Subversives

Stories from the Red Scare

By Ursula Wolfe-Rocca

From top left: Josephine Baker, Frank Kameny, Harry Bridges, Emma Tenayuca, Hallie Flanagan, Louise Thompson Patterson.

As a high school U.S. history teacher for 20 years, I struggled to find a good way of teaching the McCarthy Era. So most of the time — I am embarrassed to admit — I skipped it altogether. Instead, I tried to weave threads about anti-communist politics into my units on the Black Freedom Struggle, the Cold War, and nativism. This mixer activity is a lesson I wish I had written earlier in my career. In it, students meet 27 different targets of government harassment and repression. Some of these individuals are communists (and Communists), some are not. Most are politically engaged in some form of organizing, but not all. They are men and women, immigrants and native-born, young and old, racially diverse, in government and outside it, affluent, middle class, and poor, Queer and straight. Students encounter Josephine Baker, the U.S.-born star of the Paris stage, Frank Kameny, a gay astronomer working for the U.S. military, Harry Bridges, a longshoreman and union activist organizing dockworkers on the West Coast, and many others. These are the inspiring, poignant, and fascinating stories of McCarthyism that students are denied in the version found in most textbooks.

Throughout the 20th century, the government and powerful elites mobilized anti-communist politics to stamp out the efforts of some of the United States' most dynamic activists and political organizations — like Emma Tenayuca, who led the pecan shellers strike; Hallie Flanagan, who headed the Federal Theatre Project; or

Louise Thompson Patterson, one of the founders of Sojourners for Truth and Justice. Whenever organizers challenged the status quo — racism, sexism, capitalism, militarism, and colonialism — its defenders screamed "communism."

Our students deserve to know that anti-communist repression has always been about a lot more than Russian spies, a blustering senator from Wisconsin, and a blacklist in Hollywood.

The Red Scare offered up in this lesson restores the powerful and inspiring stories of the wide range of activists and organizations who were its victims. One of the guiding tenets of the Zinn Education Project is that the transformational social change so desperately needed will never come from above, from presidents and CEOs. It will come from people like us, like our students — and like the many everyday people profiled in this lesson.

This lesson also seeks to clarify how powerful interests seek to discredit anyone who tries to challenge their power. Whereas "communist" became shorthand for any undesirable person or belief in the eyes of the elites, so today "voter fraud" is used by Republicans to disenfranchise "undesirable" voters who threaten to upset their traditional seats of power, and Critical Race Theory acts as a sweeping indictment of white supremacy's critics. This lesson aims to help students become alert to the way shiny new terminology can advance very old forms of oppression.

The Red Scare was a scorched-earth policy against the country's most progressive forces. But their legacies live and grow. Today, activists who call for abolition of prisons and police, or a complete moratorium on fossil fuel extraction, or a jobs guarantee for every American, are often dismissed as impractical, imprudent, utopian, and yes, sometimes they're red-baited as well. But our students deserve to know there have always been savvy dreamers, clear-eyed critics of the status quo, who believe — and act like — a better world is possible.

Suggested Procedure

1. Tell students, "Today we're going to investigate an era of government repression referred to as the Red Scare and, sometimes, as the McCarthy Era. First you will meet and learn the stories of dozens of people who lived through this time. Afterward, you will collectively answer the question: Who was targeted during this era and why?"

California ephemera collection (Collection 200). Library Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library, UCLA.

The Southern Negro Youth Congress conducting a school for voters in a city park in New Orleans. Illustration from the brochure "Negro Representation Now!" published by the American Labor Party, 1956.

2. Distribute one mixer role to each student in the class. All the roles depict real people. The books I relied on most heavily were [*Sojourning for Freedom: Black Women, American Communism, and the Making of Black Left Feminism*], by Erik S. McDuffie, and [*The Lavender Scare: The Cold War Persecution of Gays and Lesbians in the Federal Government*], by David K. Johnson.

3. Tell students that although you are asking them to take on the "role" of the character they have been assigned, this is not an acting class. Students should speak in their own voices and refer to the information in their role sheet as the basis for their conversations with each other. There are 27 roles, so in most classes every student will be assigned a unique character. If you have a smaller class, rest assured that you do not need to use all 27 roles to do the lesson. The roles are laid out so that even if you used only the first 12, 15 or 18, students would still have plenty of information to work with. Of course, I recommend that any educator considering teaching this lesson carefully read through all the roles ahead of time. That way you can put together a "just-right" selection for your classroom. (Note that there are two roles for one person — Jack O'Dell. So students may be confused when they meet Jack O'Dell #1 and Jack O'Dell #2, or when the O'Dells run into each other. The fact that he was targeted more than once by these policies over the course his long life of activism is worth raising with students in the debrief in step No. 8.)

4. If you are doing this activity in person, it is helpful if students have name tags, so their peers can easily grasp the character's name and spelling. On Zoom, students can rename their screen names or hold up a note card as a name tag. Since these roles are long, it is important to give students plenty of time to read their roles multiple times. Suggest that they underline or highlight key information that stands out to them. You might also have students answer a few questions to help them get comfortable with the information they're going to share:

    - What does your character do? Are they an artist? Teacher? Journalist? Political activist?
    - How and why was your character targeted? Who targeted them?
    - What's the most interesting thing about your character?

5. Distribute a copy of the Stories from the Red Scare Mixer Questions to every student. Read the questions aloud with the class and ask students to identify the ones their character can answer for other members of the class. This will help them ease into the one-on-one conversations during the mixer. A student might say, "Hi! I am Claudia Jones. I can help you answer No. 2 or No. 4 or No. 6." Make sure students note that question No. 7 will require them to be alert to similarities or overlap between the lives of their character and the people they are meeting.

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6. Explain to students that they will circulate through the classroom or Zoom rooms meeting other individuals, and that they should use the mixer questions as a guide. Tell students, however, that answering the questions on the worksheet is not the end goal. Rather, their task is to use information from all the stories to answer the question: *Who was targeted during the Red Scare and why were they targeted?* So they should aim to have substantive conversations over speedy ones. They should also use a different individual to answer each of the questions. Tell students that they will not answer No. 8 during the mixer, but afterward. Clarify and assure students that they will not meet all the different individuals in the room, nor are they supposed to.

7. If you are doing this activity in person, ask students to meet in one-on-one pairings as much as possible. (When students group up, the activity is diminished, becoming less of a conversation and more like taking turns.) Once the mixer is underway, I recommend rotating around the room, perhaps playing a role to hop into a conversation with a temporarily partnerless student. You'll want to coax students to keep moving and meeting, and remind them to stick to one-on-one conversations. If you are teaching remotely, students will meet in breakout rooms, perhaps three at a time, for five minutes.

8. Students will not get to all the characters in the room, but once they've met a good cross section, perhaps seven or eight, have them return to their seats or to the main room. Ask them to spend a few quiet minutes gathering their thoughts through writing. Ask students to choose one or more of the following questions to answer:
    - Whose story did you find most interesting?
    - What is something that surprised you? Disturbed you?
    - What's a question about this era that you're wondering about or chewing on?

   After about five to 10 minutes of quiet reflection, ask students to discuss their answers with the large group. In mixer activities like this one, this whole-group discussion is a critical step because it is one of the ways students have a chance to learn about additional individuals they did not meet in the activity.

9. Break students into groups of two or three. Tell them that it is time to tackle Question No. 8 on their mixer questions sheet: *Who was targeted during the Red Scare and why were they targeted?* Tell students to imagine that they are going to explain this era to someone who has never heard of it before. Some students may misunderstand the question of "who" to be a request for a list. So clarify that this analysis will require students to make generalizations, not simply name all the individuals encountered in the mixer. Remind students that every single person they encountered in the mixer was in some way targeted during the era, so their explanation needs to reflect the diversity of all those examples.

