

The Communist Ghost

On Friday, July 12, 1963 Mississippi Governor Ross Barnett told the US Senate Commerce Committee that “Communists are ... championing the cause of the Negroes in America as an important part of their drive to mobilize both colored and white for the overthrow of our Government.... It is obvious to many of us throughout the country that the racial agitation, strife, and conflict that has been stirred up throughout our Nation is largely Communist inspired.” (Senate Commerce, 1963, 359-61) This was made at a hearing on a bill to “eliminate discrimination in public accommodations affecting interstate commerce.” While the claim seemed irrelevant to the matter under consideration, the theme was not new. The Communist ghost had been haunting the South since the highly publicized Scottsboro trials of the 1930s, when the Communist Party (CP) took over defense of nine black teenage boys accused of raping two white girls in Alabama in 1931. (Kluger, 1975, 144-49, 153-4) Politicians used it to scare the populace into believing that they were under imminent threat. In the minds of most white Southerners, “integration” and “Communism” were two sides of the same coin. (Sokol, 2007, 38)

The DoJ had monitored Negro activity during World War I when it was feared that German spies were fomenting racial antagonism in the South. Because the IWW had tried to organize black and white together it was often identified as the white source of black insurrection. After the 1917 Russian Revolution there was wide-spread hysteria that anarchists and radicals were organizing for a revolution in the U.S. The Red Summer of 1919 led the press to take up the idea that “Bolshevist agitation” was causing Negroes to take up arms even when there was no evidence to back it up. In the red scare of the 1920s, Communists and radicals generally took the place of German spies and the Wobblies as perpetrators of racial discontent. This view particularly fit the mind set of white Southerners, who simply did not believe that Negroes were capable of organizing themselves. If Negroes were rioting, or peacefully protesting, or simply speaking out against white repression, it had to be because they were being provoked to do so by white subversives. (Record, 1951, 24-25; Ellis, 1994)

Throughout the 1930s the CP made major efforts to recruit Negroes. It was particularly active in Alabama, in part due to the industrial city of Birmingham. In 1931 it organized the Alabama Sharecroppers Union which tried to raise wages and crop prices. Although open to all, within two years all its members were Negro. The CP was so much more successful in organizing poor Negroes in the South than poor whites that white Southerners called it the “nigger party.” (Kelley, 1990, quote on 92, 156) Outside the South the CP picketed hotels, theaters and restaurants which did not admit Negroes or made them use segregated facilities. (Meier and Rudwick, 1976, 339-40) In 1934-35 it published *The Negro Liberator*, a biweekly newspaper, out of New York. (<https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn91074710/>) The CP promoted several Negroes to high-profile positions within the Party. It held highly publicized “trials” of party members for “white chauvinism” (i.e. racism). CP-controlled unions promoted racial equality despite contrary views of many white members. These actions persuaded some Negroes that the CP was serious about tackling their problems. (Sitkoff, 1978, 145-49, 157-59; Record, 1951, 26, 72-73 87-89; Arnesen, 2006, 32-33; Gilmore, 2008, 70-77)

The CP created numerous front groups and captured others. Among them were the

League of Struggle for Negro Rights, which organized support for the Scottsboro Boys, the National Negro Congress (NNC) formed in 1935 and the Southern Negro Youth Congress (SNYC) founded in 1937. They campaigned against fascism as well as the elimination of race discrimination. When Hitler and Stalin signed a nonaggression pact in 1939, the CP changed its position on Nazism and war. When Germany invaded Russia in 1941, the CP pivoted again. Each time, the CP compelled these organizations to follow suit. Consequently its appeal to Negroes plummeted and these organizations declined. By 1947 the NNC was dead; SNYC died a year later. (Arnesen, 2006, 15-16) After the end of WWII the Party tried to take over the NAACP, despite having vilified it during the 1930s as a bourgeois tool of American capitalism. It succeeded in capturing a few branches, mostly on the coasts, but could not penetrate the national office. It was thrown out when the national NAACP closed those branches and created new ones. The Party's inability to attract Negro support was readily seen in the election of 1948. Despite a major appeal for the Negro vote by the CP influenced Progressive Party, the results were meager. Those Negroes who could vote, largely voted for Truman. (Record, 1951, 194-5, 199, 207, 249, 262-8, 281-3, 285; Jonas, 2005, 135-37, 142, 143-44, 145)

