Women, the Entertainment Industry, and the Blacklist Era

HIST-UA 625

Fall, 2011 -- Thursdays 2:00-4:45

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“I want my children to live proudly with their own religious beliefs, with no inquiry by any one of you gentlemen as to what they are. And I want my children to read all kinds of books and to sing all kinds of songs and not just the ones that you may think fit for them to read.”

Naomi Robison, appearing before the House Committee on Un-American Activities (HUAC), March 30, 1953

“I am perfectly willing to answer all of your questions about subversive activities in the entertainment industry, and the answer is that there is none.”

Madeline Lee, appearing before HUAC, August 17, 1955

One of the darker epochs of American history were the years most commonly known as the McCarthy-era. Although the senator from Wisconsin played only a small part in the investigations of the entertainment industry (most of the investigations were conducted by the House Committee on Un-American Activities (HUAC)), it is through his name that history seems destined to remember this time. History seems to have also chosen to only remember the men whenever discussions of this period are presented. Long forgotten, or more accurately ignored, women were named in great numbers, made numerous appearances before the Committees, and found themselves victims of the blacklist along with their male colleagues.

Were the women who appeared really all that different from the men? Was there a difference in how the committees approached the women? I think on many occasions the answer would be yes to both questions. The women do mention the next generation more frequently, and the committees tend to condescend to the women on a more regular basis. This course grows out of a project I am working on entitled *Dumb Blondes and Southern Belles*, named such because there were women who chose to go before the committees as “dumb blondes” while at the same time the committee often chose to treat many of the women who appeared before them as dumb, blonde or not. The other female prototype was the “Southern belle,” and she too made a number of appearances.

This course reviews the history of this period, and the women of the entertainment industry who were named at and/or appeared before the various Un-American Activities Committees (House, Senate, and State) from 1938-1958; focusing primarily on those who appeared. To date, I have identified over 300 of these women. Among this group are Academy Award and
Tony Award winning actors and writers, some who might be familiar to you, many who should be familiar but have been long forgotten by ensuing generations, along with a host of others who never had the opportunity to reach their full potential. Here is an opportunity to examine an important piece of the American story through a new lens, and as a result, giving a fascinating group of women their place in history.

**Textbook:**


Most books written about this period usually take the attitude that “naming names” was either a good thing (those considered on the “right”) or a bad thing (those considered on the “left”). *The Inquisition in Hollywood* leans toward the latter but is in itself an excellent overview of the period and has the added value of currently being in print. There are other books you might find interesting/helpful:

From the “left:” Victor S. Navasky’s *Naming Names*, and Stefan Kanfer’s *A Journal of the Plague Years: A devastating chronicle of the era of the blacklist* which presumes familiarity with the period.

From the “right:” Kenneth Lloyd Billingsley’s *Hollywood Party: How Communism Seduced the American Film Industry in the 1930s and 1940s*, and Ronald and Allis Radosh’s *Red Star over Hollywood: The Film Colony’s Long Romance with the Left*.

A bibliography follows this syllabus that includes more than just the required reading.

**Requirements:**

1. Students must read all assignments before class and come prepared to participate in the discussion. To that end, students are expected to write a short response to the material they have read. These responses can be in the form of questions that were triggered by the readings, or a short paragraph or two in reaction to the material. While this is a lecture class, students are more then invited to participate. If questions and/or reactions are received in a timely manner, all efforts well be made to address them in class. (If you will be absent, your questions or reactions are due before the class meets: send it by email to me, kevyne.baar@nyu.edu.)

2. The First Paper (3-5 pages) is your reflection on and reaction to the material presented. Consider how you would feel if faced with the situation in which these women find themselves. What types of questions might you have asked? What might you have wanted to explain that you didn’t get to? This is not a research paper (although the use of citations and appropriate references are allowed if applicable). It is a continuation of the ongoing class discussions, questions and reactions to the material.
3. The Second Paper (2-4 pages) is the beginning of your research for your final paper. In consultation with the instructor, pick a theme or a person who intrigues you from what we have been doing in this course. (The only person excluded is Lillian Hellman, about whom much has been written.) The paper should include an abstract of and introduction to the subject of the final paper. It should also identify some of the sources you are planning to use. Among possible research sources don’t forget to include:
- The Internet Movie Data Base (IMDB.com)
- The Internet Broadway Data Base (IBDB.com)
- The many historical newspapers available through ProQuest on the library website
  (The use of all of these as well as other resources will be reviewed in class)

4. The Final Paper (10-15 pages) will flesh out what was begun in the Second Paper. Depending on scheduling, your research may be presented and discussed in class. The Final Paper is due one week after the completion of classes.