10. Ask a few groups to read their answers to the whole class. As students share, encourage them to notice similarities and differences in their answers.

11. Tell students that the era they learned about in the mixer activity is usually called "the McCarthy Era." Ask students to consult a standard U.S. history textbook — either the one they've been assigned or one found online. Ask them to find the McCarthyism section in the book and to compare it with their own description of the McCarthy Era. Have a discussion. Some possible questions:
    - What information was included in the textbook that was missing from the mixer?
    - What information was in the mixer that was absent in the textbook?
    - How does each version communicate a different history?
    - Why do you think the textbook excluded the stories we learned today? Who benefits from that exclusion?
    - Which should be rewritten? The textbook? Or this mixer? Both? Neither? Why?

Possible next steps

- The majority of the people profiled in this mixer have much longer — and more fascinating — stories than I could possibly include here. Importantly, most targets of McCarthyism did not stop organizing and building movements, despite the obstacles put in their way by government harassment. Give students a chance to choose a person from the mixer to learn more about and create some kind of biographical sketch — a poem, a poster, or other creative product.

- Help students see that McCarthyism was one stop on the long track of government harassment, by teaching about the "first" Red Scare and COINTELPRO, and asking students to identify similarities and differences. You might also bring in current events about the government's relationship to today's social movements for racial, immigration, and climate justice. Ask students to identify what terms today are used to isolate, criminalize, and target these movements.

Ursula Wolfe-Rocca (ursula@rethinkingschools.org) has taught high school social studies since 2000. She is on the editorial board of Rethinking Schools and is a writer and organizer for the Zinn Education Project. (2021)

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Mixer Questions

1. Find someone who lost their job due to the Red Scare. Who is this person? What is their story?

2. Find someone who was deported or lost their passport due to the Red Scare. Who is this person? What is their story?

3. Find someone who experienced surveillance or harassment due to the Red Scare. Who is this person? What is their story?

4. Find someone who was targeted because of their political beliefs due to the Red Scare. Who is this person? What is their story?

5. Find someone who was targeted because of their identity (race, gender, sexuality, ethnicity) during the Red Scare. Who is this person? What is their story?

6. Find someone who was targeted as a communist or a member of the Communist Party during the Red Scare. Who is this person? What is their story?

7. Find another character in the mixer your character knows or is connected to. Who is this person? How are the two of you connected?

FINAL QUESTION (You will not answer until AFTER the mixer activity and discussion.)

8. Who was targeted during the Red Scare and why were they targeted?

Mixer Roles

1.
Esther Cooper Jackson
Southern Negro Youth Congress

I was born in Virginia in 1917 to two parents who taught me to hate injustice. From my mother, I got an interest in doing something about the Jim Crow situation in which we lived. From my father, a decorated World War I vet, I learned to hate war — he came home a pacifist and turned me into one too. But it was at Fisk University in Nashville where I studied sociology and became even more committed to changing society. As part of my work, I interviewed Black women who worked as domestics in white homes during the Great Depression, and it was from them that I learned about what it meant to be triply oppressed — as poor people, Black people, and women. I was also part of a faculty study group, made up of both white and Black professors, who came together to read, discuss, and organize for a better world. That's how I was introduced to and joined the Communist Party of the United States (CPUSA). No other political organization at the time combined the things I was most concerned about — economic and racial justice, anti-fascism, women's rights.

I met my husband, James, through that circle of friends and colleagues. He was in the CPUSA too, and he had founded the Southern Negro Youth Congress (SNYC) in 1937. I became its secretary not long after. SNYC organized a unionization campaign for Black tobacco workers in Virginia, anti-lynching campaigns across the South, and sponsored all sorts of political education. One of my favorite projects was the Caravan Puppeteers, a political puppet show put on by SNYC members to alert rural Black people about their right to vote. But by the late '40s we were being attacked on all fronts. In Alabama, where SNYC was headquartered, we couldn't find places to meet safely. Some churches and meeting halls were willing to let us use their space, but pretty soon the police would show up and arrest us for breaking state segregation laws (since SNYC was always an interracial group). The government also harassed us for harboring "communists" in our organization. In 1951, my husband was indicted under the Smith Act, accused with dozens of other CPUSA members of "advocating the overthrow of the U.S. government." He went into hiding rather than give himself over to the U.S. courts. SNYC was harassed out of existence. My family was torn apart. And for what? For organizing the lowest paid workers in the country for better wages? For teaching Black Southerners about their right to vote?

2.

Frank Kameny
The Mattachine Society of Washington

In 1957, I was on assignment for the U.S. Army in Hawai'i. I had recently graduated with my PhD in astronomy and had been hired by the Army Map Service to map distances around the globe so our military could more accurately target its intercontinental ballistic missiles. I was right in the middle of making measurements of the moon when I received a letter instructing me to return to Washington, D.C., immediately to "attend to certain administrative requirements." I was in the middle of a massive research project that I refused to just abandon, so I ignored the summons, which I assumed was some bureaucratic paperwork issue.

When I finally got back to Washington, I was met by two government investigators who interrogated me. They said, "Information has come to the attention of the U.S. Civil Service Commission that you are a homosexual. What comment, if any, do you care to make?" I asked what information they had, but they refused to answer. Finally, I admitted that I'd had relationships with other men. A few months later, I was fired. I appealed the decision through every possible avenue within the Army and Civil Service, but they wouldn't reconsider. Finally, I decided to take my firing to court because this was an issue much bigger than me. There were hundreds, perhaps thousands of gay men and women who were being fired by the government based on their suspected homosexuality. In my court brief, I said that I was one of 15 million Americans who was being treated as a second-class citizen based on sexual identity, not based on any misconduct. When the Supreme Court denied my petition, I helped organize the Mattachine Society of Washington (MSW), a civil rights organization focused on gay rights. The MSW quickly became a target — first the D.C. police, then the FBI, tried to infiltrate and harass our organization. Even Congress intervened and tried to block our ability to raise charitable donations to our work, suggesting we were a "subversive organization."

3.

Marcelle Henry
Voice of America

I was born in France but am now a citizen of the United States. I work for Voice of America (VOA) — a broadcasting company that is run by Congress and focuses on reaching foreign audiences. Our programs air in dozens of different languages around the globe. I wrote the scripts for book reviews that were shared on various radio programs.

One of my former bosses was called to testify before Sen. Joseph McCarthy's hearings on supposed communist influence in government — I guess VOA is technically part of the government. He brought up my name a number of times, saying that I positively reviewed books that were "anti-American" and fed into communist propaganda about the United States. For example, he was asked about my review of Edna Ferber's novel *Giant*, a love story set against the backdrop of Depression-era life in Texas. The committee demanded to know why the VOA's review of the book described white Texans as heavy drinkers who mistreat Mexican farm laborers. Those were not my words, but the words of the author! The book is about the disparities in wealth and living conditions between whites and Mexicans, rich and poor, in Texas. But that didn't matter to Sen. McCarthy's assistant Roy Cohn who was doing the questioning. He said, "So you feel this kind of broadcast does a great service to the communist cause?" My former boss said, "Yessir." Not too long after that I was interrogated by officials from the State Department. I couldn't believe the questions they asked me: "Have you ever had sexual intercourse without being married?" "When did you last have sexual intercourse?" After being bullied into admitting relationships with a number of different men, I was fired on the grounds that my "moral turpitude" made me a security risk.

4.

