



John Earl Haynes, “The Cold War Debate Continues: A Traditionalist View of Historical Writing on Domestic Communism and Anti-Communism,” *Journal of Cold War Studies*, Volume 2, Issue 1 (Winter 2000): 76-115.

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I welcome the opportunity to respond to Professor Schrecker’s commentary on “The Cold War Continues: A Traditionalist View of Historical Writing on Domestic Communism and Anti-Communism” in *The Journal of Cold War Studies*. Her *Many Are the Crimes: McCarthyism in America* is easily the most impressive revisionist book of recent years. Consequently, I give close attention to her comments.

Professor Schrecker is “not sure” why I think that historical writing about American communism and anticommunism will continue “for many years to come.” To her those matters are “redolent of political antiquarianism,” and have “run out of steam”; and she asks “will the domestic Cold War never end?” She is not the only writer to complain. Last year *The New York Times Sunday Magazine*, which rarely carries articles about scholarly debates, devoted a lengthy cover story (eight color photographs, two full page) to this historical argument. The article, “Cold War Without End,” had a number of themes, but one dominated; a complaint that the author did not want to hear any more, judging the issue chiefly interested only Jews concerned about “acceptance and assimilation,” certain persons with “unresolved feelings of personal betrayal” and the “Oedipal conflicts of red-diaper babies,” all of whom had failed to “process the news that the war is over.”[1] Professor Anna Kasten Nelson in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* recently brushed aside two books on Soviet espionage and one on the Cold War with a “it is time to move on.”[2] One can not help but notice the fervor and the length with which disinterest to these issues are proclaimed. It also seems ill-suited to call upon historians to “move on” because the events in question are “over” when virtually all of what historians do is about events that are “over”. Rome fell a long time ago, but historical study of the Roman empire is still lively. The English civil war, the American civil war, World War II, and the Holocaust are over, but calls for historians to “move on” from these subjects would, if anyone were bold enough to make them, go unheeded.

The Cold War on the ground is over and the threat of a civilization-destroying nuclear war has receded. The USSR is no more and communism, although not gone, is going. Consequently the Cold War and communism are no longer staples of current politics. But communism and the Cold War in history are far from over. This past century has seen war, revolution, mass murder, human butchery, terror, and cruelty on an extraordinary scale. Communism and anticommunism played central roles in that ghastly century and making historical sense of these appalling phenomena will be a major preoccupation of scholars in the coming decades. Further fueling this is the increasing availability of documentary sources that will allow historians to understand with greater clarity matters that were ambiguous. The end of the Cold War and the passage of time will also allow more of the perspective provided by distance from the events that is one of the

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virtues of historical scholarship. Far from the antiquarianism that Schrecker sees as the future for this area, more likely is a flourishing of historical study of the Cold War in both its domestic and foreign aspects. Professor Schrecker takes too negative a view about the availability of new archival records. While some collections available in Moscow in 1992-95 have been closed, most have remained open and new collections made available. The Library of Congress and the Russian State Archive

of Social and Political History (RGASPI) have microfilmed the entire CPUSA collection, more than 430,000 pages, and that microfilm is newly available at the Manuscript Reading Room of the Library of Congress. This is a massive set of material and there are hundreds of files in that collection that no American historian has looked at as yet. In 2002 the International Computerization of the Comintern Archive project, of which the Library of Congress is the American partner, will make conveniently available as digitized images a million pages of the records of the Communist International at RGASPI. Included in these pages will be all of the documents in the Comintern's regional secretariats with hundreds of thousands of pages of reports from local Communist leaders and C.I. representatives on Communist activities all across the globe. Far from being a time to move on, this is a time for historians to move in to these as yet only partially exploited archival resources.

Professor Schrecker states that "Haynes overlooks other sources ... FBI files, in particular..." This is not correct. In my JCWS article on page 100 I specify that my and Klehr's *Venona: Decoding Soviet Espionage in America* is based on "FBI files" as well as the decrypted Venona messages and Comintern and CPUSA documents from RGASPI. In *Venona* we said this: "In the late 1970s the FBI began releasing material from its hitherto secret files as a consequence of the passage of the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA). Although this act opened some files to public scrutiny, it has not as yet provided access to the full range of FBI investigative records....Even given these hindrances, however, each year more files are opened and the growing body of FBI documentation has significantly enhanced the opportunity for a reconstruction of what actually happened." [3]

