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**Polarization of American identity over HUAC propaganda:
Ideological conflicts at Iowa State University in the early 1960s**

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Polarization of American identity over HUAC propaganda: Ideological conflicts at Iowa State University in the early 1960s

by

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A thesis submitted to the graduate faculty
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The student author, whose presentation of the scholarship herein was approved by the program of study committee, is solely responsible for the content of this thesis. The Graduate College will ensure this thesis is globally accessible and will not permit alterations after a degree is conferred.

Iowa State University

Ames, Iowa

2020

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NOMENCLATURE

HUAC	House Un-American Activities Committee
JBS	John Birch Society
ISU	Iowa State University
ISC	Iowa State College

ABSTRACT

The following work explores the impact of HUAC propaganda on rural settings, specifically using a case study of Ames, Iowa in 1961. Between March and June 1961, Ames hosted showings of two films entitled *Communism on the Map* and *Operation Abolition*, both produced by the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC). When approaching the Cold War, many historians have focused upon developments in large urban centers and the politics behind policies. By studying the events of 1961, this work widens the Cold War historiography which is severely lacking in discussion of rural communities.

Ames, Iowa became the epicenter of a hysterical ideological struggle, after a local citizen reported his concerns to the Federal Bureau of Investigations. These concerns pertained to the Iowa State University student body reacting improperly to the screening of HUAC propaganda films. HUAC intended the films to spread alarm over supposed communist subversion, but a significant number of students at the university felt outraged at the films. In turn, their protests seemed to confirm the worst fears of the community's anti-communists, that young people and untrustworthy Americans failed to take seriously the threat of subversion. This event showcases the deep ideological divides which were deepening between anti-communists and those who rejected HUAC's message.

The events in Ames sparked debates in local newspapers, where students, faculty, and community members discussed the merits of anti-communism and the constitutionality of HUAC itself. The *Iowa State Daily*, *Ames Daily Tribune*, and *the Des Moines Register* encapsulated the community's worries, opinions and outrage in a time when the entire nation was on edge over Cold War politics and domestic identity. Anti-communists also voiced their concerns directly to Iowa State University's president. The beliefs of rural anti-communists as well as their anti-

HUAC counterparts echoed opinions felt on a national scale. This case-study thus yields a more inclusionary interpretation of the Cold War that understands rural and small-town Americans as full historical participants.

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

The 1960s were an ideologically formative decade for the United States. The civil rights and feminism movements fought to change the perceptions of rights for all members of American society. As these movements were escalating unrest on the home front, international tensions were rising between the United States and the U.S.S.R. The threat of outright war between these superpowers increased already outstanding ideological conflicts between communism and capitalism. This brought the conflict to the forefront of discussions across the United States. With tensions on the rise, the House Committee on Un-American Activities (HUAC) began to increase its national presence. From its origin in 1938, HUAC had aimed for the direct management of American values, specifically working to root out what its mission defined as un-American values. HUAC and its supporters believed that the real threat to American society lay in a large network of communist subversion, a danger that traditional judicial processes were ill equipped to handle. HUAC believed that communist subversion was efficient at skirting around the law. Accordingly, by 1954, as the Communist Control Act brought about the criminalization of communist party membership, HUAC began pursuing a new strategy to preserve American society. HUAC hoped to transform most citizens into vigilant patriots, ready to report to authorities any suspicious behaviors that might be indicators of communist subversion. To help convince the American public to confront the direct threat of communist subversion, HUAC created a series of propaganda films in 1961. Those movies, *Communism on the Map* and *Operation Abolition*, were intended to scare Americans into supporting HUAC's efforts and create a network of informants. Across the nation, however, the unsubtle propaganda in these films led skeptics and political opponents to criticize HUAC and its

methods. Throughout the material that HUAC produced, the organization rarely specified the definition of what was “American” beyond general statements about being a red-blooded, middle-class citizen. On balance, however, the net effect of propaganda effectively made it plain to the public what was considered un-American. This work will use HUAC’s clear definition of un-American beliefs and behavior to show the boundaries of American identity and help to create a clearer picture of rural America during the height of the Cold War.

When HUAC began looking into communist subversion in the United States, the organization created a binary structure of what was American and Un-American. Even within its title: House Un-American Activities Committee, it is apparent that the focus was upon Un-American rather than American qualities. The philosophy relied on generalized guidelines about what was considered American, including principles of support for democracy, Christian piety and American international policies. What little definition that these guidelines gave to HUAC’s “American” values was intentionally left open to interpretation, allowing the group to cast a wide net. The Committee’s refusal to define what being an American meant reinforced the idea of its pseudo-judicial nature and helped HUAC to adapt to changing international politics and the perceived domestic threats. While the U.S. judicial system requires accusers to prove guilt, HUAC’s methods expected targets to prove themselves innocent of un-American behavior.¹ Essentially, a person who was accused of being a communist or communist sympathizer had to prove their loyalty without knowing the exact line between what was considered patriotism and what could be seen as suspiciously covering for guilt. The line between guilty and innocent was difficult to draw, and, in many cases, the right answer was both incriminating and proof of “Americanness”. One such example was Americans’ opposition to fascism during World War

¹ Davies, Powell, *The Urge to Persecute* (Boston: The Beacon Press, 1953), 17.

II. After the United States entered the war, many citizens reacted to the political climate by joining anti-fascist leagues, many of which were managed by communists.² Such formerly permissible and even well-regarded associations might turn into a condemning scar on one's character down the road, as national and international politics evolved.

The Cold War changed how Americans drew societal boundaries, especially in relation to perceived political deviation from the norm. Early in the Cold War, anti-communist movements and organizations set the boundaries on "Americanness", by launching accusatory actions against non-conformists. However, as these ideological structures began to lose the hearts and minds of Americans in the 1960s, advocates often doubled down on their ideology. Rural centers, already on the fringes of urban society, became ideological battlegrounds between the old and new. Ames, Iowa was one of these rural centers which felt this ideological conflict to its core. As tensions rose over the propaganda that HUAC sent out to reinforce American ideology, so did the discourse in local newspapers. Concerns escalated and culminated in the 1961 denunciation of local Iowa State University professor Elbert B. Smith, an episode that reveals the deep ideological differences plaguing America at a turning point in the Cold War. This case study reveals Iowa to be a deeply divided society in 1961, where at least some citizens worried that the U.S. was on the brink of an ideological collapse.

² Powell, *The Urge to Persecute*, 20-21.

CHAPTER 2. HUAC AND ANTI-SUBVERSION CAMPAIGNS

The focus of HUAC, like McCarthy's rhetoric or the aims of the John Birch Society, was to root out communism and persecute those who were clearly beyond the boundaries of "Americanness." In addition to pointing fingers at supposed threats to America, HUAC also sought to educate the American public on how to remain vigilant against subversion by un-American entities. HUAC produced films, articles, and radio programs to make appeals to Americans to support its political mission, but by the 1960s many audiences questioned the methods of these appeals. Throughout its history, HUAC created an extensive archive of dispositions, subpoenas, and propaganda, creating a large source base to draw from when discussing its history. Many scholarly studies have focused on HUAC's propaganda but have neglected to engage how these creations affected specific communities, as the discussion below of historiography will show. This work will build upon these previous analyses to study the effects of this elaborate propaganda machine on rural communities, using local media discourse.

The study of propaganda seeks to find the hidden motives and reasoning behind messages. Propaganda may be studied in its purest form at the source, but its impact must be discerned by studying the farthest points of distribution of its message. The Eastern coast of America was home to the centers of government, but propaganda produced in federal agencies had a much wider reach. The Western coast of America was home to rapidly growing postwar population centers, which housed dense populations of liberals who fervently opposed HUAC's message. The American Midwest included many sparsely populated rural expanses, and so a study of the impact of HUAC propaganda is needed to explore the full scope of its political impact nationally. Accordingly, this work focuses on the rural settings of the American Midwest and how HUAC propaganda was accepted or questioned in these communities. Ames, Iowa, a

Midwestern college town, presents an excellent case study of residents' reactions to the showing of two HUAC propaganda films in 1961. Local anti-communists warned that Ames could be the next hotbed of communism, accusing Iowa State University students and even some professors of unpatriotic behavior in their protests against HUAC's films and its message.

The historiography of the American Midwest during the Cold War uses three methodologies: urban focus, national legislation, and studies of anti-communism. While all these techniques of studying the Cold War era have their strengths, none of them properly capture the rural experience and how interactions occurred between urban centers and rural communities. Too often, observers rely on a simple extrapolation of urban trends to rural settings, without proper case studies. The lack of inclusion for rural communities in the study of the Cold War has created a gap in the history of America. Methodologically, I will be combining many of these approaches to better tell the story of the effect of Cold War tensions. Over the past seventy years, the historiography has evolved to adapt to trends in historical analysis and to fit the narrative of American identity through its intense rivalry with communist Russia.

