

Red Destinies

From Harvard Square to Stalin's and Mao's Dungeons and the Weathermen Biographies of American Communists

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2023

Preview

During the early 1930s four highly educated, high-status, native born Cambridge, Massachusetts families became involved with the Communist Party and its programs. Then, they and their friends became tangled in the Spanish Civil War, refugee work and espionage in France and Germany and Switzerland, Soviet agricultural policies that contributed to the great 1930 famine, a destructive battle within the Unitarian denomination, union battles in American industry and the American South, Hollywood studio strikes, spy rings in Washington, bloody purges in the Soviet sphere, China's disastrous Great Leap Forward and Cultural Revolution, and the futile struggles to save American Communism after it became irrelevant to 1960s' radical youths.

Four of the families' members were kidnapped, tortured, and held prisoners for five years by the Soviets. Two of their associates suffered the same fate in China. One close friend died mysteriously during America's McCarthy anti-Communist years, another served time in jail because of suspected treason. One family member became infamous when he decided to live the rest of his life in Communist Hungary. Significant, only a few ever criticized Russia and China after the world learned of their brutal policies and many of the families' members refused to recognize the faults and failures of communism and admit it led to dictatorships, stalled economies, and to totalitarian policies such as forced abortions, suppressing religion, and outlawing independent social organizations.

The families were part of significant history. Few Americans are old enough to remember when Communists and communist ideas were influential in the United States and the world. They were, especially during the 1930s and 1940s when the American Communist Party had 100,000 dues paying members, forwarded revolutionary ideas that alarmed

governments and religious orders, was powerful in America's labor unions, and pushed Soviet and Chinese Communist friendly policies. During the 1930s, the nation's young intellectuals felt they were required to be at least communist sympathizers. In the late 1940s it was revealed that Party members and supporters had long been involved in espionage, including spying on World War II's atomic bomb project.

Before then, beginning in the later 1930s, the American Communist movement and its revolutionary doctrines seemed so dangerous government investigations at state and national levels became common, as did anti-Communist laws. The investigations became front-page news after World War II and through the early 1950s as Party leaders were jailed and two Communist spies executed. The coverage continued with lower visibility for two decades but all the investigations shocked the nation. They pointed to Communist subversion in America's government and disloyalty within its intellectual elites at a time when there were growing concerns over the spread of Communist influence throughout the world, and as it became clear America's Communist Party had been and was financed and controlled by the Soviet Union. The investigations and revelations took a great toll. By the late 1950s the Party was down to a few thousand members who were squabbling among themselves while fighting new radical groups supporting China, not the Soviet Union.

This work centers around the strange lives, adventures, and misadventures of those four Massachusetts families, the Cannons, Hintons, Fields, and Clarks who were active through the Communist "heydays" of 1930s and early 1940s, the following years of confrontation, and the decades of Party decline after the mid-1950s. A few of their members remained active after the 1989-1990 dismantling of European Communist countries..

Only two members of those Cambridge families, Noel Field and William Hinton, achieved fame, but others were in contact with many on the left who did. Alger Hiss, Mother Bloor, Allen Dulles, Robert Oppenheimer, Harold Ware, Will Geer, and Nathan Gregory Silvermaster were among them. But family members worked with more than the historically remembered. They knew many old immigrant leaders who barely earned a living as Party functionaries, poor white and black Southern farmers, lice and flea infested Chinese peasants, itinerant farm hands in the mid-West, Russian peasants who forgot to put oil in tractors, and muscular types who dealt with strike breakers, even in Hollywood.

Three of the families became active Communists while the Cannons remained left-leaning political liberals who were entangled in 1930s and 1940s Communist-supported refugee programs in Spain and France that fed into a heated battle between America's liberals, socialists, and regular unionists against Communist influence in unions and relief organizations. Those battles spilled-over into a struggle within the Unitarian church and into post-World War II's anti-Communist crusades that were driven as much by liberals and socialists as by the likes of Senator Joe McCarthy.

In contrast to the Cannons, the Fields early-on became deeply and directly involved with Communist activities including espionage, assassination, covert action, and, later, the postwar purges in the Soviet bloc. The Hintons had their own interests. Although busy with Party matters in the United States they are most noted for their long-term ties to Communist China's struggles. The Clarks concentrated on America where they and their allies were active in farmers' movements, the Hollywood Ten movie writers' trials, industrial union conflicts, and the Communist underground of the 1950s. The Clarks had a special and somewhat tragic history: Two of the family spent time in asylums, three ended life in near poverty.

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The Cannon and Field Connections

Walter Cannon, the respected Harvard University physiologist, became entangled in pre- World War II battles between American socialist-liberals and Communists over refugee policies in the United States, Spain, France, and Switzerland, and over Communist influence in the United States. Those conflicts spilled-over into a wrenching conflict within the Unitarian church, and into illegal activities and espionage in France and Switzerland by Americans such as Varian Fry, Cannon's Cambridge neighbors the Fields, and Unitarian officials. Victory did not end the struggles. They intensified as Noel Field was accused of being a Communist agent who had used the American's OSS and the Unitarians to secretly further Communism in Europe.

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Part 2

The Clarks and Friends and the American Party

While Walter Cannon and his Unitarian allies Stephen Fritchman and Noel Field were entangled in international struggles their friends the Clarks were focused on Party goals and

problems in America. Even Jean Clark, who was involved in intelligence and Communist intrigues in Switzerland became engaged in America's Communist conflicts. The Clarks' involvements ranged from strikes in New England's factories and Hollywood's studios, to America's farm struggles, and to San Francisco's labor and arts communities. Mother Susan Clark's wide range of left-wing connections in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and the nation, were especially important. She even had ties to Ella Bloor and her son Harold Ware who aided Russia's farms and led an intelligence group in America that included Alger Hiss.