As fascism grew in Europe, Congress created the House Committee on Un-American Activities (HUAC) in 1938 to investigate "the extent, character, and object of un-American propaganda activities" on the eve of World War II. After the war was over, HUAC looked for subversives, real and imagined, in federal agencies and labor unions. In 1949, HUAC held hearings on "Communist Infiltration of Minority Groups" to highlight the claim that the Communists wanted to create a Negro Soviet Republic which would unite the blackbelt counties into a separate country. The report included copies of pamphlets and a long list of Communist-front organizations supposedly set up to draw Negroes into the Party. Most of those organizations were defunct. (Quote from H. Res. 282, May 1938; HUAC, Hearings, July 14, 1949)

Southerners used fear of Communism to portray racial liberalism, no matter how mild, as subversion. When the Southern Conference on Human Welfare (SCHW) held its first meeting in the Birmingham Municipal Auditorium in November of 1938, the fact that a quarter of the twelve hundred attendees were Negro attracted a lot of attention. On the second day the police told them that letting people sit where they wanted violated the city's segregation ordinances and they had to separate. Expressing regret, they did, but passed a resolution condemning the laws that compelled segregation. The resulting negative publicity led elected officials to distance themselves from the organization. (WP 11-24-38, X23; 11-30-38, 11; Couch, 1938, 169; Krueger, 1967, 29; Reed, 1991, 17)

For ten years SCHW worked on enlarging the Southern electorate by seeking to eliminate the poll tax, supporting labor unions, and opposing lynching, issues which were also important to the Communist Party. Party members were among the founders of the SCHW and also among its most active members. The SCHW was perpetually short of funds. Party members were more willing than most to work for little or no money. (Krueger, 1967, 60-93) While they did not control the SCHW, "the red taint stuck with it" causing some prominent Southern liberals to stay away and making it more difficult to raise money. (Sosna, 1977, 142) In a 1947 official *Report*, HUAC used those associations to "expose" the SCHW as a "deviously camouflaged Communist front operation." In 1948 the organization split between those who supported Henry Wallace's campaign for President and those who supported Truman. This was the final blow to an

organization that had always struggled to survive. (Krueger, 1967, 167, 186; Sosna, 1977, 145; Salmond, 1978, 435n4; Lewis, 2004, 22-23, 60; Kelley, 1991, 184-6; HUAC, 1947, quote on 17; Reed, 1991, 127)

The idea that anyone who espoused equality, or even just opportunity, for Negroes must be a Communist was repeatedly hammered by Southern political leaders during the second red scare. In his 1948 campaign for President, South Carolina Governor Strom Thurmond said that Truman's "so-called civil rights program... has its origin in Communism." (NYT 8-22-48,13; WP 8-22-48, M2) In 1950, Rep. John Rankin (D. MS) denounced the editor of an Ole Miss student newspaper for writing that "qualified Negro applicants should be allowed to enter the School of Law..." Rankin ranted that this "editorial was influenced by the very Communist element with which we are now locked in a death struggle." (Harkey, 1967, 69)

After WW II, Communists were persecuted and prosecuted. A mere allegation could cost jobs and cause rejections. In 1949 New York City Councilman Benjamin J. Davis Jr., a black man, was convicted of conspiracy to overthrow the government because he was a member of the CP. He served three years in prison. His father had been a member of the Republican National Committee from Georgia. (NYT 10-29-45, 19; 8-24-64, 27) In a lengthy 1956 report to President Eisenhower, FBI director J. Edgar Hoover estimated that Negroes were seven percent of a national Party membership of "slightly less than 20,000" and that it had "failed to attract even a significant minority of the Negroes in the United States to its program." (Hoover, 1956, ii, v) The CP's work on racial issues did have an impact on progressive whites. It publicized the wide variety of injustices suffered by Negroes in the North as well as the South. It spread throughout the left and labor movement leadership the idea that segregation and blatant race discrimination were unacceptable and should not be ignored. (Record, 1951, 115)

A year after the 1954 *Brown* decision, Senator Eastland called for an investigation of the "subversive influence" behind the decision because some of the social scientists cited in it were connected to "the worldwide Communist conspiracy." (Bartley, 1969, quote on 119, 185; Sokol, 2007, 40) That same year the white Citizens' Councils published a little book by Mississippi Circuit Judge Tom Brady on the evils of "amalgamation." The back cover proclaimed that "Integration of the races and the destruction of White America is one of Communistic Russia's objectives." In October of 1955 Georgia Attorney General Eugene Cook gave a speech on "The Ugly Truth about the NAACP" which was reprinted as a pamphlet and widely circulated. He told the Georgia Peace Officers Association that "I refer to the subversive designs behind the current crusade of the misnamed National Association for the Advancement of Colored People and its fellow traveling fronts to force upon the South the Communist-inspired doctrine of racial integration and amalgamation." As one example of this he said that the NAACP Inc. Fund's chief attorney, Thurgood Marshall, had once been an officer of the National Lawyer's Guild, which, he said, was a Communist front. In 1956 South Carolina Governor George Timmerman, Jr. told the state Democratic convention that "Racial mixing in the South is a very real and very meaningful part of the Communist conspiracy." (Quint, 1958, quote on 132; see generally Lewis, 2006, 42-44, 95-98)

