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Brassbound G-Men and celluloid reds: the FBI's search for communist propaganda in wartime Hollywood

John Sbardellati

Historian Eric Hobsbawm envisions the Grand Alliance of the Second World War as 'a moment of historical paradox in the relations of capitalism and communism, placed, for most of the century – except for the brief period of antifascism – in a posture of irreconcilable antagonism'.¹ It is no surprise, therefore, that despite a dramatic increase in American goodwill toward the Soviets, largely a product of the valiant efforts of the Russians against the Nazi foe, roughly a third of all Americans continued to distrust the Soviet ally.² The Roosevelt Administration sought to promote goodwill, but even within it fears and doubts persisted. The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and its director, J. Edgar Hoover, theoretically under the control of the Justice Department, secretly harbored deep concerns over the president's policy. They feared that American Communists would use their newfound standing to infiltrate important national institutions.

To a significant degree these fears were directed at Hollywood. FBI concerns regarding the entertainment industry dated back to the years following the first Red Scare, but during World War II the Bureau began a systematic investigation of the motion picture industry. Just as the FBI feared Communist 'infiltration' of various labor and government posts, so too did the agency worry that Hollywood Reds were securing new positions of power within the film industry. Bureau policy operated on the assumption that 'the motion picture industry is begin-

ning to be recognized as one of the greatest, if not the very greatest, influence upon the minds and culture, not only of the people of the United States, but of the entire world'.³ From the Bureau's point of view, the American way of life was at stake. Even as the Grand Alliance cooperated to defeat fascism, the G-Men secretly began waging a cold war.

The secondary literature on the 'red scare' in Hollywood has devoted too little attention to the role of the FBI and has too readily dismissed concerns about Communist propaganda. The two most influential works on this subject, *Naming Names* by Victor Navasky and *The Inquisition in Hollywood* by Larry Ceplair and Steven Englund, give passing recognition to the role of the FBI in assisting the House Committee on Un-American Activities (HUAC) in its postwar hearings on the entertainment industry, yet neither of these books discuss the FBI in any detail. Furthermore (and as a result), both share a somewhat flawed assumption.

Navasky portrays the HUAC trials as 'degradation ceremonies' designed to foster a ritualized conversion to an anti-Communist consensus. Despite

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'much hoopla about Communist propaganda in the movies', Navasky suggests that such fears did not motivate the hearings, and that in any case the Committee soon learned that no such threat existed. Likewise, Ceplair and Englund argue that Hollywood was investigated for its publicity value. They point out that screenwriters (those in Hollywood most often charged with subversion) were simply not in a position to take over the screen with Communist propaganda since the studio system maintained tight control over film content, and since 'the rigidity of the basic film genres – comedies, musicals, melodramas, cops-and-robbers, Westerns, etc. – simply did not lend itself to radical propaganda'.⁴ Recently, however, historians have paid more attention to film content, finding these old assumptions flawed.⁵ Despite this newfound appreciation for (or disdain of) the Left's ability to influence and shape film content, little work has been done in terms of reinterpreting anti-Communist motivations vis-à-vis the motion picture industry. FBI records offer a fruitful resource for such work.

These FBI files reveal that fears of propaganda motivated its massive investigation of the film industry during World War II. In this period, the FBI began an intense formulation of a body of 'knowledge' that demands critical attention if one is to understand the origins of the postwar hearings.⁶ Insecurity lay at the heart of Bureau policy. As it surveyed the domestic scene, and particularly Hollywood, the agency fretted over the peril of 'a gigantic world-wide conspiracy of control which has its origin and direction in the Communist Party of the Soviet Union'. After the 1943 release of Warner Bros.' *Mission to Moscow*, J. Edgar Hoover exclaimed that 'recent events in the motion picture industry have caused me much concern regarding the spread of Communism'.⁷

In many ways, the G-Men's fears were peculiarly American. As historian Anders Stephanson argues, America's Cold War ideology evolved from a deeply rooted tradition 'more intricate than any simple Manichaeism. . . [which] fuses (in the main) radical Protestantism with classical republicanism and liberal thought, generating a specifically "American" language of politics, unthinkable anywhere else'. As Stephanson puts it, this ideology's 'first principle . . . is the dynamic notion that freedom is always already under threat, internally as well as externally, and that it must be defended by those so called upon'.⁸ This American world-view proclaims a messianic national mission ('city on a hill', 'white

man's burden', 'containment') while revealing a fundamental insecurity.

This ideological tradition was greatly intensified in 'Hooverism'.⁹ J. Edgar Hoover, after all, subscribed to what some historians term a 'countersubversive' tradition, an ideology marked by intense anxieties regarding the danger of foreign and radical subversion, which for Hoover and others were often one and the same.¹⁰ In Hollywood he and his agents perceived a dire threat from an ideology deemed alien and extreme. In the context of the Grand Alliance, and especially after the premiere of *Mission to Moscow* – a film that seemed an ominous indicator of the Communist grip on movie-land – Hoover feared the production of more 'films having a propaganda effect favorable to the Communist ideology'. In order to combat this dire cultural and political threat, Hoover sent his men on a mission of messianic proportions.¹¹

Though the Bureau's activities may be justly criticized, it was by no means mistaken in recognizing the vital role that film plays in shaping and reflecting national identity. Indeed, modern historians and film theorists alike have utilized Benedict Anderson's concept of the nation as an 'imagined community' to argue that cinema plays a vital role in constructing and dispersing images of the nation.¹² We may say that the FBI grasped this concept years before most scholars, but in doing so the Bureau was by no means unique, for this historical moment witnessed a plethora of actors – including filmmakers, film commentators, and other agencies of the federal government, most notably the Office of War Information – who recognized the power of film in modern society. This pronounced acclaim for cinema's social importance was acute during the war years, but the FBI departed from its contemporaries in labeling the motion picture as a possible national security threat.

Even if the G-Men correctly identified Communist propaganda in Hollywood's World War II output (a debatable point), they failed to develop a methodology that would support the assumption underlying their investigation: i.e., that such activity imperiled the nation. Doing so would have required them to investigate audience reception. However, according to film theorist Janet Staiger, audiences have the ability to accept, mediate, or resist what they see on the screen. They do not check their class, ethnic and gender identities at the door as they would a winter overcoat. Nevertheless, the FBI tended to operate by what Staiger calls 'a 'hypodermic needle' theory of

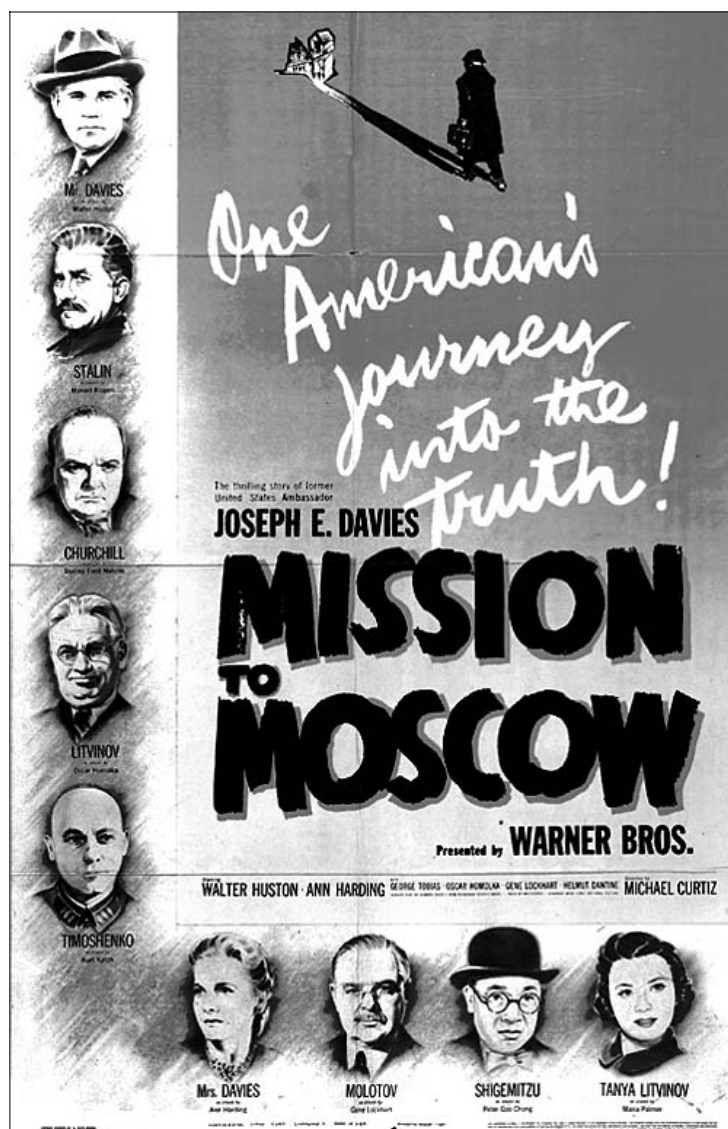


Fig. 1. *Mission to Moscow* (Warner Bros., 1943) was sold to audiences as 'One American's journey into the truth'.

cultural production', whereby 'ideology is simply 'injected' into individuals', and only belatedly questioned its assumptions regarding the effects of these supposedly subversive films.¹³ Such questioning, however, led not to a re-examination of the merits of their investigation, but rather served to heighten their need for secrecy lest critics expose the Bureau's operation in Hollywood.

Secrecy, of course, is vital to intelligence gathering, but secrecy is also a major drawback when it serves to shield knowledge from critical attention. No one better appreciated this dilemma than Daniel Patrick Moynihan, who deplored the growth of secrecy in the American state over the course of the

twentieth century. Ultimately, Moynihan portrayed secrecy as a threat to security itself, for when 'secrets become organizational assets', critical information is withheld and therefore policy is based upon poor and uninformed assumptions, democratic debate becomes increasingly rare, and 'secrecy and bureaucracy became enmeshed'. Accurate assessments were often thwarted, miscalculations abounded.¹⁴

In order to better understand the consequences of FBI secrecy in its investigation of Hollywood, let us return once again to the concept of the 'national cinema'. Film theorist Susan Hayward argues that the discourses surrounding films constitute one of the modes by which 'the national' is enunciated. She moves beyond the simplified notion that film and its surrounding discourse serves either to shape or reflect national identity, and toward a more complex understanding of filmic discourse as part of a negotiated national identity. Like archival institutions, discourses have the power to canonize, and therefore the ability to mobilize or submerge certain national myths.¹⁵

During World War II, the FBI became a participant in cinematic discourse, but in a secretive fashion, thereby effectively closing itself off from the wider discourse by selectively collecting only that information from informants and the press which matched its own ideological presumptions. By hoarding its information, by keeping its knowledge-base immune to public scrutiny, and by keeping its superiors in the dark regarding the extent and nature of the Hollywood investigation, the FBI formulated a body of knowledge that was marked by ideological rigidity and a lack of theoretical sophistication. Such methods could go unchallenged only within the bureaucratic context of what Moynihan refers to as the 'culture of secrecy'.¹⁶

Two reports

To be sure, the FBI had cast its gaze on the screen before World War II.¹⁷ Yet the war years – when the Grand Alliance granted American Communists greater legitimacy, and, importantly, when the film *Mission to Moscow* reached theatres – witnessed the Bureau's first intensive examination of the motion picture industry. As one of its first tasks, the FBI wrote its own history of Communism in Hollywood. Two reports from the summer and fall of 1943 depicted the Bureau's version of events, thereby setting the context and internal justification for its investigation. The reports are quite similar, though the latter was

more detailed and more overtly xenophobic. These reports explain why FBI concerns skyrocketed during the war, and why propaganda, and not simply political and social activity, ranked as the chief concern of the G-Men.

The 1943 reports attempted to analyze the motion picture industry from the early teens, 'that period when it first began to be recognized as a stable institution in American life', to its present. Here the Los Angeles office clearly, if secretly, entered the discourse of 'national cinema', as it alerted superiors in Washington that over the course of its history, cinema 'has undergone a definite change in its relations with the national life of the United States'. The October 1943 report divided the history of the motion picture industry into two periods, with the advent and proliferation of sound around 1930 serving as the dividing line. Ironically, the report showed the Bureau's ignorance even of its own history. The FBI maintained that during the silent era motion pictures

... were for entertainment purposes only. Propaganda of any serious type had no place in picture production; in fact, had there been occasion for such propaganda of a subtle political nature it would have been ineffective in the silent picture, a fact which is obvious. ... As a consequence the motion picture industry and those individuals prominent therein were not involved, or even concerned, with political matters or with any attempt to influence the public mind along those lines.¹⁸

This 'fact' had not been so obvious to Hoover and others in the Bureau when they investigated filmmakers in the early 1920s.

