

The Second Red Scare and the Unmaking of the New Deal Left

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The Second Red Scare and the Unmaking of the New Deal Left

Landon R. Y. Storrs

PRINCETON UNIVERSITY PRESS

Princeton and Oxford

Published by Princeton University Press, 41 William Street, Princeton, New Jersey 08540

In the United Kingdom: Princeton University Press, 6 Oxford Street, Woodstock, Oxfordshire OX20 1TW

press.princeton.edu

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Storrs, Landon R. Y.

The second Red Scare and the unmaking of the New Deal left / Landon R.Y. Storrs.

p. cm. — (Politics and society in twentieth-century America)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-0-691-15396-4 (hardcover : acid-free paper) 1. Anti-communist movements—United States—History—20th century. 2. New Deal, 1933–1939. 3. Conservatism—United States—History—20th century. 4. Liberalism—United States—History—20th century. 5. United States—Officials and employees—Biography. 6. United States—Officials and employees—Political activity—History—20th century. 7. Criminal investigation—Political aspects—United States—History—20th century. 8. Allegiance—United States—History—20th century. 9. Internal security—United States—History—20th century—Juvenile literature. 10. United States—Politics and government—1933–1945. I. Title.

E743.5.S86 2013

973.91—dc23 2012014277

British Library Cataloging-in-Publication Data is available

This book has been composed in Sabon and Archer

Printed on acid-free paper

Printed in the United States of America

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Contents

List of Illustrations

Abbreviations Used in Text

Selected Government Officials Investigated under the Federal Loyalty Program

Introduction

1 When the Old Left Was Young . . . and Went to Washington

2 Allegations of Disloyalty at Labor and Consumer Agencies, 1939–43

3 “Pinks in Minks”: The Antifeminism of the Old Right

4 The Loyalty Investigations of Mary Dublin Keyserling and Leon Keyserling

5 Secrets and Self-Reinvention: The Making of Cold War Liberalism

6 “A Soul-Searing Process”: Trauma in the Civil Service

7 Loyalty Investigations and the “End of Reform”

Conclusion

Appendix 1: Loyalty Case Records and Selection

Appendix 2: Case Summaries

Appendix 3: Chronology of the Federal Loyalty-Security Program

Appendix 4: Statistics of the Federal Loyalty-Security Program

Acknowledgments

Notes

Selected Bibliography of Primary Sources

Index

Illustrations

- 1.1 Elizabeth Wickenden and Tex Goldschmidt, 1933
- 1.2 Charlotte Tuttle Lloyd, about 1945
- 1.3 Catherine Bauer, 1940s
- 1.4 Lucy Kramer in regalia with members of the Oglala Sioux, about 1935
- 1.5 Felix Cohen, Lucy Kramer, and Gene Cohen, 1942
- 2.1 Rep. Martin Dies (D-Tex.), 1937
- 2.2 J. B. Matthews testifying before the Dies Committee, 1938
- 2.3 Members of the Washington D.C. League of Women Shoppers picketing, 1939
- 2.4 Caroline Ware, Consumer Division, Office of Price Administration, 1941
- 2.5 Caroline Ware at Senate hearing, 1946
- 3.1 “Better take a second look” cartoon, *Washington Times-Herald*, 1952
- 4.1 President Truman with his new Council of Economic Advisers, 1946
- 4.2 Mary Dublin and Leon Keyserling, 1950
- 4.3 Mary Dublin and Elisabeth Dublin at Barnard College
- 4.4 Headline quoting Leon Keyserling’s response to McCarthy’s allegations, 1952
- 5.1 A page from Mary Dublin’s 1938 appointment book
- 7.1 Pauli Murray and Esther Peterson, 1962
- 7.2 Wilbur Cohen and President Lyndon Johnson, 1968
- 7.3 Elizabeth Wickenden, circa 1951
- 7.4 Tex Goldschmidt, circa 1951
- 7.5 Tex Goldschmidt and Elizabeth Wickenden with Lyndon and Ladybird Johnson, circa 1967

Abbreviations

| | |
|--------|--|
| AAA | Agricultural Adjustment Administration |
| AAUW | American Association of University Women |
| ADA | Americans for Democratic Action |
| AFDC | Aid to Families with Dependent Children |
| AFL | American Federation of Labor |
| ALPD | American League for Peace and Democracy |
| APWA | American Public Welfare Association |
| CEA | Council of Economic Advisers |
| CIO | Congress of Industrial Organizations |
| CNF | Consumers' National Federation |
| CP | Communist Party USA |
| CR | Consumers' Research |
| CSC | Civil Service Commission |
| ECA | Economic Cooperation Administration (Marshall Plan agency) |
| ECOSOC | Economic and Social Council of the United Nations |
| EEOC | Equal Employment Opportunity Commission |
| EO | Executive Order |
| FBI | Federal Bureau of Investigation, Department of Justice |
| FERA | Federal Emergency Relief Administration |
| FFR | Fund for the Republic, Ford Foundation |
| FSA | Federal Security Agency (1939–53) |
| HEW | Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (1953–80) |
| HUAC | House Un-American Activities Committee |
| ILO | International Labor Organization |
| IOELB | International Organizations Employee Loyalty Board |
| IRA | Indian Reorganization Act |
| LID | League for Industrial Democracy |
| LWS | League of Women Shoppers |