The most recent method for studying the Cold War is that of studying population centers with large case studies and extrapolating to a wider American Cold War experience. This method has a major benefit, it helps to fill gaps for source material which may no longer exist. Urban-focused historians such as Theodore Draper have emphasized the study of communism in large cities such as Chicago, Minneapolis, and Omaha. In his 2003 edition of *American Communism & Soviet Russia*, Draper specifically focuses on instances of communist popularity in these cities during the Great Depression.³ While these metropolises do provide a more diverse

³ Draper, Theodore, *American Communism and Soviet Russia*, (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2003).

supply of source material, these cities are hardly representative of the American Midwest as a whole. Contrary to this method, I posit that the large cities of the Midwest are the exception rather than the rule. Attention to small towns is essential, in order to offer a more detailed historical understanding of the complexity of Midwestern ideas, interactions, and concerns.

The second approach to this historiography involves an analysis of the national legislature. Using this method, historians such as David Caute and Landon Storrs have created narratives which center around the effect of legislative action on the state and national level to convey public sentiment. In Caute's landmark 1978 work entitled, *The Great Fear: The Anti-Communist Purge under Truman and Eisenhower*, he discusses the limiting of communist activity via legislative action. While the Midwest is not a focus of Caute's work, it does appear through his discussion of support for legislation and presidential candidates.⁴ The discussion of Midwestern sentiment here presents as passive participation and individual action, rather than direct agency, as representing a truly unique demographic. Storrs in his book, *The Second Red Scare and the Unmaking of the New Deal Left*, uses a similar method to Caute but includes direct agency for Midwestern rural sentiment. Storrs' brief discussion of the Midwest comes in the form of Native American and minority support for liberalism and is more anecdotal in passing, rather than a true case study.⁵ Nevertheless, his work ultimately falls short of explaining how small Midwestern communities interacted with urban centers in this history.

The oldest approach in studying the Cold War is to address the Midwest as a victim of national anti-communist institutions and movements such as McCarthyism, the House

⁴ Caute, David, *The Great Fear: The Anti-Communist Purge Under Truman and Eisenhower* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1978), 41-45.

⁵ Storrs, Landon, *The Second Red Scare and the Unmaking of the New Deal Left* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), 16-50.

Committee on Un-American Activities, and the John Birch Society. Early Cold War historians such as James Burnham and Robert Carr were discussing the HUAC and Joseph McCarthy while they were each still extant. Burnham, who wrote his work *Web of Subversion* in 1954, discussed the possibility of a large-scale subversion of the United States government. Burnham's book was written in the wake of Joseph McCarthy's rabble-rousing in the Senate, and it encapsulated the American obsession with subversion and suggested that it was not a passing fad propagated by one man. Rather, Burnham concluded, the hysteria surrounding subversion was a cultural defense mechanism to enforce conformity. Burnham focused on a case study of people accused of subversion and used an analysis of Stalinist accusatory practices in the U.S.S.R. to shed light on American hysteria. Burnham even quoted Stalin in his introduction to explain the source of American hysteria, "From a communist point of view, in fact, open communist activities are primarily an auxiliary and front for an underground."⁶ Recently this comparative study of the Cold War has blossomed under Sheila Fitzpatrick, and Robert Gellately, both of whom have worked to provide a more diverse view of the hysteria and accusatory practices which plagued both the United States as well as the U.S.S.R. Although the work of these historians is important in the historiography of the Cold War as a whole, this project will be focusing solely upon the rural American experience and thus will not be directly interacting with their works.

Other historians have focused specifically on the creation of HUAC and the legality of its processes, such as the work of law professor Robert Carr. By studying the early years of HUAC, Carr set the groundwork for a discussion of where national security began and personal liberty

⁶ Burnham, James, *The Web of Subversion: Underground Networks in the U.S. Government* (New York: The John Day Company, 1954), 16.

ended.⁷ Carr's work, published in 1952, precede the hysteria of Joseph McCarthy and appeared before the mass criticism aimed at academia in the late 1950's. Carr provides a unique analysis of HUAC with fewer personal biases than at least some later McCarthy-era works. Given that HUAC particularly targeted the political beliefs and practices of academia, many professors and academics proved especially critical of its actions. For example, Walter Goodman's 1969 book *The Committee: The extraordinary career of the House Committee on Un-American Activities* condemned the committee's actions at every turn.

From the beginning, HUAC's prime directive was to root out subversion, and these politicians cast a wide net. Subversion was defined by historian Powell Davies in 1953 as "anything that attacks the principle of the form of government as guaranteed by our Constitution."⁸ Davies' definition pointed out that subversion did not require a direct action against the government of the United States itself, but instead, some type of assault against American ideas of government. In this definition, the ideas of government were protected rather than the government itself, meaning that the HUAC had little interest in rooting out physical threats. Instead, its battle was one of ideology, aimed at creating a consensus of fear. Davies wrote his work near the height of Cold War tensions, yet he suggested a more passive strategy against communism. He stated, "Communism is the enemy. But we cannot defeat it by remaining as we are. We cannot subdue it by force of arms... We must wear it down.... Our truth must defeat its falsehoods, our liberty its servitude, our justice its oppressions, our compassion its cruelties, our faith its cynicism, our humanity its degradations and debasement"⁹

⁷ Carr, Robert, *The House Committee on Un-American Activities, 1945-1950* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1952), 1-35.

⁸ Davies, Powell, *The Urge to Persecute*, 146.

⁹ *Ibid*, 212.

From this passage Davies provided a very clear plan for the United States to overcome communism abroad and at home. In doing this he had ultimately provided an appeal to HUAC supporters to search for the truth, not give into hysteria and work towards improving American values. Davies believed that if all these goals could be met, then a better strategy for combatting communism would arise. In the historiography of the Cold War, Davies was one of many scholars who wrote about HUAC tactics but the idea that consumed Davies was one of bias. Davies approached his work with a vision of victory of capitalism over communism and started from a point of view that communism was the great enemy and that the threat to American society was very real.

While the works of Davies, Carr, Storrs and Cauter provide the groundwork for this project, this research represents a local study of the impact of anti-communism and a breakdown of why HUAC propaganda was so controversial. To start by briefly examining the history of HUAC, the ideology supporting pseudo-judicial institutions like HUAC proved essential to sustaining long-term existence. In the case of HUAC, its creation in 1936 was originally meant to be temporary. Two years later, when the committee was fully organized, it was clear that Martin Dies, the chairman of the committee, had little intention of allowing the committee to be temporary. The committee even received permanent resources in the form of personnel from the justice department, institutionalizing its more sustained intention.¹⁰ After the end of World War II in 1945, the committee transitioned to what was known as the standing committee, and it existed as the HUAC until its rebranding into the House Internal Security Committee in 1969. The committee would be dissolved altogether in 1975, ending its near forty-year career.

¹⁰ Goodman, Walter, *The Committee: The Extraordinary Career of the House Committee on Un-American Activities* (Baltimore: Penguin Books Inc, 1969), 24-25.

The Cold War was not the beginning of organized anti-communism in the United States, given that perceptions of Communist threat had even been a concern of American officials after the Russian Revolution of 1917. The post-World War I era of anxiety is when the United States began its anti-communist doctrine. Yet even so, the Republican victor of the 1920 election, Warren G. Harding was skeptical about the need for intense anti-communism campaigns, commenting, “Too much has been said about Bolshevism in America.”¹¹ Often referred to as the “first red scare”, the era from the Russian revolution until the beginning of World War II was a defining moment for anti-communist political sentiment. Tensions ran high, as the Russian revolution was fresh on American minds. In 1938, the Foreign Agents Registration Act addressed many of these growing concerns in a new policy of requiring foreign political agents to register publicly. That approach, however, did not offer any means to fight the perceived threat of home-grown communists, nor did it pertain to any American citizens that those lobbyists had influenced. The Smith Act, passed in 1940, attached criminal consequences to Communist sympathy, criminalizing any political activity whose platform actively attempted to abolish the American government.¹² The Smith Act drove many revolutionary communists and their allies underground, leading HUAC and other observers to fear that communists had shifted to present themselves as socialists, new dealers and traditional progressives. The resulting sentiment meant that in anti-Communist circles, no one on the political left was above suspicion.¹³

¹¹ Ceplair, Larry, *Anti-Communism in Twentieth-Century America: A Critical History* (Santa Barbara: Praeger, 2011), 22.

¹² Caute, *Anti-Communism in Twentieth-Century America*, 25-32.

¹³ *Ibid.*

Following World War II, earlier fears of communism invigorated these tensions with the rising Cold War rivalry between the global superpowers, often depicted as the ultimate battle of ideologies. High-profile spokesmen such as J. Edgar Hoover trumpeted the necessity of guarding the political purity of Americans, especially the younger generations. In his 1960 book, *Communist Target: Youth, Communist Infiltration and Agitation Tactics*, Hoover warned that American youth were impressionable, vulnerable to manipulation. This “brainwashing” was supposedly happening within the university setting, as leftist teachers encouraged students to embrace subversive goals and “think freely”. Hoover portrayed college students as threats, but not by their own intent.¹⁴ What is assumed in this case is that citizens were born American, but communists were made. The judicial backing of the F.B.I. for HUAC played right into conservative fears of subversion by leftists. HUAC had long feared academia as representing a hotbed of leftist thought, but after Hoover’s warning, the committee reinvigorated its review of what it saw as subversive influences within higher education.