Having created a vision of a harmless, romantic past of 'an American institution, reflecting American ways of life', the October report then described a fall from grace in keeping with the Puritan declension myth. The threat, however, was now secular, but like the seventeenth century Puritans, the Bureau worried about foreign control and internal dissension.¹⁹ Now, however, technology itself became the culprit, for the 'revolutionary innovation' of sound 'paved the way for the use of the motion picture as a propaganda instrument'. The Bureau saw the film industry as perhaps the greatest 'influence upon the minds and culture' of people the world over, agreeing with banker A.P. Giannini who allegedly said, 'The nation which controls the cinema can control the thought of the world'.²⁰

The August 1943 report detailed the efforts of the Soviet Union to do just that. Moscow was the first to realize the propaganda potential of film, claimed Source A, and it 'seized the lead' in this endeavor by sending its best crews to Hollywood for training. Source A asserted that 'Russia and the Russians had become the leaders in all forms of motion picture and theatrical entertainment'. Taking its orders from the Communist International (Comintern), the CPUSA issued a directive in 1935 calling for infiltration of Hollywood labor unions and 'the so-called cultural and creative fields' in order to 'determine the type of propaganda to be injected into the motion pictures'.²¹

The October report added a more xenophobic view. After the advent of sound, 'a different type of individual filtered into the industry and began taking it over'. The threat was not only foreigners, but their children as well. Such persons harbored 'ideas and culture' alien to 'the ideals and traditions of America'. Those tinged by alien ways did not even have to be intentionally disloyal, for they naturally carried with them an 'instinctive racial affinity inherited from European social life' which, revolutionary or not, was deemed un-American.²²

Future FBI correspondence continued to stress this theme of foreign infiltration. For example, in a memo listing approximately 150 individuals believed to have connections with the Party, Richard B. Hood, Special Agent in Charge (SAC) of the Los Angeles office, emphasized the national affiliations of those suspected. Hood, for instance, stressed that composer Hanns Eisler was a German refugee, Charlie Chaplin hailed from Great Britain, director Elia Kazan 'claims to be a citizen but it cannot be verified', director Lewis Milestone was born in Russia, though he 'claims that he was naturalized'. And so on.²³ No one of foreign extraction was above suspicion, their 'claims' notwithstanding. The xenophobia so prevalent in the first Red Scare had by no means disappeared.

Certainly the FBI reports were not suggesting the sole threat to the screen stemmed from inherent, yet innocent, cultural connections between immigrants and their native land. Rather, danger emanated from the Soviet Union which consciously sought to spread its 'foreign ideology'. The Central Committee of the CPUSA formulated a plan of action and in 1938 sent its representative Victor J. Jerome to promote the Party in Hollywood. Jerome, according to the FBI, spearheaded the tactic of setting up

'front' groups in order to mask the activities of Communists.²⁴

And in fact during the Popular Front era (1935–39) Hollywood Communists did endeavor to set up Left-liberal coalitions. The most important of these were the Hollywood Anti-Nazi League and the Motion Picture Artists' Committee, both focused on international events (MPAC specifically worked to aid the Loyalist cause in Spain), and the Motion Picture Democratic Committee (which concentrated on domestic politics). Hollywood Communists who worked enthusiastically to forge the Popular Front were sincerely dedicated to these causes, but they were also abiding by the orders of the Comintern, for in 1935, at the Seventh Congress of the Communist International in Moscow, Comintern Chairman Georgi Dimitrov directed Communists in all countries to unite with their former leftist foes against fascism.

Countersubversives like Hoover and HUAC Chairman Martin Dies would use the term 'front' to mean 'facade', but it was used by its practitioners to mean 'coalition'. Hollywood's non-Communist liberals, like Philip Dunne, who worked closely with Communists in the Popular Front, never saw them as threats. Chief among the Cold War myths is the idea that Communists insidiously used front organizations to spread their control. In reality they had moved to the right in the service of liberal, not revolutionary, goals. Dunne put it best: 'It was not a question of liberals 'fellow-traveling' with Communists, but Communists 'fellow-traveling' with liberals, which is quite a different proposition'.²⁵

In August 1939 the Nazi-Soviet Pact was signed. Communists were now ordered to abandon coalitions with the non-Communist Left, and in Hollywood this is exactly what many did. The new Party line was undoubtedly harder to swallow than the old, but though some left, others remained loyal to the cause. Hollywood Communists, such as Allen Boretz, Paul Jarrico, and Robert Lees, believed the pact to be a sound maneuver on Stalin's part, especially after the failure of the Soviet Union's push for collective security. Nevertheless, for these the pact period was a 'terrible time' when former liberal comrades cried out, 'Where are you, the great anti-Fascists now?'²⁶

If some Hollywood party members were deeply troubled, others, such as the director Herbert Biberman, took leading roles in new organizations, like the American Peace Mobilization (APM), which during the pact period smeared Roosevelt and char-

acterized aid to Britain as support for imperialism. 'This is not a war to wipe out the evils of Hitlerism and tyranny', APM leaders pronounced. 'It is not a war to defend democracy. It is a war to line the pockets of corporate interests at the expense of the peoples of the World.'²⁷

However, in June 1941 the Party line took another serious jolt when Hitler launched an invasion of the Soviet Union that caught an inept Stalin by surprise. Communists were now instructed to dump the peace platform. The West would no longer be denounced for imperialism, but heralded as a potential democratic partner. The American Peace Mobilization quickly became the American People's Mobilization for Victory over Fascism, proclaiming 'APM stands for: All aid to those fighting fascism; maintain and extend our democracy; for a just, democratic peace'.²⁸

To some, this changing Party line indicates a slavish subservience to Moscow on the part of American Communists. Party leaders William Z. Foster and Robert Minor, however, argued that the new policy was necessary because of changing world conditions, adding American Communists must continue supporting the Soviet Union, 'the greatest bulwark of peace and freedom'.²⁹

Hollywood Communists who followed this logic were tragically misguided, but hardly the threats they were made out to be. As Paul Jarrico relates, 'I thought the Soviet Union was a vanguard country fighting for a better future for the entire world, including the United States. This was an illusion, I discovered. But the illusion didn't make me disloyal; it made me a fool.'³⁰ Nevertheless, the FBI considered those who followed the Party line to be dangerous operatives. The Bureau also erroneously believed that the period of the pact, though pushing the CP underground and into isolation, did little to hurt the prestige and influence of the Party. In fact the Popular Front lay in ruins. Most liberals would never fully trust their former comrades again.³¹

It was no coincidence that the FBI initiated its massive investigation of Communists in Hollywood during the war years. The Bureau feared that the Grand Alliance created a situation that left the nation vulnerable to Communist subversion. The Communists could now pose as 'ardent patriots', merging their organizations 'with all legitimate efforts' in Hollywood and across the nation. Thus, 'by deception and patriotic subterfuge', the Communists were, according to the FBI, exploiting the war effort. The

G-Men believed that the reds used insidious methods in 'hiding the communist apparatus in the regular activities of the country [so] that it is extremely difficult for the unsuspecting citizen to distinguish them'. Unmistakably, World War II served as the catalyst for a massive expansion of FBI activity in Hollywood, waged in secret and in isolation until international conditions changed and information could be effectively laundered through the House Committee on Un-American Activities.³²

FBI suspicions aside, Hollywood Communists were dedicated to the war effort.³³ Indeed, some in Hollywood bemoaned the Party's new stance. John Bright and Lionel Stander, for instance, believed that the Party collaborated too closely with the Roosevelt Administration during the war, and failed to support trade unionists and protest racial discrimination by backing A. Philip Randolph or criticizing Japanese internment.³⁴

In Hollywood the program was also conciliatory, as one Party document makes clear.³⁵ Whereas the FBI believed that Hollywood Communists intended to exploit wartime conditions and infiltrate the industry, the Party instead instructed, 'Victory does not require any radical adjustments of our economic system which are not compatible with the prevailing capitalist organization of production, and therefore, it would be harmful to call for such basic changes'. Insisting that Hollywood films would continue to reflect 'the American way of life, which is capitalistic', the Party did not seek to revolutionize the motion picture industry. 'Just as we do not ask for radical changes in the form of the industry itself', this Party directive maintained, 'we should not look for radical changes in the familiar forms and patterns of motion pictures'.

This document, therefore, suggests the Party had no illusions about who controlled the industry, for

All fundamental decisions as to content of pictures and planning of over-all propaganda service of the industry as a whole will be made ... by the producers. Any suggestion to the contrary would imply a change in the capitalist structure of the industry, which would be totally unacceptable to the producers.

The essential fact of producer control was no obstacle, however, for the producers would be influenced by their own patriotism, by the government (through the Office of War Information), and 'by the

growing understanding and consciousness of audiences'. For their part, Party members were to encourage these trends by 'taking leadership in developing the organized awareness of the motion picture public' and by refraining from any challenges to producer control which might push 'the producers into the defeatist camp'.³⁶

The FBI obtained this Communist Party document through one of its confidential sources. Yet this did not lead the Bureau to reassess its assumptions about the Communist wartime program in Hollywood. Thus, the FBI failed to adequately assess its own intelligence and instead its investigation proceeded under the assumption that Communists were seeking to capture the motion picture industry in order to spread their revolutionary propaganda.³⁷ For the G-Men, everything connected to a vast propaganda campaign. The Communists, the August 1943 report proclaimed, launched 'two lines of attack' in Hollywood, one focused on labor groups, the other on creative artists. But the goal of propaganda reigned supreme and the twin campaigns were intended to serve this single purpose.

As Source A contended, 'the Communists must try to capture the labor unions for, if this could be done, they could exert much influence in the nature and type of pictures produced, and thus save the Soviet cause'.³⁸ Here the Bureau correctly identified the Party's analysis of the relationship between industry form and motion picture content, yet it neglected Communist cooperative goals vis-à-vis the producers. The October report went into more detail, specifying an eight-pronged attack, which in addition to labor unions and creative fields, encompassed front organizations, mass meetings, political support of candidates secretly fond of Communism, and efforts to infiltrate the studios and government agencies, most importantly the Office of War Information (OWI), which itself exerted control over the content of films. Thus the FBI asserted that 'Production of a type of motion picture favorable to Communism and the Soviet Union' was the Communists' first and foremost goal.³⁹ For the G-Men it was always about the movies.

Mission to Moscow

The typical view of Hollywood during World War II, both by contemporaries and in public memory, is not one of subversion. Rather, the entertainment industry is often remembered for its contributions to the war effort, Frank Capra's *Why We Fight* series for the U.S.

Fig. 2. Congress suspected 'interventionist propaganda' in Warner's *Confessions of a Nazi Spy* (1939).



Signal Corps being perhaps the most noteworthy of these. Also, stars like James Stewart and Clark Gable joined the armed forces, and sex-symbols such as Hedy Lamarr and Betty Grable could be found at the Hollywood Canteen serving G.I.s before they shoved off for duty in the Pacific.⁴⁰ Even the so-called escapist films played a positive role, for as *New York Times* critic Bosley Crowther pointed out, the movies were 'almost as essential to [G.I.] Joe as dry clothes or a chance to grouse'. Hollywood movies elevated troop morale; as one soldier put it, a good film was 'like a two-hour furlough home'.⁴¹ Thus, far from being seen as subversive, Hollywood garnered wide praise.

Nevertheless, the G-Men were not the only ones to view Hollywood with suspicion during the war years. Indeed, on the eve of American entry into the war, isolationist Senators led by Burton K. Wheeler (D-MT) and Gerald P. Nye (R-ND) launched an investigation of the motion picture industry through the Senate Interstate Commerce Committee. They charged that Hollywood, through such films as Charlie Chaplin's *The Great Dictator* and Anatole Litvak's *Confessions of a Nazi Spy*, had produced interventionist propaganda. The investigation died after Pearl Harbor, but for some Hollywood remained a source of controversy during the war. For example, the in-

dustry met with charges of wartime profiteering, though a congressional investigation under Senator Harry S. Truman uncovered administrative sloppiness, but no scandal.⁴²

Some conservatives did voice concerns during the war that Hollywood propagandized American audiences. Congressional Republicans such as Missouri Representative Walter C. Ploeser attached the 'propaganda' label to films largely for partisan reasons. Dubbed an 'aggressive isolationist' by the *New York Times*, Ploeser echoed the Wheeler line that the motion picture industry produced films and newsreels biased in favor of the Roosevelt Administration and its policy of internationalism. He considered *Mission to Moscow* to be 'purely New Deal propaganda', and expressed reservations regarding the film industry's plans to make a picture about Woodrow Wilson. Ploeser criticized Hollywood for 'trying to perpetuate the New Deal, or... trying to bend the country to extreme internationalism, in which our sovereignty would be surrendered to a super-State'. His proposed investigation was called off after Will Hays, in a talk with several Republicans, said that he would ask the industry to set up a voluntary propaganda code to preclude partisanship.⁴³

But whereas Ploeser and others feared the

effects of 'New Deal propaganda', for Hoover and his G-Men the real threat emanated from the Reds.⁴⁴ And nothing did more to exacerbate these fears than the Warner Bros.' 1943 film *Mission to Moscow*. This film seemed to confirm their belief that Communists were taking control of the industry, a prospect that threatened the American way of life and triggered a more in-depth investigation of Hollywood (and specifically of Hollywood films) than had heretofore taken place.