Schrecker is also incorrect that I overlook "memoirs and oral histories of American Communists." Such sources are cited frequently in Klehr and my books on American communism, and in *Venona* we state that "...in this volume Venona will not be treated in isolation. The documentation of Venona is integrated with a broad range of other corroborative evidence, including testimony, both written and oral, by a wide variety of persons spread over many decades. It includes voluntary statements from defectors from Soviet intelligence, reluctant testimony from persons under legal compulsion, candid discourse gathered by listening devices, as well as information available in published works." [4]

She also says that I have "not produced the usual more or less disinterested survey of the scholarly literature on domestic communism and anticommunism." I have been writing in this field a long time and "disinterested" surveys are not "usual" in the sense that she and I would both agree that they are disinterested. Take, for example, Michael E. Brown's "Introduction: The History of the History of U.S. Communism" in *New Studies in the Politics and Culture of U.S. Communism*. Schrecker was one of the essayists, all revisionists, published in this volume. Brown dismissed the writings of Theodore Draper, Joseph Starobin, and Harvey Klehr,

historians whose work I regard as exemplary, as not scholarship at all, stating that their texts were only “an extraordinary overtly tendentious type of satire.” Brown linked the appearance in the 1980s of traditionalist (he uses the term “orthodox”) historical writings about American communism to “the introduction of a durable fascist element at the center of the United States polity,” an apparent reference to the election of President Ronald Regan. In contrast, he praised the work of Professor Schrecker and other revisionists, commenting that “what appears to be sympathy” for the CPUSA in their work “is in fact simply a willingness to accept responsibility for the only perspective from which a critical historiography can proceed.”[5]

Professor Schrecker states that since “the dissolution of the Soviet bloc and the opening of the Kremlin archives brings us to the present wave of historiography, one dominated largely by traditionalists...” As regard the latter point, I wish I agreed, but at best it is only partially correct. The new archival material has energized scholars of a traditionalist perspective, and their work has made a difference in how many historians now view the era. But in my area of concern to say that current historiography is “dominated” by traditionalists is an overstatement. Those historians who write on American communism and anticommunism in a traditionalist fashion have, depending on whom and how many you wish to identify, written scores of scholarly books, some of them path breaking original research, published by a variety of respected university presses. Yet these same scholars are excluded from publishing essays in the discipline’s most prestigious journals, the *Journal of American History* and the *American Historical Review*. Lowell Dyson’s 1972 “The Red Peasant International in America” was the last time any of these traditionalists had an essay on domestic communism, anticommunism, or Soviet espionage published in the *Journal of American History*. The *American Historical Review* has a similar record of excluding traditionalists. On the other hand, over these past thirty-eight years these two journals have published dozens of essays by revisionist scholars on one or another aspect of American communism (positive) and domestic anticommunism (harshly negative). I hope this thirty-eight year exclusion is ending, but it hasn’t yet.

Professor Schrecker also taxes me for what is not in my JCWS essay, discussions of historical writings on the FBI and of some of the early work on McCarthyism. She could add I didn’t discuss the major works from the vast literature on Communism in Hollywood, among central and eastern European ethnic Americans, or the party’s influence on American theater and music. The major books and articles on all these subjects are covered in my *Communism and Anti-Communism in American Life: an Annotated Bibliography*, but that was a book of 321 pages while the JCWS piece was an essay of 49 pages. [6] In an essay one must pick a few major themes and ration the number of books discussed. Professor Schrecker also says that I “inexplicably” ignore Robin D. G. Kelley’s *Hammer and Hoe: Alabama Communists During the Great Depression*. It is explicable and, in any event, his book isn’t entirely ignored. In my JCWS essay I wrote that “The ‘new historians’ [as the revisionists of the late 1970s, 1980s, and early 1990s often termed themselves] have produced hundreds of essays and dozens of books on an astounding array of topics: Communist influence on folk music, drama, poetry, and various literary figures; Communist activity among Jews, Finns, Italians, blacks, Mexicans, and Slavs of various sorts; CPUSA support for sharecroppers in Alabama and Arkansas, grain farmers in Iowa, South Dakota, and Minnesota, and dairy farmers in New York; Communist influence on social gospel Protestants, professional social workers, and socially conscious lawyers; Communist influence in sports; and Communist activities in the labor movement.” I alluded to

Kelley's book with the phrase "CPUSA support for sharecroppers in Alabama." But I did not discuss it specifically because it was one of many works, some of excellent quality, described in my next statement: "Taken as a whole, this literature is strong on periphery and weak at the core." [7] The Black Communists of Alabama are an interesting topic that needs and deserves historical study, one Kelley has provided. But they are very much "periphery." There were very few of them, their sharecroppers union lasted but a short while, left no institutional residue, and had little impact on Alabama history. In terms of the CPUSA, the bulk of its membership, organizational activity, and impact was in the urban North and West Coast, not the rural South. American Communists had a significant influence in the industrial labor movement in the North and far West and on politics in those same areas. Its impact on the agricultural South was insignificant.