¹⁴ Hoover, John E, *Communist Target: Youth: Communist Infiltration and Agitation Tactics*, 1960.

CHAPTER 3. CAMPUS TENSION AND HUAC'S FILM CAMPAIGN

Throughout the late 1940s and early 1950s, many colleges and universities were targeted as supposed sources of liberal and many times communist thought. In this era, individual professors faced harsh consequences for leaning too far to the political left, either in true belief or in matters of research. Faculty of universities around the nation were targeted, and 126 professors were brought up on individual charges from their universities.¹⁵ The American public was not only aware of this fact but had begun a nail-biting craze of suspicion. Professors around the nation turned to the American Association of University Professors or AAUP for support. They found AAUP's support lacking and, in many cases, not holding up its tenet of defending free academic discourse and political belief among professors. One faculty member of UCLA, John Caughey, found this out the hard way when he refused to sign a loyalty oath and was terminated from his position in 1956. In response, the AAUP offered him financial support, to which Caughey observed "that it is analogous to coping with the problem of industrial accidents by raising money to cover hospital costs."¹⁶ It is clear that many professors had nowhere to turn; defending oneself was akin to guilt, and lack of defense meant that a person's life could be torn asunder. By 1960, HUAC had laid the groundwork for asserting that universities and youth organizations were prime targets for insurrection.¹⁷

On May 12, 1960, the HUAC set up a council of investigation to ascertain the extent of communist activity in Berkeley, California. After the group sent out subpoenas for testimony, an

¹⁵ Schrecker, Ellen, *No Ivory Tower* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 97-109.

¹⁶ Schrecker, *No Ivory Tower*, 314-315.

¹⁷ Lewis, Lionel, *Cold War on Campus: A Study of the Politics of Organizational Control* (New Brunswick: Transaction Books, 1988), 7-26.

anonymous source sent a call out for the students of the University of California to come to Berkeley's city hall to protest. The call was answered by over a thousand students, a few hundred of whom were allowed inside the already packed hearing room and the surrounding halls, while the rest waited outside. As the subpoenaed communists came to testify, they used their time to make statements that inflamed many listening students.¹⁸ Protests eventually turned into a riot, as students mobbed police who were trying to restore order. The police responded by turning fire hoses on the students who refused to leave, dragging many of them one by one down the stone stairs of the city hall.¹⁹ In J. Edgar Hoover's perception, those students had been manipulated by a few agitators, taken advantage of, by speakers seeking to meet the goals of communist infiltration.²⁰

In 1960, the House Un-American Activities Committee commissioned the creation of two films that could be shown to general audiences around the country and thus, the filmmakers hoped, to steer public opinion in places such as Iowa. The first of these films, titled *Communism on the Map*, was meant for community education and warned about the potential spread of communism and socialism both overseas and within the United States. This film was intended as an introduction to foster a public discussion on international communism and to build the belief that capitalism was besieged on all fronts.

The second film, *Operation Abolition*, gave HUAC's perspective on the 1960 Berkeley, California student riots. The film showed local educators and political leaders whom HUAC had

¹⁸ *Operation Abolition*, directed by Fulton Lewis III, written by John E. Hoover, accessed February 15, 2018, <https://archive.org/details/HUAC-Operation-Abolition-Film>

¹⁹ *Operation Abolition*.

²⁰ Hoover, John E, *Communist Target: Youth*, 1960.

subpoenaed to give testimony on their involvement with any known communist organizations. Among those subpoenaed was Archie Brown, second in command of the California Communist Party. Brown appeared on film acting extremely uncooperative and had to be removed from the courtroom three times, twice for allegedly inciting riots and once for being in contempt of the committee. Brown's behavior was not unusual for witnesses called before HUAC, who typically refused to answer questions. Brown instead tried to use his time to read into the record a prepared statement. As the committee ordered him to answer specific questions, Brown simply kept re-reading his statement, repeatedly citing his First and Fifth Amendment rights. Brown demanded that the committee "open up the doors" and let protestors in to see what their government was doing. Many students present at the town hall outside the committee room responded with verbal attacks against the police present. HUAC's film *Operation Abolition* focused on that student disorder to validate concerns voiced by FBI director J. Edgar Hoover, earlier in 1960. Hoover had stated that the American public itself was an unlikely target for subversion, but that communists could well target impressionable students across the nation.²¹ Hoover warned parents and community members that their friends and family could be swept up in a communist plot. HUAC similarly perpetuated fears about the rabbleroxing of young people. As shown in *Operation Abolition*, Archie Brown responded to very few questions during his Berkeley interrogation, but one that he did clearly answer was the name of his hometown. When the chairman asked where he was from, Archie Brown proudly stated that he was born and raised in Sioux City, Iowa.²² This scene in *Operation Abolition* undoubtedly grabbed attention of many viewers when this film was shown on the Iowa State University campus. It suggested that

²¹ Hoover, John E. *Communist Target: Youth*.

²² *Operation Abolition*.

alleged communist agitators were not a thousand miles away, but within their own state, giving subversion a homegrown link. An article in the Des Moines register on September 20 of 1961 describes that, “two air force officers were removed from their jobs and were reprimanded for violating orders by showing the film.”²³

Both *Communism on the Map* and *Operation Abolition* set out to intensify fear of communism and increase vigilance against possible threats among the American public. Both films were for community education, and *Operation Abolition* in particular was extensively used in far-right leaning anti-communist seminars.²⁴ Universities were prime targets for these seminars, since critics believed that faculty and students usually landed on the liberal side of the political spectrum. In 1961, about 15 to 17 million people viewed *Operation Abolition* at schools, libraries, and local theaters.²⁵

The HUAC’s *Operation Abolition* emphasized the threat of communist insurrection. Such warnings from HUAC were not altogether new, but what changed was how fear was being used. The film presented un-American activities as an ongoing threat, citing the student riots at the University of California at Berkeley. The target of HUAC propaganda had always been to denounce communists, but with this film, the committee set the parameters of Americanness specifically as revolving around support or disdain for the committee itself. Ultimately, the film intended to create a sense of pride for HUAC’s supporters, via the thought process that if communists opposed it, then its investigations must be on the right track. HUAC aimed for

²³ Doak, “2 Punished for Showing of ‘Operation Abolition’,” *Des Moines Register*, September 20, 1961.

²⁴ Bogle, Lori, *The Pentagon’s Battle for the American Mind: The Early Cold War*, (College Station, Texas A&M University Press, 2004), 133-169.

²⁵ Harrison, Joshua, “Operation Correction: The Rhetorical Battle Sparked by Film Footage of the May 1960 Student Protest at San Francisco’s City Hall,” *American Communist History*, vol 12, no.2 (2013), 137-40.

Operation Abolition to reinforce its political message of vigilance, but the movie spurred national debates over HUAC's methods, its constitutionality, and the accuracy and ethics of the film itself.

In Ames, Iowa, following showings of these HUAC films, these debates became encapsulated in exchanges via campus newspapers and other local media. Sparks of hysteria flew between writers to the *Iowa State Daily*, as Iowans considered the imagined threat of societal upheaval. The two sides in this debate were the ideas of "positive Americanism" and anti-communism. While parties in the Iowa discussion typically agreed that communism was an unacceptable political ideology, they disagreed about how to express these baseline beliefs. Fervent anti-communists called for the tough pursuit of known communists as well as an aggressive investigation of possible subversives. But other observers worried about rabble-rousing and questioned whether subversion really presented such widespread danger; they believed that persecution and blacklisting might do more harm than good and, in some cases, push innocent non-communists to extremes.

Prominent national political figures of the era, such as F.B.I. director J. Edgar Hoover, pressed for regarding communist subversion as a very real danger. Hoover's 1958 book *Masters of Deceit: The Story of Communism in America and How to Fight It* described the Soviet run American Communist Party as posing a hidden but constant threat. By his logic, Americans' sense of security was only an illusion, meaning that any visible hints of subversion must be dealt with swiftly and harshly, to uncover the hidden tendrils beneath the surface. Hoover categorized the threat as coming from outside of American society, and thus concluded that to be part of this subversion was to surrender your identity as an American. Hoover directly stated that

“Communists are not Americans” and thus that anyone who was a communist thereby ceases to be an American.²⁶

Not everyone was swayed by Hoover’s words, even in the depths of the Cold War environment. For instance, the concept of “positive Americanism” presented in 1960 by Donald G. Paterson, professor of psychology at the University of Minnesota, created an alternative that offered a more restrained approach to communism.²⁷ Paterson argued that communists were not as prevalent in U.S. society as Hoover or the HUAC would have people believe; he suggested that instead of witch hunting, Americans should focus on creating an environment for American values to thrive.²⁸ Paterson suggested that as long as citizens were content, then they would be unwilling to tear down American capitalism by joining communist agitators. His view aimed to foster a less paranoid, more positive American identity, while warning that the anti-communist crusade was doing more damage than good. That perspective offered an alternate vision of what it meant to be an American, resting on a trust in American values and a faith that capitalism would ultimately outlast its ideological rival anyway. Such differing opinions, about how much to fear the threat of subversion and how to respond, intensified discussion amongst an already anxious public.