| | |
|---------|--|
| MSA | Mutual Security Agency |
| NAACP | National Association for the Advancement of Colored People |
| NCL | National Consumers' League |
| NLRB | National Labor Relations Board |
| NRA | National Recovery Administration |
| NSL | National Student League |
| NWP | National Woman's Party |
| NYA | National Youth Administration |
| OCD | Office of Civilian Defense |
| OEO | Office of Economic Opportunity |
| OIT | Office of International Trade, Department of Commerce |
| OPA | Office of Price Administration |
| SISS | Senate Internal Security Subcommittee |
| SP | Socialist Party of the United States of America |
| SSB/SSA | Social Security Board (1935–46)/Social Security Administration (1946–) |
| UN | United Nations |
| UNESCO | United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization |
| UNRRA | United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration |
| UPWA | United Public Workers of America |
| USHA | United States Housing Authority |
| USIA | United States Information Agency |
| WPA | Works Progress Administration |

Selected Government Officials Investigated under the Federal Loyalty Program

- BERNICE LOTWIN BERNSTEIN, regional director, Department of Health, Education, and Welfare
- MARY MCLEOD BETHUNE, director of Negro Affairs, National Youth Administration
- THOMAS C. BLAISDELL JR., assistant secretary of commerce
- ESTHER BRUNAUER, State Department liaison to UNESCO
- RALPH BUNCHE, United Nations diplomat
- JOHN CARMODY, Federal Works Agency administrator
- WILBUR J. COHEN, Social Security official, later secretary of health, education, and welfare
- MORDECAI EZEKIEL, New Deal economist and United Nations agricultural expert
- ARTHUR "TEX" GOLDSCHMIDT, public power expert and United Nations development official
- LEON KEYSERLING, President Truman's Council of Economic Advisers, chair
- MARY DUBLIN KEYSERLING, Commerce Department official, later director of U.S. Women's Bureau
- DAVID DEMAREST LLOYD, New Deal lawyer and Truman White House aide
- FRIEDA S. MILLER, director of U.S. Women's Bureau
- OLIVER A. PETERSON, State Department labor adviser and husband of Esther Peterson, later director U.S. Women's Bureau and consumer adviser to Presidents Johnson and Carter
- PAUL R. PORTER, Economic Cooperation Administration (Marshall Plan) official
- CAROLINE F. WARE, consumer agency official, expert on community organization in Latin America

The Second Red Scare and the Unmaking of the New Deal Left

Introduction

The Second Red Scare stunted the development of the American welfare state. In the 1940s and 1950s conservatives in and out of government used concerns about Soviet espionage to remove from public service many officials who advocated regulatory and redistributive policies intended to strengthen democracy. The crusade against “Communists in government” had even more casualties than was thought. In addition to its well-known violation of civil liberties and destruction of careers, the Second Red Scare curbed the social democratic potential of the New Deal through its impact on policymakers who sought to mitigate the antidemocratic tendencies of unregulated capitalism.

This book examines a cohort of women and men who entered government service during the 1930s and 1940s and then were investigated under the federal employee loyalty program. Created in the early 1940s and formalized in 1947, the loyalty program ostensibly sought to prevent government employment of Communists, but it also drove out noncommunist leftists, who were more numerous at the higher ranks of the civil service than has been recognized. During the crises of the Great Depression and Second World War, service in the dynamic Roosevelt administration offered the lustre and cachet—although not the financial rewards—that in other eras would be found on Wall Street or in Silicon Valley, and the federal government hired some of the nation’s most brilliant and ambitious talent. That high-powered group included some people who were inspired by the opportunity to forge policies they believed would prevent future depressions and wars by reducing inequalities—of class, race, and even gender—within the United States and abroad. Although a few of them were or had been members of the Communist Party, most never were. They did not dominate the policymaking arena, but their increasing influence provoked a powerful reaction from American conservatives. The reaction included exploiting Americans’ fear of Soviet espionage to ensnare left-leaning officials in investigations that either marginalized them or forced them toward the political center.

Some of the prominent people whose hitherto secret or little-known loyalty cases this book explores are Leon Keyserling and Mary Dublin Keyserling, Arthur Goldschmidt and Elizabeth Wickenden, Wilbur Cohen, Catherine Bauer, Esther and Oliver Peterson, Frieda Miller, Carolin Ware, David Demarest Lloyd, Thomas Blaisdell, and Paul R. Porter.¹ The cumulative impact of the loyalty investigations and many others altered the general tone and content of the reform agenda and also affected specific policy fields, including labor and civil rights, consumer protection, national health insurance, public assistance, worker education, public works, public housing, Native American rights, and international aid.

The loyalty program’s constricting effect on public policy thus was deeper and more direct than has been recognized. Until recently, the inaccessibility of government loyalty case records hampered scholarly inquiry, and the destruction of many files by the National Archives poses a permanent challenge.² A further complication stems from the reluctance of many loyalty defendants to publicize their experiences, at the time or later. The highly educated civil servants who are the subject of this study recognized the power of history, and many of them carefully documented their achievements for the historical record. As they did so, however, they tried to protect themselves, their survivors, and their causes by playing down their leftism, playing up their anticommunism, and omitting or minimizing the facts of their investigation. The loyalty program not only constrained policy development; it also produced distortions in the sources on which scholars have relied to write American history.