As the civil rights movement gained in strength and popularity, red-baiting was used to discredit it nationally as well as locally by associating it with the evil of Communism. (Woods, 2004, 5; Carter, 1995, 14) Southern politicians had a lot of practice with this tactic, having used

it to attack unions attempting to organize workers. Just as the Soviet Union used the South's treatment of Negroes as a weapon in the international propaganda war with the US, so did the South use Communism as a weapon in the national propaganda war with the civil rights movement. The movement claimed the moral high-ground in its struggle with the institutions of white supremacy; the South tried to associate it with "evil" in order to maintain those institutions.

The white South was aided in this propaganda war by FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover. Born in segregated Washington, D.C. in 1895, Hoover absorbed the racial attitudes of his white contemporaries who only saw Negroes as menials and servants. White supremacy was the dominant view nationally as well as in the South during his formative years. All but a few whites shared fundamental assumptions about Negro incapacities, though within this consensus there were wide variations. Hoover believed that every organization which questioned the racial status quo was inherently subversive. (Schlesinger, 1978, 291; O'Reilly, 1989, 10)

Hoover worked closely with Congressional Committees that sought to investigate and expose subversives, in particular the House Committee on Un-American Activities (HUAC), the Senate Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations (SPSI) of the Government Operations Committee, and the Senate Internal Security Subcommittee (SISS) of the Judiciary Committee. The FBI provided them with information and names for use in public hearings and statements in the *Congressional Record*. The two Senate Committees were chaired by Southerners throughout the civil rights era. The chairmanship of HUAC alternated between Southerners and Northerners. The SPSI was Senator Joe McCarthy's (R. WI) vehicle for his Communist witch-hunts until he was replaced with Sen John L. McClellan of Arkansas in 1955. After Sen. Eastland (D. MS) became chair of the SISS in 1955, he made extensive use of information from the FBI to attack the civil rights movement. These Committees often hired former FBI agents to staff their hearings and write their reports. The results would then be sent to press and patriotic groups under the imprimatur of a governmental body. (Woods, 2004, 5, 56; Schrecker, 2002, 17)

All of these committees also employed professional anti-Communists at one time or another, many of whom had been members of the Communist Party. The CP had a talent for making enemies, especially among those who had once been in or close to the Party. Some left the Party sufficiently angry and bitter to spend their lives trying to put it out of business. They made a career of exposing persons and groups who might have any association with Communists, no matter how remote, or just believed in some of the same goals. During the anti-Communist crusades of the 1950s, they found ready clients among those whose targets were labor unions, government agencies and liberals. Testimony from former Party members and leftists added legitimacy to accusations that might have little evidentiary basis. (Schrecker, 2002, 12-19)

Hoover frequently testified about Communist infiltration in the civil rights movement before Congressional committees. Usually this testimony was in closed session, but selected information from it would often be released to the press at a later date. His January 29, 1964 testimony before a House appropriations subcommittee was made public in late April, when the Senate was debating the civil rights bill. The headlines read: "Reds Found Active in Rights Movement" (*Chicago Tribune*), "Reds Influencing Rights Movement, Hoover Says" (*Los Angeles Times*), "Hoover Says Reds Exploit Negroes" (*New York Times*), and "Hoover Finds

Rights Drive Red-Tinged” (*Washington Post*). This confirmed everything white Southerners already believed and left them puzzled as to how the rest of the country could continue to support the movement.