Mission to Moscow presented audiences with a movie version of the popular book by Joseph E. Davies, the former Ambassador to the Soviet Union. In fact, the Roosevelt Administration, through both the Office of War Information and Davies himself, had a hand in the production of this film. Satisfied with the results, the OWI's Bureau of Motion Pictures considered the film

... a magnificent contribution to the Government's War Information Program, as well as proof of the potency of the motion picture as a means of communicating historical and political material in a dramatic way ... The presentation of the Moscow trials is a high point in the picture and should do much to bring understanding of Soviet international policy in the past years and dispel the fears which many honest persons have felt with regard to our alliance with Russia MISSION TO MOSCOW pulls no punches; it answers the propaganda lies of the Axis and its sympathizers with the most powerful propaganda of all: the truth. The possibility for the friendly alliance of the Capitalist United States and the Socialist Russia is shown to be firmly rooted in the mutual desire for peace of two great countries.⁴⁵

The OWI's comments notwithstanding, *Mission to Moscow* hardly represented the best example of truth in historical filmmaking. Indeed, the film's depiction of a 'firmly rooted' alliance between Russia and the United States belied one of the major impetuses behind its making. Historian Todd Bennett illustrates how *Mission to Moscow* was intended as an expression of goodwill at a time when Stalin feared – especially in the absence of a 'second front' – the possibility of a separate peace. Domestically, the film was intended to combat suspicions of the Soviet ally. In fact, the perceived need to make a film such as this suggested the fragility of the Grand Alliance, and hardly its firm rooting. The result was a feature that

not only criticized appeasement and isolationism, but also justified the Nazi-Soviet pact, the invasion of Finland, and even Stalin's purges (the latter by telescoping the series of purges into one trial wherein the defendants are depicted as operatives of a dangerous Nazi fifth-column).

This shining portrait sought to overcome traditional American prejudices by convincing audiences that life in the Soviet Union was none too different from that in America, that it was a nation moving forward, its economy industrializing, its citizens eager to partake in consumerism. Even in terms of gender roles, the film depicted the Soviet Union as not all that different. In contrast to the hardened image of Soviet women in other Hollywood films, such as *Ninotchka* (1939), *Mission to Moscow* shows Russian women concerned with beauty by portraying a vibrant Soviet cosmetics industry. As Mrs. Davies remarks, 'I guess women are no different the world over ... primarily they want to please their men!'⁴⁶

Mission to Moscow clearly aimed to better the American public's image of its Soviet ally. Given the Bureau's assumptions about the intentions of Communists in the film industry, the G-Men were bound to feel threatened by such a film. Soon after the picture opened, the Los Angeles office sent its own review of the film to Hoover:

This picture will no doubt lend support to the activities of the Communist Party at present time. Its membership is increasing and its undercover activities are increasing. It is conceded that the motion picture is a very powerful propaganda instrument and its ability to reach a very large percentage of the people makes it a most potent factor in molding opinion. There can be little doubt that this picture will have an effect on some classes of the American people, which will not be in the interest of the American form of Democracy, for the reason that all through the picture the Governmental processes of the United States and Britain are made to suffer by contrast with the political philosophy of JOSEPH STALIN and the Soviet Unions (sic), which is made to appear as the finest ever conceived by man.⁴⁷

This notion that public opinion could be so easily molded – indeed that 'some classes' were particularly vulnerable – revealed the insecurity of FBI officials. And yet this belief in a malleable public had encouraged the Bureau since the 1930s to undertake



Fig. 3. The FBI identified Jay Leyda as the 'real director' of *Mission to Moscow*. [Courtesy NYU Cinema Studies Department.]

efforts at swaying public opinion. The G-Men recognized the biggest battles in any ideological war would be over the control of information, and in 1943 a film like *Mission to Moscow* seemed to indicate that the Communists were winning that struggle.⁴⁸

By July the Los Angeles office had assembled a 66 page report under the heading 'Propaganda Pictures'. Clearly, *Mission to Moscow*, 'a propaganda motion picture favoring the Soviet System of government and economy and thereby indirectly favoring Communism in the United States', ranked as the most dreaded film to date. The report claimed that the film had been 'completely controlled by the Soviet Embassy at Washington', especially since it had one scene showing 'Trotsky plotting with German agents' (thereby substantiating Stalin's claim that Trotsky was an infidel).

More often, however, the Bureau operated on the assumption that if a film's cast and crew had connections with the Party, the film itself was a piece of propaganda. Hence most of their intelligence consisted of attempts to prove such connections. If an individual belonged to organizations that the Bureau believed were Communist fronts – during the war the most important was the Hollywood Writer's Mobilization (HWM), which the FBI erroneously labeled a descendent of the League of American Writers (LAW)

– then the connection was established and the film, apparently, contaminated. Though screenwriter Howard Koch would later be an 'unfriendly' witness before HUAC, in 1943 the Bureau had little information on him and instead reported the real culprit to be Erskine Caldwell, who had adapted the Davies book to a play. As a LAW member, Caldwell was believed by the Bureau to have Party connections. Hence Caldwell served as a more convenient target, and so the Bureau's report incorrectly insisted 'the fact is that "Mission to Moscow" was written by ERSKINE CALDWELL'.⁴⁹

The July report went to similar lengths to prove that *Mission to Moscow*'s 'real' director was also not the man credited. The Bureau claimed Michael Curtiz was only 'listed as director', whereas the real director was Jay Leyda, another LAW member. According to the Bureau, Leyda, the film's technical advisor, had been recruited to the project by the producer, Robert Buckner, a man revealed by 'private and confidential sources' as one 'sympathetic to Soviet philosophy'. Curtiz, according to the report, was only a front man with little experience, selected because 'he goes along with the Communist line'. Of course the Bureau's intelligence here could not have been more wrong. Curtiz had a long history as a Hollywood director, most recently of *Yankee Doodle Dandy* and the American classic, *Casablanca*, which Koch co-wrote. Nevertheless, the July report suggested that the Communists were so insidious that even the screen-credits could not be trusted.⁵⁰

Subversives filled the cast as well. To the Bureau, leading man Walter Huston had registered himself suspect on 8 November 1942 when he appeared at 'a salute to our Russian Ally' rally. He was also a leader of the Hollywood Democratic Committee which the Bureau considered a front-group. The report listed Oscar Homolka, who played Russian ambassador Maxim Litvinov, as a 'well known fellow traveler'. The Bureau also made a point of documenting that Homolka was himself a Russian, as if that in itself was evidence of subversion. The tactic employed by the Bureau to prove that *Mission to Moscow* amounted to Communist propaganda ultimately relied upon assumptions of 'guilt by association'. That quickly became the dominant pattern in the FBI files.⁵¹

During the war public opinion on the Russian ally was mixed. Though American opinion regarding the Soviets fluctuated during the war years, a *Fortune* poll in February 1942 showed that well over 80 per

cent of the public believed that the country would be well served by working along with Russia. Looking back on 1942, *Time* selected Joseph Stalin as its 'man of the year'. The magazine praised Stalin and his countrymen for their brave efforts against the Nazis. No longer deeming the Soviet Union a rogue state, *Time* even credited Stalin's prewar accomplishments:

Within Russia's immense disorderliness, Stalin faced the fundamental problems of providing enough food for the people and improving their lot through 20th-Century industrial methods. He collectivized the farms and he built Russia into one of the four great industrial powers on earth. How well he succeeded was evident in Russia's world-surprising strength in World War II. Stalin's methods were tough, but they paid off.

Stalin's terrible brutality hardly seemed relevant to a nation that welcomed his contribution to the war effort, for *Time* recognized one of the war's essential truths: 'As Allies fighting the common enemy, the Russians have fought the best so far'. Moreover, as historian Ralph Levering contends, criticizing Russia during the war 'was like criticizing one's son when he is struggling to recover from a crippling paralysis, and almost nobody except the ultraconservative Hearst-McCormick-Patterson newspaper axis was doing it'. Indeed, according to Levering, U.S. goodwill toward the Russians peaked in 1943, especially among informed, cosmopolitan Americans.⁵²

A controversial film if ever there were one, *Mission to Moscow* sparked a national dialogue and occasioned an arena for debate. The film received wide attention by America's leading newspapers and periodicals, including *Life*, *The Nation*, *The New Republic*, *Newsweek*, *The New Yorker*, *The New York Times*, and *Time*. The FBI obsessively focused on one simple question regarding *Mission to Moscow*: was it Communist propaganda? Yet other commentators asked different, and perhaps more interesting, questions. What responsibility did film have to truth? What duties were incumbent upon the motion picture industry with the country at war?

Such perspectives led to more mixed feelings about the film that the G-Men considered dangerous propaganda. Some commentators enjoyed the controversy it created. David Lardner, in *The New Yorker*, asserted that to 'the degree that "Mission to Mos-

cow" causes a stir, it is a good picture'. He believed that misgivings about the Russian ally were widespread and needed allaying. Thus *Mission to Moscow*, whatever its historical inaccuracies, might still perform a vital service, though Lardner feared this 'a perilous likelihood, however, that because it is a very top-heavy, clumsy affair, the film will fail to achieve the important ends it should'.⁵³ *Newsweek* also gave the film a somewhat mixed review, declaring that though 'shy on pure objectivity' it succeeded 'as a good-will offering and as a sincere plea for closer cooperation between the United States and Soviet Governments'.⁵⁴ Indeed, those who applauded this film did so out of the conviction that cementing ties between the allies served as a noble wartime goal.

Yet others were uneasy about the film and more pessimistic about its ability to foster better relations with the Soviets. 'Whitewash', opined an editorial in *The Nation*, 'makes a poor cement for the United Nations'.⁵⁵ Dwight MacDonald, Max Eastman, Sidney Hook, Alfred Kazin, A. Philip Randolph, Norman Thomas, Edmund Wilson, and other intellectuals soon initiated a letter campaign against the film, decrying its falsification of history, its glorification of Stalin's dictatorship, and its equation of Soviet and American political methods and values.⁵⁶

The most vociferous critics of the film were John Dewey and Suzanne La Follette. Dewey, the distinguished philosopher, had chaired the International Commission of Inquiry into the Moscow trials of 1937–1938. La Follette had served as secretary to the Commission which had exposed the great injustices committed by Stalin. Now the two expressed their sense of alarm over *Mission to Moscow* in a letter to the editor of *The New York Times*, strongly denouncing it as 'the first instance in our country of totalitarian propaganda for mass consumption'. They criticized its many historical inaccuracies, especially 'the impression that Stalin is killing off not potential political opponents but traitors in the service of foreign powers'. *Mission to Moscow* was 'anti-British, anti-Congress, anti-democratic and anti-truth'. Dewey and La Follette expressed contempt for such 'propaganda' pictures which 'have helped to create a certain moral callousness in our public mind which is profoundly un-American'.⁵⁷

Dewey and La Follette were often dismissed as 'Trotskyites', or as one official of the Veterans of Foreign Wars put it, as 'renegade Communists' whose criticism amounted to 'a subversive influence' in a time of war.⁵⁸ The National Council of American-

Soviet Friendship also deplored any criticism of the film as 'a distinct disservice to the cause of American-Soviet unity during the war and afterward'.⁵⁹ And in a reply to the Dewey/La Follette letter to *The New York Times*, historian Arthur Upham Pope cited Soviet contributions to the war as the reason why attacks on the film were unwarranted:

The major fact now as far as Russia is concerned, is her stupendous effort and immeasurable sacrifice for the common welfare of the nations and her will to a collective peace. The fact of her ten million dead – nearly twenty times that of her Allies – the unfathomable suffering, the vast destruction that she has endured, ought to stay reckless and venomous speech.⁶⁰

America's most prominent film critics expressed their misgivings about *Mission to Moscow* as well. After seeing the picture, *New Republic* film critic Manny Farber – who found it a 'peculiar picture' and 'the dullest imaginable' – endorsed the main Dewey/La Follette charge that the film played loose with historical facts, most significantly by telescoping the series of trials into one, thereby creating the illusion 'that the bloodiest purge in the history of man consisted of one trial at which sixteen men were convicted'. Even worse, *Mission to Moscow* dashed the hopes of Farber and his contemporaries who desired more realism in film. Bosley Crowther welcomed 'a film which is frankly a political argument'. Yet while approving of the film's contribution to Allied relations, Crowther deplored the film's lack of integrity. 'For there are certain essential responsibilities which go with the blessings of free speech', wrote Crowther, and in his view, *Mission to Moscow* evaded such responsibilities. Farber and Crowther expressed powerful frustrations. They hoped that the film industry verged on entering a new era in which it would tackle serious social issues, but, as Farber wryly commented, the result in this case was 'mish-mash ... directly and firmly in the tradition of Hollywood politics'.⁶¹

The very controversy which surrounded *Mission to Moscow* demonstrated that the content of this motion picture hardly controlled the political and cultural discourse it sparked. Unlike the Bureau, few of the film's public commentators fretted over the possibility of Communist 'infiltration' of the motion picture industry. Instead, the most pressing concerns were the responsibility of film and the develop-

ment of an artistic medium that could enlighten the public. To see *Mission to Moscow* as a product of Communist infiltration necessitated a rather primitive understanding of Hollywood filmmaking. Indeed, even Dewey and La Follette did not make such charges. Yet at the FBI, *Mission to Moscow* set off warning signals and sparked a more intense investigation of Hollywood.