²⁶ Hoover, John E, *Masters of Deceit: The Story of Communism in America and How to Fight It*, (Henry Holt and Co: New York, 1958), 102.

²⁷ Doak, “Communists, Leftists Hope for Effortless World Control Says Prof.,” *Iowa State Daily*, May 17, 1961.

²⁸ Doak, “Communists, Leftists Hope for Effortless World Control Says Prof.,” *Iowa State Daily*, May 17, 1961.

CHAPTER 4. HUAC FILM SCREENINGS AND ENSUING DEBATE IN AMES, IOWA

On March 17, 1961, *Communism on the Map* was shown at the journalism building on the Iowa State University campus. The film contained descriptions of socialism and communism, in which they were equated to each other, implying that the post-World War II European continent was consumed by communism.²⁹ Overall, the theme emphasized the risk of spreading international communism and depicted America as the bastion of capitalism but surrounded on all fronts, with Cuba to the South, Europe to the East, and Russia and China to the West. Students and reporters from the *Iowa State Daily* attended the film showing, as did some community members and college faculty, including historian Elbert Smith and economist Harold Davey. These two faculty allegedly dominated the post-film discussion time with criticisms of the film's viewpoint. According to reports from one attendee, Smith and Davies even went so far as to shut down a student from Lebanon who argued for the validity of the film's depiction of the overseas popularity of alternatives to capitalism.³⁰

Ames residents responded to the film by writing letters to the Iowa State University paper, which either condemned the film or supported its release. In particular, the letters opened a public disagreement between two Iowa State University students, Jack Kartel and Stephen Ryan. On one hand, Kartel was one of the most outspoken critics of *Communism on the Map* while on the other hand Ryan wrote in support of the film. On March 24, 1961, Kartel wrote, "I was shocked because I found that even college-educated, American men and women, wrapped in the protective armor of the flag, can be swayed by mass media so unashamedly emotional in

²⁹ Bogle, Lori, *The Pentagon's Battle for the American Mind*, 151-152.

³⁰ Norris, David, *Ames Community Action Report*, June 20, 1961, Iowa State University Special Collections, The James Hilton Papers, *Bliss Report*, Box no. 15, File no. 52.

nature that it makes me ill to admit that I sat through the whole showing.”³¹ Kartel then concluded, “Perhaps apathy towards such “education” is after all the best course of action. It is one I will take in the future.”³² While Kartel declared that he was so fed up with the political nature of the film that he planned to remove himself from the entire debate, some other Midwest college students were also apparently moving toward apathy. Just a month after Kartel’s declaration of apathy, on April 13, 1961 the *Iowa State Daily* published an article discussing student interest and views on the John Birch Society on the Kansas State University campus. The JBS had fostered a longstanding reputation of being extremist and even subversive in its support for anti-communism and HUAC. The poll takers at Kansas State University were surprised by students’ responses. Specifically, the poll moderators were disturbed by the lack of student political concern, and they wrote, “No one that we have questioned seems to have any definite opinions formed in favor or against the supposedly anti-communist organization.”³³ The article points out that the tactics of the JBS were “Militantly anti-communist” and “borrowed the communist technique of setting up front groups.”³⁴ What had concerned the poll takers in this instance was the apathy of young Americans to anti-communism in general and that it showed a failing of American identity.

While Kartel had declared that the film’s patriotic hard-sell made him feel “ill,” fellow ISU student Stephen Ryan wrote in support of HUAC and the anti-communist agenda. Ryan declared that “I have no particular ax to grind except the ax which every United States citizen

³¹ Kartel, Jack, “Emotional Appeal in Anti-Red Film,” *Iowa State Daily*, March 24, 1961.

³² Ibid.

³³ *Kansas State Collegian*, “Students Have Few Views on John Birch Society,” *Iowa State Daily*, April 13, 1961.

³⁴ Ibid.

should and must grind sooner or later the affirmation of our American heritage and the denunciation of a communist future.”³⁵ Ryan represented communism as an absolute enemy for Americans to combat as a rite of passage into American identity; to be American, Ryan believed, one must be anti-communist. Ryan further asserted that, “To me, communism vs. democracy is an area where there are only blacks and whites; no grays. I have a feeling that people who speak of this open-mindedness and objectivity generally have nearly three strikes against democracy at the onset of any discussion comparing communism and democracy.”³⁶ Ryan’s argument effectively tried to label critics of the film and of HUAC as Un-American.

The showing of *Communism on the Map* was just the first component of the propaganda campaign about to hit Ames. Beyond the message of the film itself, the Ames community was also concerned about how that message was presented, with its implications regarding patriotism, debate, and dissent. Immediately after the ISU campus showing, *Communism on the Map* became a hot topic of debate in Ames. The film host, Arden Pulley, the local student whom the *Iowa State Daily* invited to show the film, stated, “I was under the impression that the viewers were concerned over communist advances and sincerely interested in the film.”³⁷ Pulley was responsible for the film equipment and setting up before the showing as well as packing up after discussion, and he was appalled at the student behavior he witnessed. The reality of how the community felt was drastically at odds with Pulley’s initial beliefs about how Ames viewers would receive the film. To Pulley, the film was “an excellent government document which,

³⁵ Ryan, Stephen, “Letter to Editor,” *Iowa State Daily*, March 28, 1961, Iowa State University Special Collections, The James Hilton Papers, *Bliss Report*, Box no. 15, File no. 52.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ Norris, David, *Why are we coming to you*, Iowa State University Special Collections, The James Hilton Papers, *Bliss Report*, Box no. 15, File no. 52.

among other things, informs us that ‘every Communist communication must convey an orthodoxy that is revolutionarily activating message to the party and its followers. This same communication must convey a different, ie. Soothing, pacifying and paralyzing message to the opponent of communism.’ It is of little value for each of us to go looking for Communists with the hope of pointing our finger at them, however we must learn to become resistant to their efforts of conditioning and thought control.”³⁸ Pulley worried about the world becoming corrupted by the counter narrative presented by communists and thus valued the message from HUAC as the authority on anti-communism, which he assumed had Americans’ best interests at heart.

The campus debate over HUAC propaganda was not over, though. Iowa State University hosted two showings of HUAC’s film *Operation Abolition*, on April 16 and May 14, 1961, on campus. The initial showing on April 16 was a smaller showing, sponsored only by the Frisbie United Student Center, accompanied by a discussion led by history and political science professor Elbert Smith. In this preliminary showing, Smith approached the film as a prime example of propaganda; news accounts referred to him as “providing various pieces of printed material pointing out the propaganda techniques used in the film.”³⁹ While the April 16 showing of *Operation Abolition* drew a smaller crowd, Smith’s outright criticism of the film nonetheless attracted the attention of the community. In attendance at the film on April 16 was Patricia Bliss, the wife of an Ames city councilman and owner of an Ames building development company. After the event, Bliss expressed her skepticism of Smith’s lesson on propaganda, telling fellow Ames resident David Norris that “The ‘various pieces of printed material’ were indeed

³⁸ Pulley, Arden, “Must Have Committees Against Reds,” *Iowa State Daily*, May 5, 1961.

³⁹ Doak, “Operation Abolition Shown to Students,” *Iowa State Daily*, April 18, 1961.

various...supplied free of charge and there was nothing to back up HUAC's side of the controversy... Some of which I believe to be supplied by a communist front."⁴⁰ By so strongly opposing anti-communism, Smith brought himself into the line of fire, suspected of propagating his anti-American and anti-patriotic beliefs to the student body. Bliss also noticed that "No faculty member or adult was invited or present to offer the opposite viewpoint."⁴¹ In particular, the lack of additional viewpoints at the film with an audience of students and youth correlated with J. Edgar Hoover's warning in *Communist Target: Youth* earlier that year about youthful susceptibility to political manipulation. In communicating with Norris, Bliss attached a copy of *Communist Target: Youth* to emphasize her concern over Smith's demeanor. The lack of impartial discussion at showings of *Operation Abolition*, concerned Bliss, especially since the showings had been advertised with a promise that the film would be a platform for an unbiased discussion. The April 16 showing had been advertised as being a chance to partake in anti-communism, but Bliss perceived it as becoming Elbert Smith's platform for teaching about propaganda. In her mind, the intention of the film had been corrupted, and given the attention drawn to the issue, a second showing was scheduled for May 14, 1961.

Just a few days before the showing, on May 11, 1961, an editorial from the *Iowa State Daily* stated:

No doubt viewers this Sunday will hear synopses of both sides of the argument during the discussion, but perhaps more fruitful observations can also be obtained... Most students will probably attend the showing here with their mind already made up about the film. The most educational value from the showing can therefore be obtained not by talking about the film itself, but by projecting the conversation into the future. In all the controversy surrounding "Operation Abolition" little has been said about how to resolve the argument between

⁴⁰ Bliss, Patricia, *Bliss Report to David A. Norris*, 3, Iowa State University Special Collections, The James Hilton Papers, *Bliss Report*, Box no. 15, File no. 52.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

supporters and protestors of the film. With the aid of the panel members, perhaps the audience can gain some insight into how America can educate itself against communism without offending some of its citizens.⁴²

As this quote makes clear, the Ames community already was aware of the controversial nature of *Operation Abolition*. Accordingly, the *Iowa State Daily* editorial writers encouraged a hope that the post-film discussion panel would help to curb the intensity of audience reactions.