As part of the red scare that accompanied the Cold War, many states established their own “little HUACs” in various guises. While all hunted for subversives, not all searched in the same places. Outside the South, labor unions and universities were popular hunting grounds. One of the longest-lasting red-hunters was the California Senate Fact-Finding Subcommittee on Un-American Activities (SUAC). In 1940 it started a war with the University of California that lasted thirty years. Its 1965 *Report* in which I was named for my participation in the Berkeley Free Speech Movement and other student political groups was just one bullet in its gun though it wasn’t aimed at the students so much as at the President of the entire University system. SUAC wanted the Regents of the University to fire Clark Kerr because he had refused to co-operate with its effort to purge faculty rumored to harbor Communist sympathies or liberal tendencies. In 1948 SUAC co-sponsored a two-day Interstate Legislative Conference on Un-American Activities in Los Angeles. Ten state governments were represented along with “several patriotic and veterans groups.” (Heale, 1998, 7-8, 18)

Southern states didn’t create little HUACs until they were spooked by the *Brown* decision. Then they saw these committees as a way to investigate and expose the subversives who promoted integration, especially the NAACP. Most such bodies didn’t have “Un-American Activities” in their names, but they did the same things as those that did. Some were legislative committees; some were executive commissions. Some states created both. They included the Georgia Commission on Education (GCE, founded 1953), the Louisiana Joint Legislative Committee on Segregation (1954) aka the Joint Legislative Committee on Un-American Activities (LUAC), the Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission (MSSC, 1956), the Virginia Commission on Constitutional Government (1956), the Florida Legislative Investigation Committee (FLIC, 1956), the Arkansas State Sovereignty Commission (1957), the South Carolina Committee to Investigate Communist Activities (1958), and others. (Bartley, 1969, 221-24; Woods, 2004, 85-116)

Initially these took aim at the NAACP, trying to prove it “is nothing more than a vehicle of the Communist Party.” After all, the NAACP was behind all those court cases which were threatening to overturn the Southern Way of Life. This belief eclipsed testimony at HUAC’s 1949 *Hearings* that the CP “has nothing but utter contempt” for such groups as the NAACP and the Urban League. The speech by Georgia’s AG on “The Ugly Truth about the NAACP” cited HUAC and the *Congressional Record* to give a veneer of respectability to the claim that the NAACP was Communist controlled. This worked as long as no one checked the actual text. The GCE published a book on *Communism and the NAACP*. (Matthews, 1958) The legislative committees in Louisiana, Florida, Mississippi and Arkansas attacked it during hearings on the causes of racial unrest. The Florida Committee found the head of the Miami branch of the NAACP in contempt for not producing membership lists to see if any were members of the CP; it sentenced him to jail for six months. South Carolina and Mississippi asked the U.S. Attorney General to put the NAACP on the official subversive list. Several states barred public employment of NAACP members. Alabama, Arkansas, Louisiana and Texas banned it outright. “In varying degrees, all the southern states employed state power to hinder, harass, or crush dissent” and put the NAACP out of business.

(<http://www.crmvet.org/tim/timhis56.htm#1956naacp>; HUAC, 7-14-49, second quote 515; Bartley, 1969, 186-8, 212-24, first quote on 87, third quote on 212; Lewis, 2004, 56; Lewis, 2006, 96; Woods, 2004, 68; *Gibson v. FLIC*, 1963)

CORE was the target during the 1961 Freedom Rides, since it was the primary organizer. As the busses arrived in Jackson, the head of the Mississippi Highway Patrol announced that they were “directed, inspired and planned by known Communists.” He said that two Riders had gone to Cuba where the Soviets taught them to do sit-ins and Freedom Rides. Gordon Carey, speaking from the CORE office in New York, said this was “ridiculous.” In fact the two Riders did go to Cuba, but with Fair Play for Cuba which was a completely different organization with a different agenda. (Quotes in *NYT* 6-30-61, 25)

Alabama waited until 1963 to create its own little HUAC. The Subversive Unit of the Public Safety Department and the “red squads” of various municipal police forces did their own surveillance and deterrence. Creating a body to stamp out Communist-inspired outside agitators was on Governor George Wallace’s agenda when he was inaugurated early that year, but he waited until after the Birmingham demonstrations in May to ask the Legislature for action. It obliged by establishing the Alabama Legislative Commission to Preserve the Peace (ALCPP) which would, in the words of its chairman, Rep. John Hawkins, reveal “the entire scope of the subversive apparatus” in Alabama. On the recommendation of Gov. Wallace he immediately hired Ralph Roton, an undercover investigator for the Klan, to go to Washington to photograph the August 28 march and rally at the Lincoln Memorial. In 1964 ALCPP released a ten page brochure on “Communists in Civil Rights” which devoted 2.5 pages to summarizing an FBI report on “Communist infiltration and leadership of civil rights actions outside the South.” This included what we did in the S.F. Bay Area in 1963-64. In the next few months it wrote studies of the pending civil rights bill and about the National Council of Churches which were widely distributed. Also in 1964, ALCPP participated in the annual meeting of the Southern Association of Investigators on the topic of “Communist Subversion in Racial Unrest.” In 1965 ALCPP submitted its first report to the legislature. It accused SCLC, CORE and SNCC of promoting Communism. It said SNCC was “an extremely dangerous, irresponsible group which tends to promote acts of violence...” However, “SCLC’s ... activities have resulted in more violence than any other single organization in the nation...” (Woods, 2004, first quote on 171; Carter, 1995, 230-4; HUAC, 1966, 3190; second quote in ALCPP, 1964, 5; ALCPP, 1965, 3-7, third quote on 10-11, fourth quote on 22; *NYT* 2-17-64, 1; 2-9-66, 27; 2-18-64, 34; *BN*, 2-8-66, 1; *Sun* 6-30-65, 4; *WP* 6-30-65, A3)

