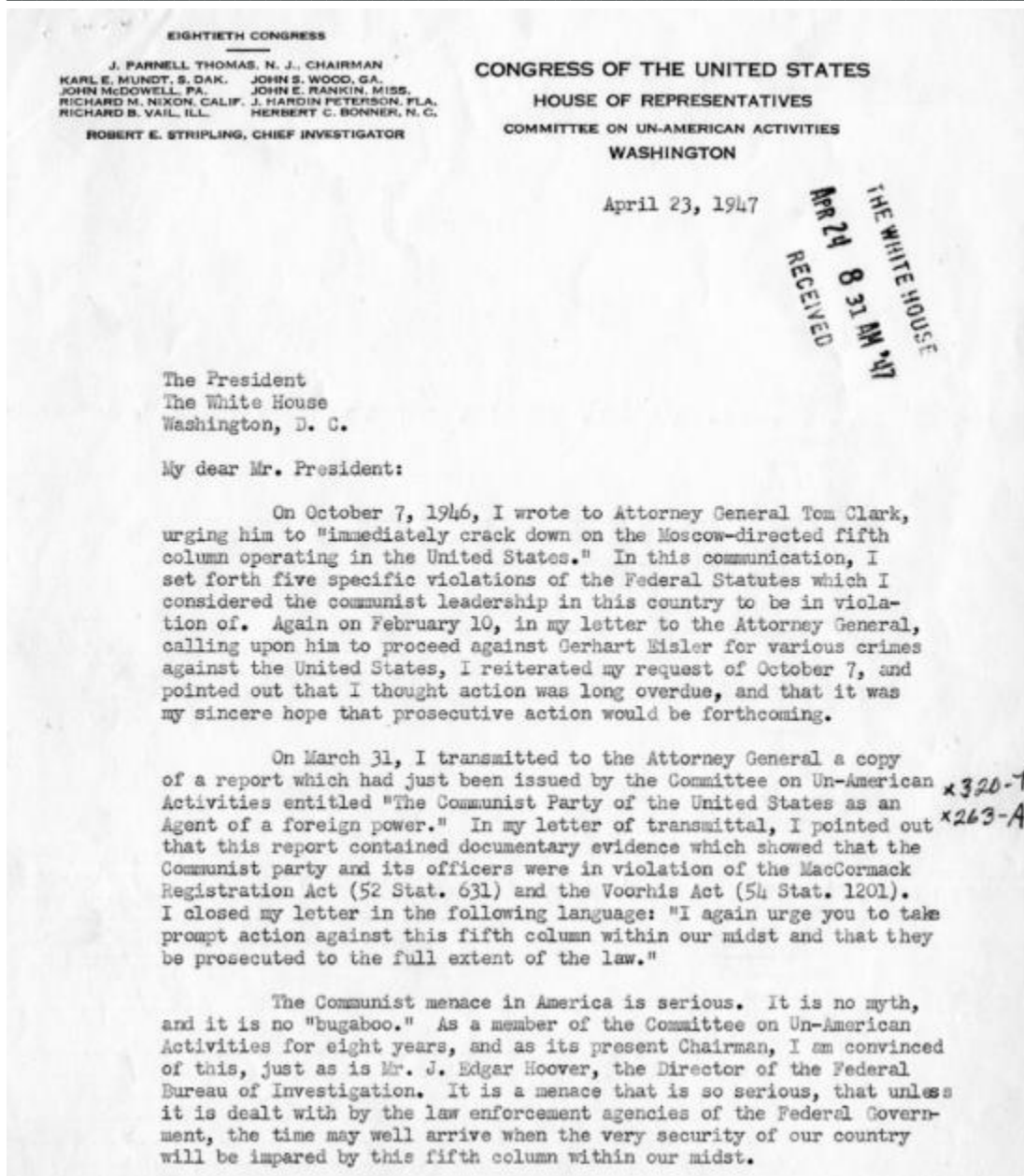


1. Who was the author of the document?
2. Who is the intended audience? (Who was it meant for?)
3. When was the document written?
4. Why did the author write it? What was their purpose?
5. Does the author support national security or personal freedom? What evidence from the text or source supports that?

## Source 7

**Source Information:** Correspondence Between J. Parnell Thomas and Harry S. Truman, April 25, 1947. Truman Papers, Official File. OF 263: Communism.

Note: J. Parnell Thomas was the chairman of HUAC.