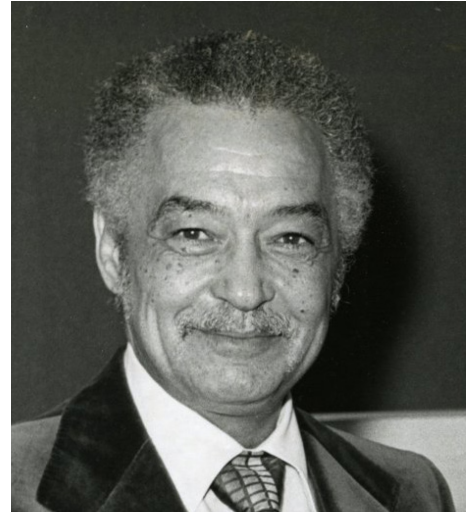
Harry Bridges
International Longshoremen's and Warehousemen's Union (ILWU)

I was born in Australia. As a teenager I worked for my dad, who was a realtor, collecting rents from tenants who could barely pay and who were sometimes in desperate situations. I hated that work and the more I saw the more I knew there was something wrong with how things were run. I became a sailor, moved to San Francisco, and joined the International Longshoremen's Association, which was trying to create a union to fight for fair treatment of workers laboring on the West Coast docks. We had zero job security and bosses could fire workers for any reason, at any time; there were always plenty of other desperate workers to take their place. We were asking for an end to the barbaric system of hiring — known as the "shape-up," where every morning, longshoremen had to line up and beg to be selected for a day's work — and a fair labor contract that would cover all the longshoremen along the West Coast. In 1934, we voted to strike — to force the waterfront employers to recognize our union and negotiate with us. Our strike was long — ports were shut down for 83 days — and painful — the police killed four of our longshoremen, two in Seattle and two in San Francisco. But we won.

That strike turned me into a labor leader, and after that it seemed like I had a target on my back. Four times the U.S. government tried to deport me. The charges? That I was "affiliated with an organization that was advocating for the overthrow of the U.S. government." I had given my blood, sweat, and tears to the International Longshoremen's Association — which on the West Coast became the International Longshoremen's and Warehousemen's Union in 1937 — but that was not the organization the government accused me of affiliation with. They said I was a communist. As I said again and again at multiple hearings — the Dies Committee, the House Un-American Activities Committee — I have never been a member of the Communist Party. Do I have friends and colleagues who are communists? Yes! Will I talk and work with communists? Yes! But that doesn't make me a threat to the United States, only a friend to the workers I represent. They never did succeed in throwing me out — I became a citizen too — but I spent years of my life fighting the government's false claims against me. What did they find so threatening about me?

5.

Coleman Young
National Negro Labor Council



When I was 5, my family moved to Detroit from Alabama. I worked hard in school, got excellent grades, and was eager to go to college. But at that time there weren't a lot of scholarships for working-class Black people like us. We couldn't pay for school, so I went to work. When the war came, I became a second lieutenant in the U.S. Air Force. I was a bomber, proudly fighting the fascists in Europe, but I never stopped fighting racism at home either. While I served, I wrote articles detailing the indignities of the racism and discrimination suffered by Black members of the U.S. military; these articles were published by Black newspapers under a pseudonym — Captain Midnight. After the war, I was elected the director of the United Public Workers Union for my county; I was the first African American elected to such a high position in the Detroit labor movement. In 1951, I was one of the founders of the National Negro Labor Council (NNLC). We were a Black-led organization affiliated with the larger trade union movement and our goal was full freedom for African Americans. The NNLC's focus was economic — good jobs and fair employment practices. But we also marched against police brutality and called for an end to the war in Korea, which we saw as needless. Was it just a coincidence that the very same year we founded the NNLC, I got a subpoena calling me to testify at one of the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) hearings?

HUAC was looking all over the country for evidence of "communist subversion," but it seemed to a lot of us in the labor movement like the hearings always coincided with strikes or union elections. Here is another thing I noticed: There were six of us subpoenaed in that first round of hearings and four of us were Black, and all of us were involved in fighting for the rights of African Americans. I showed up at that hearing but I testified on my terms, not theirs. They tried to prove that I had been a "fellow traveler" of communists, but I was clear: Whoever was on the side of freedom for all Americans, regardless of race, was a friend. Whoever was opposed to freedom for my people was foe. After the hearings, which were front-page news, the white press demonized me. The *Detroit Free Press* compared me to an animal, saying the committee had "loosened the reins" and that I "took the bit in [my] mouth and ran wild." After that it was like there was a target on the backs of all of us who had been interrogated by HUAC. We had trouble getting and keeping work. We were evicted from apartments. And all the organizations I was a part of were harassed into the ground by the government.

6.

Louis Jaffe
New York City Teachers Union

I had been teaching social studies at the same high school in Brooklyn for 17 years when my whole world got turned upside down. Like any good social studies teacher, I was teaching my students to understand and develop opinions about what they were hearing on the radio and seeing in the headlines. In the late 1940s, those headlines were about the "Cold War" that was heating up between the Soviet Union and the United States. I taught lessons on nuclear weapons, comparing Soviet and American views; I taught lessons on the new United Nations, again, comparing the views of the two most powerful countries on its Security Council, the United States and the Soviet Union. Soon my principal was calling me into his office to express his displeasure with my lessons. He felt I was taking the Soviet side. I told him that I wanted my students to think critically and engage in discussion, not simply swallow the U.S. position, but that I was always careful to offer arguments from multiple perspectives, including that of the U.S. government. He forced me to turn over all my students' notebooks. After I complied, he returned them with no explanation or comment. In 17 years of teaching, I had never received a bad evaluation from my superiors. My written reviews commented on my professionalism, my high academic standards, and my skill in questioning students, which was "usually quite challenging and thought-provoking." I was also commended for my "fine relationship between [you] and your pupils." But now I was getting bombarded with concerns from my principal and department chair that I was peddling propaganda for the communists.

I fought back at every turn, answered every accusation with facts, and publicized what was happening to me in the local education journal. Of course, that only made them madder. Against my will, the superintendent transferred me to another school. Soon, I was not the only one, and there were seven of us under investigation by the school board. All of us had been active in our union and loud critics of the school district. In fact, it was right after we demanded that the school district toss out our old, blatantly racist textbooks, and called on them to fix the deplorable conditions the city's inner-city schools — like non-flushing toilets — that we were accused of being communists. We knew our First Amendment rights and refused to answer questions about our personal political beliefs. We were charged with insubordination and suspended without pay. In the end, more than 1,000 of us were interrogated, dozens of us were fired, and more than 200 teachers resigned under harassment and pressure.

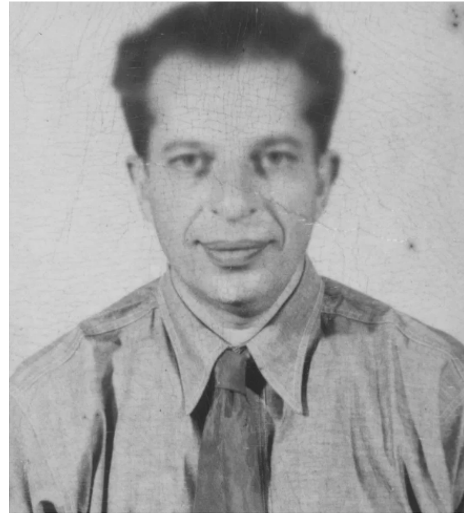
7.

Emma Tenayuca
Workers Alliance of America

I was born in Texas in 1916 and was raised by my grandparents. My grandfather taught me to take pride in my Mexican and Native ancestry and to always fight for justice. To me, justice was not some abstract idea; justice simply means people are treated fairly in their jobs and get what they need: food, shelter, dignity. That's all we were fighting for in 1933 when I joined my first strike. The women workers at the Finck Cigar Company were only demanding fair wages and safe working conditions but were met with brutality. The San Antonio police chief threatened to deport us to Mexico; we were tear-gassed six times. After that experience, I knew I wanted to continue the fight for laborers, especially the Mexican American women in my community. These women were often ignored by larger labor unions, even as they were the most exploited by their bosses.