The federal employee loyalty program was a crucial instrument of the Red scare that gripped the nation after the Second World War, climaxing in the ascendance of Senator Joseph R. McCarthy (R-Wis.). Although that Red scare—longer and even more virulent than the one that followed the First World War—metastasized beyond government institutions and beyond the realm of employment, its momentum derived from claims that Communist spies in powerful government positions were manipulating U.S. policy to Soviet advantage. In response to conservative charges that the U.S. Civil Service Commission had been lax in screening federal workers, President Harry S. Truman institutionalized the loyalty program in 1947 by expanding existing procedures for weeding out employees deemed disloyal to the U.S. government. During the program's peak between 1947 and 1956, more than five million federal workers underwent loyalty screening, and at least 25,000 were subject to the stigmatizing "full field investigation" by the FBI. An estimated 2,700 federal employees were dismissed, and about 12,000 resigned.³ Such numbers, however, cannot capture the program's broader effects on the civil service, on politics and public policy, and on historical memory.

Existing scholarship on the loyalty program suggests that it chiefly affected low-level government workers and Communist Party members. In fact, loyalty investigations truncated or redirected the careers of many mid-level and senior officials, who generally kept secret the fact that they had been investigated. Many of the accused were neither mainstream liberals, as early critics of the loyalty program maintained, nor Communist Party members (much less Soviet spies). Rather, they were a varied group of leftists who shared a commitment to building a comprehensive welfare state that blended central planning with grassroots democracy. Some called themselves social democrats, some belonged to the Socialist Party, and others resisted categorization, but they agreed that economic and technological development had created interdependences among people and among nations that rendered the ideologies of individualism and nationalism obsolete and even dangerous. As internationalists, they sought to use the social policies of other nations as models and to apply American resources to reduce inequalities and promote peace abroad. The power of these leftists was never uncontested, but their expertise, commitment, and connectedness gave them strength beyond their numbers. Before loyalty investigations pushed this cohort either out of government or toward the center of the political spectrum, the transformative potential of the New Deal was greater than commonly understood.

Some loyalty defendants left public life, some moved to lower-profile jobs, and others reinvented themselves as Cold War liberals who celebrated American capitalism and advocated an aggressive anticommunist foreign policy. Several resurfaced as advisers to the Kennedy and Johnson administrations and framed their proposals in more centrist language than they had used before being investigated. They generally kept their distance from the new generation of radicals that emerged in the 1960s. For these New Deal veterans, the rightward drift of liberalism toward the "vital center" was at least in part a response to firsthand experience of political repression. It was not, as much scholarship suggests, a purely intellectual response to American economic performance, Soviet conduct, or other exogenous factors.⁴ The loyalty program profoundly shaped not only individual careers but also U.S. politics and policy from the New Deal of the 1930s through the Great Society of the 1960s.

A striking number of professional-level loyalty defendants were women. Historians have noted the Second Red Scare's impact on women in voluntary associations, labor unions, and artistic circles, but women in government have received less attention.⁵ Although women's opportunities in government were hardly equal to men's—women held fewer than 3 percent of federal policymaking positions in 1947—women had more options in government than they did in academia or the private sector.

During the Roosevelt and Truman administrations, small numbers of professional women, especially lawyers, social workers, and economists, worked their way into positions of authority, most visibly in the temporary New Deal and war agencies, the Federal Security Agency, and the Labor and Commerce departments.⁶ Anticommunists challenged the loyalty of high-ranking women with disproportionate frequency. Furthermore, male loyalty defendants often faced allegations about their wives' political activism. Conservatives' tactics and language in their crusade against "Communists in government" tapped popular hostility to powerful women and "effeminate" (or just egalitarian) men to rally support for hunting subversives and for rolling back liberal policies. In other words, government and private actors manipulated the fear of espionage toward ends that included shoring up social hierarchies that the New Deal policies had helped destabilize. This exploration of the antifeminism of the Old Right suggests that the New Right that emerged in the 1970s was not in fact so new.

Scholarship on the federal loyalty program and the wider Red scare has ranged between two poles, one emphasizing the threat of Soviet espionage and the other emphasizing the dangers of political repression. Prior studies of the loyalty program per se were completed during the 1950s, when key government documents (such as the files of the Civil Service Commission, FBI, congressional investigative committees, and executive agencies) were closed to researchers. Limited to interviews and published materials, contemporary scholars nonetheless offered enduring critiques of the loyalty program. They identified flaws that invited injustice to employees: the program relied on vague and shifting standards of loyalty, on dubiously constructed lists of subversive organizations, and on the testimony of FBI informants whose anonymity denied defendants the right to confront their accusers. In addition to leaving many people jobless and stigmatized as unemployable, those early studies correctly concluded, the program undermined the morale and caliber of the civil service by discouraging original thinking and hindering recruitment. More generally, it contributed to an atmosphere that curtailed civil liberties, especially the freedoms of speech and association. The impact of these flaws was magnified as other employers imitated the federal program.⁷ The next generation of scholarship debated the relative culpability of President Truman, congressional conservatives, and the FBI in creating and sustaining the loyalty program. Historians' observation that the loyalty program was ineffective at catching spies deepened the consensus that the program had been unnecessary as well as unfair.⁸