1. Who was the author of the document?
2. Who is the intended audience? (Who was it meant for?)
3. When was the document written?
4. Why did the author write it? What was their purpose?
5. Does the author support national security or personal freedom? What evidence from the text or source supports that?

## Source 8

**Source Information:** Aug. 14, 1951 - Address at the Dedication of the New Washington Headquarters of the American Legion Public Papers - Harry S Truman

Note: Harry S. Truman was speaking at the dedication of the American Legion Headquarters in Washington, D.C.

---

### Excerpt

The keystone of our form of government is the liberty of the individual. The Bill of Rights, which protects our individual liberties, is a fundamental part of our Constitution.

When the Legion pledged itself to uphold the Constitution, and to foster 100 percent Americanism, it pledged itself to protect the rights and liberties of all our citizens.

Real Americanism means that we will protect freedom of speech--we will defend the right of people to say what they think, regardless of how much we may disagree with them.

Real Americanism means freedom of religion. It means that we will not discriminate against a man because of his religious faith.

Real Americanism means fair opportunities for all our citizens. It means that none of our citizens should be held back by unfair discrimination and prejudice.

Real Americanism means fair play. It means that a man who is accused of a crime shall be considered innocent until he has been proved guilty. It means that people are not to be penalized and persecuted for exercising their constitutional liberties.

Real Americanism means also that liberty is not license. There is no freedom to injure others. The Constitution does not protect free speech to the extent of permitting conspiracies to overthrow the Government. Neither does the right of free speech authorize slander or character assassination. These limitations are essential to keep us working together in one great community.

Real Americanism includes all these things. And it takes all of them together to make 100 percent Americanism--the kind the Legion is pledged to support.

I'm glad the Legion has made that pledge. For true Americanism is under terrible attack today. True Americanism needs defending--here and now. It needs defending by every decent human being in this country.

Americanism is under attack by communism, at home and abroad. We are defending it against that attack. And we are protecting our country from spies and saboteurs. We are breaking up the Communist conspiracy in the United States. We are building our defenses, and making our country strong, and helping our allies to help themselves.

If we keep on doing these things--if we put our best into the job--we can protect ourselves from the attack of communism.

But Americanism is also under another kind of attack. It is being undermined by some people in this country who are loudly proclaiming that they are its chief defenders. These people claim to be against communism. But they are chipping away at our basic freedoms just as insidiously and far more effectively than the Communists have ever been able to do.

These people have attacked our basic principle of fair play that underlies our Constitution. They are trying to create fear and suspicion among us by the use of slander, unproved accusations, and just plain lies.

They are filling the air with the most irresponsible kinds of accusations against other people. They are trying to get us to believe that our Government is riddled with communism and corruption--when the fact is that we have the finest and the most loyal body of civil servants in the whole world. These slander mongers are trying to get us so hysterical that no one will stand up to them for fear of being called a Communist.

Now, this is an old Communist trick in reverse. Everybody in Russia lives in terror of being called an anti-Communist. For once that charge is made against anybody in Russia--no matter what the facts are--he is on the way out. And what I mean is, he is on the way out!

In a dictatorship everybody lives in fear and terror of being denounced and slandered. Nobody dares stand up for his rights.

We must never let such a condition come to pass in this great country of ours.

Yet this is exactly what the scaremongers and the hate mongers are trying to bring about. Character assassination is their stock in trade. Guilt by association is their motto. They have created such a wave of fear and uncertainty that their attacks upon our liberties go almost unchallenged. Many people are growing frightened--and frightened people don't protest.

Stop and think. Stop and think where this is leading us.

The growing practice of character assassination is already curbing free speech and it is threatening all our other freedoms. I daresay there are people here today who have reached the point where they are afraid to explore a new idea. How many of you are afraid to come right out in public and say what you think about a controversial issue? How many of you feel that you must "play it safe" in all things--and on all occasions?

I hope there are not many, but from all that I have seen and heard, I am afraid of what your answers might be.

For I know you have no way of telling when some unfounded accusation may be hurled at you, perhaps straight from the Halls of Congress.

Some of you have friends or neighbors who have been singled out for the pitiless publicity that follows accusations of this kind--accusations that are made without any regard for the actual guilt or innocence of the victim.

That is not fair play. That is not Americanism. It is not the American way to slur the loyalty and besmirch the character of the innocent and the guilty alike. We have always considered it just as important to protect the innocent as it is to punish the guilty.