The legislature also created the Alabama State Sovereignty Commission (ASSC) with the Governor at its head. Together, these bodies sought to infiltrate, investigate and expose the civil rights movement. They also kept tabs on lawyers trying civil rights cases in the state, especially those working for the DoJ, and news reporters writing about the civil rights movement. ASSC was fairly public about its activities; ALCPP’s were shrouded with secrecy, but they occasionally made the newspapers.

These committees were particularly suspicious of institutions of higher education. After faculty at Louisiana State University signed a petition opposing some racist legislation, LUAC investigated the school for subversion. In Mississippi, the legislature and the WCC monitored all schools to “prevent subversive influences from infiltrating,” which meant keeping out all

guest speakers who might support integration. In South Carolina, the administrators of Negro colleges were told to purge all “subversives” – which meant anyone who supported *Brown*. Throughout the South, but especially in the Deep South, for someone associated with an institution of higher education to publicly articulate a view in support of integration was equated with subversion which was the same as Communism. They had to go. (Bartley, 1969, 228-233, quote on 233) After James Meredith became the first Negro student at the University of Mississippi in 1962, prompting major riots, the MSSC investigated all U.M. professors who signed a resolution condemning the state for that rioting. Some were forced to resign. It tried to find a way to expel Meredith two months before his graduation. It also looked for a way to shut down black Tougaloo College, a source of civil rights activists, by linking its white chaplain and white President to Communist front organizations. (Katagiri, 2001, 125-6, 128, 153-6) When Gov. Wallace couldn’t push through the legislature a ban on Communist speakers at Alabama colleges, he got the State Board of Education (which oversaw most public institutions of higher education) to do so. (BN 11-3-65, 14)

Official committees often worked hand in glove with private bodies. Long before *Brown* the Negro vote had been slowly growing as the Supreme Court reduced barriers (e.g. the white primary) and different groups, especially the NAACP, ran registration drives. The white Citizens’ Councils of Louisiana published a booklet on *Voter Qualification Laws in Louisiana – Key to Victory in the Segregation Struggle* which warned that “the Communists and the NAACP plan to register and vote every colored person of age in the South ... and using their votes to set up a federal dictatorship in the United States.” LUAC used this booklet in conferences it sponsored with voting officials to show them how to purge Negroes from the voter rolls. In only two and a half years 30,000 Negroes were removed from the voting lists. (“Literacy” 1959, 9; USSCR, 1961, I:43-48) The ASSC gave \$1,200 to the International Association for the Advancement of Ethnology and Eugenics, whose purpose was to disprove the idea that the races were equal. It also gave \$1,500 to the *Citizens’ Council Forum*, a radio show promoting the views of the white Citizens’ Councils. (BN 1-23-66, 33) The MSSC gave close to two hundred thousand dollars to the WCC for this program. (Katagiri, 2001, 190) These bodies worked closely with the FBI, which identified and reported all suspected Communists, including supporters of causes that Communists also supported. Its COMINFIL (Communist Infiltration) files bulged with efforts to identify Communists active in civil rights organizations.

The NAACP distanced itself from the Communist Party as much as possible. At its 1950 convention it resolved “to eradicate Communist infiltration.” Its director of branches was charged with suspending or closing any branches “that came under Communist control.” (Gilmore, 2008, 123, 168; Sullivan, 2009, 370; quotes in Jonas, 2005, 148) At its 1956 convention, Thurgood Marshall named CP front organizations that the NAACP should avoid, based on information that he had received from the FBI. Even though Hoover maintained ties with the NAACP leadership, he was convinced that Communists were using it to stir up trouble. He connected dots to create pictures of what he expected to see even when it meant ignoring the findings of his field agents.¹ He continued to assign agents to report on the NAACP, its officers,