In 1938, I was elected to lead a strike of pecan shellers in San Antonio. The strike was huge — 12,000 workers — and long, lasting three months. Partway through, the union leadership asked me to step down as leader; they said my ties to communists (I had joined the Young Communist League in 1935 and my husband at the time was a leader of the Communist Party in Texas) would turn public opinion against me. Leader or not, I never left the picket lines, stopped giving speeches, or writing pamphlets in support of the strike. Eventually though, the anti-communists in Texas drove me out of town. At one event, I was forced to escape a mob of 5,000 rock-throwing men through a building's underground secret passage; death threats against me became common. Leaving San Antonio didn't stop the FBI from following me — I later found out I was on a list of U.S. government "enemies." And when I wanted to help defeat fascism in World War II, by serving in the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps, the government rejected me and blacklisted me because of my ties to communism. Everyone thought the communists were trying to take over the government. But all we were trying to do was organize labor, and organize the unemployed, so they would have their rights.

8.
Albert Maltz
Hollywood Ten



I was born in Brooklyn. My parents were Jewish immigrants from Russia and managed to build a good life here in the United States. I went to Columbia, then Yale. It must have been the mid-1930s that I became a communist. For me, Marxist ideas were the noblest set of ideals ever penned by humankind. I mean, where else do you find thinkers saying that we are going to end all forms of human exploitation? Wage exploitation, exploitation of women by men, the exploitation of people of color by white peoples, the exploitation of colonial countries by imperialist countries. This was an inspiring body of literature to read! In the spirit of these ideas, I started my career as a playwright for an organization of actors and performers who produced plays directed at working people called the Theatre Union. During World War II, I wrote a novel about German resistance to the Nazi regime, a book that was distributed to 150,000 U.S. soldiers during the war. It was also during the war that I began writing for movies. I won two Academy Awards, one for a short film starring Frank Sinatra, speaking out against anti-Semitism. I soon reached the end of my Hollywood honeymoon. I was called before the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC), which was investigating — and attempting to eliminate — the influence of communists in Hollywood.

I was one of a group that became known as the Hollywood Ten. We refused to answer questions related to our political affiliations nor would we share information with the committee about any of our colleagues. For that we were cited for contempt by Congress, arrested, and jailed. I served one year in prison. One thing that was hard to miss about all this anti-communist fervor is that a lot of the people being targeted were Jewish, like me. I recall one telling moment at the hearings. A congresswoman asked the HUAC sponsors to name the specific films the committee believed were helping the Communist Party. Rather than answer the question, Rep. John Rankin of Mississippi stood up to read names of those who had signed a petition defending our First Amendment rights. "One is Danny Kaye. We found his real name was David Daniel *Kaminsky*. Then there was Eddie Cantor. His real name was Edward *Iskowitz*. Edward G Robinson, his name is Emanuel *Goldenberg*." Well, of course, those are all Jewish names. As if being Jewish was itself a disqualification! And as if there is something shameful in the long tradition of immigrant families adopting new names to make their way in the United States.

9.

Claudia Jones
The Communist Party

I was born in 1915 in Trinidad. When I moved to New York City at 8 years old, I was Claudia Cumberbatch. And that was still my name a few years later, when my mother died, and when I was winning "good citizenship" awards at my junior high, and a few years after that, when I contracted tuberculosis and had to spend long stints in the hospital. But when I became a political activist, I changed my name. I thought it might help thwart the government harassment that was coming my way. It didn't work. In 1936, I was reading about the horrifying miscarriage of justice that was the Scottsboro case. Nine African American teenagers had been falsely accused of raping two white women; eight of the nine were convicted and sentenced to death. I was desperate to help in any way I could to appeal and reverse those convictions. The Communist Party USA was leading the campaign to save the Scottsboro Boys, and that's how I joined the party. After many years of writing for various publications, I became the Negro Affairs editor of *The Daily Worker*, the Communist Party's newspaper in the United States. I wanted to help readers understand that though we workers all experienced oppression from the capitalist class, we didn't all experience it the same way or to the same degree. I argued that Black women like me were triply oppressed — by sexism, racism, and class exploitation — and that gave us not only harder lives, but also a heightened political consciousness, a keen understanding of what needed to be changed in society. In 1948, I was arrested for being a member of the Communist Party. The government said I had violated the McCarran and the Smith acts and I was ordered deported. At my sentencing I was given a chance to address the court. This is what I said: "I am fighting for the full and unequivocal equality for my people, the Negro people, which as a communist I believe can only be achieved allied to the cause of the working class. My Jim Crow experiences as a young Negro woman, the bitter indignity and humiliation of second-class citizenship, makes a mockery of our government's claims of a 'free America' in a 'free world.'" I spent the rest of my life in London and never stopped fighting for the liberation of Black people — in the United States and across the globe.

10.

Bruce Scott
Department of Labor

I was born in Chicago, went to college in Chicago, and developed an active social life as a young gay man in Chicago. I got a job with the government in the late 1930s as a wage and hour inspector — making sure employers weren't breaking the law or their contracts with workers. Then the war came, and after serving in the military I moved to Washington, D.C., and continued my work in the Department of Labor. In D.C. I rented a two-story townhouse with a friend in the Georgetown neighborhood; it turned out to be a haven for gay folks like us. Of the four identical townhouses on my street, three were rented or owned by gay people. The rest of the town was not always so welcoming. One night, I was walking home through Lafayette Park, which was a known cruising place for gay men — but that night I was not interested in a date, just a shortcut home. Soon a police officer stopped me and was asking me all sorts of questions — about my sex life! — which I refused to answer. He arrested me for "loitering" and took me in. I posted $5 collateral and they let me go home. That incident came back to haunt me several years later when Congress was holding the McCarthy hearings on suspected communists and the Hoey hearings on the "security risk" of homosexuals in government. In the minds of those congressmen, the hearings were connected. In fact, you'd hear it all the time — "queers and communists!" as if the two went hand in hand. The government made it clear at those hearings that homosexuals would not be tolerated: "The privilege of working for the United States government should not be extended to persons of dubious moral character, such as homosexuals or sex perverts." So I wasn't all that surprised when my boss came to me one day with evidence of my long-ago loitering arrest and questions about my personal life. He told me I had to resign. I held out longer than many, but I knew my time had come. After 17 years at the Department of Labor, I was out of a job and barred from working in government ever again.

11.

Jack O'Dell (1)
National Maritime Union

I was raised by my grandparents in Detroit in the 1920s and 1930s. One of my great-great-grandfathers had escaped slavery to join the Union Army. I wonder what he would have said if he'd been around to see me choose to head back to the South to attend college at Xavier in New Orleans. During World War II, I joined the Merchant Marine and then the multiracial National Maritime Union (NMU). After the war, I was a volunteer organizer in Operation Dixie, an effort by the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO), a bigger union with which the NMU was affiliated, to fight racism through organizing interracial unions across the South. But when I got to work, I realized Operation Dixie wasn't what the CIO had advertised. They seemed less interested in helping workers on the ground organize themselves and more interested in pressuring those workers to join already existing, often less militant, unions elsewhere. This was not what I believed in. I believed in militancy and organizing new unions out of unorganized workers. This split was happening in lots of unions, including the NMU, between the leftists, like me, and leaders who wanted to cooperate with the government's effort to purge "communists" from the labor movement. In 1947, the government passed a law called Taft-Hartley that required union leaders to file affidavits with the Department of Labor promising not to tolerate communists or supporters of the party. Where I was, in New Orleans, anti-communism became a tent under which all the racist elements could assemble. The anti-communist conservative union elements would team up with the police and the Klan to run Black people out of the union hall. It was almost like a Reconstruction thing you read about — how they overthrew the government, the Blacks forced to flee. It was that kind of atmosphere they were able to create. I was expelled from the NMU the day after the Korean War broke out — June 26, 1950.

