

2008

Black Struggle, Red Scare: Segregation and AntiCommunism in the South, 1948-1968

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Recommended Citation

Peterson, Zac (2008) "Black Struggle, Red Scare: Segregation and AntiCommunism in the South, 1948-1968," *Vulcan Historical Review*: Vol. 12, Article 13.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.library.uab.edu/vulcan/vol12/iss2008/13>

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JEFF WOODS. *Black Struggle, Red Scare: Segregation and Anti-Communism in the South, 1948-1968.* Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2004.

Black Struggle, Red Scare examines how conservative, segregationist politicians from the South attempted to connect the activities of the Civil Rights Movement to the Communist Party or groups with Communist Front affiliations. These white politicians remained cognizant of the fact that if they could connect integration to communism, they could publicly discredit it. They linked preserving "southern traditions" or the "southern way of life" with national security. As McCarthyism, or virulent anti-communism, lost popularity on the national scene, in the late 1950s and early 1960s, red-baiting civil rights activists in the South came into its own.

Woods advances a thesis that examines McCarthyite tactics of the state and local-run "Little HUACs." The state-run committees and their investigative machinery (so-called "little FBIs") serve as the focus of the book. He examines how State Sovereignty Commissions in the Deep South probed individuals with suspected and known connections to communists within their ranks and linked them to civil rights organizations. Organizations such as the Southern Conference on Human Welfare (SCHW), the Southern Conference Education Fund (SCEF), the National Lawyers Guild (NLG), and the communist connections of various members associated with these organizations were repeatedly used by these "little HUACs" to discredit any civil rights movement activity. Stanley Levinson, although an avid worker for civil rights in the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), had communist affiliations. The potential damage these segregationist politicians, could cause forced Martin Luther King, Jr., and the SCLC to cut all ties from Levinson.

Woods also looks at the composition of the congressional investigative committees, such as the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) and the Senate Internal Security Sub-Committee (SISS). Members of these committees were often highly-placed

southern congressmen and senators such as Senator James Eastland of Mississippi, Chair of SISS; or Representative Edwin Willis of Louisiana, Chair of HUAC. These congressmen took the ready-made, red-baiting precepts remaining from the McCarthy era and applied them to the new developments emerging in the struggle for civil rights.

Woods explores FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover's role in supporting the inquiry into communism in the Civil Rights Movement. J. Edgar Hoover, a native of Washington, D.C., saw segregation as the American way of life and communism in any form as a threat to American society. Hoover used his office and power to investigate communist connections in the various civil rights organizations and shared the information he gathered with congressional committees or state-run initiatives, especially if it damaged the credibility of a social movement he abhorred.

Overall, Wood's thesis successfully demonstrates that conservative, segregationist politicians often succeeded in red-baiting participants of the Civil Rights Movement, which weakened the movement from multiple sides. However, there are some minor factual inaccuracies. In discussing the May 1963 demonstrations in Birmingham, Alabama, he says that "King's followers decided to put their sons and daughters on the line" (170). This statement holds inaccuracies in two respects. First, local representatives of the "traditional Negro Leadership" in Birmingham like John and Adeene Drew, Dr. Lucius Pitts, A.G. Gaston, and Rev. John Cross directly opposed to the use of children below college age. Second, children often did not wait for their parent's permission to participate in the movement; many defied their parents, emptying local high schools in those turbulent days.

106 | Woods also leaves out one event from Birmingham that might have had an impact if explored in the light of the conservative, anti-communist, anti-civil rights crusade. This episode could have strengthened the overall argument of Chapter Six: "The Southern Red Scare and the Civil Rights Act of 1964." The 1963 bombing of the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church, along with the recent March on Washington and the children's demonstrations in Birmingham, provided a powerful catalyst for transforming the national opinion of the Civil Rights Movement. Woods could have explored the maliciously false ideas among some segregationists that communists bombed the church

in a plot to create racial tensions in an otherwise satisfied black populace, or as a plot by integrationists to further the goals of civil rights. However, mainstream segregationists who comprised the White Citizens Councils and the "little HUACs," investigated the local civil rights activities for communist influence and allowed the Klan to exist while doing little to stop them.

Despite the minor inaccuracies and the important event left out from Chapter Six, *Black Struggle, Red Scare* explains important aspects of the history of the civil rights era and of Post-War America generally. These events need to be examined to extinguish the misconception that the Civil Rights Movement had any meaningful connection to the Communist Party. This is an excellent book that would make an important contribution to any class concerning the Civil Rights Movement, anti-communism, or historical problems in Post-War America.

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