The tone changed in the 1990s, when newly declassified Soviet and U.S. intelligence sources indicated that a few Roosevelt and Truman officials, most notably Alger Hiss, indeed were Communist Party members or sympathizers who passed information to the Soviets—just as anticommunist conservatives from Congressman Martin Dies (D-Tex.) to Senator McCarthy had charged.⁹ These findings reignited the disagreement between espionage scholars and those who emphasized the negative consequences of the Red scare. Each side accused the other of ignoring a grave threat to American democracy—espionage on the one hand, repression of political dissent on the other. The espionage historians have been very harsh, likening critics of the anticommunist crusade to Holocaust deniers, and castigating them as Stalin apologists bent on creating a left-wing mythology of the "Lost Cause." In their view, focusing on the repressive aspects of anticommunism implies a moral equivalence between the Soviet dictatorship and the U.S. government.¹⁰ Although the espionage scholars acknowledge that the drive to eliminate communism in the United States produced some injustices, they imply that it was relatively rare and incidental, when in fact the repression was widespread and resulted from a coordinated reaction against democratic challenges to the political and economic status quo.¹¹ Best-selling authors such as Ann Coulter have selectively appropriated the new espionage research to cast McCarthy as a martyred hero and his critics as traitors. The Texas Board of

Education has revised its curriculum standards to require teaching that the most recent scholarship “basically vindicates” McCarthy.¹²

We can accept key findings of the new scholarship on espionage without minimizing the harm done by the repression. Soviet espionage was a legitimate worry for officials responsible for national security, and identifying and prosecuting spies was difficult. Although the people named by the ex-Communist informants Elizabeth Bentley and Whittaker Chambers had left government service by 1947, officials remained vigilant because they knew unidentified Communist cells had existed. Notwithstanding all the false accusations that were made, one should not dismiss out of hand the possibility that a loyalty defendant had been a Soviet agent.¹³ Nevertheless, these facts do not preclude the obligation of scholars to mine newly accessible sources for insight into the objectives and consequences of the Red scare.

The threat of espionage was real, but no less so was repression in the name of catching spies. This book does not engage the ongoing debate over the extent to which espionage jeopardized U.S. security. It does demonstrate, however, that the Second Red Scare did even more damage than is generally known.¹⁴ The campaign against “Communists in government” began before the Cold War and was driven by conservatives whose objectives were broader than the eradication of the Communist Party.

Uncovering a significant leftist presence in the Roosevelt and Truman administrations does not vindicate those anticommunists who claimed that the government was riddled with subversives. It searched for but did not find evidence of espionage or other illegal conduct; the policymakers and administrators studied here were neither subversives nor spies. They hoped for a transition through constitutional methods to what they called social democracy or democratic socialism. While conservatives promoted limited government and the sanctity of property rights, left-leaning officials argued that the public interest was better served by an active government that, at the very least, regulated private interests to protect the public, provided opportunities and security for those that the private labor market did not, and further promoted political and economic democracy by prohibiting racial and sexual discrimination.

Many decades ago the preeminent historian Richard Hofstadter observed that the “real function” of the Second Red Scare was “not anything so simply rational as to turn up spies . . . but to discharge resentments and frustrations, to punish, to satisfy enmities whose roots lay elsewhere than in the Communist issue itself.” Hofstadter argued that nativism, religious fundamentalism, and hatred of the welfare state and the United Nations were the “deeper historical sources of the Great Inquisition.” In his view, these attitudes added up to an antimodern, reactionary populism.¹⁶ Regional and local studies built on Hofstadter’s insight by showing that Red scares were most virulent where rapid change threatened old regimes. Political fundamentalists everywhere feared the trend toward “pluralistic order and a secular, bureaucratizing state.” In Detroit, though, they defended class prerogatives above all, whereas in Boston religious conflict was key, and in Atlanta maintenance of white supremacy was paramount. In other words, the intensity of Red scare politics was not simply a function of the strength of the Communist threat. Red scares erupted at various places and moments in defense of class, religious, and racial hierarchies.¹⁷

These astute analyses of anticommunism do not address the conservative reaction to women’s increasing sexual and economic independence. Meanwhile, historians interested in gender analysis have exposed the intersections between Cold War politics and restrictive constructions of masculinity and femininity, but without sufficient attention to anticommunist attacks on actual women, especially women in government. Domestic anticommunism indeed was fueled by anxiety about the perceived

threats to American masculinity posed by totalitarianism, corporate hierarchy, and homosexuality. Congressional conservatives indeed used charges of homosexuality—chiefly male homosexuality—government agencies for their own political purposes.¹⁸ The flip side of the anticommunist right's hostility to insufficiently masculine men, however, was antipathy to powerful women. Scholars of the right in the 1920s and 1980s have shown that men and women who feared homosexuality, racial and religious pluralism, and state bureaucracy were not enthusiastic about feminism, either. Advocacy of the white, Christian, heterosexual, *patriarchal* family often was their driving concern.¹⁹

If one engine of the Second Red Scare was popular resistance to the rise of the government expert, as Hofstadter argued, that resistance was intensified by the fact that some of those experts were women. The crises of the Depression, war, and the nuclear threat expanded the federal bureaucracy and also shifted power from legislators to bureaucratic experts. These career civil servants typically were better educated and more cosmopolitan than legislators. Furthermore, the masculinity of male civil servants long had been suspect. Stereotypes about male bureaucrats and male homosexuals overlapped: both groups could be seen as non(re)productive, nonentrepreneurial men laboring in subordinate positions to other men. The fact that federal jobs were sexually integrated at a time when most workplaces were not created additional negative perceptions of both male and female government workers. In the 1920s, conservatives' belief that the state subverted patriarchal gender norms was apparent in their fear that newly enfranchised women would vote to expand state agencies protecting women and children, empowering state administrators—many of whom were female—the expense of male heads of household.²⁰ During the 1930s, more professional women found employment in government because the creation of new agencies increased staffing needs, the expansion of the merit system made hiring procedures more objective, and some relatively feminine men were making hiring and promotion decisions. The result was a perceived feminization of the civil service that gave conservatives another reason to dislike the bureaucratic state.