¹ I first saw an example of this when I read the FBI files on student political activities at U.C. Berkeley, in particular the 1964 Berkeley Free Speech Movement. The files didn’t arrive until after I had pretty much completed my book, *At Berkeley in the Sixties* (2004). What Hoover wrote about Communist influence in the FSM in his Director’s memos was inconsistent with

members, resolutions and activities long after they reported no CP influence. (Williams, 1998, 160-61, 254-8; Church Committee, 1976, Book III, 450-1)

While some organizations with “civil rights” in their name *were* Communist fronts (e.g. the Civil Rights Congress, 1946-56), the FBI was suspicious of *all* civil rights organizations. It started a file on CORE within two years of its 1942 founding and investigated the Montgomery Improvement Association during its 1956 bus boycott. After the 1961 Freedom Rides, it vastly expanded its investigations of civil rights organizations. In October of 1962 it opened a COMINFIL file on SCLC, identifying eight people with some connection to the organization who might have some Communist sympathies, broadly defined. (Fosl, 2002, 122-25; O’Reilly, 1989, 47, 80, 82, 132-3)

It was the August 28, 1963 March on Washington that “convinced Hoover that he would have to smash [the movement] before it irreparably damaged his America.” Even though FBI agents found that the CP had no role in the march, the agency started a new file called “Communist Influence in Racial Matters.” Indeed, Hoover chastised the head of the FBI’s own Domestic Intelligence Division who had reported the “obvious failure” of the CP to attract Negro members or to influence the civil rights movement. The Division retracted its conclusions in light of the Director’s superior knowledge. It began its COINTELPRO campaign to “expose, disrupt, discredit, or otherwise neutralize” the civil rights movement in December of 1963. (O’Reilly, 1989, first quote on 126, 132-3, last quote on 137, 140; middle quote in Church Committee, 1976, Book III:81, 105-8)

When it came to the civil rights movement, Hoover made no pretense of objectivity. His agenda was to undermine the movement however he could. Although he was sometimes compelled to investigate crimes *against* civil rights activists, his agents primarily collected information *on* them in order to expose anything that could be labeled as Communist influence or moral degeneracy. This information was sent to the DoJ, the President, leaked to the press and given to Members of Congress and Congressional Committees. It was also shared with other civil rights organizations. Hoover may have known that Communists exercised little influence in civil rights organizations, but claiming otherwise supported his point that these organizations were subversive and should be stopped. When President Johnson compelled him to find the murderers of three Freedom Summer workers in 1964, Hoover ordered his agents to investigate *all* of the roughly 650 volunteers and “anyone who had any connection with Freedom Summer whatsoever.” (quote in O’Reilly, 1989, 178-79; FS number in Rothschild, 1982, 48n2)

As SCOPE was being organized in the Spring of 1965, FBI field agents were told to get the names of volunteers from their colleges and universities and identify subversives. There were a few with “old left” associations of one sort or another, but very few. (Garrow, 1981, 146; memo of 4-12-65 re: SCOPE, FBI File #157-2925) Nonetheless, rumors ran rampant. The *New York Times* reported that in Hale County AL, whites spread “the word among Negroes that the

both my personal observations as a participant and what I learned from researching my book decades later. When his agents didn’t report what he knew to be true, he told them to look harder. The consequence was that not only did the FBI “see” things that weren’t there, but missed seeing what was there. Hoover saw “old left” manipulation of the FSM and completely missed the birth of the “new left” with its very different politics.

civil rights movement is run by Communists...” (NYT 8-2-65, 15) A local newspaper in Macon, Georgia said the SCOPE group had been trained by “Communist-oriented instructors... in Atlanta.” It gave as an example of this training the attempts of “bi-racial groups... to integrate eating establishments.” Those working in towns where they were visible to whites were often called communists (among other names) to their faces. (*Daily Bruin* 7-9-65, 1; 7-20-65, 4) Excerpts from the SUAC report in which I was mentioned were circulated in Henry County, AL after I left.

Like Hoover, white Southerners saw what they expected to see, but their expectations were more sinister. Whereas Hoover saw the CP as trying to *influence* civil rights organizations, white Southerners saw Communists as pulling the strings. In particular they saw white Southerners who supported integration as Communists who were manipulating Negroes. (Carter, 1995, 186, citing *BN* 9-27-63) Consequently Southern officials and newspapers took particular aim at organizations run by white Southerners which openly supported civil rights. One of their favorite targets was the Southern Conference Education Fund (SCEF) a tax-exempt entity created by the SCHW in 1946. Another was the Highlander Folk School.

