



Unfriendly Witnesses: Gender, Theater, and Film in the McCarthy Era (Theater in the Americas)

Milly S. Barranger

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Unfriendly Witnesses: Gender, Theater, and Film in the McCarthy Era examines the experiences of seven prominent women of stage and screen whose lives and careers were damaged by the McCarthy-era “witch hunts” for Communists and Communist sympathizers in the entertainment industry: Judy Holliday, Anne Revere, Lillian Hellman, Dorothy Parker, Margaret Webster, Mady Christians, and Kim Hunter.

The effects on women of the anti-Communist crusades that swept the nation between 1947 and 1962 have been largely overlooked by cultural critics and historians, who have instead focused their attention on the men of the period. Author Milly S. Barranger looks at the gender issues inherent in the investigations and at the destructive impact the investigations had on the lives and careers of these seven women—and on American film and theater and culture in general.

Issues of gender and politics surface in the women’s testimony before the committeemen, labeled “unfriendly” because the women refused to name names. *Unfriendly Witnesses* redresses the absence of women’s histories during this era of modern political history and identifies the enduring strains of McCarthyism in postmillennial America.

Barranger recreates the congressional and state hearings that addressed the alleged Communist influence in the entertainment industry and examines in detail the cases of these seven women, including the appearance of actress Judy Holliday before the committee of Senator Pat McCarran, who aimed to limit the immigration of Eastern Europeans; actress Anne Revere and playwright Lillian Hellman, appearing before the House Un-American Activities Committee, sought the protections of the Fifth Amendment with different outcomes; of writer Dorothy Parker, who testified before a New York state legislative committee investigating contributions to “front” groups; and of director Margaret Webster, before Senator Joseph McCarthy’s subcommittee, whose aim was the indictment of Senator J. William Fulbright and the U.S. State Department. None escaped subsequent blacklisting, denial of employment, and notations in FBI files that they were threats to national security.

Unfriendly Witnesses is enhanced by nine illustrations and extensive excerpts from *Red Channels: The Report of Communist Influence in Radio and Television*, originally published in 1950 at the height of the Red Scare, and which listed 151 allegedly subversive writers, directors, and performers. Barranger includes the complete entries from *Red Channels* for the seven women she discusses, which include the “subversive” affiliations that prompted the women’s interrogation by the government.

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