Professor Schrecker also states that "Haynes is not, I think, particularly interested in anticommunism" and devotes "little attention to the latter." The JCWS essay concentrated on American communism. But my writing shows ample interest in anticommunism. My *Dubious Alliance: The Making of Minnesota's DFL Party* recounts the 1930s-1940s struggle within the labor and liberal movement in Minnesota between anti-Communist liberals and a Communist-led Popular Front faction. My *Red Scare or Red Menace: American Communism and Anticommunism in the Cold War Era* devotes separate chapters to "The House Committee on Un-American Activities," "Varieties of American Anticommunism" (covering evangelical Christians and Roman Catholics, ACTU, the Socialist party, Trotskyism, Lovestone, and labor movement anticommunism), "The Struggle for the Soul of American Liberalism" (concentrates on the ADA anti-Communism liberalism), "Partisanship and Anticommunism" (discusses Republican anticommunism and the role of Nixon and McCarthy), and "Anticommunism at High Tide" (examines the FBI and executive branch legal offensive against the CPUSA, the development of loyalty-security programs, and the literature of exposure). [8]

Professor Schrecker also writes that "despite Haynes' insistence, espionage is not the main story of American communism..." I have never insisted on anything like that. In *Venona*, Klehr and I wrote that while "espionage was a regular activity of the American Communist party... to say that the CPUSA was nothing but a Soviet fifth column in the Cold War would be an exaggeration; it still remains true that the CPUSA's chief task was the promotion of communism and the interests of the Soviet Union through political means." [9] Of the seven books that I have authored or co-authored on aspects of the history of American communism, espionage was a central theme only in two.

Professor Schrecker also says she finds "personally offensive" my generalization that "...most of the revisionists shared a hostility to capitalism, anti-Communism, and the American Constitutional order.... They saw American Communists, whatever their faults, as kindred spirits in the first against capitalism and established American institutions." Let me state the basis for this generalization. Many revisionists explicitly defined their historical work as part of a radical agenda. Paul Lyons, an early revisionist whose 1982 *Philadelphia Communists, 1936-1956* cited by many as a model revisionist grass-roots study, stated that he regarded Communists as "people committed to a vision of social justice and a strategy of social change that make them my political forebears. And like my biological parents, they merit a love that includes--in fact, requires--recognition of their faults and errors. Needless to say, such a love also rests on an

honoring.” He stated further that he regarded his book as a “contribution” toward the achievement of “socialist cultural hegemony.”[10] In a 1985 bibliographic essay, Maurice Isserman, a leading revisionist figure, allowed that the “new historians” had their origins in radical political commitment. He maintained, however, that their perspective later shifted away from a partisan “search for a usable past.”[11] In his case that was true, but other revisionists have retained their commitment to blending history with political action. In 1994 Allan Wald, a revisionist who has published numerous essays and books on cultural history, most notably *The New York Intellectuals: The Rise and Decline of the Anti-Stalinist Left from the 1930s to the 1980s*, wrote that “United States capitalism and imperialism remain absolute horrors for the poor and people of color of the world, and ultimately hazardous to the health of the rest of us. Therefore, the construction of an effective oppositional movement in the United States remains the most rewarding, and the most stimulating, task for radical cultural workers. That is why I choose to assess the experience of Communist writers during the Cold War era from the perspective of learning lessons, finding ancestors, and resurrecting models of cultural practice that can contribute to the development of a seriously organized, pluralistic, democratic, and culturally rich left-wing movement.” [12]

As for the stance Professor Schrecker takes toward communism and Communists, in her 1998 *Many are the Crimes* she states that “I do not think that I conceal my sympathy for many of the men and women who suffered during the McCarthy era nor my agreement with much (though not all) of their political agenda.” Nor has she concealed her attitude toward capitalism. She concluded the same book with the statement that “only now, under the impact of a globalized, yet atomized, capitalist system, political repression may have become so diffuse that we do not recognize it when it occurs.”[13]

Professor Schrecker judges my views of American communism to be lacking “complexity” and “nuance” and complains that I seem “unable to accept an interpretation of American communism that looks at its achievements as well as its sins (I suppose Haynes would prefer the work ‘crimes’ here.” She supposes wrong. While I have likely at some point used the term crime in regard to some particular aspect of Communist activity, it is not one of my habitual descriptives. It is Professor Schrecker, not me, who has put the word “crimes” in the title of her book, and she was referring to anticommunism.