We want to protect the country against disloyalty--of course we do. We have been punishing people for disloyal acts, and we are going to keep on punishing the guilty whenever we have a case against them. But we don't want to destroy our whole system of justice in the process. We don't want to injure innocent people. And yet the scurrilous work of the scandalmongers gravely threatens the whole idea of protection for the innocent in our country today.

Perhaps the Americans who live outside of Washington are less aware of this than you and I. If that is so, I want to warn them all. Slander, lies, character assassination--these things are a threat to every single citizen everywhere in this country. And when even one American--who has done nothing wrong--is forced by fear to shut his mind and close his mouth, then all Americans are in peril.

It is the job of all of us--of every American who loves his country and his freedom--to rise up and put a stop to this terrible business. This is one of the greatest challenges we face today. We have got to make a fight

1. Who was the author of the document?
2. Who is the intended audience? (Who was it meant for?)
3. When was the document written?
4. Why did the author write it? What was their purpose?
5. Does the author support national security or personal freedom? What evidence from the text or source supports that?

## Source 9

**Source Information:** Gallup Vault Poll: Celebrity Witnesses Before Congress in 1947 Public Opinion.

Note: Gallup is a polling organization which publishes public opinion polls on a variety of issues.

Gallup Vault: Celebrity Witnesses Before Congress in 1947 by RJ Reinhart

### Americans Divided on Handling of the House Un-American Activities Committee Hollywood Hearings

What is your opinion of this investigation (of Hollywood by the congressional committee) -- do you approve or disapprove of the way it was handled?

	<b>Approve</b>	<b>Disapprove</b>	<b>No opinion</b>
	%	%	%
Overall*	37	36	27

\* Asked of the 80% of respondents familiar with the HUAC hearings

GALLUP, NOV. 7-12, 1947

### Nearly Half of Americans Favored Punishing Those Who Did Not Cooperate With the House Un-American Activities Committee

Do you think the Hollywood writers who refused to say whether they were members of the Communist Party should be punished or not?

	<b>Should be</b>	<b>Should not be</b>	<b>No opinion</b>
	%	%	%
Overall*	47	39	14
<b>Education level</b>			
College	34	54	12
High school	44	43	13
Grammar school	53	31	16
<b>Occupation</b>			
Professional and business	41	47	12
White collar	36	51	13
Farmers	62	23	15
Others	49	35	16

\* Asked of the 80% of respondents familiar with the HUAC hearings

GALLUP, NOV. 7-12, 1947

1. Who was the author of the document?
2. Who is the intended audience? (Who was it meant for?)
3. When was the document written?
4. Why did the author write it? What was their purpose?
5. Does the author support national security or personal freedom? What evidence from the text or source supports that?

### Source 10

Source Information: 1947- Owner of Walt Disney Studios Walt Elias Disney at hearings of House Committee on Un-American Activities (HUAC) in the United States

---

Youtube Video of Walt Disney's Testimony: [Walt Disney Studios owner Walt Disney testifies against Communism at hearings of.... HD Stock Footage](#)

1. Who was the creator of the video?
2. Who is the intended audience? (Who was it meant for?)
3. When was the video created?
4. Why did the author create it? What was their purpose?
5. Does the video support national security or personal freedom? What evidence from the source supports that?



## Source 11

**Source Information:** 1965- Pete Seeger Testimony on being Blacklisted in America

Note: Pete Seeger was an American folk singer and social activist. Seeger was one of the folk singers responsible for popularizing the spiritual “We Shall Overcome” that became the anthem of the Civil Rights Movement.

---

Youtube: Pete Seeger Testimony on being Blacklisted in America

[Pete Seeger on being blacklisted in America, 1965: CBC Archives](#)

1. Who was the creator of the video?
2. Who is the intended audience? (Who was it meant for?)
3. When was the video created?
4. Why did the author create it? What was their purpose?
5. Does the video support national security or personal freedom? What evidence from the source supports that?

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

<u>Source Information:</u>	<u>For the House of Un-American Activities Committees:</u>	<u>Against the House of Un-American Activities Committee:</u>	<u>Supports both for and against:</u>	<u>Informational (just provides information about HUAC):</u>
<u>Source 1:</u>				
<u>Source 2:</u>				
<u>Source 3:</u>				
<u>Source 4:</u>				
<u>Source 5:</u>				
<u>Source 6:</u>				

<b><u>Source 7:</u></b>				
<b><u>Source 8:</u></b>				
<b><u>Source 9:</u></b>				
<b><u>Source 10:</u></b>				
<b><u>Source 11:</u></b>				