Many of these same patterns and attitudes affected Jewish civil servants, male and female. The Roosevelt administration was more open to Jews than its predecessors had been, and as we shall see, many loyalty defendants were Jewish. Commentators at the time speculated about the likelihood of bias in loyalty charges against Jews, and scholars have long understood that the right's hostility to the New Deal was tinged with anti-Semitism.²¹ By contrast, the loyalty program's impact on women, and on husbands of activist women, has not been appreciated.

The first chapter introduces a group of young radicals, male and female, who ascended with surprising rapidity in the Roosevelt administration. The women were not part of the better-known network of older female New Dealers, most of who had been born in the 1870s and 1880s. That older group, clustered in the female enclaves of the U.S. Women's and Children's Bureaus and the Women's Division of the Democratic Party, wielded significant influence over certain social policies and in party politics at the height of the New Deal. Their achievements were constrained by the limits of their own vision and by resistance from more powerful men.²² Most of the women I describe were born in the first decade of the twentieth century, and they were further to the left than the older New Deal women. The left's stronger influence on the younger women contributed to several other differences. Many of the younger group advocated women's sexual emancipation and conducted their personal lives accordingly. Women in the younger cohort were less likely to make "maternalist" arguments that stressed women's innate differences from men, and they identified less exclusively with women-only organizations. They were more likely to marry and to have children than the previous generation. Although predominantly white and middle or upper class, the younger group was more culturally diverse in that it included atheists, Jews, and women who married across religious, ethnic, and national lines. The younger women also were more likely than their predecessors

actively oppose racial discrimination.

These women did not call themselves “left feminists,” but the term usefully distinguishes them from nonfeminist leftists and from the “pure” feminists of the National Woman’s Party, whose proposed equal rights amendment antagonized advocates of wage and hour laws for women. Other scholars have referred to activists of similar outlook as “labor feminists,” but “left feminist” better captures the breadth of their commitments, which in addition to workplace activism included antiracist initiatives and consumerist campaigns to raise working-class living standards. Some years ago I tried to convey the sense of the left-liberal spectrum by calling these same people “Popular Front feminists,” but many readers inferred that I meant primarily people who were in or close to the Communist Party. The people discussed here did move in circles that included Communists, especially in the 1930s and early 1940s, when the ideological lines were not so sharply drawn. But I have decided not to use a phrase that some will interpret as indicating Communist leadership. This book uses “left feminist” in an inclusive sense to refer to women and men who pursued a vision of women’s emancipation that also insisted on class and racial justice.²³

Left feminism was more vital in the 1930s and 1940s than one would guess from most studies of the left or of feminism. It is often argued that leftists focused primarily on class justice in the 1930s and were not attuned to racial and gender politics until the postwar period.²⁴ And until recently, the conventional wisdom held that feminism was dormant between the suffrage victory in 1920 and the 1960s, and that leftist women had little influence beyond insular radical circles.²⁵ In fact, the American left in the 1930s attracted women and men who saw that the values of “free enterprise” and “rugged individualism” protected prerogatives of gender and race as well as class. Furthermore, some of those people got jobs in government. Left feminism was closer to power than we have thought—although not as close as its enemies feared, or pretended to fear.

Not all women in government were left feminists. But those who were gained force from the fact that they often knew one another, through shared interests in labor, poverty, housing, public health and health insurance, consumer rights, and international peace—interdependent causes that in their vision had a feminist subtext. From their sometimes precarious positions in government, these women pushed for policies to raise the living standards of poor and working-class Americans, which they argued would strengthen both the economy and American democracy. They advocated raising wages through unionization and wage-hour laws; combating unemployment through planning, public works, and generous relief and social insurance policies; and further protecting purchasing power with national health insurance, public housing, and consumer rights. The historical gender division of labor encouraged them as women to be especially concerned with health, housing, and child welfare, and they understood how that division of labor made women particularly vulnerable to poverty and labor exploitation. These civil servants tackled barriers to the economic and political participation of women of all races, for example by lobbying against racial and sexual discrimination in employment, against the exclusion of female and minority-dominated occupations from the Fair Labor Standards and Social Security Acts, and against the poll taxes that disproportionately disfranchised minorities and women.