Anticipation ran high for the May 14, 1961, second showing of *Operation Abolition*, which was sponsored by eleven student groups, including the YMCA, Frisbie United Student Fellowship, Young Republicans, Young Democrats, Interfraternity Council, and Panhellenic Council. Community leaders around the Ames area hoped for a chance to re-do the earlier discussion that critics believed Smith had hijacked. This time around the discussion was led by a panel comprised of Harold Davey of economics, ISU student and Interfraternity Council president Jack Hansen, ISU student Dick Rainford of the Young Republicans Club, and ISU student Tom Harkin of the Young Democrats club.⁴³ Since this panel featured multiple leaders of the student body with different viewpoints, it promised to provide a more politically even-handed discussion of the film, as per the *Iowa State Daily's* advertisements. Davey had been a strong critic of HUAC when he discussed *Communism on the Map* earlier that year and was slated to be the leader of the opposition to the film. However, the organizers of the showing did not count on the audience being already extremely biased against HUAC and already in avid agreement with Davey's critiques of the film. At the post-film discussion, some audience members began to boo in response to favorable comments about HUAC from student panelists and to cheer with great enthusiasm when Davey responded with harsh criticism.⁴⁴ Will Jumper, a local professor of

⁴² Doak, "Showing of HUAC Film Might Prove Educational," *Iowa State Daily*, May 11, 1961.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Borchers, Harold, "Film Shocks Writer," *Iowa State Daily*, March 17, 1961.

English and Speech, later wrote that during the showing, he “laughed bitterly or gaily depending upon whether the distortions were vicious or merely ludicrous.”⁴⁵ Those skeptical film viewers in Ames particularly objected to the way that *Operation Abolition* depicted the 1960 student protests of the HUAC at the University of California by blaming the unrest on communist agitators.⁴⁶ That accusation seemed to remove all agency from the students’ actions and delegitimized student protests, amounting to what Will Jumper called “Pictorial Blackmail.”⁴⁷

The negative response to HUAC and its agenda shown by some campus audience members at the second showing of *Operation Abolition* seemed to further reinforce J. Edgar Hoover’s warning from *Communist Target: Youth*. Anti-communists in Ames could now see that the backlash from students was growing. The initial showing of *Communism on the Map* seemed to confirm that some ISU faculty were critical of HUAC and ready to voice such criticism to students. The second showing of *Operation Abolition* seemed to confirm the anti-communists’ worst nightmare, that students had begun to turn against HUAC. Anti-communists in Ames feared that a local communist subversion movement had taken hold of the Iowa State student body. Accordingly, concerned citizens responded by escalating beyond simply writing to the newspaper; they took matters to the university president and F.B.I., ready to become what J. Edgar Hoover had wanted, Americans ready for action against communism.

Again, following the film showing, students and other Ames residents wrote to the local newspaper. Some correspondents, such as Jill Gaylord, wife of an Iowa State student, stressed the idea that in discussions surrounding *Operation Abolition*, a “fair balance of pro/con ideas

⁴⁵ Jumper, Will, “HUAC Film Makes Prof Amused, Bitter,” *Iowa State Daily*, May 16, 1961.

⁴⁶ Erickson, Leif, “Were Calif. Students Dupes of Reds,” *The Courier*, March 2, 1961.

⁴⁷ Jumper, Will, “HUAC Film Makes Prof Amused, Bitter,” *Iowa State Daily*, May 16, 1961.

need to be presented.”⁴⁸ This technique of defending HUAC argued that moderators for the post-film discussion should have enforced a discussion where all beliefs were held in the same regard. Other writers warned that failure to oppose communism at every turn would only aid communists. Arden Pulley, a senior student at ISU declared that “We must prevent a wedge from separating the people from our government and the destruction of our society by the Red machine of abolition.”⁴⁹ Pulley added that the movement to abolish HUAC was a subversive action by communists and indicated that HUAC should be given the benefit of the doubt. Pulley regarded HUAC as purely American and suggested that people should stand with HUAC and the American government, rather than risking consuming communist propaganda by accident.

But others in Ames who had attended the showing of *Operation Abolition* or followed the controversy wrote in to challenge the premise that HUAC was protecting American interests. With few reasons to believe that communists were behind every blade of grass, these critics only saw the committee as an outdated witch hunt which violated citizens’ rights. Frank Cartledge and David Garfinkel, both students at Iowa State University, encapsulated this feeling in their letter to the Iowa State Daily on May 10, 1961. They stated that “These committees have been organized to protect this country from internal danger. To do so at the cost of impinging U.S. citizens is a poor exchange indeed, even if these committees were effective, which they are not! Vigilante committees have assumed namely, the power of accusation with judicial immunity.”⁵⁰ These two students were not alone, as many other Ames citizens echoed their sentiment. Another student, Donald Adams, stated in a letter to the campus paper, “We have just as much to

⁴⁸ Gaylord, Jill, “Answers Letter on HUAC Film,” *Iowa State Daily*, May 17, 1961.

⁴⁹ Pulley, Arden, “Must Have Committees Against Reds,” *Iowa State Daily*, May 5, 1961.

⁵⁰ Cartledge, Frank, “Un-American Committees Usurp Rights,” *Iowa State Daily*, May 10, 1961.

fear from the activities of the far right as we do from the activities of the far left.”⁵¹ Adams warned that Americans truly had to fear HUAC as well as communists and indeed, that the tactics of HUAC appeared to be not too dissimilar to those utilized by communist propaganda bureaus.

Watching the HUAC film *Operation Abolition* and seeing or hearing about the audience reaction prompted others in Ames to take even more direct action beyond writing letters to local papers. On June 20, 1961, Ames resident David Norris wrote what he called a community action report, which he sent to the president of Iowa State University, James Hilton. As one of the city’s leading businessmen, Norris was particularly alarmed by the HUAC film’s depiction of events in another college town, Berkeley. He perceived California communist leader Archie Brown as having instigated student riots, adding his alarm that similar tactics were being used in Ames. Norris feared that the student body of Iowa State University could be a threat to the institution and community if the wrong things were said by the wrong person.⁵² Norris wrote, “We are concerned about the influence of these few on some unsuspecting citizens and, even more important, on some unsuspecting students who are being influenced because of their respect for the scholastic attainment of Smith and others.”⁵³ In his report, Norris made no actual accusation of communist leanings towards any one person in Ames, at ISU, or in Iowa. Instead, he expressed concern about community disillusionment with government institutions that had

⁵¹ Adams, Donald, “Film Tactics Disgusting, Inexcusable for Congress,” *Iowa State Daily*, May 18, 1961.

⁵² Norris, David, *Summary of the Report*, Iowa State University Special Collections, The James Hilton Papers, *Bliss Report*, Box no. 15, File no. 52.

⁵³ Norris, David, *Ames Community Action Report*, Iowa State University Special Collections, The James Hilton Papers, *Bliss Report*, Box no. 15, File no. 52.

been created to hunt down America's internal enemies. In his introduction to the report, Norris declared:

We are not accusing anyone of being a communist. We believe that all men, including ourselves, must be held accountable for our actions regardless of our intent when it involved the survival and freedom of others. We are concerned with the attitudes of a few towards anti-communism, patriotism and our traditional form of government, even the Congress of the United States. We do not question the right of any man to independent political belief; but insofar that the stand of any person, ourselves included, parallels the stand advocated by communists, militarily, economically and politically, it is of acute concern to all Americans.⁵⁴

This comment was directed towards the many students and faculty who had spoken out after the film to criticize HUAC and what they regarded as its unnecessary and dangerous alarmism over subversive activity. Norris interpreted that reaction as an unpatriotic lack of support for Anti-communist vigilance. Specifically, Norris complained that the professors who dominated the post-film discussion at ISU were biased against the HUAC and had used their authority to become rabble-rousers, trying to whip up anti-anti-communism among ISU students and community members attending the screening.⁵⁵ Norris wrote, "Faculty are using their positions, personally and occupationally with the University to further their political ideals," adding that "faculty use baseless accusations, labels and untrue statements about students, films and organizations to further other views."⁵⁶

Norris's letter specifically criticized the way several ISU professors had acted during the campus showing of *Operation Abolition*. One of Norris' most pointed complaints was against Smith who had, in his eyes, instigated the entire student body. Norris complained to Hilton that the ISU students present jeered at comments made in favor of the film, but applauded Smith's

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Norris, *Ames Community Action Report*.

⁵⁶ Ibid, 3.

anti-HUAC remarks.⁵⁷ Norris's observations mentioned two other ISU professors as being strong critics of the HUAC films, Keith Huntress of the English department and Harold Davey of Economics.

