

# Reading Response 2

## HIST 380

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The first paper, by MacLeish, discusses how a hypothetical future America might perceive the late forties he's writing in. He points out that at the height of the USA's power, right after our smashing success in WWII, we are focusing our body politic at only containing the Russians. He is extremely critical of the blinders that focus was giving the US, and how ridiculous it was that all the effort was being spent only on that one task.

He then goes on to discuss how the real conflict isn't between Capitalism and the Communists, it's between "a dying world not altogether dead [and] a new world conceived but not yet born." The old world had little personal autonomy, the new is the world of the individual. Communism is not a movement about the individual, but the collective, so he labels Communism a reactionary movement.

He then goes on to point out what later becomes a significant black mark on US foreign affairs, the USs' willingness to work with authoritarian regimes if they will help stop the spread of communism. The writer's goal is to have an open, free world, which cannot happen if the US begins to sell out its' values so it can single-mindedly contain communism.

The writer is extremely concerned about the perceived erosion of American values. He would like to see a return to principled, thoughtful attitudes on policies internal and external. Such attitudes would allow him to realize his goal of free individuals.

Contrasting this view, but still wrapped in the American flag is J. Edgar Hoover. His first sentence makes this very clear: "The Communist Party, USA, works day and night to further the Communist plot in America."

J. Edgar's tone is clear: the Communists are subversive, evil and inhuman. They (but not he) practice thought control so they can effect outside their relatively few actual numbers. He (in reactionary style) takes aim at "the issues of the day: social reforms, peace, politics, veterans', women's, and youth problems" by equating the people who work on these issues to communists.

From a modern perspective, the tone of this book is incredible! The director of the CIA is blatantly propagandizing to the American people in peacetime! Just four years earlier, we were fighting alongside the communists! J. Edgar literally calls the members of the Communists party ready to "derail a speeding train" and "if asked, gun in hand, to assault the Capitol of the United States." It's just insane how obvious the propaganda is!

Hoover makes the party seems like a massive terror, hiding behind every door, in every sewer and under every bed. They are the boogeyman, impossible to see or touch, but evil and scary. A wife and mother is reported as saying "Daddy is dead" to her child when the Party sent her husband off into hiding.

*The Lavender Scare* is was written much more recently. It exposes the forgotten or papered over persecution of homosexuals in the US Government (especially the State Department) during the broader Red Scare.

It details how contrary to mainstream historical coverage of the period, queer fear was as real as communist fear, if not more so. It discusses how after McCarthy dropped his bombshell, the State Department disclosed that they had 91 employees pressured to resign due to "security risks," a codeword for homosexuals.

All three readings discuss the turn to a more reactionary political atmosphere in the US immediately following WWII. It is interesting to see the abrupt turn from the progressive policies of the previous era. The retreat into xenophobia and homophobia is a disappointing stain punctuating then end of the high morality and public consciousness of WWII.