For the time being, wiser voices prevailed. These public commentators attributed *Mission to Moscow's* making not to Communist control, but rather to varied impulses. For as the astute James Agee remarked, *Mission to Moscow* was a mixture

... of Stalinism with New Dealism with Hollywoodism with journalism with opportunism with shaky experimentalism with mesmerism with onanism, all mosaicked into a remarkable portrait of what the makers of the film think that the American public should think the Soviet Union is like – a great glad two-million-dollar bowl of canned borscht, eminently approvable by the Institute of Good Housekeeping.⁶²

Had the G-Men explored the wider discourse on this film, they should have learned that their investigation was groundless, for not only did a film like *Mission to Moscow* reflect a hodgepodge of viewpoints, as Agee contends, but the mere facts of its controversial reception and lackluster performance at the box office should have suggested to the Bureau that American viewers were highly capable of resisting messages which they found at odds with their view of the world.⁶³

Injecting propaganda

Throughout the war years, the G-Men blamed 'the present war situation' for allowing Communists the opportunity to 'inject propaganda into writings and pictures to build a case for Communism in the United States by making it appear by the use of their ideology that STALIN and the Soviet Union are waging a glorious fight against HITLER'. Indeed, so deeply ingrained was the G-Men's fear that the war opened vast opportunities for Communist propaganda in film that even evidence to the contrary (such as a marked shift away from *Mission to Moscow* type propaganda) was employed as proof of the FBI's position. The G-Men claimed that *Mission to Moscow* had been the Hollywood Communists' 'crowning achievement', but in the wake of the national controversy over that film Communist methods became

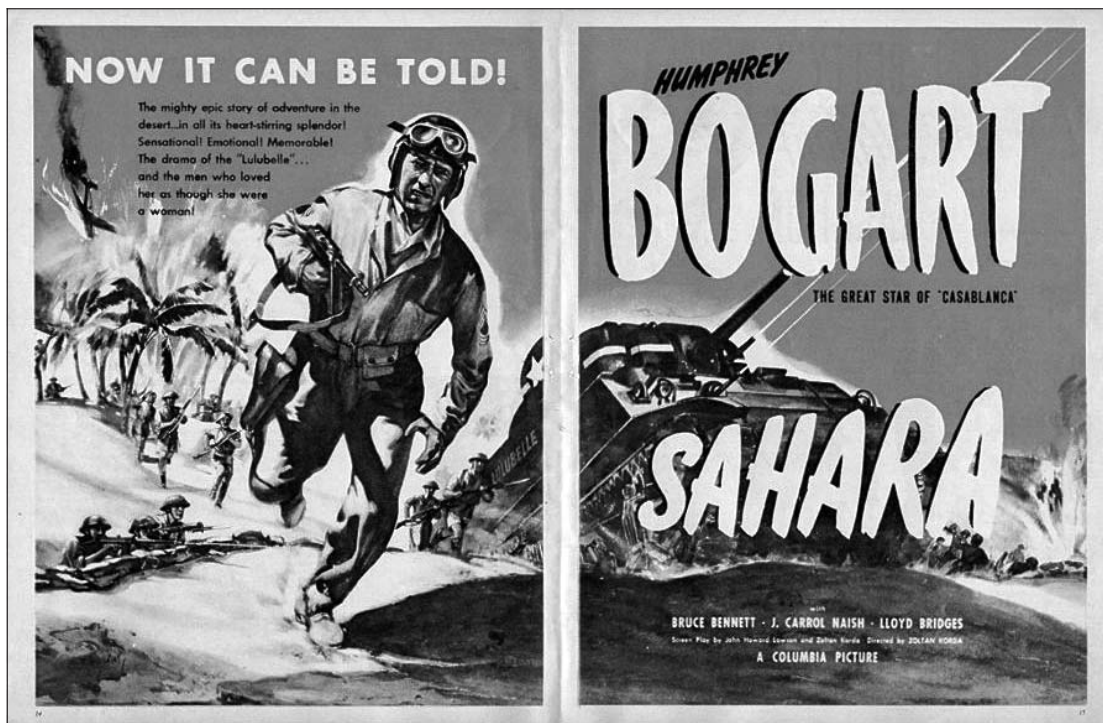


Fig. 4. A two-page trade advertisement for John Howard Lawson's *Sahara* (Columbia, 1943), which directly references the success of Bogart's previous hit, *Casablanca*.

more subtle, and more insidious. Now the goal was to 'insert a line, a scene or situation carrying the Communist Party line into an otherwise non-political picture'. Such tactics were considered dangerous because they were hard to identify. 'Unless one is familiar with the past activities of the individual Communist', claimed one report, 'it is very difficult to detect those who are projecting and carrying on the work of propaganda in pictures'.⁶⁴

Such a statement of course begs the question: if propaganda is so hard to detect, how could it be threatening? Such circular thinking was not unique during the war years. As John Morton Blum has argued, the prejudice against Japanese that resulted in their internment was so entrenched that 'the very absence of sabotage came to be regarded as evidence that some terrible Japanese plot was brewing'.⁶⁵ Bureau assumptions regarding Communist activity in Hollywood were marked by a similar obtuseness; even contrary evidence did little to dampen the FBI's assuredness.

Predisposed to the idea that any project that included Communists likely contained some form of propaganda, the Bureau went to great lengths to prove that Hollywood was under siege. Often, as in the case of *Hangmen Also Die* or *Edge of Darkness*, the Bureau categorized films as propaganda without

reference to film content whatsoever, but solely on the basis of the political affiliations of some of the people involved in these productions. And when reports did discuss film content the films were usually reduced to blurbs in which the single 'line, scene or situation carrying the Communist Party line' encapsulated the true meaning of the film. For example, *Action in the North Atlantic* (Warner Bros., 1943) made the list of subversive films because

In the picture there is no Communist ideology expressed openly or directly; however, when the picture was being made, the writer, JOHN HOWARD LAWSON, who is a known Communist of long standing and fanatically active in that cause, took advantage of this opportunity to glorify the NATIONAL MARITIME UNION, a Communist controlled seaman's union.⁶⁶

There were, of course, more positive views on a film like *Action in the North Atlantic*. For example, Dorothy Jones, in *Hollywood Quarterly*, praised it for being among the few films that had 'attempted to approximate the documentary form, striving for a realistic and dignified portrayal of the American serviceman'.⁶⁷ Yet the Bureau never even considered the notion that a film on which Communists had worked could be patriotic. Instead the mere presence of

Lawson, a man the Bureau believed was the leading Communist in Hollywood (which he was), contaminated the entire picture. And, according to the files, the contagion spread. Humphrey Bogart and some of his fellow cast members were described as having 'been followers of the Communist Party line to a limited degree'. Bogart was not a Communist, but evidently even a 'limited degree' of Red signified that trouble was brewing.⁶⁸

Not surprisingly, the Bureau considered another Lawson/Bogart war film, *Sahara* (Columbia, 1943), subversive as well. The Los Angeles office labeled *Sahara* a propaganda picture because it was 'highly recommended by the Communist Press'. Little else was noted, except of course that Lawson was the Red kingfish in Hollywood and Bogart was a 'fellow traveler'.⁶⁹ The film deserves a brief analysis here, for though it can hardly be described as Communist propaganda, it presented the rationale for the war through a particular vision of progress that was in keeping with Popular Front attitudes promoting racial equality and social cooperation.

Sahara presents the story of a small group of Allied soldiers in North Africa who, by their heroics, divert a German battalion from reinforcing other Nazi forces at the battle of El Alamein. Though Bogey's 'Sergeant Joe' is the charismatic leader who loves his tank 'like a dame', the film avoids the 'shining hero' stereotype used by many war films, and instead focuses on the heroics of the group. Indeed, throughout the picture each character contributes to the victory, and when the small band of nine men decide to take on 500 Germans through bluff tactics the decision is made as a group.

The Office of War Information considered *Sahara* 'a moving and convincing portrayal of the unity of the United Nations' fighting men', and held out hope 'that SAHARA may point the way to a type of war picture which up to this time has rarely made an appearance, a story focused on the part played by individuals in the conflict, but with broader implications of the significance of their actions on the future of the world'.⁷⁰ Critics also applauded *Sahara*'s presentation of the war as a cause necessitating united action. Dorothy Jones credited *Sahara* for being among the handful of war films that avoided the 'swashbuckling American hero so deeply resented overseas'. Bosley Crowther concurred, adding that the film was very popular among troops who were 'resistant to blatantly heroic war films'.⁷¹

Sahara also presents the view that, in a war

against Nazis, conquering racism was part of the struggle. One character, Sergeant Major Tambul, is a black Sudanese soldier who joins up with Bogart's group in the desert. At odds with black stereotypes, Tambul is a dignified character whose sacrifice and heroics contribute greatly to the Allied victory.⁷² Lawson and Zoltan Korda (director and co-author of the screenplay) also use the Tambul character to illustrate that racism was something to equate with the enemy. In one scene Bogey tells Tambul to search a German prisoner, who protests because he 'doesn't want to be touched by an inferior race'. Bogey's reply ridicules Nazi racial beliefs. 'Tell him not to worry about his being black, Bogey says to an interpreter, 'it won't come off on his pretty uniform'.

Sahara also suggests that just as the war would defeat the racist Nazis, so too would the experience of fighting together promote cross-cultural tolerance and understanding (of course the filmmakers had to employ a plot device simply to have Tambul fighting along with white soldiers at a time when America's armed forces were still segregated). In one scene an American soldier from Texas strikes up a conversation about marriage with Tambul. The Texan, called 'Waco' by his comrades after the name of his hometown, speaks of his plans for marriage after the war, but supposes that Africans like Tambul 'feel differently about marrying'. In his naivete Waco figures that Africans have 300 wives each, a comment which elicits a smile from Tambul. Tambul mockingly replies that 'four wives make real happiness'. When asked why, he says that 'two and two are company for each other, and the man, he has his rest'. Of course Tambul is only joking and Waco learns that Africans are not so different after all. Waco, an ignorant but not cruel southerner, realizes 'you sure learn things in the army'.⁷³ Thus the film articulates a smooth vision of racial progress as one goal of the war.

Did the FBI object to *Sahara*'s rather moderate call for progress in race relations? No evidence directly suggests so, but one may infer that this may have been the case given Hoover's long standing hostility to those who challenged the color line. Scholars of Hoover and the FBI have presented a wealth of material documenting Bureau opposition to Black civil rights leaders and organizations. Starting in the early 1920s the Bureau monitored groups such as the NAACP and the United Negro Improvement Association. During World War II they bugged the March on Washington movement, and during the

turbulent 1960s the Bureau monitored and harassed leaders like Martin Luther King, Jr. Moreover, Hoover's biographers depict him as a racist. Having grown up in segregated Washington, D.C., he believed that Blacks were an inferior people, best suited as servants to whites. Until pressure by the Kennedy Administration forced a slight change, the Bureau's only Black agents were in fact Hoover's personal servants. Throughout his life he feared that Black activists were uniquely susceptible to Red radicalism.⁷⁴

Such attitudes were evident in the Bureau's investigation of Hollywood.⁷⁵ The FBI considered Communist propaganda techniques to include not only efforts to inject certain ideas into films, but also efforts to block ideas that the Party disdained as well.⁷⁶ According to informant 'B-31', a Declaration of Principles authored by Maxwell Anderson, Lillian Hellman, and Peter Lyon in 1944 repudiated film and other popular culture portrayals of stereotypical images of Blacks as

... happy-go-lucky, lazy illiterates, clowns, cowards, superstitious, ghost-ridden, liquor drinking, chicken-stealing, watermelon-eating, jazz-crazed Aunt Jemimas or Uncle Toms, who at their worst are villains and at their best slavish admirers of their white 'superiors'. We wish these dangerous vilifications to stop forever.