Norris's comments reflected more than just his reaction to the events immediately surrounding him in Ames, they reflected wider national events. The early 1960s represented an extremely tense environment of Cold War confrontation. In April of 1961, President John F. Kennedy announced the failure of hostile action against communists in Cuba. The Bay of Pigs, as the episode became known, further escalated ongoing tensions between communist nations and capitalist nations. The war of ideology had taken a violent turn with this project to arm and fund Cuban nationalists. Their goal was to retake the island nation from the newly communist dictatorship and return the Atlantic and Caribbean as a barrier between communist bases and the United States. The speech that President Kennedy made on April 20, 1961, addressed not only the failure at hand but also the nature of the war to come against communism. The war Kennedy presented was one where "it is clearer than ever that we face a relentless struggle in every corner of the globe that goes far beyond the clash of armies or even nuclear armaments. The armies are there, and in large number. The nuclear armaments are there. But they serve primarily as the shield behind which subversion, infiltration, and a host of other tactics steadily advance, picking off vulnerable areas one by one in situations which do not permit our own armed intervention."⁵⁸ Kennedy's message thus presented an image of future wars being fought with subversion and cloak and dagger, words that hit home for many American citizens. In his comments to ISU

⁵⁷ Ibid, 2.

⁵⁸ Kennedy, John F, "Address before the American Society of Newspaper Editors," Speech, Washington, D.C, April 20, 1961, JFK library

president James Hilton, Norris quoted Kennedy's April 20th speech, using it as rationale for bringing his concerns forward. Norris believed that Kennedy was calling citizens into action against the veiled threats of communist subversion. In a footnote to his letter, Norris escalated his concerns by informing Hilton that "he had also forwarded his letter to special agent Thomas Gearity of the FBI office in Omaha, Nebraska."⁵⁹

Charges of subversion, association with communists, or sympathy for communism had proved disastrous for many other Americans during the Cold War. A number lost their jobs, several committed suicide. But at ISU, despite the seriousness of the accusations of a lack of patriotism leveled against professors such as Norris and Bliss and Smith, it does not appear that these faculty members involved with the incident suffered any serious official repercussions. There were apparently no moves to fire or blacklist any of those involved. Indeed, one year later, the ISU yearbook, the 1962 BOMB, featured a photograph of Smith entertaining other faculty at his home. His ongoing and public role in the university faculty's social life suggests that those charges did not even result in his being socially shunned.

The growth of Iowa State and its official change from collegiate status to university status could have been a major reason for Smith's retention on staff. Iowa State University's student population was growing rapidly; from 1953 until 1965, the student population almost doubled in size, from 7,800 to 12,400.⁶⁰ What this meant was that Iowa State University faculty and staff were in a transitional mode of thinking. Historian Lionel Lewis has suggested that unlike large campuses subject to intense public scrutiny over political matters, smaller and medium sized

⁵⁹ Norris, *Ames Community Action Report*, 2.

⁶⁰Iowa State University Archives, "History of Iowa State: People of Distinction: Dr. James H. Hilton," iastate.edu, <http://www.public.iastate.edu/~isu150/history/hilton.html>

schools had more leeway to give the individual the benefit of the doubt. Lewis indicates that many small colleges chose to handle controversial situations internally, usually suggesting that the accused go under review or attend meetings of rotary clubs, where local authorities could keep an eye on the person in question.⁶¹ Lewis finds that even university administrations had a role in the accusation process. HUAC had established its purview in 1959 with the Supreme Court case *Barenblatt v. United States*, where the court ruled five to four that the first amendment did not protect from congressional inquiries.⁶² In similar fashion, historian Ellen Schrecker writes, in cases where charges were taken seriously enough to be reported to the legal authorities, the results were devastating; accused professors were usually refused tenure based on accusation alone.⁶³ For example, in 1949, Professor Robert Hodes was given tenure at Tulane Medical School in New Orleans, but after allegations of communist sympathy were brought against him in 1952, he was quietly dismissed before evidence or trial.⁶⁴ Dismissal for refusal to cooperate with authorities, such as HUAC, carried more serious consequences for others. Schrecker also describes in vivid detail the case of Chandler Davis, a professor at the University of Michigan, who was found to be in contempt of Congress in 1959. Davis refused to answer HUAC's direct inquiries on the grounds of the first amendment and faced jail time for refusal to cooperate with an official inquiry into matters which threatened the American way.⁶⁵ Schrecker provides context to the situation in Ames, where Ames students were booing and laughing at

⁶¹Lewis, Lionel, *Cold War on Campus: A Study of the Politics of Organizational Control* (New Brunswick: Transaction Books, 1988), 33-37.

⁶² Lewis, *Cold War on Campus*, 171-179.

⁶³ Schrecker, *No Ivory Tower*, 219-240.

⁶⁴ *Ibid*, 242-244.

⁶⁵ *Ibid*, 219-223.

HUAC's message just two years after Davis was imprisoned for non-compliance with HUAC and summarily fired from his teaching position.

None of the national uproar or disruption happened in Ames. Indeed, by 1961, some of the worst tensions in academic circles over subversion charges had eased. By the early 1960s, Schrecker notes, blacklists had been relaxed, partly to accommodate a shortage in qualified faculty as universities and colleges across the U.S. expanded.⁶⁶ Hilton's leniency towards Smith undoubtedly represented a very difficult decision. On one hand, Smith potentially posed a liability to Iowa State University's reputation, both nationally and locally, especially after critics made their accusations public. On the other hand, Hilton was pushing for expansion of ISU during this time, which suggested a need for retention of qualified, established professors.

Smith clearly did not become an outcast. Indeed, just one year after the controversy over his role in the HUAC screenings at ISU, Smith mounted a run for the U.S. Senate.⁶⁷ Smith lost his race, but during the campaign, media accounts praised him as a man who was "on the go all of the time" and always receiving a "fine reception."⁶⁸ Again, this evidence suggests that Smith faced little to no social repercussions for his actions at the showings of *Communism on the Map* and *Operation Abolition*. Fears about anti-communism in Iowa were apparently insufficient to cripple Smith's campaign in 1962. Despite Smith's loss in the Senate election of 1962, he carried significant backing from public figures such as John F. Kennedy, who endorsed Smith's campaign.

⁶⁶ Ibid, 283-307.

⁶⁷ *Quad-City Times*, "Dr. E. B. Smith at Alcoa Picnic," *Quad-City Times*, August 25, 1962.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

Again, the small scale of the Iowa press community may have made a difference in the whole controversy. Rather than passively absorbing news reports coming from large urban centers, Iowans read accounts of local events and then wrote back to the editor to voice their opinions. By 1960, Iowans had been thoroughly exposed to earlier Cold War charges of subversion, and wide-scale propaganda that defined communists as anathema to proper Americans. The beliefs and alignments that could put someone under suspicion of being a communist included opposition to religion, opposition to American policies foreign and abroad, an identity with former progressives, and active members of worker unions. The idea behind anti-communist education was to provide a glimpse into the chaotic potential that communism could have on capitalism. Education about communism was duly meant to reinforce the stigma against all of those who could be allied to the communist cause. Intrinsicly, this education emphasized the most extreme and terrifying aspects of a communist take-over. But literature was not the only form of anti-communist education during this period. Red scare reenactments put on by local American Legion posts throughout the late 1940s and 1950s brought these ideas of hysteria off the page into a pretend reality for many Americans. As historian Richard Fried discusses, in May, 1950, members of the local American Legion outpost in Mosinee, Wisconsin dressed up as commissars and terrorized Mosinee with dramatized visualization as to what would happen if communists took over.⁶⁹ The aim was to scare people in a whole new way. Rather than reading or hearing secondhand reports of communist riots or trials, people found those mock communists knocking on their doors. Churches were shut down; fake military parades were staged, and the mayor was “executed” by firing squad. As ridiculous as it sounds, this

⁶⁹ Fried, Richard, *The Russians are Coming! The Russians are Coming!* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 67-86.

pageantry of communist became a very popular form of community education and even entertainment. The press described the event in Mosinee in glee, suggesting a fair-like atmosphere of drama and comedy. Reporters across the entire state flocked to Mosinee in droves. It is no surprise that such an event would occur in Senator McCarthy's home state. Within months, the North Western Iowa town of Hartley staged a similar day-long anti-communist pageant. Significantly, the initial reaction of some residents to this kind of corporeal Anti-communist propaganda was hostile, and many Iowans rejected the idea altogether. Fried writes, "In one case one homemaker threatened to sic her dog on any "communist" who tried to enter her home".⁷⁰ No newspapers visited, no reporters flocked into town, some people even left on "Fishing trips". One Hartley citizen even went so far as to say, "They know communism is bad... when you play with something that is bad, somebody's going to get hurt."⁷¹ Iowans turned their noses up at mock revolutions; some clearly felt insulted by directed, inconvenient propaganda shows. In reacting to the HUAC films, many Ames residents mentioned this earlier education on communism, and some even argued for stepping up the coverage warning about the danger to American well-being.⁷² In other words, Iowa residents were vitally aware of earlier education campaigns regarding the supposed danger of communism, but few could agree on what were the proper messages or who should be educating whom.

To some Americans, HUAC seemed like a well-suited institution to handle the education of the American public, while others whole-heartedly disagreed. HUAC's supporters claimed that it was vital to back the anti-communist campaign as a necessary precaution of the

⁷⁰ Ibid, 81.