Jim Dombrowski was initially the executive director of both SCHW and SCEF. A white Methodist minister, Dombrowski focused SCEF on publicizing the evils of racial segregation. Based in New Orleans until 1966, its governing Board had distinguished members of both races. In 1954, Sen. Eastland’s investigating subcommittee (SISS) subpoenaed some of SCEF’s white board members to a hearing in New Orleans in order to show that SCEF was a Communist front. Despite a lack of hard evidence, the SISS report labeled SCEF as part of the nationwide Communist conspiracy. (Klibaner, 1983; Senate Judiciary, 1954; Krueger, 1967, 137-38; Sosna, 1977, 169-70)

Carl and Anne Braden joined the SCEF staff in 1957. Anne took over responsibility for its newsletter, *The Southern Patriot*. Long active in the South as journalists and organizers, Carl was convicted of sedition when he bought a house in his hometown of Louisville in 1954 so he could sell it to a Negro friend. The house was mysteriously bombed and Carl was charged with the crime. Upon conviction, he was sentenced to 15 years in prison and lost his newspaper job. He served eight months before the Supreme Court ruled in 1956 that state sedition laws were superseded by the federal Smith Act.² The Bradens were only on the SCEF staff a year before HUAC came to Atlanta to hold hearings on Communist activity in the South. It subpoenaed Carl and other civil rights activists, mostly white, to testify. When he refused to answer questions, he was found in contempt of Congress. For this he served ten months in a federal prison in 1961-62 when the Supreme Court upheld the citation. (Klibaner, 1983, 193-94; Goodman, 1968, 420-1; Reed, 1991, 172-3; *Braden v. United States*, 1961)

Throughout their tenure with SCEF, the Bradens made it their special task to persuade

² Several people were charged with “conspiracy to damage property to achieve a political end – communism” as a result of this effort to integrate a white neighborhood. (Fosl, 2002, 168) The 1956 Supreme Court decision came in a Pennsylvania case but applied to 41 state sedition statutes. Only the DoJ could indict under the 1940 Smith Act – which provided criminal penalties for anyone who advocated overthrow of the government by force and violence – and it had no interest in doing so in this case.

white Southerners to take action against segregation. This put them high on the target list of the South's little HUAC's. Anyone who did that *had* to be a Communist. The Bradens were socialists and Dombrowski was a Christian socialist; none were members of the CP. In the eyes of the FBI, and most Americans, that was a distinction without a difference. (Braden, 1964; Braden, 1989, 10; Klibaner, 1983, 193n34, 195n40)

The repeated accusations of being a Communist front took its toll. The more respectable civil rights groups, such as the SRC and the NAACP kept their distance from SCEF. The NAACP was sufficiently frightened by such accusations that in 1957 the South Carolina state conference purged Modjeska Monteith Simkins, a SCEF vice president, from her long-standing position as its secretary. (Woods, 1990, 115) CORE also avoided association. In 1960 the Tallahassee chapter listened to Carl Braden speak, but declined a \$5,000 contribution from SCEF. National CORE advised visiting organizers to decline an invitation to stay in the Braden home, even though Louisville CORE was warm to them. (Rabby, 1999, 100-1; Meier and Rudwick, 1973, 120) SCLC was ambivalent about SCEF, not really wanting the burden of this association but unwilling to reject a committed ally. C. K. Steele, SCLC's first vice president, was a member of SCEF. So was Fred Shuttlesworth, who became President of SCEF in June of 1963. Shuttlesworth had been on SCEF's Board since 1958 as well as on SCLC's Board. His ACMHR was an affiliate of the SCLC. Of the major civil rights organizations, only SNCC fully embraced SCEF. After SNCC was founded in 1960, SCEF helped SNCC raise money as well as funding it directly. *The Southern Patriot* wrote about SNCC's activities while often ignoring those of the other civil rights organizations. (Manis, 1999, 397-8; Fosl, 2002, 232-6, 258-9; Carson, 1981, 32) In the summer of 1962, Carl Braden came to Mississippi to run a series of workshops on civil liberties for SNCC. The *Jackson Daily News* headline read "Red Crusader Active in Jackson Mix Drive." Local Negroes who heard about this were too frightened to attend the workshops. (Braden, 1989, 10; Dittmer, 1994, 231) ALCPP described *SP* as a Communist publication when citing it as a source of information on SNCC. (ALCPP, 1965)

At the July 1963 hearings on the Civil Rights bill held by the Senate Commerce Committee, Gov. Wallace used this association to impugn the bill. He emphasized that the "self-styled Reverend," Fred Shuttlesworth, was President of SCEF, which both SISS and HUAC had found was "set up to promote communism" throughout the South. Wallace challenged the Committee to "do something" about the "Communist influences in the integration movement." (*NYT* 7-16-63, 16; Senate, Commerce, 1963, 435-43) Senator Eastland apparently heard his request.