SCHEDULE

Week One, September 8: Introduction to the class

Presentation: “We Were There Too! Women in the Entertainment Industry, the Un-American Activities Committees, and the McCarthy-Era Blacklist”

Week Two, September 15: Women and the Business of Entertainment


Week Three, September 22: The Curtain Falls on the Federal Theatre Project

Ceplair and Englund, Chapters 4 and 5


  Testimony of Hallie Flanagan
  Testimony of Hazel Huffman
  Testimony of Sallie Saunders
  Testimony of Ellen S. Woodward
Week Four, September 29: A First Look at Hollywood

Ceplair and Englund, Chapter 6
Film Clips: The Good Earth and The Great Ziegfeld starring Luise Rainer
Great Dames by Marie Brenner, Chapter on Luise Rainer
Testimony of Luise Rainer
Testimony of Rena Vale (two appearances)

Week Five, October 6: the Helpful Women of 1947, and the Congressman’s Wife

Ceplair and Englund, Chapters 7-9
Ginger Rogers, Ginger, My Story, pages 279-281
Robert Mayhew, Ayn Rand and Song of Russia: Communism and Anti-Communism in 1940s Hollywood, Chapter 5
Karen Chilton, Hazel Scott: The Pioneering Journey of a Jazz Pianist from Café Society to Hollywood toHUAC, Chapter 11
Testimony of Lela Rogers
Testimony of Ayn Rand
Testimony of Hazel Scott Powell

Week Six, October 13: The Committee Returns to Hollywood

Ceplair and Englund, Chapter 10
Women in Horror Films, 1940s by Gregory Mank, Chapter on Gale Sondergaard
Film Clips: Road to Rio and Return of a Man Called Horse featuring Gale Sondergaard
Film Clip: National Velvet and Gentleman’s Agreement featuring Anne Revere
Testimony of Gale Sondergaard
Testimony of Meta Reis Rosenberg
Testimony of Anne Revere

October 13, 2011 -- First Paper Due

Week Seven, October 20: So Many Witnesses; So Little Time

Ceplair and Englund, Chapter 11
Patrick McGilligan and Paul Buhle, Tender Comrades: A Backstory of the Hollywood Blacklist, interviews with Alfred Lewis Levitt, Marguerite Roberts, and Bess Taffel
Testimony of Eve Ettinger
Testimony of Helen Slote Levitt
Testimony of Bess Taffel
Testimony of Marguerite Roberts
Week Eight, October 27: The “Dumb” Blondes

Will Holtzman, Judy Holliday, Chapter 1
McGilligan and Buhle, Tender Comrades interview with Karen Morley
Film Clips: Adam’s Rib and Born Yesterday starring Judy Holliday
Film Clip: Dorothy Comingore in Citizen Kane
Film Clip: Scarface (1932) featuring Karen Morley
  Testimony of Judy Holliday
  Testimony of Dorothy Comingore
  Testimony of Karen Morley
  Testimony of Stella Adler

Week Nine, November 3: That thing called Television

Ceplair and Englund, Chapter 12
Those Wonderful Terrible Years by Rita Morley Harvey, Chapter 7
Ball of Fire: The Tumultuous Life and Comic Art of Lucille Ball by Stefan Kanfer, Chapter 9
McGilligan and Buhle interview with Joan LaCour Scott
Film Clip: I Love Lucy starring Lucille Ball
  Testimony of Jean Muir
  Testimony of Lucille Ball
  Testimony of Desiree Ball
  Testimony of Joan LaCour

November 3, 2011 -- Second Paper Due

Week Ten, November 10: Give My Regard to Broadway

K. Kevyne Baar, Investigating Broadway: The House Committee on Un-American Activities
Meets Members of the New York Theatre Community at the Foley Square Courthouse, August 15-18, 1955, Chapters 4, 8-10
Kate Mostel and Madeline Gilford, 170 Years of Show Business, Chapter 6
  Testimony of Sarah Cunningham
  Testimony of Irma Jurist
  Testimony of Susan Wells d’Usseau
  Testimony of Madeline Lee

Week Eleven, November 17: Nearing the end of the line

The Undiminished Man: A Political Biography of Robert Walker Kenny by Janet Stevenson, Preface
Film Clips: Detective Story and Shampoo featuring Lee Grant
Film Clip: *Gone With the Wind* featuring Olivia De Havilland
Testimony of Gale Sondergaard
Testimony of Janet Stevenson
Testimony of Lee Grant
Testimony of Olivia De Havilland

**Week Twelve, December 1: Whatever Became of ……?**

Kenneth Lloyd Billingsley, *Hollywood Party: How Communism Seduced the American Film Industry in the 1930s and 1940s*, Introduction
Film: *Hollywood Remembers the Blacklist: AFTRA/DGA/SAG/WGA*

**Week Thirteen, December 8:** Possible presentations of research projects in progress

**Week Fourteen, December 14:** Possible presentations of research projects in progress

**FINAL PAPER DUE: Thursday, December 22, 2011.**

**Bibliography**


Eric Bentley (Ed.), *Thirty Years of Treason: Excerpts from Hearings before the House Committee on Un-American Activities 1938-1968*, Nation Books, 2002


Will Holtzman, *Judy Holliday*, G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1982


Kate Mostel and Madeline Gilford, *170 Years of Show Business*, Random House, 1978


Bonnie Nelson Schwartz and the Educational Film Center (Eds.), *Voice from the Federal Theatre*, University of Wisconsin Press, 2003


Margaret Webster, *Don’t put your daughter on the stage*, Alfred A. Knopf, 1972