Those policy goals resounded across a left-liberal spectrum that was quite fluid before the rising tide of anticommunism produced more self-conscious political identification and inhibited coalition building. Leftists of varying stripes had already begun cooperating when the Communist Party USA announced its Popular Front strategy in 1935. Most scholarship on the Popular Front has been dominated by the “Communist issue,” the long-standing debate about the relative importance of Moscow’s influence over the Communist Party USA leadership, on one hand, and American Communists’ significant contributions to the labor and civil rights movements, on the other. The

debate is unlikely to end soon. In any case, it has diverted attention from the independent leftists who outnumbered the Communists and by no means depended on them for direction.²⁶ Notwithstanding their ideological differences, participants in the Popular Front pursued a social democratic electoral politics that attracted broad public support: a 1942 poll reported that 25 percent of Americans favored socialism and another 35 percent “had an open mind about it.”²⁷ Popular Fronters shared the social democratic objective of extending “the democratic principle of equality from the civil and political spheres to the entire society and the economy.”²⁸ Together social democrats, Socialists, and Communists tried to push the New Deal to the left, urging interventions in the market to redistribute wealth and increase public control. Although Communist doctrine opposed reforms that might hinder the development of class consciousness, in practice many party members cooperated with those who believed progress toward the ideal of socialism would come through constitutional, gradual reform rather than through revolution. Social democracy, with its emphasis on evolutionary change and the growing interdependence of classes, was especially attractive to middle-class people who sought a constructive role in reform. A related feature of social democratic theory was the prominent role accorded to consumers as arbiters of the public interest. Because consumers often were construed as female, social democracy had special resonance for progressive middle-class women, including some who found opportunities in the federal civil service.²⁹

The story of these ambitious, left-leaning women in government would be incomplete without attention to the men who were their allies, colleagues, lovers, and sometimes their codefendants. Long before the days of the Clintons and the Obamas, there were many “power couples” in Washington and in left-liberal circles. In addition to Eleanor and Franklin Roosevelt, prominent dual-career couples around government in the 1930s and 1940s included Caroline Ware and Gardiner Means, Leo Keyserling and Mary Dublin Keyserling, Charlotte Tuttle and David Demarest Lloyd, Lucy Kram and Felix Cohen, Abe Fortas and Carol Agger Fortas, Lucille and Mordecai Ezekiel, Wilbur Cohen and Eloise Bittel Cohen, and Elizabeth Wickenden and Tex Goldschmidt, to name just a few whose achievements and struggles I explore. The wives played key roles in fostering the dense heterosocial networks that characterized New Deal Washington. The husbands, like New Deal men more generally, were not immune to sexism. Some Roosevelt administration policies in fact reinforced gender (and other) inequalities, and female New Dealers sometimes chafed at the insufficient enlightenment of the men who were their purported allies.³⁰ These were significant limitations, but they should not obscure the substantial differences in gender ideology between left-liberal men and their conservative counterparts during the midcentury decades.

More than historians have, the right noticed the influx of left-feminist women and men in government and began attacking them well before the federal loyalty program’s formal creation in 1947. [Chapter 2](#) introduces key figures in the emerging anticommunist network and analyzes two early episodes: the Smith Committee attack on the National Labor Relations Board and its allies, and the Dies Committee attack on the consumer movement, especially the League of Women Shoppers and the Office of Price Administration. The power of the labor movement in stimulating the reaction against the New Deal is well known, but the consumer movement should be recognized as another major trigger. Women were important in the ascendance of both industrial unionism and organized consumerism, and conservatives highlighted women’s role in an effort to undermine public confidence in those movements and their allied government agencies.

[Chapter 3](#) documents the antifeminism of key instigators of the Second Red Scare: staff members of congressional investigative committees and the conservative journalists with whom they cooperated. Their public statements and private correspondence indicate that they associated communism with men’s loss of control over women’s labor and sexual conduct. For them, the need

stabilize white male supremacy was one reason to oppose communism. Antifeminism, an objective and of itself, also was a means to other objectives. Leading anticommunists deployed antifeminism just as they did homophobia, to generate popular enthusiasm for their attacks on the Roosevelt and Truman administrations.³¹

From 1940 through the mid-1960s, Mary Dublin Keyserling and Leon Keyserling were particularly prominent targets for the anticommunist right. His first claim to fame was drafting the National Labor Relations Act, and her career began as a consumer activist, so they aptly represent the movement whose successes mobilized anticommunist crusaders. The Keyserlings were “purchasing-power progressives” who argued that raising working-class living standards was essential for a healthy economy and a healthy democracy.³² During the Truman administration, Leon provided intellectual leadership for the Fair Deal from his position on the Council of Economic Advisers, while Mary analyzed international aid and trade statistics for the Department of Commerce. As [chapter 4](#) reveals, they both experienced long, bruising loyalty investigations. They resigned in 1953 during the transition to the Eisenhower administration. Leon reemerged as an economic adviser to the Democratic National Committee and the AFL-CIO in the late 1950s and then as an ally of the centrist Democrat Hubert Humphrey. In 1964, President Lyndon Johnson appointed Mary head of the U.S. Women’s Bureau, over the objections of congressional conservatives who revived the old disloyalty allegations. The Keyserlings are remembered as Cold War liberals who supported the Vietnam War and celebrated capitalism’s ability to eliminate poverty through growth, rather than redistribution. But in the 1930s, as [chapter 5](#) reveals, both had been leftists. Under the pressure of recurring investigations, both of them moderated their goals and language, and they elided radicalism from their autobiographical narratives.

We have known little about the experience of being under investigation because so few loyalty defendants, especially high-ranking ones, were willing to talk about it. In the 1950s and 1960s, scholars tried to document those stories and gave up. [Chapter 6](#) uses private letters and other unpublished sources about defendants other than the Keyserlings to recapture the subjective experience of being investigated, not as an exercise in voyeurism but to explain why the effects were so profound. It reviews the grave consequences of dismissal in order to re-create the context in which defendants made painful choices about what tone and tactics to adopt during their inquisitions. It then discusses the range of strategies used by defendants, with particular attention to how those strategies often played on and in turn reinforced conservative gender prescriptions.