B-31 considered the Declaration to be 'in complete accord with the very latest of these Communist inspired Red creations'. The Declaration's heavy backing (B-31 maintained that it garnered 500 signatures amongst various artists) offered further proof of this informant's conclusion that 'Hollywood is full of Red's up to its eyebrows, and this is no joke'.⁷⁷

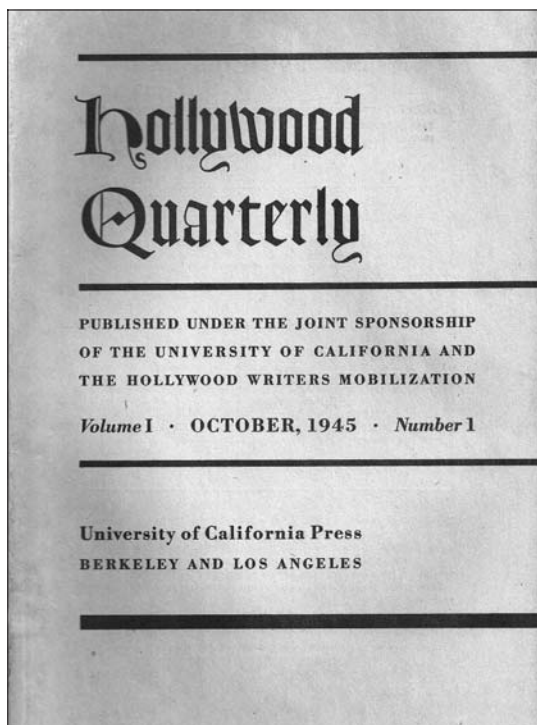
Another report claimed that the Party had prevented the production of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Upon hearing of the project, the 'Communist Party immediately decided this would not be to its liking because the character of UNCLE TOM, as portrayed in the book was too much of a servant and was too loyal to his "master", and therefore the picture would be contrary to the present line and efforts of the Communist Party to stir up the Negroes to assert themselves on the basis of equality'. The Communists, according to Bureau files, launched a 'campaign of intimidation' that succeeded in preventing the filming of 'an American classic', a sure sign of the Party's subversive presence in Hollywood.⁷⁸ Assistant FBI

Director D. Milton Ladd later claimed that the leftist Hollywood Writer's Mobilization, which had connections with the Office of War Information, made efforts to inject propaganda at every opportunity: 'For example, it is reported that wherever possible it demanded a second front, freedom for India, independence for Puerto Rico, racial equality and similar material parallel to the Communist Party line'.⁷⁹ Thus liberal (or in the terminology of the day, 'progressive') causes, including racial equality, were regarded as signs of subversion because the Party happened to support them. Along such lines of thinking, reform would be stifled, as would calls for reform in film.

In an effort to innovate policy to counteract the perceived propaganda activities of Hollywood Communists, Richard Hood, Special Agent in Charge of the Los Angeles Office, proposed a plan for collaboration with the Hollywood office of the Office of War Information, Bureau of Motion Pictures (BMP). Hood couched his proposal in modest terms, suggesting that he might advise OWI and the Hays Office in order to ensure that the FBI's 'interests at times be better represented'. Under his plan, matters of policy would of course be set from above with Hood acting as liaison.⁸⁰ Certainly the type of collaboration Hood had in mind could have given the Bureau the opportunity to influence the very medium it feared was under attack. From time to time, the FBI had and would continue to attempt to influence American culture by working with the motion picture industry. But with regard to this endeavor, Hoover had misgivings.

In fact Hoover's reply to Hood indicated that he had no trust in the OWI. He shot down Hood's idea partly because it would have allowed too much authority for an underling in Hoover's tightly centralized Bureau. Hoover insisted 'all questions pertaining to motion pictures in which the Bureau has a legitimate interest should be passed upon here at Bureau headquarters before any action is taken'. But Hoover's objection also reflected his vendetta against one OWI official, Ulric Bell, who headed the Overseas Branch of the OWI, the office which eventually had the most influence over films because it decided which ones were fit to be shown outside of the country. Bell was the object of Hoover's fury not because he was suspected of being a Communist, but because he had committed an even greater sin. According to Hoover, Bell had distributed a memorandum critical of the FBI to hundreds of 'prominent

Fig. 5. Front cover of the first issue of *Hollywood Quarterly* (October 1945), a joint project of the University of California and the Hollywood Writers Mobilization. Richard Koszarski collection.



individuals' in D.C. and around the country. This document characterized the Bureau as ill-prepared to defend the nation against sabotage and espionage and called for the establishment of a new division within the FBI responsible only for internal security and headed not by Hoover but by its own divisional chief.⁸¹ That Bell was a top official in the OWI, therefore, raised a flag for Hoover. But soon he came to suspect the entire Overseas Branch of the OWI of Communist infiltration.

One year after the Bell episode, Hood's Los Angeles office began reporting about the alleged Communist subversion of OWI's post-liberation pictures. OWI's cooperation with the Hollywood Writers Mobilization (HWM), which the FBI labeled 'a completely Communist-dominated organization', supplied the rationale for this charge. The HWM was a voluntary war organization consisting of 3500 writers working in screen, radio, and music, whose contributions included hundreds of documentary/short subject films, radio scripts, Army and Navy camp sketches, war bond and blood bank speeches, war agency brochures, feature articles on war activities, songs, posters and slogans. It also sponsored writing courses for rehabilitating veterans (an initiative led by Dalton Trumbo among others). Working with the University of California, the HWM was the driving

force behind the 1943 Writers Congress which sought to 'evaluate the role of the writer in war time, to provide a clear recognition of the importance of that role, to strengthen solidarity in the ranks of the writers for the great task ahead of all civilized men and women – the smashing of armed fascism and the consolidation of the victory of democracy after the signing of the peace treaties'. In May 1945 the HWM began shifting its emphasis toward the post-war world, producing a radio series which dealt with the adjustments necessary in dealing with returning veterans and reconversion to a peace-time economy. Its postwar activities included encouraging the Hollywood production 'of motion pictures distinguished both for their entertainment value and their integrity of idea content', and collaborating with the University of California in sponsoring *The Hollywood Quarterly*, a professional journal dealing with creative and technical issues. HWM was a Popular Front organization – that is, it enlisted Communists on behalf of a liberal agenda – but the Bureau saw nothing but Red. One member, Philip Dunne had ceased his activities with Reds after the Soviet attack on Finland, but now, with his country allied with the Soviets in the effort to defeat Hitler, Dunne resumed his collaboration with Hollywood Communists. Astute observers would have recognized that Dunne was no 'commie-stooge', but according to the Bureau he was 'back in the Communist fold'.⁸²

The HWM's work for the OWI's Overseas Branch especially aroused FBI concerns. Robert Riskin, Chief of the OWI's Overseas Film Bureau in New York City, placed members of the Mobilization in important positions within his agency.⁸³ As Production Chief, Dunne ranked directly under Riskin. Others on the editorial board – including John Howard Lawson, Sidney Buchman, Howard Koch, Meta Reis, Robert Rossen, and Allen Rivkin – had Communist affiliations.⁸⁴ The FBI fretted that the films being made by the OWI 'will be of a political nature, more or less, and deal with matters in which the Communist viewpoint could easily be injected'. Thus the FBI revealed its concern about the postwar world, and specifically about the Communist role in that world. It listed several films planned by the OWI, dealing with such subjects as postwar employment and inflation, returning soldiers, world trade, international relations, postwar relief/rehabilitation, and America's security branches (including the FBI).⁸⁵

In March 1945, the FBI had reported that Riskin, now heading the OWI's Bureau of Motion

Pictures in Hollywood, had plans to make more documentaries and work in conjunction with the State Department in order to have the films shown 'all over the world once the war is over'. Hood's office reported that HWM would continue as the 'driving force' behind these films, and therefore 'there is no doubt that ideology would play a large part in the content of any picture produced'.⁸⁶

No longer suspecting only a group of radicals in Hollywood, the Bureau's investigation now spread to an agency of the federal government. Because of the collaboration between the Hollywood Writers Mobilization and the OWI, the Bureau alarmingly reported, 'Documentary motion pictures made in Hollywood by the Office of War Information and distributed abroad, are produced by persons subservient to the political line of the Communist Political Association'.⁸⁷ Clearly the war created opportunities for Communists to enter mainstream organizations, and even affiliate themselves with the government. All this was anathema to Hoover and his G-Men.

What, then, was the FBI to do about the Red menace in Hollywood? In October 1944 Hoover finally, albeit misleadingly, alerted his superiors to the perceived threat, notifying Attorney General Francis Biddle that reliable sources had passed alarming information to the Bureau. Not only did Hoover seek to characterize the FBI's role as passive, he also blatantly lied to Biddle, claiming that 'no direct investigation has been conducted with reference to the Motion Picture Industry'.⁸⁸ Yet if the FBI Director hoped that the Justice Department would initiate actions against Hollywood Communists, he was disappointed.

With little direction from superiors in Washington, it was left to Special Agent Hood to innovate policy. In April 1945 he proposed a new program. Believing that Hoover might soon be called upon to speak about Communist infiltration of the motion picture industry (in 1945 there was already some talk of a HUAC investigation), Hood argued that it would be necessary to point out specific instances of Red propaganda.

Tellingly, Hood recognized the weaknesses of the Bureau's assumptions when he asserted that 'it will not be sufficient to state that a certain known Communist wrote, directed, or produced a particular motion picture which follows the Communist Party line'. This, of course, had been the tactic – and the key theoretical failing – of the FBI's previous reports. Instead, Hood now proposed something quite ambi-

tious: the G-Men would themselves become film reviewers. Hood outlined a plan in which scripts would be obtained through Bureau informants; the FBI would flag all suspect scripts, and when the final films were released to the public Special Agents would secretly join the audience and construct their analyses. Thus Hood did not propose to actually interfere with the production of films, but rather to have his agents, whom he believed to be qualified experts in detecting propaganda, chronicle the subversive content of those pictures. In an effort to convince his superiors of the soundness of this plan, Hood forwarded three FBI reviews of the RKO picture *The Master Race*.⁸⁹

Released in late 1944, *The Master Race* was directed by Herbert Biberman, a future member of the Hollywood Ten. Biberman's film – a 'B' picture if there ever was one – sought to inform the public of the need for American postwar involvement in Europe to ensure that not only the war, but also the peace, would be won. In telling the story of the liberation and rehabilitation of a Belgian town, the film stressed the necessity of postwar unity between East and West. For though the Nazis would soon be defeated, they would still attempt to 'sow the seed of disunity right in the very core of your victory', as the film's evil Nazi proclaims. Biberman's didactic film (based on his original story) aimed primarily at perpetuating the Grand Alliance after the war and building support for European reconstruction in order to forestall a breeding ground for fascism. Though the OWI believed *The Master Race* to be in many ways a valuable contribution to understanding postwar problems, its Overseas Bureau considered it unsuitable for export because of its unrealistic portrayal of wartime devastation, and its likelihood to irritate foreign audiences as a 'film presentation by Americans of our own bounty to the enslaved peoples of Europe'.⁹⁰

Whereas the OWI branch considered the film too U.S.-centered, for the G-Men-cum-film critics (three attended the film and two of the three read the script), *The Master Race* was a perfect example of 'subtle and veiled Communist propaganda inserted by innuendo through the theme, settings, circumstances and characters'. Presenting a positive image of Russia was crucial to sustaining American public support for continued international cooperation, and *The Master Race* propagandized this message by presenting the view that 'The Russians are no freaks but are ordinary people, industrious, congenial, and

intelligent, just like people in the United States'. The three reviews illustrated the G-Men's unsurprising consensus regarding the subversive credentials of *The Master Race*. Each pointed to the glowing depiction of the Russian, Lt. Andrei Krestov, a cheerful fellow who, despite being outranked by British and American officers, is frequently the one most capable of problem solving. The G-Men were struck by Krestov's physical appearance, which stood in contrast to the American Major 'with a rather large waist line for his age', and the British Captain 'with a very weak voice whose personality and character reflect virtually no strength or forcefulness whatsoever'. By contrast, 'Krestov was a fine specimen of physical manhood'. Through the film's masculine depiction of the Russian, the G-Men feared that *The Master Race* would produce a virile image of the Soviet Union that would make Communism more appealing at home.⁹¹

One can certainly see the logic of Hood's proposal. If the Bureau's premise was correct, and certain films were truly subversive, this would need to be demonstrated. Yet Hood's superiors in Washington turned a cold shoulder to his project. Assistant Director D.M. Ladd's three main objections should have raised concerns not simply about Hood's proposal, but about the Bureau's entire campaign in Hollywood. First, it dawned on Ladd (perhaps after reading the reviews of *The Master Race*) that the G-Men were no film critics, and that as non-experts their opinions would be easily challenged. An institution as concerned about its public image as the FBI could never expose itself to the possibility of public ridicule. But Ladd's concerns were not simply based on questions of public relations, for he also pointed out that 'the present Communist "line" is, at least on the surface, most harmonious with' American policy, and thus questioned whether such propaganda could be readily demonstrated. Finally, and perhaps most interestingly, Ladd recognized a major flaw in the Bureau's assumptions. Even if the Bureau's experts could convincingly demonstrate that Communist propaganda had been injected into a particular film, 'this still would be no evaluation as to the actual or possible effect that the propaganda has on the public in general'. Ladd had successfully articulated the conceptual backwardness underpinning the FBI's entire investigation of Hollywood. Yet instead of leading to a shift in policy, Ladd's points only served to undermine Hood's proposal.⁹²

Ladd's remarks carried great weight with

Hoover and he quickly disapproved of Hood's proposal. But Hoover did not order Los Angeles to cease all investigation of film content. Instead, Hoover and Ladd approved a more limited program which allowed for agent analyses of motion pictures only when said films were 'obviously of a Communist propaganda nature' or when 'reliable informants' had already pointed out the films' subversive qualities. Seeking to avoid an investigation of all 'films of a social or political nature', Bureau officials nevertheless approved of a more scaled-down version of Hood's program, ensuring that, though there were no plans for dissemination, if need be these analyses could be attributed to outside experts instead of FBI agents.⁹³

Hood's proposal had spawned serious questions about the entire nature of the FBI's investigation of Hollywood. For the first time Bureau officials recognized some of the weaknesses of their assumptions. This should have been a moment when policy was halted, or at least reconsidered. Instead, stubbornly, secretly, the G-Men plunged ahead on a course that would soon entail disastrous results for many in Hollywood.