12.

Madeleine Tress
Department of Commerce

I remember what I was wearing at that interrogation: a pale blue suit and high heels. It was hot in Washington, D.C., and there was no air conditioning in that room at the Department of Commerce building. I had been working there as an economist for only a few months. I didn't really know what this meeting was about, but when one of those men leaned across the table and said, "Your voluntary appearance here today has been requested in order to afford you an opportunity to answer questions concerning information that has been received by the U.S. Civil Service Commission," I realized this was serious. I asked if I could consult a lawyer; they said, "Sure, but he can't be in here with you." So I agreed to go forward with the interview alone. At first, they just asked me harmless questions about my name, date of birth, address, etc. But then came the reason we were there: "Miss Tress, the commission has information that you are an admitted homosexual. What comment do you wish to make regarding this matter?" I froze and my mind raced. Should I lie? Tell the truth? I opted for, "I'd rather not comment." But the questions just kept coming. They asked me about the bars I frequented. They named my friends, some of whom were also gay, and asked if I knew who they were romantically involved with. The interrogators became belligerent and deeply offensive, asking me how I had sex with women and saying that I could never be satisfied without a man. That interrogation was one of the most demeaning experiences of my life. At the end, they pushed a statement across the table that I refused to sign. I knew there was only one thing left for me to do: resign. And I did. I was furious. But I was even more furious when I found out who had informed on me. Bob, who sat across from me at work, had called the FBI about my "lifestyle"; I think he was just trying to get the focus off of him and onto me, since at the same time his brother, a union organizer, was being targeted by the government as a suspected communist. And that wasn't the end of it. A few years later, I worked hard to win a Fulbright Fellowship to study abroad, but the State Department blocked the award. Turns out my file was "flagged." The note in my file read "questionable loyalty and morals (lesbian)."

13.

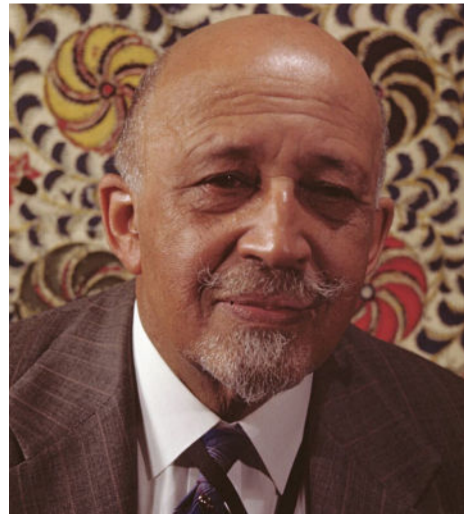
Lorraine Hansberry
Inter-American Peace Conference

I was born in 1930 on the South Side of Chicago, Black and female. I am the author of A Raisin in the Sun, a popular play about one Black family's struggle to build a life and navigate racism in Chicago. But before my play made me an "acclaimed" and "award-winning" author, I watched McCarthy and his henchmen destroy the careers of too many of my friends and colleagues. There were arrests in the early morning and the shifty-eyed fellows who follow, follow, follow you.

There were certainly times I thought I would end up in jail too. After all, so many people I admired were being targeted — Paul Robeson and W. E. B. Du Bois to name two. Robeson and Du Bois had created a monthly newspaper called *Freedom*, for which I sometimes wrote. The paper's motto was "Where one is enslaved, all are in chains!" And that pretty much summed up what we wrote about: We were against all the evils enslaving the world's peoples: colonialism, poverty, nuclear weapons, racism, violence, war, and the oppression of women. McCarthyites like to rant about "communist subversion" — and it's true that I was a member of the Communist Party for some years — but they don't want to talk about *what* we so-called "communists" in the United States were trying to subvert. We were trying to subvert war with the Soviet Union or any other country. We were trying to subvert the exploitation of poor people, here in the United States and around the world. We were trying to subvert racial discrimination. When the U.S. government revoked Paul Robeson's passport, I agreed to speak on his behalf at the Inter-American Peace Conference in Uruguay. Of course, I had to lie, and tell the passport officials that I was going to be vacationing in Europe. After I attended the conference — which the U.S. State Department had declared illegal — it wasn't long before government agents showed up at my door to give me the Robeson treatment. They took my passport too.

14.

W. E. B. Du Bois
World Peace Council



I am one of the founding members of one of the longest-running civil rights organizations in the United States, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), which we started in 1910. I have been a peace activist for as long as I can remember, in part because I have been a human rights advocate for as long as I can remember, and in my mind so many wars are connected to the exploitation of colonized peoples, here in the United States and across the globe. But I made a mistake in the First World War. In 1917, I published an essay called "Close Ranks" that called on my fellow African Americans to support the war in the hope that our sacrifices in the Army would be rewarded with full citizenship. Instead, the exact opposite happened. Black soldiers in uniform were attacked on streetcars and sidewalks all across the country at the end of the war. President Woodrow Wilson said that Black soldiers were spreading communist ideas upon their return from Europe. After that betrayal, I never again wavered from my peace politics. I was 83 years old when, in 1951, the Justice Department arrested me as an agent of the Soviet Union. What was my offense? I was a member of the World Peace Council (WPC), an international organization dedicated to disarmament and anti-colonialism. In my work with WPC, I had circulated a petition, the Stockholm Appeal, which called for a ban on nuclear weapons. The government deemed my peace activism "communist propaganda." I faced a $10,000 fine and five years in prison — a very long time for an 83-year-old man. So I chose to fight, loudly and publicly. I gave speeches all across the country. I placed ads in newspapers, circulated petitions, and called for an international letter-writing campaign targeting judges, prosecutors, the attorney general, the secretary of state, and the president. In the end, the judge dismissed the charges against me because the prosecution could not provide even one lick of evidence that I was a foreign agent. I won, but the government was not done with me. The next year they took my passport to stop me from traveling to another peace conference.

15.

Alvah Bessie
Hollywood Ten

I was born in Harlem to a well-off Jewish family. I have to admit that when our family's business fell apart in the 1920s, I was somewhat relieved. I didn't want to be a businessman. I wanted to act and write — and now I could. I spent four years acting in New York, after which I moved to France to try my hand at writing. I became a translator of French literature into English. When fascism rising in Europe, I joined the anti-fascist Abraham Lincoln Brigade, fighting for democracy in Spain. Upon my return to the United States from Europe, I joined the American Communist Party and wrote film reviews for left-wing magazines and screenplays for Warner Brothers. One of those screenplays got me nominated for an Academy Award in 1945! But just two years later, I was out of work and sitting in jail. I was one of the many Hollywood writers, actors, directors, and producers called to testify before the House Un-American Activities Committee. It was a horrifying time. You had the leader of the America First Party whipping up fears of "alien-minded Russian Jews in Hollywood!" You had Walt Disney himself putting out a list of no-no's for screenwriters: "Don't smear the free enterprise system." "Don't smear wealth." "Don't glorify the common man." I mean, are you kidding me? Whatever happened to free expression? I had two choices: I could be a "friendly" witness and cooperate with the hearings — name names of colleagues, denounce any affiliation with communists and communism, and validate the whole sham. Or I could be an "unfriendly" witness and refuse to cooperate with injustice. That's what I did. When the committee asked me, "Are you now, or have you ever been, a member of the Communist Party?" I refused to answer, citing my First Amendment rights. A number — but not enough — of us took the "unfriendly" route. We were held in contempt of Congress, prosecuted, and sent to jail. When I was released, there was no going back to my old work; I was on a blacklist and no one in the industry would dare hire me. So I got a job at a nightclub and wrote satirical novels about my experience with Hollywood's anti-communist hysteria.