I don’t agree with her assessment that my approach to Communist history lacks complexity or nuance but I agree that a historical treatment of communism and anticommunism should embody those traits. One of the points of disagreement between us is my view that her approach to anticommunism lacks those traits. She demonizes opposition to communism. Fervid opposition to communism, Schrecker explained, “tap[ped] into something dark and nasty in the human soul,” and she held it responsible for many of the ills of American society since 1945. Her *Many are the Crimes* indicted anticommunism for destroying the civil rights movement’s ties to the “anti-imperialist left” and thereby “indirectly strengthening [Africa’s] colonial regimes,” held anticommunism responsible for the Taft-Hartley act and added “debilitating as Taft-Hartley was, it was not solely responsible for labor’s disastrous failure to replenish its ranks. Here, again, the anticommunist crusade bears much of the responsibility, for it diverted the mainstream unions from organizing the unorganized.” Anti-Communists also bore responsibility for the failure of national health insurance, driving talented people from government service, and

biasing foreign intelligence and foreign policy analysis. Anticommunism's baleful influence included the slow development of feminism, elimination of talented musicians from orchestras, dull television programming, promoting in Hollywood "the good guy/bad guy polarization of the Westerns, the unthinking patriotism of the war movies, the global triumphalism of the bible epics, and the constricted sexuality of the romantic comedies." Because of McCarthyism "in the fine arts, for example, serious painters abandoned realism." Anticommunism also got the blame for retarding the progress of science, crippling higher education, and Nixon's abuse of presidential powers. Schrecker has stated that the "term McCarthyism is invariably pejorative" and has applied that pejorative term to any opposition to communism. She termed Joseph McCarthy, his allies and imitators as McCarthyists but added that there were "many McCarthyisms" including "a liberal version ... and there was even a left-wing version composed of anti-Stalinist radicals." Of the latter, she took the view that "Socialists and other left-wing anti-Communists functioned as a kind of intelligence service for the rest of the [anti-Communist] network." If she had a positive evaluation for any sort or variety of opposition to Communism in Many are the Crimes, I missed it. Weighted in the balance and found wanting are Harry Truman, the Americans for Democratic Action, the AFL, the CIO's non-Communist majority under Philip Murray, Trotskyists, Lovestoneists, Socialists, Catholics, the FBI, Partisan Review and the "New York intellectuals," Sidney Hook, Hubert Humphrey, Morris Ernst, Norman Thomas, Walter Reuther, and on and on. Not only "many are the crimes," but many are the criminals. [14]

Professor Schrecker calls on us to "understand (not judge, but understand)" what motivated those in the 1930s and 1940s to cooperate with Soviet espionage against the United States. Considering her frequent and harshly negative judgment of anti-Communists of the 1930-1950 era, I am not persuaded by her call for us not to "judge" those who assisted Soviet espionage. But I agree that we need to understand their motivation and actions. And I hope, at long last, we are at a point where that is an appropriate question. As long as the reigning consensus was that Rosenberg, Hiss, White, and the rest were innocents falsely accused of espionage this was not an appropriate question. But I would add that historians must also "understand" why most Americans found Soviet espionage an outrage and reacted with fury and anger at those Americans who assisted Soviet espionage and at those political groups and figures who seemed indifferent to this espionage. And I see no objection to offering a bit of judgment as well.

Professor Schrecker in Many are the Crimes says that those who assisted Soviet espionage "...were already committed to Communism and they viewed what they were doing as their contribution to the cause ... [and] ... it is important to realize that as Communists these people did not subscribe to traditional forms of patriotism; they were internationalists whose political allegiances transcended national boundaries. They thought they were 'building .. a better world for the masses,' not betraying their country." Here Professor Schrecker and I have a basic disagreement. She treats this as an exculpatory explanation. I regard it as justifying the suspicion with which security officials regarded Communists who worked in sensitive positions. If one wished to protect American secrets, it would be foolish to trust someone whose "political allegiances transcended national boundaries," "did not subscribe to traditional forms of patriotism," or regarded given secrets to the USSR as "not betraying their country" but as "building .. a better world for the masses." [15]