Film and democracy

During the cataclysmic events of World War II the FBI cast its gaze on Hollywood, and feared what it saw. The Great War, a generation earlier, had been fought to 'make the world safe for democracy', and failed. The G-Men now feared that this war would do no better. Yet they envisioned the threat to the future as something far greater than ever faced before. By the autumn of 1943 the FBI fretted that the Communists had already made great strides: 'there can be no doubt that the national origins and inherited 'ideologies' of *those now in control of the motion picture industry* are determining these developments and bending them in a direction unfavorable to American ideals and customs – and it can be said, in the long run, *democracy* [italics added]'.⁹⁴

Democracy? For the FBI, Hollywood was dangerous because it could be used as a tool to promote revolution and set up a totalitarian state. Yet the Bureau was embarking on a program which, viewed from another perspective, would ultimately encroach upon the very idea of a democratic screen. Enshrined in secrecy, the FBI formulated a body of knowledge within a vacuum. It did not seek to gather information on Hollywood in an 'objective' fashion, but rather sealed itself off from a broader cultural discourse in

order to build a case against Communists and 'fellow travelers' in the film industry. It often relied upon press sources, but in a very selective manner, ignoring a vast literature that was not useful to its investigation.

Indeed, this outside discourse viewed Hollywood in a wartime context in which Communist subversion was not a major concern, and called into question the very assumptions upon which the FBI was basing its case. Bureau notions of the relationship between film and democracy differed sharply from the views of contemporary Hollywood commentators. For these, the great issues facing Hollywood during the war had little to do with the threat of Communist subversion. Rather, the pressing concerns were the freedom of the screen on the one hand, and the screen's responsibility to the peoples of the world on the other.

Writing for *The Nation* less than a year into the war, Hollywood commentator Ezra Goodman proclaimed that the cinema faced new demands from the public. Certainly, people still appreciated escapist films, but they also hungered for serious treatment of serious issues. Goodman optimistically reported that the motion picture industry was emerging 'from its mental shell', but added that it still had a long road ahead: 'It has yet to realize the essential seriousness of the war as a theme; it has yet to remove the last blonde from the bombers'. For Goodman, Hollywood had an awesome responsibility because the 'screen can be a most effective medium for creating understanding between the peoples of the United Nations and for affirming the democratic ideals that we are fighting for'.⁹⁵

Like Goodman, film commentators such as Manny Farber and Dorothy Jones believed Hollywood had important wartime obligations. But writing later in the war, they concluded that the film industry had, despite a few exceptions, done a poor job of informing the public of the great issues of the day. Unlike the FBI, Farber scoffed at the idea of Communist influence in film, for the studio system utilized self-censorship to protect itself from any controversy. Instead, Farber worried that the studios too often produced pictures marked by 'melodramatic attitude, patriotic narrowness and glibness all around'.

However, the documentaries made during the war, especially Frank Capra's *Why We Fight* series, were 'unadorned with Hollywood whoop-la' as *New York Times* film critic Bosley Crowther proclaimed. And the lesson was clear. The documentaries



showed the potential of film outside the confines of the studio system. As Dorothy Jones asserted, this new appreciation for realism was now seeping into the Hollywood studios, leading hopefully to a mature cinema that would recognize its 'social and political responsibility'. The emancipation of film was for many the most pressing concern, for as Farber concluded, the 'war has once more pointed up the need for complete freedom from repression for the movie artist, and also the incongruous fact that in a war where freedom is the most prominent word, the most popular medium of expression is nowhere free'. Thus while the FBI was compiling information which would ultimately be used to restrict freedom of expression in the name of democracy, a wider discourse now demanded greater artistic autonomy, believing this the necessary precondition for the promotion of democratic ideals.⁹⁶

In wartime Hollywood, autonomy and responsibility could be competing imperatives, and the G-Men were by no means the only ones seeking to subvert one by evoking the urgency of the other. As Clayton Koppes and Gregory Black have shown, the Office of War Information put significant pressure on the film industry to incorporate wartime propaganda, and though it did not claim formal censorship powers, it did, through its Overseas Branch, use its leverage on foreign markets to influence film content. Though some might consider OWI's aims laudable – its film manual showed many traces of Henry Wallace's 'Century of the Common Man' – its tactics were often heavy-handed.⁹⁷

The FBI, of course, did not appeal to Wallace

Fig. 6. *Crossfire* (RKO, 1947) was a highlight of Hollywood's post-war 'social-problem film'.

in formulating its definition of democracy. Though its investigation of Hollywood did not impact the screen during the war years, in 1947, as Athan Theoharis has shown, the Bureau would covertly provide key assistance to HUAC's investigation of the motion picture industry. The FBI – initially wary until guaranteed its assistance would remain secret – eventually funneled HUAC vital information, including membership records obtained by breaking into CP offices in Hollywood. Extremely grateful for the FBI's support, HUAC chairman J. Parnell Thomas told the Bureau that Hoover 'more than any other person is responsible for his Committee not being put out of business'.⁹⁸

As the war drew to a close, few imagined what lay in store. Instead, a brief moment of optimism regarding postwar American cinema emerged. Film, many hoped, might finally become an effective medium for discussing social problems and affecting change. Indeed, the early postwar era witnessed a boom in the production of 'social problem films' such as *The Lost Weekend*, *The Best Years of Our Lives*,

Crossfire, and *Gentlemen's Agreement*. But the attack on Hollywood would quickly close the door on these types of productions. The fear of Communist propaganda in Hollywood had begun well before the Cold War. Though FBI concerns dated back to the first Red Scare, World War II served as the catalyst for its full-fledged investigation of the motion picture industry, particularly since the alliance with the Soviet Union set the conditions for a renewed Popular Front at home. Deeply concerned about the prospect of Communist propaganda, the G-Men justified their investigation as a defense of American democracy. No doubt it was a subversion of this very principle.

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Notes

1. Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Extremes: a History of the World, 1914–1991* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), 7.
2. Ralph Levering, *American Opinion and the Russian Alliance, 1939–1945* (Chapel Hill: the University of North Carolina Press, 1976), 127.
3. Report, SAC, Los Angeles to Hoover, 11 October 1943, COMMUNIST INFILTRATION OF THE MOTION PICTURE INDUSTRY (hereafter COMPIC), FBI 100-138754-22. [Research in this file was conducted at the FBI's Freedom of Information Act Reading Room at the J. Edgar Hoover Building in Washington D.C.]
4. Victor S. Navasky, *Naming Names* (New York: The Viking Press, 1980), xv, 286, 300–301, 317. Larry Ceplair and Steven Englund, *The Inquisition in Hollywood: Politics in the Film Community, 1930–1960* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979), xiv, 80, 256.
5. For studies that attribute positive influence to the Left's cultural impact see: Paul Buhle and Dave Wagner, *Radical Hollywood: The Untold Story Behind America's Favorite Movies* (New York: New Press, 2002); Paul Buhle and Dave Wagner, *Hide in Plain Sight: The Hollywood Blacklistees in Film and Television, 1950–2002* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003); Michael Denning, *The Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century* (London: Verso, 1997); Saverio Giovacchini, *Hollywood Modernism: Film and Politics in the Age of the New Deal* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2001); Michael Rogin, 'How the Working Class Saved Capitalism: The New Labor History and *The Devil and Miss Jones*', *Journal of American History* 89 (June 2002), 87–114. For studies that depict the Left in Hollywood as Stalinist propagandists see: Kenneth Lloyd Billingsley, *Hollywood Party: How Communism Seduced the American Film Industry in the 1930s and 1940s* (Roseville, CA: Forum, 1998); Robert Mayhew, *Ayn Rand and Song of Russia: Communism and Anti-Communism in 1940s Hollywood* (Lanham, Maryland: Scarecrow Press, 2005); Ronald Radosh and Allis Radosh, 'A Great Historic Mistake: The Making of *Mission to Moscow*', *Film History* 16 (2004), 358–377.
6. Other studies utilizing the COMPIC file have instead tended to emphasize the early post-war period. See John A. Noakes, 'Bankers and Common Men in Bedford Falls: How the FBI Determined That *It's a Wonderful Life* Was a Subversive Movie', *Film History* 10 (1998), 311–319; John A. Noakes, 'Official Frames in Social Movement Theory: The FBI, HUAC, and the Communist Threat in Hollywood', *Sociological Quarterly* 41 (Fall, 2000), 657; Athan Theoharis, *Chasing Spies: How the FBI Failed in Counterintelligence but Promoted the Politics of McCarthyism in the Cold War Years* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2002), 139–169.
7. Report, SAC, Los Angeles to Hoover, 18 February

- 1943, COMPIC, FBI 100-138754-4. Letter, Hoover to SAC, Los Angeles, 21 June 1943, COMPIC, FBI 100-138754-5.
8. Anders Stephanson, 'Liberty or Death: the Cold War as US Ideology', in Odd Arne Westad, ed., *Reviewing the Cold War: Approaches, Interpretations, Theory* (London: Frank Cass Publishers, 2000), 81–100.
9. Athan Theoharis, Ellen Schrecker, and others have agreed that the term 'Hooverism' is more appropriate than 'McCarthyism', signifying not only that the Bureau was the center of anti-Communist operations, but also that its power began well before and continued long after the Senator from Wisconsin's short stint in the national spotlight. See: Athan Theoharis and John Stuart Cox, *The Boss: J. Edgar Hoover and the Great American Inquisition* (New York: Bantam Books, 1988), 333, and Ellen Schrecker, *Many are the Crimes: McCarthyism in America* (Boston: Little, Brown & Company, 1998), 203.
10. On the countersubversive tradition see: Richard Gid Powers, *Not Without Honor: The History of American Anticommunism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 10–15; Michael Paul Rogin, *Ronald Reagan, the Movie and Other Episodes in Political Demonology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), xiii–xix. Lest it be said that here and elsewhere I emphasize Hoover's personality/ideology too much, it is important to point out that to a great degree he was able to institutionalize his own world-view within the FBI. As his biographers Theoharis and Cox explain, the FBI was a 'tightly centralized bureaucracy', in which 'a virtual cult of personality' reigned. Certainly he was unable to control each of his agents as strictly as he wished, but 'the boss' ran a tight ship. He formulated stringent guidelines for his men, moral as well as professional, and maintained a tight control on the Bureau's information. Moreover, he recruited mainly young men from the South and West who he believed were more easily molded to his conservative world-view. Theoharis and Cox, *The Boss*, 117–120, 155.
11. Letter, Hoover to SAC, Los Angeles, 21 June 1943, COMPIC, FBI 100-138754-5.
12. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983). Two examples of film scholars' indebtedness to Anderson are: Lary May, *The Big Tomorrow: Hollywood and the Politics of the American Way* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 2, 257, and Susan Hayward, *French National Cinema* (London: Routledge, 1993), 8, 14. Films, of course, have always had a transnational character as well, but this by no means discredits the argument that film carries the ability to speak to national identities.
13. Janet Staiger, 'Class, Ethnicity, and Gender: Explaining the Development of Early American Film Narrative', *IRIS* II (Summer 1990), 21. Of course one could add other markers of identity, including political and religious affiliations, which viewers would use to interpret messages in films and other media.
14. Daniel Patrick Moynihan, *Secrecy: The American Experience* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998) 59, 73, 80, 111. One should note that the CPUSA, too, was afflicted by too much secrecy. Screenwriter and former Party member Paul Jarrico believed as much. He told interviewer Patrick McGilligan that the Party blundered in following Soviet leadership. 'But I think there was another serious mistake', Jarrico added, 'which was probably special to Hollywood, and that was that our membership was covert. Secret. There are good historical reasons why Party members did not advertise their membership in the Party. But in Hollywood it was a disastrous course, because though we would have been one-tenth the size that we were [if we had been public], we would never have suffered the plague of informers that we did suffer. And we would have accomplished just as much, I think – or more.' Paul Jarrico interview by Patrick McGilligan in *Tender Comrades: A Backstory of the Hollywood Blacklist* (eds), Patrick McGilligan and Paul Buhle (New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 1999), 348.
15. Hayward, *French National Cinema*, 6–8.
16. Informed by Weber, Moynihan proclaims that 'a culture of bureaucracy will always tend to foster a culture of secrecy'. Moynihan, *Secrecy*, 153.
17. On the Bureau of Investigation (precursor to the FBI) and its early interest in left-wing independent filmmakers, see: Federal Bureau of Investigation, Investigative Case Files of the Bureau, 1908–1922, Record Group 65, Microfilm Series M1085, National Archives, College Park. The Bureau monitored several key figures in the labor film movement, including Joseph D. Cannon, William Kruse, John Arthur Nelson, Upton Sinclair, and John Slayton. For a secondary source on these figures and the Bureau's activities see: Steven J. Ross, *Working-Class Hollywood: Silent Film and the Shaping of Class in America* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1998), 9, 81, 153–160, 171, 230, 273, 326. The Bureau's nascent interest in Hollywood has its record in the early portions of Charlie Chaplin's FBI file (file number 100-127090), which is pre-processed and can be obtained from the FBI.
18. Report, SAC, Los Angeles to Hoover, 11 October 1943, COMPIC, FBI 100-138754-22.
19. See 'Propaganda', chapter 10 of Perry Miller, *The New England Mind: From Colony to Province* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1953).
20. Report, SAC, Los Angeles to Hoover, 11 October 1943, COMPIC, FBI 100-138754-22.