Judges and politicians began to rein in the loyalty program in the late 1950s. An anti-McCarthyist network convinced the public that the loyalty program was crushing civil liberties, wasting money on harmless low-level people, discriminating against racial and ethnic minorities, and being exploited as a tool of partisan politics. In the process of documenting these real problems and achieving the necessary reforms, however, critics deflected attention from the ways in which the loyalty program reinforced male supremacy and also repressed what had been a substantial social democratic influence in policy circles.

Some loyalty defendants left government or left public life altogether, reducing the range of political debate by their marginalization or absence. Others stayed in public service, but they reflexively hedged against the threat of further investigation by softening their critiques of capitalism and couching their reform proposals in anticommunist terms. Loyalty defendants frequently destroyed or withheld from archival collections those sources that documented their early leftism and the investigations. In interviews and memoirs, they typically took every opportunity to stress their anticommunism while downplaying their sympathy with the noncommunist left. The silences and distortions produced by loyalty investigations have been reproduced in the historiography

twentieth-century American politics. More important, as [chapter 7](#) demonstrates through examples from many fields, “the American inquisition” faced by federal officials in the 1940s and 1950s constricted public policymaking and forestalled the extension of social democracy in the United States.

Many forces combined with the loyalty inquisition to push American liberalism toward the political center in the 1940s and 1950s, away from the regulatory and redistributive approach of the New Deal—sometimes called “social Keynesianism”—and toward the growth-oriented, fiscal Keynesianism of the Fair Deal and Great Society. The disappointing “Roosevelt recession” of 1937, combined with the dramatic economic growth of the war years, persuaded some policymakers that stimulating economic expansion, rather than trying to reslice the existing pie, was the most effective way of raising American living standards. Liberal Democratic administrations’ dependence on cooperation from congressional conservatives on national defense—from World War II to Korea to Vietnam—made less interventionist economic policies politically expedient. The labor movement narrowed its objectives after the CIO’s southern drive failed and in response to accusations of Communist infiltration. The confidence and unity of the American left were shattered by disillusionment with the brutality of Stalin’s regime and the undemocratic methods of the Communist Party USA. A nascent conservative moment led by business ideologues relentlessly denounced regulatory and redistributive economic policies. The list could continue.³³

Thus the federal employee loyalty program was hardly the sole or determinative cause of the transformation of American liberalism from the 1930s to the 1960s. But disloyalty charges were a hitherto hidden factor that, often in interaction with the other developments, had a significant political impact. Historians simply have not known how many senior officials had direct and protracted encounters with the loyalty machinery. It is impossible to prove that the loyalty program was *the* decisive force that altered these people’s trajectories. The ideas and priorities of individuals change for many reasons, and isolating a single one is difficult. Furthermore, generalization is perilous because loyalty defendants faced diverse circumstances and responded in diverse ways. But the timing and nature of repositioning on the part of one public servant after another make it hard to dismiss the loyalty program’s influence.

The evidence available for each case varies, but I draw my conclusions from the following kinds of sources (and from their juxtaposition): Civil Service Commission case files, papers that loyalty defendants deposited in archives, papers they withheld from archives, public statements over the course of many years, and autobiographical representations in memoirs and interviews. In cases where it is possible to map the chronology of an employee’s investigation in relation to his or her evolving policy prescriptions, a correlation often is apparent. Leon Keyserling’s evolution from a champion of labor rights and economic planning to a leading proponent of economic growth and of militarizing the Cold War transpired, it turns out, against a backdrop of potentially career-ending investigations that included interrogation about his views of capitalism and his wife’s political associations. The change in tune of public housing advocate Catherine Bauer, as another example, is less puzzling in light of the discovery that allegations of her radicalism were crippling her husband’s career by denying his firm government contracts. As we will see in [chapter 6](#), some defendants explicitly acknowledged the traumatizing impact of being accused of disloyalty, either in private correspondence to friends or behind the doors of closed hearings.

Sometimes I draw inferences from the absence of sources. After reading the voluminous documentation in Civil Service Commission case files—which include materials of which defendants would have had copies—the lack of any such records in those individuals’ archival collections stands

out. Similar gaps are apparent in many loyalty defendants' memoirs and interviews. In some instances, materials surfaced in the possession of relatives after a defendant's death. These newly discovered sources are illuminating in and of themselves, revealing, for example, that some individuals once were further to the left than we have known. But the very fact that loyalty defendants withheld these materials from the archives further attests to the deep impression made by the investigations. The government anthropologist Lucy Kramer withheld papers from the Beinecke Library that document her socialism and that of her husband, the Indian law expert Felix S. Cohen. The FBI file of social welfare expert Wilbur Cohen turned up in his attic after he died; his embrace during the 1950s of antipoverty policies that addressed the failures of individuals rather than of the labor market takes on a new coloration in light of the persistent investigation he and his wife faced.

The accumulated evidence from these and many other cases makes it fair to conclude that loyalty investigations induced influential government figures to move toward the political center and sometimes to obscure earlier leftist activism, thereby affecting both policy and historical sources. Those loyalty defendants whose objectives and tone did not change found their career options and influence truncated. Future researchers may wish to analyze specific cases more closely to assess the relative importance of being investigated to a particular individual's ideological and career trajectories. The intent here is to identify a broad pattern and invite further exploration of the questions it raises.