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Part 3

The Hintons, Espionage and the China Connections

Several others from the Boston- Cambridge group led unusual lives after World War II. Especially important were those who, during the 1920s and 1930s, had ties to Cambridge's ultra-progressive Shady Hill School. In addition to the Clarks and the Fields were the Hintons. They and their friends became deeply involved in China's Communist Revolution and in the American Party's struggles.

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Part Four

The Fields and Friends and Enemies and the Cold War

When World War II ended the older battles between the socialist/ liberal groups and America’s Communists were renewed, as were the allied struggles within the Unitarian Church. Then, the Unitarians’ and the Noel Field’s World War II’s links to espionage led to some of the strangest episodes of the Cold War. Noel Field, his wife, his brother, and his foster daughter were kidnapped, imprisoned, and tortured as the Soviet bloc launched another round of widespread and deadly political purges. As strange was Noel Field’s decision to again “see no evil” and to become a permanent expatriate in his captor’s country.

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A History of This History

The Cambridge families caught my attention more than a decade ago when I was researching the history of an innovative science information system created by Herbert Haviland Field, Noel's father. The resulting book included a short section about Noel's Communism, his espionage, and about his and his wife, brother, and step-daughters' kidnapping by the Soviets.¹ I was fascinated by the hints I encountered during the research for *Information and Intrigue* of the other three families' Communist involvements. While busy with the research for another book on the history of information systems and a deeper exploration of the Fields' history, I began exploring the lives of the Clarks, Hintons, and Cannons. That proved to be challenging as none had been researched in any depth by historians. That meant locating and evaluating what historian call primary-sources, uninterpreted evidence.

As I began finding materials I became convinced the three families, as well as the Fields, deserved biographies that included their backgrounds and their fates after their active years. I also concluded those biographies had to incorporate the actions of those close to the families as well as the families' reactions to the startling twists-and-turns of Communist policy, and the Party's tangled fate after its high point during the 1930s and 1940s. I also felt the biographies had to be placed in the contexts of the times and related movements, including the changes in communist ideology as old Marxism was pushed aside by the ideas of the 1960s New Left.

Researching for the biographies and their historical contexts took much, much longer than I expected. Crucial information had to be recovered through Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests to the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the State Department. Unfortunately, those agencies and the National Archives suffer from understaffing at their FOIA offices. So, it

took years, not months, to have critical requests for thousands of pages fulfilled. The search through hundreds of historical newspapers and magazines became easier after they were scanned and digitized by companies such as Newspapers.com Newspaper Archives. Much information was obtained through web-based data services including Ancestry and My Heritage that now hold a wide range of easily searched files including passenger records, city directories, and censuses. The digitized holdings of the Internet Archive, JSTOR, and the HathiTrust reduced the time required to search many government reports, academic books, and journal articles. Unfortunately, many other important government records and archival and academic sources demanded traditional time-consuming examination. As well, the existing published literature contained so many questionable statements that laborious fact-checking became a constant.

Help from the children of the Clark (Figueiredo), Fletcher, and Field families was and is much appreciated. The staffs at my university's library proved that librarians are devoted to service and scholarship. They located and obtained hundreds of hard-to-find books and articles. Many other librarians and archivists, especially those at Boston University's Gotlieb Center, Syracuse University, the New York Public Library, Smith College, the Library of Congress, Harvard, the University of Illinois, and the United States National Archives in Washington, D.C. and College Park, Maryland, also deserve salutes.

Notes on Sources, Citations, and Terminology

This study is based on thousands of documents and publications. Some are of the traditional type, well organized archival materials and published secondary works that are easy to cite without using too much space. But several sections of this work depend on source types that are difficult to cite without taking unjustified space with multiple and long web addresses or

file indicators, perhaps several for a single paragraph. The identifiers in on-line family history data bases, on-line historic newspaper collections, many FOIA files, and the titles to government investigation reports are examples of the problems. For example, when tracing people and subjects I would discover a birth date in one source, location and employment information in several others, and information on relatives in others. I saw that full citations of each source would demand almost as much space as the text.

Given that keyword searches of on-line and digitized database materials are now so efficient I decided that unless an item was of critical importance I would just point to the general source knowing the item could be retrieved by those readers who required it. Thus, I have used pointers such as family history , FOIA name , census, newspapers, rather than identifiers like <https://records.myheritagelibraryedition.com/research/record-10705-501456802/noel-field-in-us-city-directories> ; FBI FOIA 100-PH-22727 Robert Dahl; or <https://records.myheritagelibraryedition.com/research/record-10446-4321341/noel-field-in-1911-england-wales-census>. The FOIA request and RD numbers are listed in the appendix. After noticing how much space the citations were taking I also decided to use modified versions of the MLA citation formats. I dropped vol. and no. and .p. .and pp if they were used, assuming readers would know entry meanings.

FBI reports, memoirs, web pages: FBI reports on individuals have been the subject of much criticism so I often checked the assertions in them against other sources. The checks revealed the FBI's reports were quite accurate, making them acceptable sources. All memoirs were evaluated for their facts and what they did not include I tried to avoid using free-standing web pages but if they seemed useful they were also fact-checked.

Terminology: To avoid confusion, I have made distinctions between believing in communism in general and party doctrines by capitalizing Communism, and distinguishing the formal American party from others by using Party. However, I have used the terms Russia and the Soviet Union interchangeably.

Dollar values: Unless noted all dollar values are in terms 2020 American dollars, using the Federal Reserve inflation calculator.

ⁱ Colin B. Burke, , MIT Press, 2014.