21. Report, SAC, Los Angeles to Hoover, 25 August 1943, COMPIC, FBI 100-138754-21.
22. Report, SAC, Los Angeles to Hoover, 11 October 1943, COMPIC, FBI 100-138754-22. Its conclusions aside, the Bureau by no means erred in detecting a large influx of Europeans into Hollywood. On this community and its relations with intellectual migrants from New York, see Saverio Giovacchini, *Hollywood Modernism: Film and Politics in the Age of the New Deal* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2001).
23. Memo, SAC, Los Angeles to Hoover, 3 June 1944, COMPIC, FBI 100-138754-35.
24. Report, SAC, Los Angeles to Hoover, 11 October 1943, COMPIC, FBI 100-138754-22.
25. Letter, Philip Dunne to Spyros Skouras, 2 April 1952. Ralph de Toledano Papers, Box 18, Folder 8, Howard Gotlieb Archival Research Center, Boston University. It is important to note that Dunne made these points not as a Communist sympathizer but as a liberal whose experience working with Communists pushed him toward anti-Communism. For more on the Popular Front in Hollywood and its disintegration, see Ceplair and Englund, *The Inquisition in Hollywood*, chapters 4–5.
26. See Allen Boretz interview by Patrick McGilligan and Ken Mate, 119; Paul Jarrico interview by Patrick McGilligan, 335–336; and Robert Lees interview by Paul Buhle and Dave Wagner, quote from 423; all in *Tender Comrades* McGilligan and Buhle (eds).
27. 'Call to American Peoples' Meeting', New York City, 5–6 April 1941, American Business Consultants/*Counter Attack* Collection, Box 14, Folder 12-35-1A, Tamiment Library, New York University.
28. 'Stop Hitler/Defeat Appeasement' Flyer, American Business Consultants/*Counter Attack* Collection, Box 14, Folder 12-35 (1-37), Tamiment Library, New York University.
29. William Z. Foster and Robert Minor, *The Fight Against Hitlerism* (New York: Workers Library Publishers, 1941), 4. I found this pamphlet in the Van Deman Papers, Box 30, R-5139, Records of the U.S. Senate, Senate Internal Security Subcommittee (SISS), Record Group 46, National Archives, Washington, D.C. Retired General Ralph H. Van Deman was a regular provider and recipient of intelligence, whose network included the FBI, the military, and his own informants. For more on the Van Deman files see: Richard Halloran, 'Senate Panel Holds Vast 'Subversive' File Amassed by Ex-Chief of Army Intelligence', *New York Times* (7 September 1971): 35.
30. Jarrico interview by Patrick McGilligan, in *Tender Comrades*, eds. McGilligan and Buhle, 336.
31. See, for instance, Report, SAC, Los Angeles to Hoover, 18 February 1943, COMPIC 100-138754-4. Indeed, the FBI and other investigators often used adherence to the changing Party line as proof of membership or fellow traveling. Navy intelligence issued an Investigative Guide for detecting Communists, based largely on familiarity with the Party Line. See Memorandum, D. Dwight Douglas to Officers-in-Charge, 29 May 1943, Van Deman Papers, Box 43, R-6276, Records of the U.S. Senate, Senate Internal Security Subcommittee (SISS), Record Group 46, National Archives, Washington, D.C. On the Party's inability to recover from the Nazi-Soviet Pact, see Jarrico interview by Patrick McGilligan, in *Tender Comrades*, eds. McGilligan and Buhle 335–336.
32. Report, SAC, Los Angeles to Hoover, 25 August 1943, COMPIC, FBI 100-138754-21. This fear that the Grand Alliance bestowed dangerous opportunities for American Communists was echoed by other intelligence agencies, including the Office of Naval Intelligence, which issued a memorandum proclaiming that Communist 'activities at the present time ... are given a cloak of "patriotism" and are obscured However, at the present time the Communist Party of the United States is thoroughly organized, nationally and locally, and is extremely active; in fact much more active than ever. Because of present world conditions, it is enjoying greater popularity than ever before and hence is more powerful.' Memorandum, D. Dwight Douglas to Officers-in-Charge, 29 May 1943, Van Deman Papers, Box 43, R-6276, Records of the U.S. Senate, Senate Internal Security Subcommittee (SISS), Record Group 46, National Archives, Washington, D.C.
33. For some this would simply constitute more evidence of their subservience to Moscow. See, for instance Harvey Klehr, John Earl Haynes, and Fridrikh Igorevich Firsov, *The Secret World of American Communism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 11. However, we must take into account the sincere anti-fascism on the part of the Hollywood left, the period of the pact notwithstanding. On this point, see Giovacchini, *Hollywood Modernism*, chapters 3–5.
34. John Bright interview by Patrick McGilligan and Ken Mate, 150–151; Lionel Stander interview by Patrick McGilligan and Ken Mate, 619; both in *Tender Comrades* McGilligan and Buhle (eds).
35. The document in question, entitled 'The Motion Picture Industry and the War', bears little identifying information. Obtained by the Los Angeles Police Department's Radical Squad, the document is a seven page brief on labor-management cooperation, union policy, and motion picture propaganda. It contains the following instructions: 'This material is being furnished to you to form the basis for more organized and systematic work in your branch. It should be digested thoroughly in your branch bureau, and discussed in the branch primarily from the point of view of the action which the branch should undertake.' The suggested action included: 'Stimu-

- lating the expression from the motion picture public of their desires and needs, through the *People's World*, the *Worker*, and the union press'. In both language and content it is clearly a Party document, though one cannot tell anything more about its authorship or level of distribution. Records of the U.S. House of Representatives, Special Committee on Un-American Activities, 1938–1944 (The Dies Committee), Exhibits, Evidence, etc., re: Committee Investigations, Los Angeles Police Department Radical Squad, Record Group 233, Box 50, unlabeled folder, National Archives, Washington D.C. (hereafter Los Angeles Police Department Radical Squad records).
36. 'The Motion Picture Industry and the War', Los Angeles Police Department Radical Squad Records, Box 50, unlabeled folder. The document notes great disagreement with the policy of supporting the producers, citing proposals to campaign for stronger powers for the OWI or for replacing Will Hays with Wendell Willkie. Here the OWI proposal is dismissed as not only too threatening to the producers, but also unsatisfactory given OWI's perceived failings in endorsing disagreeable pictures such as *Tennessee Johnson* as well the fact that 'the government does not know enough about entertainment values and the production of pictures to be able to direct industry intelligently'. Moreover, this document claims that the 'mere substitution of Willkie for Hays' would not change the Hays Office's 'extremely reactionary role in relation to content'.
 37. Report, SAC, Los Angeles to Hoover, 16 February 1944, COMPIC, FBI 100-138754-32.
 38. Report, SAC, Los Angeles to Hoover, 25 August 1943, COMPIC, FBI 100-138754-21.
 39. Report, SAC, Los Angeles to Hoover, 11 October 1943, COMPIC, FBI 100-138754-22.
 40. Garth Jowett, *Film: The Democratic Art* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1976), 311–315.
 41. Bosley Crowther, 'The Movies Follow the Flag', *New York Times Magazine* (13 August 1944): 18.
 42. Clayton R. Koppes and Gregory D. Black, *Hollywood Goes to War: How Politics, Profits and Propaganda Shaped World War II Movies* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), chapter 2. Garth Jowett, *Film: The Democratic Art*, 303–306. See also David Culbert (ed.), *Film and Propaganda in America: A Documentary History*, Volume II, Part I (New York: Greenwood Press, 1990). This collection of documents contains transcripts of both the Wheeler and Truman investigations.
 43. 'Hits Funds "Misuse" in First Lady Film', *The New York Times* (6 October 1943): 8; 'Propaganda Code Planned by Hays', *The New York Times* (10 October 1943): 40.
 44. Of course the FBI did fear that Communists had infiltrated parts of the Roosevelt Administration, including the OWI which worked closely with the film industry; nevertheless their investigation of Hollywood was not driven by partisanship, but rather intense anti-Communism.
 45. Feature Viewing, *Mission to Moscow*, 29 April 1943 [quote from a review by BMP analyst Madeleine Ruthven], 'Motion Picture Reviews and Analysis, 1943–1945', Box 3521, Office of War Information, Bureau of Motion Pictures, Record Group 208, National Archives, College Park, Maryland.
 46. Todd Bennett, 'Culture, Power, and *Mission to Moscow*: Film and Soviet-American Relations during World War II', *Journal of American History* 88 (2001), 489–518; Koppes and Black, *Hollywood Goes to War*, 185–221. See also David Culbert, ed., *Mission to Moscow* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1980) and Ronald Radosh and Allis Radosh, *Red Star over Hollywood: The Film Colony's Long Romance with the Left* (San Francisco: Encounter Books, 2005), chapter 5. Culbert's introduction details the roles of Davies and the Roosevelt Administration in the production of the film. Ronald and Allis Radosh instead argue that Communists (especially the film's technical advisor, Jay Leyda) and fellow-travelers (especially screenwriter Howard Koch) did more to shape this film. The Radoshes are more authoritative on the attitudes and roles of Koch and Leyda, but their analysis suffers from too much willingness to neglect the input of non-Communist participants in the making of this film.
 47. Letter, SAC, Los Angeles to Hoover, 27 May 1943, COMPIC, FBI 100-138754-14.
 48. One example of the Bureau's efforts to influence public opinion is the 1946 'educational' campaign discussed in Kenneth O'Reilly, *Hoover and the Un-Americans: The FBI, HUAC, and the Red Menace* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1981), chapter 3.
 49. Report, SAC, Los Angeles to Hoover, 10 July 1943, COMPIC, FBI 100-138754-9. Culbert indicates that Caldwell was first hired at Joe Davies's behest, but that the writer, who had no screenwriting experience, was soon replaced by Koch. Caldwell's treatment set the structure for the film, and he was the first to telescope the purge trials into one, but Koch and Director Michael Curtiz did much more to influence the film's dialogue and visuals. Culbert (ed.), *Mission to Moscow*, 18–25.
 50. Report, SAC, Los Angeles to Hoover, 10 July 1943, COMPIC, FBI 100-138754-9.
 51. Report, SAC, Los Angeles to Hoover, 10 July 1943, COMPIC, FBI 100-138754-9.
 52. Ralph Levering, *American Opinion and the Russian*