16.

Paul Robeson
Civil Rights Congress

My father was an enslaved person who freed himself, or "ran away" as it's usually described. I grew up in New Jersey, where I became an avid and talented football player; I was an All-American at Rutgers University two years in a row. I was also valedictorian. After that, I went to law school, played professional football, and started my singing career. I became a Broadway star and soon a global headliner on all the biggest stages. For all my fame and good fortune, I could not stay away from politics. I was confronted daily with racism at home and deeply moved by the efforts of democratic-minded people trying to stop the rise of fascism in Europe. It became impossible for me not to use my platform to speak out against injustice. One time I was able to get a meeting with the president of the United States himself, Harry S. Truman. Four African Americans — two couples — had just been lynched in Georgia. I demanded that Truman do everything in his power to enact legislation that would bring an end to these murders. I spoke frankly and told him that he needed to take action or my people would defend themselves. For that comment, he kicked me out of his office.

I was a member of two groups that got put on the government's List of Subversive Organizations. The first was called the Council on African Affairs (CAA), which supported movements in Africa to end European colonial rule. The second was the Civil Rights Congress, which was committed to providing legal defense services to Black people who got entangled in the criminal justice system. On the basis of my membership in these organizations, I was called to testify at a Senate hearing. They asked me if I was a member of the Communist Party. I was not a member of the Communist Party, but I had many friends and allies who were, and I had thoroughly enjoyed my time visiting the Soviet Union. I told the committee, "Some of the most brilliant and distinguished Americans are about to go to jail for the failure to answer that question, and I am going to join them, if necessary." After that, I began to have trouble booking concerts in the United States — the FBI pressured venues to cancel my performances and when shows did happen, racist mobs whipped up by press accounts depicting me as a Soviet stooge and a traitor threatened me and anyone attending. Soon enough, I couldn't book shows internationally either, because the State Department took my passport.

17.

Louise Thompson Patterson
Sojourners for Truth and Justice

I graduated from high school at 15 because we only get one life and I had a lot I wanted to do with mine. I enrolled in the University of California at Berkeley, and it was there that I first heard W. E. B. Du Bois speak. He was giving a lecture called "The Economic Condition of the Negro in the United States." I was transfixed and inspired. The man was brilliant and never once looked at his notes. It was the first time in my life I felt pride that I was Black. I was only 22 when I got a job as a professor at the Hampton Institute, an historically Black college in Virginia. After that I made my way to Harlem, where I could surround myself with activists and artists who shared my desire to shake up the status quo. During that time, one of my closest friends was the poet and author Langston Hughes. We shared a lot, including our admiration for the Soviet Union's attempt to create a society free from all forms of oppression. We created the Harlem Suitcase Theatre from our desire to combine the arts with the struggle of everyday people. We staged interracial plays about the daily lives, struggles, and hopes of Black people in the United States and performed them for unions and other labor organizations. I visited the Soviet Union in 1932. What I witnessed there convinced me that only an entirely new social order could address U.S. racism. I went to the USSR with leftist leanings; I returned home a committed revolutionary.

And for me, it was not just about communist *ideas*; it was about the work I saw communists doing in the United States during the Great Depression. They were the ones organizing protests for jobs, food, and relief. They were the ones blocking evictions. They were the ones rushing to the defense of Black people being persecuted and prosecuted by the criminal justice system. I joined the Communist Party's National Committee for the Defense of Political Prisoners and that's how I became involved in the Scottsboro case. Nine African American teenagers were falsely accused of raping two white women; eight of the nine were convicted and sentenced to death. I was one of the main organizers of the "Free the Scottsboro Boys March," held in Washington, D.C., which brought out 5,000 protestors and got widespread media coverage. In 1951, I was one of the 14 African American women who organized a convening of Black women in Washington, D.C., to protest the arrest of W. E. B. Du Bois, who was accused of spreading "communist propaganda." We ended creating a new group, called Sojourners for Truth and Justice. We wanted to fight Jim Crow racism at home, but also U.S. Cold War policies abroad, which were hurting the globe's most vulnerable people. The FBI didn't like us much. In their eyes, we were a "communist front" with "subversive ramifications." Our members were harassed, called before Senate committees to be interrogated, and had our passports seized. We simply couldn't keep going under that kind of government pressure. We folded after a year.

18.

Josephine Baker

I am one of the most famous performers of the 20th century; I spent most of my artistic life in France — and became a French citizen — but I was born in St. Louis in 1906. We were poor (my grandparents were formerly enslaved people) and at 8 years old, I started working as a live-in domestic worker in the homes of white families. As a teenager, I started dancing with a street performance group. When we got a break — a booking in New York City — my career really started to take off. Eager to get away from the United States, I moved to Paris, where I became a headliner at the most popular clubs. I did all I could to support the resistance to the Nazi occupation of France during World War II. As a performer, I was still allowed to move around the country and continent, so I became a kind of intelligence agent, ferrying secret messages (sometimes pinned into my underwear!) for the Resistance. After the war, I returned to the United States, hoping to gain the recognition in my birth country that I'd received in France. Instead, I got a reminder of what it means to be Black there. My husband — who is white — and I were refused service in 36 different hotels we tried to book for our stay in New York. And that was the North. I decided I needed to see what life was like in the South, so I left my husband behind, took on a fake identity, traveled through the region by train, and wrote about my experiences with American racism for a French magazine. As I told a friend after that trip, it convinced me I needed to dedicate myself to helping my people.

From then on, I refused to perform in places that segregated audiences or denied African Americans entry. As I told one club owner, "I cannot work where my people cannot go. It's as simple as that." Many clubs and venues bent to my will, given my popularity and the money they could make off booking me, but it wasn't long before I started encountering new obstacles. The House Un-American Activities Committee was investigating suspected communists in Hollywood, and even though I was not affiliated with communists in any way, I was told my political activism was not good for business. Finding it hard to get work in the United States, I started booking shows in Latin America. While I would sometimes comment on American racism in a speech or in response to a question from the press, I was not a political performer. Nevertheless, newspapers depicted me as a tool of the Soviet Union, with one paper calling me "a darling of the Kremlin." I was shocked when during a performance in Cuba, I was arrested by the military police. They filed no charges against me but questioned me for three hours. When I asked what I'd done wrong, the police told me that the FBI had passed along information that I "might be an active communist." In 1955, I arrived back in New York, but was detained by the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS). I was no longer allowed in the United States.

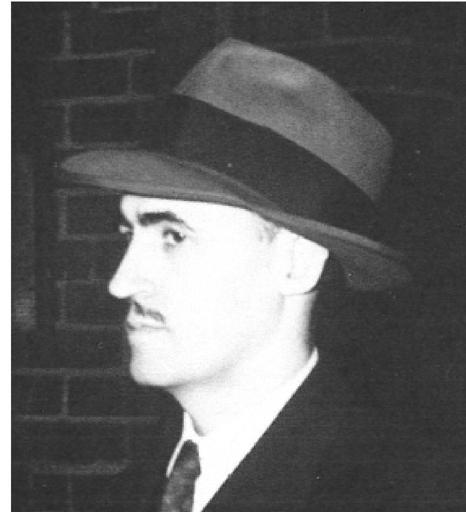
19.