Uncovering and interpreting these stories has been a tricky and sometimes uncomfortable process. With difficulty, I located and gained access to a group of surviving loyalty case files, some of which include hearing transcripts and FBI reports (see [appendix 1](#)). Occasionally I was able to locate relatives who shared materials that loyalty defendants had not expected to become public. Sifting through these hitherto confidential and private sources, I experienced the unpleasant sensation of retracing the footsteps of the Red-hunters. These public servants understandably did not wish their distinguished careers to be defined by their demeaning encounters with McCarthyism. In trying to interpret the often contradictory or fragmentary evidence—poring over transcripts for inconsistent statements, decoding acronyms from appointment books, evaluating the words of hundreds of witnesses and informants—it was easy to slip into the narrow mentality of the investigators and talk on their obsession with delineating each defendant's relationship, if any, to the Communist Party. But focusing only on the question of Communist Party membership neglects the dynamism and complexity of the American left in the 1930s and 1940s.³⁴ Preoccupation with the Communist question also oversimplifies the motives of the right. The fuller portrait of these civil servants' political views and networks that emerges here is valuable not for reductive ideological categorization but rather for demonstrating that, for a brief historical moment, left feminists were positioned to shape American policymaking.

To focus on the noncommunist left is not to suggest that the repression of Communists was unproblematic. But for various reasons, by the time the loyalty program went into full gear in 1947, very few people holding significant government jobs belonged to the Communist Party.³⁵ The noncommunist officials were subjected to excruciating, often protracted loyalty investigations that underscores that it was not communism that the right most feared.

The social scientist Caroline Ware was neither a Communist nor a spy, and loyalty officials never seriously believed she was. She nonetheless was dragged into the machinery of the loyalty program by accusations that she was a dangerous subversive. Over the course of a long career as a scholar, civil servant, and activist, Ware promoted what she called "the fuller participation as active and responsible members of their communities and nation of more and more kinds of people who, through pa

centuries, furnished the passive base for the wealth and culture they did not share.” She saw empowering ordinary people to participate in democratic government as the crucial challenge of the twentieth century.³⁶ For Ware and others on the left wing of the New Deal, the proper role of government in a democracy was not to solve all problems but rather to ensure the basic levels of economic security, education, and legal protection that would enable groups to organize to solve their problems collectively—as workers, as consumers, as women, as members of oppressed racial and ethnic groups, or as colonial subjects. By reducing the influence of people like Caroline Ware, the campaign against “Communists in government” did not protect American democracy but rather impeded the solution of problems that continue to imperil it.

Chapter 1

When the Old Left Was Young . . . and Went to Washington

In a famous description of the changes that Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal wrought in the nation's capital, one veteran civil servant grumbled that "a plague of young lawyers settled on Washington. They all claimed to be friends of somebody or other and mostly of Felix Frankfurter and Jerome Frank." In another classic portrayal, the historian Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr. explained that the Great Depression, by reducing private employment options, "made men of intellectual ability available never before; and the government had never been so eager to hire them. . . . With each prominent New Dealer acting as his own employment agency, Washington was deluged with an endless stream of bright young men." Schlesinger described their ideological orientations as ranging from fiscal orthodoxy to Wilsonian liberalism to Theodore Rooseveltian progressivism. They were passionate about ideas and worked long hours, but that did not prevent them from drinking, dancing, and arguing much of the night, transforming stuffy, sleepy Washington into a lively, sophisticated city. "The memories would not soon fade—the interminable meetings, the litter of cigarette stubs . . . the calls from the White House, the postponed dinner, the neglected wife, the office lights burning into the night, the lilacs hanging in fragrance above Georgetown gardens while men rebuilt the nation."¹

Schlesinger's evocative portrait omitted a cohort of leftist women and men whose presence was crucial to Washington's transformation and to the design and implementation of many hallmark New Deal policies. It is widely known that capitalism's crisis shifted the American political spectrum to the left in the 1930s, and also that the decade's protest movements included one comprising radical students on college campuses around the nation.² Less recognized is the fact that after graduation many of those young radicals—economists, social workers, and yes, lawyers, foremost among them—took jobs in the federal government. The high unemployment rate did make government jobs more attractive to men, but the civil service was especially attractive to a growing pool of professional women, who had trouble obtaining corporate and academic positions regardless of the state of the economy.

The influx of leftists and women (not exclusive categories) into government made it easier for conservative critics of the New Deal to paint it "pink." When Schlesinger published his paean in 1957, the postwar Red scare was dissipating but still emitting noxious fumes. It is not surprising that Schlesinger, a liberal activist as well as a historian, did not highlight the leftist or female presence in Washington's corridors and lilac-scented gardens. Deliberate or not, Schlesinger's omissions—compounded by the reticence of many former civil servants—contributed to misunderstandings that subsequent scholarship has not dispelled.³

“Hope That the Present Government Is Something More Than a Conscious Agent of Vested Interests”

Many of the young professionals who came to Washington had been deeply influenced by socialism, and their initial expectations of the Roosevelt administration were low. They were attracted more by

sample content of The Second Red Scare and the Unmaking of the New Deal Left (Politics and Society in Modern America)

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