- Alliance, 1939–1945*, 61, 99, 144–145; *Time*, v 41, 4 (January 1943): 23.
53. David Lardner, 'Repercussions Would Help', *The New Yorker* (8 May 1943): 48–49.
 54. 'Successful Mission', *Newsweek* (10 May 1943): 74.
 55. *Nation* (8 May 1943): 651.
 56. Form letter, Dwight MacDonald et al. to 'Dear Friend', 12 May 1943, NAACP MSS, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. Cited in Culbert, *Mission to Moscow*, 257–259.
 57. John Dewey and Suzanne La Follette, Letter to the Editor, *The New York Times* (9 May 1943): IV, 8.
 58. 'V.F.W. Aide Defends *Mission to Moscow*', *The New York Times* (19 May 1943): 8. The New York State Commander of the V.F.W. issued a statement saying that Devereaux's views were not those of the organization.
 59. 'Assail Foes of Film', *The New York Times* (5 July 1943): 10.
 60. Arthur Upham Pope, Letter to the Editor, *The New York Times* (16 May 1943): IV, 12.
 61. Manny Farber, 'Mishmash', *New Republic* (10 May 1943): 636. Bosley Crowther, 'The Ecstasies in *Mission to Moscow* Raise Doubts on Political Films', *The New York Times* (9 May 1943): II, 3.
 62. James Agee, film column, *Nation*, (22 May 1943): 749.
 63. David Culbert notes that *Mission to Moscow* ranked 84th out of 95 films in its season. Its distribution abroad made up some of the losses, but the film never managed to break even. Still, because it played to many in the armed forces through the Army Motion Picture Service, Culbert concludes that the film reached an audience far larger than its receipts would indicate. Culbert, ed., *Mission to Moscow*, 34–35.
 64. Report, SAC, Los Angeles to Hoover, 10 July 1943, COMPIC, FBI 100-138754-9; Report, SAC, Los Angeles to Hoover, 20 April 1944, COMPIC, FBI 100-138754-26.
 65. John Morton Blum, *V Was For Victory: Politics and American Culture During World War II* (New York: Harvest, 1976), 157.
 66. Report, SAC, Los Angeles to Hoover, 10 July 1943, COMPIC, FBI 100-138754-9.
 67. Dorothy B. Jones, 'The Hollywood War Film: 1942–1944', *Hollywood Quarterly* (October 1945): 11. Of course, Jones's opinion would have been easily discounted by the Bureau. She had been the head of the Film Reviewing and Analysis Section of the Hollywood office of the OWI, an agency of the government that Hoover considered subversive. *Hollywood Quarterly* itself would have been considered tinged, if only because John Howard Lawson was on its editorial staff.
 68. Report, SAC, Los Angeles to Hoover, 10 July 1943, COMPIC, FBI 100-138754-9. The films listed as propaganda pictures in this report were: *Mission to Moscow*, *Action in the North Atlantic*, *Keeper of the Flame*, *Hangmen Also Die*, *Our Russian Front*, *Edge of Darkness*, and *This Land is Mine*. Interestingly, the report also listed 'Motion Pictures Believed To Have Propaganda Angle Which Have Been Made But Have Not Been Released, Or Are Now In The Process Of Production'. These were: *North Star*, *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, *Through Embassy Eyes*, *Russian People*, *Song of Russia*, *Boy From Stalingrad*, *Girl From Leningrad*, *The Seventh Cross*, and *Secret Service in Darkest Africa*. That the Bureau presumed these would be 'propaganda' pictures illustrates their belief that Communists would subvert any film that they worked on.
 69. Report, SAC, Los Angeles to Hoover, 12 February 1944, COMPIC, FBI 100-138754-24.
 70. Feature Viewing, *Sahara*, 8 July 1943, 'Motion Picture Reviews and Analysis, 1943–1945', Box 3524, Office of War Information, Bureau of Motion Pictures, Record Group 208, National Archives, College Park, Maryland.
 71. Dorothy B. Jones, 'Tomorrow the Movies III. Hollywood Goes to War', *The Nation* (27 January 1945): 94; Bosley Crowther, 'The Movies Follow the Flag'.
 72. The OWI had a hand in the positive characterization of Tambul. It recognized 'a great opportunity in the character of Tambul to show the heroic role of dark-skinned soldiers in this war ... and by implication, the American Negro'. Yet early scripts raised OWI concerns that this character, though portrayed heroically, 'remains apart from the others'. OWI was quite satisfied that the final version of the film incorporated its suggestions on this matter, proclaiming that 'the Sudanese Negro character, Tambul, now appears on equal footing with the other soldiers, no longer a sort of faithful Gunga Din, but a convincing brother-in-arms'. Script Review, *Sahara*, 1 February 1943, and Feature Viewing, *Sahara*, 8 July 1943, 'Motion Picture Reviews and Analysis, 1943–1945', Box 3524, Office of War Information, Bureau of Motion Pictures, Record Group 208, National Archives, College Park, Maryland.
 73. The idea that an American institution like the Army could promote progress in race relations echoed the thesis of Swedish scholar Gunnar Myrdal in *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1944). Myrdal asserted that America's race problems presented a moral dilemma for white citizens, who believed strongly in what he calls the American creed – ideas of liberty and equality. Myrdal believed that the American creed would reach fulfillment in the nation's institutions (especially its public institutions). Both Myrdal and the makers of *Sahara* were, in

- retrospect, too optimistic regarding the moral consciousness of whites, for civil rights reform came only after blacks themselves forced the issue through grassroots action. Indeed, as the actions of the FBI showed, government institutions could easily violate the American creed.
74. See, for example, Kenneth O'Reilly, *Racial Matters: The FBI's Secret File on Black America, 1960–1972* (New York: Free Press, 1989); Richard Gid Powers, *Secrecy and Power: The Life of J. Edgar Hoover* (New York: Free Press, 1987); Theoharis and Cox, *The Boss*.
 75. On this point see John Noakes, 'Racializing Subversion: The FBI and the Depiction of Race in Early Cold War Movies', *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 26 (July 2003): 728–749.
 76. According to several former Party members, Communists did organize to combat material in films that they deemed objectionable. According to Alvah Bessie, Party leader William Z. Foster told members at a meeting, 'The best you guys and girls can do here in this industry is what I would call, in military terms, "a holding action". You can't really do very good work in this industry because they won't let you. But you can prevent them, if you know how to do it, from making really anti-black, anti-woman, anti-foreign-born, anti-foreign-country pictures.' Paul Jarrico also contended that Party members were able to influence film content along these lines. See Alvah Bessie interview by Patrick McGilligan and Ken Mate, 103; and Paul Jarrico interview by Patrick McGilligan, 334; both in *Tender Comrades*, McGilligan and Buhle (eds).
 77. B-31, 'Entertainment World Linked to Communism', 24 May 1944, Van Deman Papers, Box 53, R-7110, Records of the U.S. Senate, Senate Internal Security Subcommittee, Record Group 46, National Archives, Washington, D.C. The notation on this report indicates that it was sent to the FBI as well as other intelligence agencies.
 78. Report, SAC, Los Angeles to Hoover, 20 April 1944, COMPIC, FBI 100-138754-26. The report also charged that the Communists prevented a film based on the life of Eddie Rickenbacker because they considered him a fascist. Blacks, of course, needed no such 'stirring' when it came to questions of racist content in Hollywood films. For instance, NAACP leader Walter White labored unsuccessfully to persuade MGM from making *Tennessee Johnson* (1942) given Andrew Johnson's deplorable record during Reconstruction. Letter, Walter White to Lowell Mellett, 17 August 1942, 'General Records of the Chief: Lowell Mellett', Box 1436, MGM folder, Office of War Information, Bureau of Motion Pictures, Record Group 208, National Archives, College Park, Maryland.
 79. Memorandum, D.M. Ladd to Hoover, 30 August 1944, COMPIC, FBI 100-138754-57. Navy Intelligence also listed 'Absolute social and racial equality' among the goals of Communists worldwide. Being that the other goals listed included abolition of religion, private property, and democratic government, it does not require much of a stretch to conclude that racial equality was seen as equally threatening. Memorandum, D. Dwight Douglas to Officers-in-Charge, 29 May 1943, Van Deman Papers, Box 43, R-6276, Records of the U.S. Senate, Senate Internal Security Subcommittee (SISS), Record Group 46, National Archives, Washington, D.C.
 80. Letter, SAC, Los Angeles to Hoover, 3 June 1943, COMPIC, FBI 100-138754-X.
 81. Letter, Hoover to Hood, 23 June 1943, COMPIC, FBI 100-138754-4X.
 82. Report, SAC, Los Angeles to Hoover, 13 June 1944, COMPIC, FBI 100-138754-34. *HWM, Today and Tomorrow: A Report on the Work, Purposes and Policies of the Hollywood Writers Mobilization* (Hollywood: Oxford Press, 1945), in 'Correspondence Regarding Film Production, 1943–45 – Records Concerning Film Ideas', Box 1535, Office of War Information, Record Group 208, National Archives, College Park, Maryland. See also *Writers' Congress: The Proceedings of the Conference held in October 1943 under the Sponsorship of the Hollywood Writers' Mobilization and the University of California* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1944). The G-Men were not the only ones who found the HWM's activities to be subversive. HUAC's research director J. B. Matthews considered an article by Lester Cole in *The Hollywood Quarterly* 'a malicious attack upon Mr. William Randolph Hearst'. For Matthews, this connected the HWM and the University of California to a broad Communist propaganda campaign, especially given Cole's Party affiliations. See 'Memorandum on University of California, Hollywood Writers Mobilization and Lester Cole versus Mr. William Randolph Hearst', in 'Fellow Travelers from Hollywood', Box 214, Folder 21, J.B. Matthews Papers, Rare Book, Manuscript, and Special Collections Library, Duke University.
 83. Riskin's politics should not have threatened the FBI. Shortly after retiring from his OWI post, Riskin called for an American propaganda program to counter Russian propaganda activities in Germany. See 'Urges U.S. Counter Reds' Propaganda', *New York World Telegram*, 25 May 1945, in 'Records of the Historian Relating to the Overseas Branch, 1942–45', Box 2, Entry 6B, Office of War Information, Record Group 208, National Archives, College Park, Maryland.
 84. Report, SAC, Los Angeles to Hoover, 13 July 1944, COMPIC, FBI 100-138754-40.

85. Report, SAC, Los Angeles to Hoover, 11 August 1944, COMPIC, FBI 100-138754-42. The films listed here were: *The Story With Two Endings*, *It's Murder*, *When He Comes Home*, *So Far So Good*, *World Peace Through World Trade*, and *UNRRA*.
86. Report, SAC, Los Angeles to Hoover, 9 March 1945, COMPIC, FBI 100-138754-87.
87. Report, SAC, Los Angeles to Hoover, 11 May 1945, COMPIC, FBI 100-138754-93.
88. Letter, Hoover to the Attorney General, 31 October 1944, COMPIC, FBI 100-138754-59. Hoover may have been able to justify this misrepresentation with his insistence that intelligence operations differed from actual investigations. Nevertheless, he hardly presented the Attorney General with an accurate portrayal of the Bureau's operations in this letter, which accompanied a summary of the Bureau's file on Hollywood. Nor was this the first time Hoover mislead Biddle. In 1943 Biddle had instructed Hoover to shut down his Custodial Detention program, which compiled lists of individuals to round up in an emergency. Hoover simply changed the program's name to Security Matter instead. See Theoharis and Cox, *The Boss*, 199–201.
89. Letter, Hood to Hoover, 2 April 1945, COMPIC, FBI 100-138754-86.
90. Memo, Arnold Picker to W.S. Cunningham, 17 April 1945; Feature Viewing, *The Master Race*, reviewed by Eleanor Berneis, 6 September 1944; both in 'Motion Picture Reviews and Analysis, 1943–1945', Box 3521, Los Angeles Overseas Bureau Motion Picture Division, Office of War Information, Record Group 208, National Archives, College Park, Maryland.
91. Memo, Los Angeles Special Agent to Hood, 5 March 1945; Memo, Los Angeles Special Agent to Hood, 17 March 1945; Memo, Los Angeles Special Agent to Hood, 20 March 1945; all included with Hood's letter to Hoover, 2 April 1945, COMPIC, FBI 100-138754-86. The Bureau's preoccupation with masculinity can be seen as a precursor to similar attitudes prevalent among many policymakers in the Cold War. There is a growing literature on American anxiety over masculinity during the Cold War. For example, see Frank Costigliola, 'Unceasing Pressure for Penetration: Gender, Pathology, and Emotion in George Kennan's Formation of the Cold War', *Journal of American History* 83 (March 1997): 1309–1339; K.A. Cuordileone, "'Politics in an Age of Anxiety': Cold War Political Culture and the Crisis in American Masculinity, 1949–1960', *Journal of American History* 87 (September 2000): 515–545; and Robert D. Dean, *Imperial Brotherhood: Gender and the Making of Cold War Foreign Policy* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2001).
92. Memo, D.M. Ladd to Hoover, 13 April 1945, COMPIC, FBI 100-138754-90.
93. Letter, Hoover to SAC, Los Angeles, 14 April 1945, COMPIC, FBI 100-138754-86.
94. Report, SAC, Los Angeles to Hoover, 11 October 1943, COMPIC, FBI 100-138754-22.
95. Ezra Goodman, 'Hollywood Belligerent', *The Nation* (12 September 1942): 213–214.
96. Manny Farber, 'Movies in Wartime', *New Republic* (3 January 1944): 16–20; Bosley Crowther, 'No Time to Quit: A Word on the Urgency of War Films, On What and Why They Should Be', *The New York Times* (23 May 1943): II, 3; Dorothy B. Jones, 'Tomorrow the Movies III: Hollywood Goes to War', *The Nation* (27 January 1945): 93–95; Dorothy B. Jones, 'Tomorrow the Movies IV: Is Hollywood Growing Up?' *The Nation* (3 February 1945): 123–125.
97. Koppes and Black, *Hollywood Goes to War*, 66.
98. Theoharis, *Chasing Spies*, 151–169; Thomas quoted on 164.

Abstract: Brassbound G-Men and celluloid reds: the FBI's search for communist propaganda in wartime Hollywood, by John Sbardellati

This article traces the development of the FBI's investigation of Hollywood during World War II. Motivated by a fear of Communist propaganda, the FBI initiated this surveillance before the onset of the Cold War. The Bureau conflated the cultural struggle over film with national security concerns. Justifying its investigation as a defense of democracy, the FBI data collected and formulated during these years would soon contribute to the stifling of the freedom of the screen.

Key words: FBI/Federal Bureau of Investigation, Hollywood/motion picture industry, World War II, Cold War, Communism/Anti-Communism, Propaganda, Blacklisting.