Jack O'Dell (2)
Southern Christian Leadership Conference

I came to the Civil Rights Movement through the industrial trade union movement. I believed that if white and Black workers could organize together, for better wages, fairer treatment, and dignity for all workers, we'd be getting somewhere. But after I was expelled from my union for being too radical, I joined the Southern Negro Youth Congress (SNYC), where I worked to educate Black people about their legal rights and encouraged them to register to vote. I worked closely with James Jackson, who was a communist, and his wife, Esther Cooper Jackson. I guess that was enough for the government. A couple years later I was called to testify before the House Un-American Activities Committee. The chairman of that committee — from Mississippi — had the gall to lecture me, a Black man living in the South, about "subversive activities." Those were the mealymouthed words they used to label you a communist. So I said to the committee: "I am wondering, do you know as much about the 'subversive activities' in this country that began with the slavery of the Negro people, and have been going on for 300 years, including the Jim Crow system that has been in effect since the end of the Civil War? *That* is what I am primarily concerned with in terms of 'subversive activities.'" I refused to answer their question as to whether or not I was a communist. After the government harassed the SNYC out of existence, I moved to New York. It was there I started working with the Southern Christian Leadership Conference and Dr. Martin Luther King. Just as during my time with SNYC, I worked mostly on voter registration campaigns. But in 1963, that work ended, because President John F. Kennedy told Dr. King to fire me. Apparently, J. Edgar Hoover, the director of the FBI, had gone to Kennedy and said I was a communist. So Kennedy called King, right before the March on Washington, and said, "O'Dell's a communist. He's got to go." Well, I wasn't a communist — I'd left the party in the mid-1950s — but King asked me to step down anyway. He wrote, "Any allusion to the left brings forth an emotional response that would seem to indicate that the SCLC and the Southern Freedom Movement are communist inspired. In these critical times, we cannot afford to risk any such impressions." I didn't like it, but I agreed to leave.

20.

James Matles
United Electrical Workers Union



I was born to a Jewish family in Romania, but immigrated to the United States right at the start of the Great Depression. I was 19, became a citizen, and got straight to work in a factory as a machinist. I joined the union and rose quickly in the ranks — people said I was "fiery" and a good talker. I became the lead organizer for the new United Electrical Workers Union (UE), which operated under the umbrella of the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO), and broke away from the whites-only membership policy of prior electrical equipment unions. We demanded that huge electrical companies — like General Electric, Westinghouse, and RCA — pay their workers fairly and respect our right to safe working conditions. The bosses didn't much like me, but the workers did. By the end of World War II, I had helped build our membership up to half a million. In 1947, the government passed a law called Taft-Hartley that required union leaders to file affidavits with the Department of Labor promising not to tolerate communists or supporters of the party. That law — and the anti-communist hysteria of which it was a part — wreaked havoc on the CIO. Wanting to stay on the government's good side, some leaders in the CIO decided militant unions like ours would have to go. They expelled us — along with 10 other unions. That added up to more than 1 million workers thrown out of the CIO based on suspicions we were part of "subversive organizations" harboring communists. We didn't back down and continued operating our union, but under intense government harassment that also entangled me. For the next decade, the federal government tried to take away my citizenship so they could deport me. The FBI was visiting me practically weekly, making my life miserable. For what? For fighting for decent union contracts? Because we wouldn't let the big unions — who were letting the government push *them* around — push us around? For 10 years the government alleged I was a communist and for 10 years I vigorously denied that charge. I was not a communist. But I would be an uncompromising defender of the worker until my last breath.

21.

Herbert Biberman
Hollywood Ten

My family owned a small textile business when I was born in Philadelphia in 1900. After I finished school, everyone expected I would follow in their footsteps, but I became involved in theater instead. After stage-managing and directing plays, I began working on films and when World War II arrived, I had written or directed several Hollywood films. I knew I was on the government's radar in the late 1930s when the FBI questioned me and accused me of being a Nazi. I was very critical of the government's efforts to move us into the growing war in Europe; at that time, I still thought we should stay out. I was for peace. But to accuse me, a Jew, of being a Nazi? Just because I advocated against war? That was ludicrous. After the war, I faced a new accusation: that I was a communist or communist sympathizer. I was one of many Hollywood writers, actors, directors, and producers called to testify before the House Un-American Activities Committee. Many people chose to try to salvage their careers by "naming names," but I was one of 10 witnesses who refused to participate. When the committee asked us, "Are you now, or have you ever been, a member of the Communist Party?" we refused to answer, citing our First Amendment rights. We were held in contempt of Congress, prosecuted, and sent to jail. When we were freed a year later, we faced the blacklist. First our union — the Screen Actors Guild — then the film industry executives, said we wouldn't work in Hollywood until we were cleared of contempt charges and swore we were not communists. Some of us decided to continue to work, but outside of Hollywood. In 1956, I directed a film called *Salt of the Earth*, which was about a real miners' strike that had taken place in New Mexico in 1951. The film was about the struggle to build solidarity between workers — Mexican American and white, women and men — to successfully resist the power and violence of the company. The film was denounced by Congress as "communist propaganda" and blacklisted. The FBI harassed us, trying to prove our financing was not above board. In the end, only 12 theaters in the entire country agreed to screen it.

22.

Frances Perkins
Department of Labor

I was the first woman to ever serve in a president's cabinet. I was the secretary of labor from 1933 to 1945. I was born in Boston in 1880. My family were Republicans back then, when the Republican Party was the anti-slavery party. My parents taught me to "live for God and do something," and that is what I tried to do for the rest of my life: do something that would improve people's lives. As soon as I graduated from college I was organizing — for limits on the working day for children, for the right to vote for women, and for safety for all working people. I will never forget the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire — I was there, in New York City, when 146 workers, almost all immigrant women, died in a building with locked doors and no fire escapes. I briefly dabbled in the Socialist Party, but ended up thinking it was more practical to throw my weight behind the Democrats. When the Depression hit, and President Roosevelt asked me to be labor secretary, I was bursting with ideas. I was a major proponent of the Wagner Act, which gave workers the right to unionize and bargain collectively. If those women at the Triangle Factory had the right to unionize, they might be alive today.

In everything I did, I always strived for fairness, and most of the time in a business situation, the boss and the owners have more power than the workers. So fairness required me to consistently support the right of workers to organize unions and use their collective power to demand higher wages and better conditions. But my pro-labor policies made a lot of conservatives mad. In 1939, the Dies Committee, also known as the House Un-American Activities Committee, brought an impeachment resolution against me. In other words, they tried to get me fired. The charge was ridiculous. They wanted to fire me because I had not deported (yet) the labor leader Harry Bridges. Bridges had helped lead a successful strike of longshoremen along on the West Coast in the '30s and the committee was certain he was a communist. Well, I wasn't opposed to deporting him if the law required it (at that time if an immigrant was found to be a member of a "subversive organization" they were eligible for deportation), but there simply wasn't adequate evidence that Bridges was a "subversive." They finally gave up the impeachment effort for lack of proof. I was glad I was out of government by the time the next round of House Un-American Activities Committee hearings rolled around.

23.

Sam Wallach
New York City Teachers Union

I was born in Poland, but was still an infant when my parents brought me to the United States. I wanted to be an engineer, but my teachers at City College in Brooklyn told me that, as a Jew, I would have a hard time breaking into that field. So I became a teacher of economics and history because in my experience, those fields both help us think about how to improve the world, to make it fairer, and freer from hunger and fear. I joined the teachers' union, got married, had two children, and taught. But in the late 1940s, I became one of more than 1,000 New York City teachers investigated for ties to communism. I was one of a few dozen who refused to cooperate with the investigations. When I was subpoenaed to testify at a House subcommittee hearing on communism, this is what I told them: "I have been a teacher for 15 years, a proud American teacher. I have tried all those years to inspire my youngsters with a deep devotion for the American way of life, our Constitution, and Bill of Rights. . . . As a teacher and a believer in those fundamental principles, it seems to me that it would be a betrayal of everything I have been teaching to cooperate with the committee in an investigation of a man's opinions, political beliefs, and private views." I was fired. For years following my dismissal, the FBI would show up on my porch asking me to reconsider cooperating with their "investigation" of communists. As a teacher, I couldn't help but try to turn these conversations into an education for the young agents. I'd ask, "Have you boys read the Bill of Rights?" I'd duck inside the house and grab a copy of the Constitution and begin to read relevant sections aloud to them. They'd humor me for a few paragraphs, scribble some words in their notebook, and bid me farewell. I was lucky to find other work. I became an administrator at a hospital and spent the rest of my career advocating on behalf of developmentally disabled children.