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Professor Schrecker states that “Haynes is not the only critic of my book to take me to task for not having taken *The Haunted Wood* into account even though it was published nearly a year after my own book appeared.” Professor Schrecker is mistaken. Nowhere in my essay, nor any other venue, have I made this criticism. What I found fault with was her claim in *Many are the Crimes* that “a careful reading of the Venona decrypts leaves the impression ... that the KGB officers stationed in the United States may have been trying to make themselves look good to their Moscow superiors by portraying some of their casual contacts as having been more deeply involved with the Soviet cause than they actually were” and her assertion that Venona messages regarding Harry Dexter White could be regarded not as espionage but White “merely making small talk” at diplomatic social events. Because Klehr and I took an entirely different view of those messages in *Venona*, I went to some pains in my JCWS essay to go over this point. In her commentary Professor Schrecker has revised her view of White and now agrees that he cooperated with Soviet intelligence. At some point, those who have only lately come to accept the evidence of extensive Soviet espionage in the United States and the assistance provided to it by American Communists should ask themselves what in their conception of the history of the 1930s and 1940s led them to a mistaken conclusion about these matters and how they should change that interpretive framework. [16]

I hope the members of H-Diplo who are interested in this subject will read my essay in *The Journal of Cold War Studies*. Some of the issues Professor Schrecker raises are also discussed in my response, found at <http://www.johnearlhaynes.org/page47.html>, to her and Maurice Isserman’s “The Right’s Cold War Revision,” *The Nation* (24/32 July 2000). Also at this site is an earlier and lengthier version of the JCWS essay: “An Essay on Historical Writing on Domestic Communism and Anti-Communism” at <http://www.johnearlhaynes.org/page67.html>.

Let me close by expressing my appreciation to Professor Schrecker for her serious attention to my essay and by thanks to H-Diplo for the opportunity to respond.

Notes:

1. Jacob Weisberg, “Cold War Without End,” *New York Times Sunday Magazine* (28 November 1999), 116-123, 155-158. These themes prompted one amused Jewish colleague to congratulate me on having been promoted to the status of honorary Jew by *New York Times*.
2. Anna Kasten Nelson, “Illuminating the Twilight Struggle: New Interpretations of the Cold War,” *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (25 June 1999), B6. The three books were Allen Weinstein and Alexander Vassiliev’s *The Haunted Wood: Soviet Espionage in America -- The Stalin Era*, John Louis Gaddis’s *Now We Know: Rethinking Cold War History*, and my and Harvey Klehr’s *Venona*.
3. John Earl Haynes and Harvey Klehr, *Venona: Decoding Soviet Espionage in America* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1999), p. 19.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 40.
5. Michael E. Brown, “Introduction: The History of the History of U.S. Communism” in Frank Rosengarten, Michael Brown, Randy Martin and George Snedeker, eds., *New Studies in the Politics and Culture of U.S. Communism*, (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1993), pp. 21 & 28. By “critical historiography” Brown meant critical of American society, not critical of the CPUSA. Authors in this volume include Rosalyn Baxandall, John Gerassi, Marvin Gettleman, Gerald Horne, Roger Keeran, Mark Naison, Stephen Leberstein, Ellen Schrecker, Annette Rubinstein, Alan Wald, and Anders Stephanson. Wald later disassociated himself from Brown’s essay. Alan

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Wald, "Search for a Method: Recent Histories of American Communism," *Radical History Review* 61 (1995), n. 10, p. 173.

6. John Earl Haynes, *Communism and Anti-Communism in the United States an Annotated Guide to Historical Writings* (New York: Garland, 1987).

7. Kelley, Robin D.G. *Hammer and Hoe: Alabama Communists During the Great Depression*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990; John Earl Haynes, "The Cold War Continues: A Traditionalist View of Historical Writing on Domestic Communism and Anti-Communism," *The Journal of Cold War Studies* 2, 1 (Winter 2000), p. 86.

8. John Earl Haynes, *Dubious Alliance the Making of Minnesota's DFL Party* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984); John Earl Haynes, *Red Scare or Red Menace? American Communism and Anticommunism in the Cold War Era*, (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1996).

9. Haynes and Klehr, *Venona*, p. 7.

10. Paul Lyons, *Philadelphia Communists, 1936-1956* (Philadelphia, Temple University Press, 1982), pp. 18 & 238.

11. Maurice Isserman, "Three Generations: Historians View American Communism," *Labor History* 26, 4 (Fall 1985), p. 537.

12. Alan Wald, "Communist Writers Fight Back in Cold War Amerika" in *Styles of Cultural Activism: From Theory and Pedagogy to Women, Indians and Communism*, Philip Goldstein, ed., (Newark, Del.: University of Delaware Press, 1994), 218; Alan Wald, *The New York Intellectuals: The Rise and Decline of the Anti-Stalinist Left from the 1930s to the 1980s* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1987).

13. Ellen Schrecker, *Many Are the Crimes: McCarthyism in America* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1998), pp. xviii & 415.

14. *Ibid.*, pp. x, xii, 46, 75-76, 375-376, 381, 390, 399-402, 415.

15. *Ibid.*, 181.

16. *Ibid.*, 180.

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