⁷¹ Ibid, 81.

⁷² Tripp, Marcai, "U.S. Should Know Marxism," *Iowa State Daily*, April 8, 1961.

times, a defensive precaution to root out potential communist plots. Ames resident [no comma, and give his full first name - if it's not in his letter, use other research to find it out. Not a student?] D. Erlandson expressed his opinion in writing to the *Iowa State Daily* on May 2, 1961, saying, "This attitude that so many seem to have these days, when it comes to the exposure of communism, sure is very disturbing to us who know, at least, some of the facts concerning the insidious tactics of the communists. More and more this reveals the great need for anti-communist committees to help smoke out the many Benedict Arnolds in every avenue of our free land."⁷³ To supporters of HUAC like Erlandson, the endless critiques presented by others was yet more evidence that the committee should exist. In other words, Erlandson accepted the self-affirming thought process that HUAC sought to instill in the public, the idea that any criticism of HUAC was yet more proof of the necessity of HUAC. Similarly, ISU student Arden Pulley wrote, "Are we going to spend more time degrading the methods others use which we do not agree with than we do stopping a common enemy?"⁷⁴ The supporters of HUAC saw any attack on the committee as a direct attack on the American way of life and feared that even partly justified critiques only helped the communists.

On the other hand, the critics of the committee regarded HUAC's actions, taken in the name of American security, as a gross abuse of power. In their eyes, every time the committee abused its power, it inherently undercut its own validity. Harold A Borchers, commented on HUAC tactics as enforcing the idea that communism was the great enemy at the cost of American freedom and values. In his article on March 17, 1961 Borchers commented that

⁷³ Erlandson, D, "Need Committee for Uncovering Insidious Reds," *Iowa State Daily*, May 2, 1961, Iowa State University Archives.

⁷⁴ Pulley, Arden, "Film Promotor Asks Unification Against Enemy," *Iowa State Daily*, May 13, 1961, Iowa State University Archives.

“Maybe we had better take a closer look at ourselves in the U.S. The map in the film made it look like we are the ones behind the Iron Curtain. Maybe we are a little slow in getting caught up with the times.”⁷⁵ This comment encapsulates Borchers’ mood throughout his article and depicts a reversal of HUAC’s message of communist oppression. Ames resident Bob Bartley wrote in the *Iowa State Daily* that he felt that “the real purpose of these films was not so much educating the public against Soviet communism as the advancement of certain ultra-right-wing domestic policies in the United States.”⁷⁶ In addition to his outright critique of HUAC, Bartley also provided the following four assessments, based upon what he witnessed at showings of *Communism on the Map*:

1. It would explain the “writing-off” of such allies as Great Britain and Canada. If one is sincerely interested in stopping communism, he must necessarily advocate maximum use of our allies. If he is interested in promoting neo-isolationism, he will belittle them.
2. Similarly, it would explain the constant equation of socialism and communism. If one is sincerely interested in stopping communism, he will ally himself with many socialists... If he is interested in stopping all government attempts to promote welfare of its citizens, he will brand such attempts as “socialistic” and equate this with communism.
3. It would explain the emphasis on the internal communist threat. If one is sincerely interested in stopping communism, he would realize that while an internal threat does exist, no communist coup, except in Russia itself, has ever been successful without

⁷⁵ Borchers, Harold, “Film Shocks Writer,” *Iowa State Daily*, March 17, 1961.

⁷⁶ Bartley, Bob, “Says Film Producers Have Reactionary Motive,” *Iowa State Daily*, March 29, 1961.

- prior conquest by armed troops. If he is interested in undermining our faith in our central government, he will charge that it is leading us towards communism.
4. It would explain *Communism on the Map's* proposals for fighting communism. If one is sincerely interested in stopping communism. He would realize that our central government is our most potent anti-communist weapon. If he is interested in subverting the central government. He will make the fantastic proposal of fighting communism by enervating Washington.⁷⁷

Bartley in sum asserted that the rhetoric of HUAC propaganda isolated Americans from their allies across the world, that it equated socialism and communism, effectively merging the political left into a target for the political right to attack. Bartley emphasized the problematic nature of a focus on subversion rather than a direct threat, while rejecting the idea that ideological conflict has gone underground. In fact, in his last point he entrusted the true protection of the American way of life to the central government, seeing all of the many checks and balances present in the American political system as the best and only defense against internal strife. Bartley aimed at combating fearmongering by trusting in the inherent strength of democracy; his letter did not describe communism in a positive light or even question its definition as America's ideological adversary.

While the critique of HUAC tactics from both Borchers and Bartley have differing approaches they also carry the same message, that HUAC's motives were not to prevent foreign incursion of communism but rather to push a political agenda propagated upon the backbone of

⁷⁷ Bartley, Bob, "Says Film Producers Have Reactionary Motive," *Iowa State Daily*, March 29, 1961.

hysteria. Other critics did not see the committee as inherently bad, but worried that its polarizing effect resulted in creating sympathy for the accused, rather than condemnation.

Iowans sometimes hesitated to endorse an all-out pursuit of suspected subversion. In April, 1961, the Iowa State legislature overturned a motion to create its own committee on education about communism.⁷⁸ While the reasons behind the bill failing are unclear, the initial bill specified that this planned committee would “have no power to investigate, as does the Congressional committee; and would serve to inform the public of the dangers of communism.”⁷⁹ The intention was to mirror HUAC in structure and purpose, but to be more focused upon the situation of Iowa and serve its citizens.

Politics in Iowa in 1961 were a polarized environment, but discussions were not unreasonable. Many anti-communist supporters were eager to show films that prompted discussion but not outrage. Iowa State Student, Arden Pulley told the *Iowa State Daily*, “I would like to say that even though I have shown the film strip, I am most eager to show something better if anyone will bring it forth. Hopefully this will be acceptable to the socialists and moderate leftists.”⁸⁰ Neither the pro-HUAC nor the anti-HUAC side wanted to be denied a voice, but the stakes of their disagreement sometimes masked this cordial attitude of debate. Some Ames residents wrote letters to the editor that essentially supported the right for the other side to voice their views, as long as both could be heard. In a letter to the *Ames Daily Tribune*, ISU geology student Sharon Curry complained that “I was rather alarmed at Sunday night’s showing of the film *Operation Abolition*. The notes that the panel had seemed adequately provided with

⁷⁸ Doak, “Education on Communism No Job for Committee,” *Iowa State Daily*, April 28, 1961.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Pulley, Arden, “Film Promotor Asks Unification Against Enemy,” *Iowa State Daily*, May 13, 1961.

arguments against the film, but not with the contradictions to these arguments.”⁸¹ Curry had expected to hear a level headed discourse over the merits of *Operation Abolition* but she was appalled at the turn of the discussion. She continued, “To discover the possible reason for this bias, I obtained one of the packets of information which was given to each panelist to study in preparation for the discussion. The packet furnished was entitled ‘A packet of resources on Operation Abolition’ put out by the Council for Christian Social Action, United Church of Christ. It contained six pamphlets and articles attacking the film and HUAC in addition to J. Edgar Hoover’s report “Communist Target-Youth” Six additional publications against the film (but none in favor of it) had been added to the original packet. No material specifically favoring the film was provided to the panelists, although there are several readily available government documents contradicting the objections to the film.”⁸² Sharon Curry concluded that the panelists who were supposed to be impartial moderators of discussion had been primed to push discussion in favor of protesters, thus creating an atmosphere ripe for polarization of the crowd. In perceptions of the panel as biased against HUAC, supporters of HUAC saw the evidence of their worst fears and protesters saw validation of their outrage. These events aggravated already deep ideological differences between viewers and created an aura of suspicion and doubt. HUAC’s supporters saw this backlash against HUAC as a confirmation of the validity of the film, while protesters saw the steadfast support of HUAC as systematic oppression of American freedom. The stakes were high; accusations of extremism and denunciations of HUAC’s conservative support base began to surface, as protesters against HUAC felt validated and emboldened by the post-film criticism of the anti-communist hunt.

⁸¹ Curry, Sharon, “Letter to the Editor,” *Ames Daily Tribune*, May 20, 1961, Iowa State University Special Collections, The James Hilton Papers, *Bliss Report*, Box no. 15, File no. 52.

⁸² *Ibid.*

Political ideology was at the center of these accusations and denunciations. Among other things, the HUAC's long time association with politically conservative groups such as the John Birch Society (JBS) had initially helped to build its support base. The JBS gained a reputation for militant anti-communism throughout the 1940's and 1950's, but by 1960 its direction was open to challenge. A May 12, 1961 *Iowa State Daily* article by student Ken Cargill accused the JBS of teaming up with HUAC in producing the film and even attempted to link the film's narration directly to the JBS.⁸³ Similar charges had been leveled nationwide; critics accused the HUAC of packing its film showings with JBS supporters to give itself legitimacy. But in Ames, supporters of the film were quick to react and blamed Cargill for making "a rather clumsy effort to discredit the film... [in which] Cargill had put inferences before fact."⁸⁴ In this climate, the JBS itself became newly controversial in Ames; Ames resident E. LaGrande Hobbs thought association with the JBS so taboo that he ended his letter to the *Iowa State Daily* by emphasizing that "In order to avoid any insinuations as to membership in the John Birch Society, I would like to state that I am not a member of that society or any similar society."⁸⁵

So how did student bodies across the nation go from apparent apathy towards the JBS and anti-communism to consistently debating their merits? The shift in tone can be attributed to two factors: reception of anti-communist propaganda and confirmation bias of anti-communists. At Iowa State University, at least some students had become extremely distrusting of the JBS, and the main catalyst for this reaction was the consumption of HUAC films. Both *Communism on the Map* and *Operation Abolition* had been viewed and discussed by Iowa State students. By

⁸³ Cargill, Ken, "Links Film Narration with Birch Society," *Iowa State Daily*, May 12, 1961.