24.

Hallie Flanagan
Federal Theatre Project

I was always a lover of the theater. As a child growing up in South Dakota, I would stage performances for the family in my living room. In college in the Midwest, I was shocked to learn that most professors thought plays were to be read and analyzed, but not performed! Luckily, I found my way to Vassar College in New York, where I became part of the experimental theater movement. Out of that work, I became the first woman to receive the Guggenheim Fellowship, which enabled me to travel throughout Europe and study modern theater. I was thrilled by all of it but was most taken with what I saw in Russia. I loved the plays of Chekhov! When the Great Depression hit, the performing arts were devastated just like every other part of the U.S. economy. I was thrilled when President Franklin Roosevelt appointed me director of the Federal Theatre Project (FTP), part of the Works Progress Administration, to provide jobs to the thousands of artists — set designers, stagehands, musicians, writers, and actors — left unemployed by the economic crash. Within a year, I hired 15,000 workers across 28 states; we staged hundreds of plays and performances for free or reduced prices for hundreds of thousands of Americans who had never seen live theater before.

I was committed to making sure the FTP benefited all U.S. communities, so we had ethnic theater projects — German, French, and Italian. We also launched dozens of Negro Theatre Units that focused on performing plays by Black people about Black people. I would not tolerate racism in our ranks. When a project manager in Texas tried to segregate his white and Black theater techs, I fired him. My staunch opposition to racism became one of the pieces of evidence against me a couple years later when I was accused of promoting communism. The Dies Committee, also known as the House Un-American Activities Committee, investigated the FTP. One of my employees was asked about my thoughts on racial justice. He answered, "Those who were prejudiced found it extremely difficult to get along in the Federal Theatre." Well, I took that as a compliment, but Congressman Dies said it was further proof that the FTP was sowing the seeds of communism. He said, "Racial equality forms a vital part of the communistic teachings and practices." I told the committee that our work was pro-American because our plays celebrated our constitutional freedoms of expression and addressed the most pressing concerns of our citizens. But my pleas did no good. The committee pulled our funding, immediately putting 8,000 theater industry employees out of work.

25.

Elizabeth Catlett
Taller de Gráfica Popular

My grandparents on both sides were formerly enslaved people. As a child, growing up in Washington, D.C., I recall my grandmother telling me stories about the origins of our people in Africa and the conditions of slavery. I cannot recall a time I wasn't interested in art. I would seize upon any chance I could get to study it in school. But the idea of being a professional artist, as a woman, and even more as a Black woman, seemed out of the question, so in college I studied to become a teacher. But working as a high school teacher did not satisfy me, especially since Black teachers were paid so much less than white ones. Although I lobbied for equal pay, I was unsuccessful. Art beckoned me back. I went to school again — a graduate program at the University of Iowa in Iowa City — to study sculpture. I was allowed to learn, but not live, there — the college did not allow Black people to live in the dormitories. After graduating, I taught, continued to learn new skills — like lithography — and managed to make ends meet as a professional artist. In 1946, I got a grant to travel to Mexico to study. I was excited to learn with and from Mexican artists who were addressing social issues in their work. I loved Mexico, fell in love with a Mexican printmaker, and married him. We were both part of Taller de Gráfica Popular (TGP), an artists' collective. That is where I learned how important it is to use your art in the service of people, and particularly those people struggling for a better life. We believed art should not be divorced from politics. That is why I participated in solidarity actions when there was a railroad strike in Mexico City — and was arrested. I soon realized I was being watched by U.S. officials in Mexico. When I tried to travel to the United States, I was denied a travel visa. The U.S. embassy said they suspected me of being a communist and that TGP was harboring communists. The State Department said I was an "undesirable alien." For more than a decade they would not let me back into the United States. I could not even visit my mother when she was ill and dying. I was never a communist, but I renounced my U.S. citizenship and became a Mexican citizen.

26.
William Worthy
Baltimore Afro-American newspaper

I have never been one to follow the crowd and my parents encouraged my independence from an early age. Although my dad was a wealthy doctor and I lived a privileged life, I was always keenly aware of the many injustices in the world. When people asked me what I believed, I answered that I was anti-colonialist, anti-militarist, and anti-imperialist. Those were the beliefs that informed my choice to be a conscientious objector during World War II. It was those beliefs that led me to participate in the Journey of Reconciliation, an interracial effort to use nonviolent direct action to challenge segregation on public transportation in the South. And perhaps it was those beliefs that fueled my desire to be a journalist, to pursue information about places across the globe that our government maligned, and let my readers decide for themselves what to think. During the Cold War, the State Department restricted travel of U.S. citizens to countries with which it differed ideologically. I ignored those restrictions. I believe in a free press. First, I went to the Soviet Union; next I went to South Africa but was kicked out almost immediately once they realized I was a Black American journalist. In 1956, I defied another travel ban and went to China — a communist state — to report for my paper, the *Baltimore Afro-American*. It was a 41-day reporting trip, including an interview with the Chinese president. When I returned from that trip, the U.S. government seized my passport. But the Cuban Revolution had just happened, and I was eager to report on the newest communist country. Cuba is just a hop, skip, and a jump from the southern tip of Florida, so it wasn't hard for me to get there, even without a passport. The trouble started after I filed my articles and headed home. I was tried, convicted, and sentenced to jail for "returning to the United States without a valid passport." As many of my friends pointed out at the time, no one had ever heard of a white U.S. citizen ever being arrested for re-entering the country without a passport. Luckily, I had a good lawyer and the courts said my arrest — and that statute on which it was based — was unconstitutional.

27.

Charlotta Bass
Sojourners for Truth and Justice

My first job was selling newspapers and I guess I got hooked, because I became a newspaperwoman for most of my long life. Both the *Providence Watchman*, the paper I first worked for, and the *California Eagle*, the paper I would someday own, were historically Black newspapers. The Black press has always been a protector of U.S. democracy by showing a critical interest in stories too often overlooked or denied by the mainstream media. My paper focused on the lives and struggles of Black people, but not only Black people. After all, in Los Angeles, where I lived, the restrictive covenants that kept us in ghettos applied to all minority groups: Jews, Asians, Mexican Americans, Italians, Indians — we were all denied fair housing. My paper organized to help defend the Scottsboro Boys — the nine Black teenagers falsely accused of rape and sentenced to death, but we also organized a defense of the young Mexican Americans who'd been wrongly accused of the Sleepy Lagoon murder in Los Angeles. In 1951, I was one of the founding members of Sojourners for Truth and Justice. At first, we came together to defend our friend and colleague W. E. B. Du Bois, who had been arrested by the U.S. government for distributing supposedly communist propaganda. We made a call, nationwide, to all Black women to gather in Washington, D.C., for "a Sojourn for Truth and Justice." When hundreds of women met our call, we decided to keep the work going. Next, we organized a campaign around Rosa Lee Ingram, a Black sharecropper from Georgia who, in self-defense, had killed a sexually abusive and violent neighbor. She was convicted of murder and sentenced to death. We organized protests across the nation, which eventually led to the commutation of her sentence. The FBI investigated me more times than I can count. I was classified a "security threat," and the Postal Service tried to revoke my permit to distribute my newspaper. And they didn't like Sojourners any better. In their eyes, we were a "communist front" with "subversive ramifications." We were under constant surveillance.