On October 4, 1963 the New Orleans police, at the request of LUAC, raided the SCEF offices, charging Dombrowski and two lawyers with failing to register as subversives. A Louisiana judge dismissed the charges, but not before all the files, including the names of 8,000 supporters and contributors, were turned over to Sen. Eastland's SISS, which shared them with the MSSC and ASSC. In 1965 the Supreme Court found the Louisiana statute under which they were seized to be unconstitutional but the raid had already done a lot of damage. (Braden, 1964; Reed, 1991, 174-5; Woods, 2004, 181- 193; *Dombrowski v. Pfister*)

One organization was put out of business, at least temporarily. The Highlander Folk School in Monteagle, Tennessee was founded in 1932 by James Dombrowski and Myles Horton in order to educate a radical labor leadership in the South. Based on the Danish Folk Schools

that Horton had visited, it openly embraced a variety of progressive causes. First violating the state segregation laws in 1934, Highlander was fully integrated by 1942. By 1953 desegregation had replaced labor education as its primary focus. After the *Brown* decision, money poured in to aid its integration program. Much of this was used to bring people to desegregation workshops, which “boosted black participation at Highlander.” Rosa Parks attended classes a few months before she refused to give up her seat on a Montgomery bus to a white man. Septima Clark became Highlander’s director of education after she lost her job as a public school teacher in Charleston, South Carolina for being a member of the NAACP. Shifting from labor to integration brought increased scrutiny from Southern authorities. (Adams, 1975, 91, 100; Quote in Kates, 2006, 486, 487; Clark, 1986, 34, 36-41)

In 1957, the GCE sent an undercover agent to Highlander’s 25th anniversary celebration over the Labor Day weekend to observe and photograph Dr. King and other prominent civil rights leaders. Among the many photographs of integrated activities was one showing a classroom scene of people listening to a lecture. Sitting next to Dr. King were two white men, Aubrey Williams of SCEF and Miles Horton of Highlander. In the row in front of them sat Abner W. Berry, editor of the Harlem edition of the CP’s *Daily Worker*. The GCE distributed several hundred thousand pamphlets with this photograph under the title of *Highlander Folk School: Communist Training School*. Printed on postcards and published in newspapers, it became the centerpiece of subsequent denunciations of both Highlander and Dr. King. Mississippi Gov. Barnett held up an enlarged photo of Dr. King at the “Communist Training School” when he testified at hearings on the 1963 Civil Rights Bill. (*LAT* 7-13-63, 11; Senate, Commerce, 1963, 372-73) Those marching from Selma to Montgomery in March of 1965 passed one of 200 highway billboards with this photo captioned “Martin Luther King Jr. at Communist Training School.” Seventeen months after its 25th anniversary, the Tennessee legislature began an investigation of Highlander to expose its Communist connections. This led to revocation of its charter as a nonprofit, educational institution and closure of the school. The IRS revoked its tax-exempt status. The state of Tennessee confiscated Highlander’s property and auctioned it off.³ (Woods, 2004, 103-7, 128-30, 146; Adams, 1975, 122-41; Langston, 1990, 158-162)

I knew none of this when I arrived in Atlanta to work with SCOPE in June of 1965 and none of it when I left the South in the fall of 1966. If I had, I wouldn’t have been so surprised at the circular on me with the excerpts from the California SUAC report, or my mention in the Birmingham newspaper. I didn’t know the source of either of these so I assumed that they were the work of the FBI. What I didn’t understand was why the FBI would want to label me as a Communist or even a Communist sympathizer. If its agents had followed what happened in the Berkeley Free Speech Movement in 1964, surely they knew that I was a Young Democrat who had been publicly excoriated by the radicals. At that time I hadn’t read thousands of pages of FBI files. All I knew about the FBI was what I had seen on TV as a child and what I knew from working in the movement. Knowing what I know now, I realize that the FBI knew little about the views of those active in the FSM but was probably not the source of the slurs. It was most likely the state of Alabama which had obtained the SUAC report which it used to expose me as

³ In 1961 Highlander secured a new charter for the Highlander Research and Education Center and relocated to Knoxville, Tennessee, where it remained until 1971. It moved again and shifted focus to organizing in the Appalachian communities.

something that I wasn't. To the state of Alabama, it didn't matter what my political views really were. It only mattered how I could be labeled in its battle to preserve white supremacy.