⁸⁴ Hobbs, E, "Grave Errors by Daily on Birch Society Story," *Iowa State Daily*, May 17, 1961.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

the end of the showings in the spring of 1961, the Iowa State University campus was a battleground of ideology. I believe that the nature of *Communism on the Map* and *Operation Abolition* represented a drastic shift in message and also strikingly different in tone from previous messages of propaganda during the 1940s and 1950s. Those campaigns, while not the focus of this study, tended to center around individuals or events which could be labelled as communist or communist aligned. In *Operation Abolition*, we can see a paradigm shift from this earlier concept; the film attempted to implicate all of those who opposed HUAC in a plot to lower the guard of the American people. At ISU, viewers picked up on that broader agenda and reacted with either support or distrust, fostering polarization. Student Jack Kartel picked up on that atmosphere, writing, “The discussion of a few of the individuals who attempted to be openminded and objective about the whole thing fell on deaf or distorting ears. It served only to create suspicion that here by George was a real life, godless, bloody fingered communist trying to poison the minds of righteous people. The more emotionally directed discussion of the film served to fan the embers of suspicion that were already seeded into the audience. Both types of discussion combined to make it quite impossible to carry on any sort of constructive inquiry.”⁸⁶

It is also important to realize that there was a strong thread of confirmation bias woven into the rhetoric of the films. *Communism on the Map* portrayed America as the last standing bastion of capitalism against the world. The idea that the America was alone and without allies alienated all sense of positive feelings towards foreign nations, meaning that any positive thing said about another country could be construed as being pro-socialism and thus pro-communism. Under such interpretations, any critique of the United States government might represent a plot

⁸⁶ Kartel, Jack, “Emotional Appeal in Anti-Red Film,” *Iowa State Daily*, March 24, 1961.

with ulterior motives to bring down American society from within. *Operation Abolition* took this message and made it much more specific, in warning that HUAC was being targeted by communists who hoped to abolish the committee. This amounted to the creation of a confirmation bias, in which the supporters of HUAC and even those who were undecided saw any challenge to the film's merits as an attack on HUAC. Thus, this meant that any opposition was a confirmation of the film's merits and further entrenched supporters while serving as an example to those who were apathetic. These two films aimed to prime the audience to accept these assumptions, in claiming to defend the fate of the nation.

In Ames, these community discussions of *Operation Abolition* and the HUAC also prompted reexamination into the media's role in American politics. Don Whattoff, a student at ISU, wrote to the *Iowa State Daily* on June 2, 1961, expressing an opinion that shifted attention toward the supposed ethical duty of journalists and editors. Whattoff argued that communists were a subversive lot, making it hard for the government to react fast enough, but also warning that the average citizen was not equipped to act against a disguised enemy.⁸⁷ Thus, Whattoff suggested, the duty of defending Americanness "fell on the shoulders of journalists and editors."⁸⁸ These select few should be obligated to defend the minds of the American public against subversion, through careful attention to which stories they submit and those that they chose not to publish.⁸⁹ Whattoff had little to no faith in the individual to act against communism, but suggested that mobilizing the power of the press would enable America to protect itself against subversion. Significantly, in the same letter, Whattoff also passively denounced HUAC

⁸⁷Whattoff, Don, "Price of Liberty," *Ames Daily Tribune*, June 2, 1961, Iowa State University Special Collections. The James Hilton Papers, *Bliss Report*, Box no. 15, File no. 52.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

by saying that the organization was incapable of handling the threat of communism as well as the press could. Whattoff stated:

None of us desires any abridging or deferment of his rights, but at times of necessity, we must accept a temporary deferment of certain rights. During a shooting war, men do not handle guns in quite the same manner as they do in times of peace. By the same token, in the thick of this Cold War men cannot handle words and thoughts quite the same as they do in times of peace... And by the same token, you as editor of a newspaper have this same responsibility, but to a much greater degree. You are in a position to mold public opinion and mental stance, consequently your responsibility is far greater. You are in a position, by the stand you take or do not take on each and every issue, to advance the cause of freedom or to advance the cause of its mortal enemy.⁹⁰

Whattoff's article amounted to a rejection of HUAC itself alongside a defense of its core beliefs, that communists were still a major threat, but arguing that the education and management of said threat should fall on the media.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

CHAPTER 5. CONCLUSION

The Ames community's responses to the showing of HUAC's two prominent propaganda films at Iowa State University, as seen in the complaints to ISU president Hilton and in the dialogue between letter-writers to the *Iowa State Daily* and the *Ames Daily Tribune*, show the ways in which Iowans were caught up in the fear and propaganda presented to them or sought to resist those forces. Some supported the propaganda upon solely institutional bounds, while others wanted to uphold their own beliefs in American values by proxy through HUAC. Discussions ranged from the reevaluation of political rights and the role of the media, to strategies for dealing with political dissent. The long history of anti-communism in the U.S. created a dichotomy of American identity where its citizens were defined as what they were and what they were not. The question of the validity of anti-communism provides a view into the deep political, ideological and societal divides plaguing American society in the early 1960s. At its core, the ideological battle between anti-communists and protestors of HUAC in Iowa, as elsewhere in the country, partly reflected the deep political divide between conservatives and liberals. Neither side wanted to give any ground, for fear of losing its entire ideology and thus they fought tooth and nail to win out over each other.

In many ways, HUAC was already under siege when the Ames episode occurred. The entire front page of the January 2, 1961 *Washington Post* featured a petition to abolish HUAC, signed by over two hundred notable national figures, including lawyers, public officials, and academics (many from California, who felt that they had been targeted with extreme fervor by the HUAC).⁹¹ The petitioners did not deny Congress the right of oversight, but were in fact more

⁹¹ *The Washington Post*, "Petition to the House of the 87th Congress," *The Washington Post*, January 2, 1961, Iowa State University Special Collections, The John Hilton Papers, *Bliss Report*, Box no. 15, File no. 52.

focused on the abuse of that right. These critics complained that “The committee has perverted and thereby imperiled the proper and necessary powers of the congress to conduct investigations.... It has harassed Americans who work for racial equality and justice.... It has increased bitterness between racial and religious groups of our citizens which in turn has imperiled our good relations with the people of Asia, Africa, and Latin America.... It has discouraged U.S. students and scholars from studying in countries which we Americans desperately need to understand.”⁹²

The HUAC was dissolved in 1975, but its history shows how the divisions surrounding its ideas and actions reached even rural communities such as Ames, Iowa. The communist scare at Iowa State University in 1961 was a public matter; the Ames community held a discussion through the local newspapers that lasted the better part of four months, from late March until mid-June. The dialogue extended, as citizens read the ongoing coverage, then wrote back to the editor to voice their own opinions. This point represents one of the most significant parts of the 1961 scare, the way events on ISU’s campus surrounding the showing of *Operation Abolition* brought Iowans into a wider discussion of communism, American patriotism, and community values.

Conservatives backing HUAC saw liberals as blind to the threats at hand. Liberals saw HUAC and its support base as willing to denounce all rights and even transgress the constitution to defeat an imagined enemy. Neither side was going to budge nor compromise. Giving up a single inch of ground mean the complete and utter undermining of one’s political ideology, but at

⁹² Ibid.

least in Ames, some believed that American democracy meant that both sides should have a chance to be heard.

These discussions of anti-communism have provided a picture of a high-stakes argument that to many Americans, was life or death. This moment in 1961 encapsulates a larger ideological struggle against communism and a discussion of where the line between personal rights and security should be drawn. In Ames, these discussions were recorded in letters to the editor of local papers. Contained in these letters are the reactions to HUAC propaganda which at their core expressed Americans' views of ideological threats to their identity. The episode in Ames indicates that the midwestern United States was not a backwater that ignored or blindly followed national sentiment. Instead, residents actively engaged ideas and controversy, providing their own local discourse on Cold War tensions. From supporters of HUAC to HUAC's critics, their stories tell of an ideological battlefield whose catalyst was the viewing of the HUAC films *Communism on the Map* and *Operation Abolition*. These films provided a metaphorical prodding that brought out the underlying political, ideological and social strife which had been lying just beneath the surface. What these months in 1961 show is that Iowans were part of a national discourse and were contributing their thoughts and beliefs to a problem that the nation was facing at large. All in all, this episode in Ames and ISU history provides a deep insight into what Iowans believed was American, at a point in time when the whole idea of America seemed to be under the looming threat of communism.

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