regard when SAC sponsored a national magazine article attacking the so-called ZORC cabal, the set of prominent physicists (Jerrold Zacharias, Oppenheimer, Rabi, and Charles Lauritsen) thought to be undermining the nuclear weapons buildup that SAC was promoting. The DEW Line was constructed, but soon fell victim to Sputnik and the subsequent ballistic-missile arms race.

Berkner found solace in his efforts to promote increased funding for basic research. Much of the promotional work was done to help build the facility base in astronomy and to create the new field of space science. Needell implies that Berkner pursued at least some of this advocacy at the behest of the intelligence community to offer cover for reconnaissance programs. In the end, however, the brush with SAC seems to have reduced Berkner’s value as a broker between science and the government.


Reviewed by Philip Jenkins, Pennsylvania State University

Ellen Schrecker has updated her useful reader on anti-Communism in the United States, mainly in the decade after 1945. The documents are well chosen, the commentary is usually helpful, and the book should appeal to students. As a textbook it is well conceived, and the material lends itself nicely to being spread out over class sessions through a typical semester. Particularly valuable are the detailed materials on causes célèbres like the Hiss-Chambers case, the Rosenberg affair, and the Smith Act trials, all of which give students a good feel for the problems involved in handling *parti pris* documents. Despite these strong points, the book is radically mistitled, in such a way that indicates a curious and partisan approach to this era of American history.

Schrecker offers a collection of some forty documents with a scope that goes far beyond what any normal historian would characterize as “McCarthyism,” namely the turbulent era of anti-Communist demagoguery that raged from 1950 to 1954. She includes texts on the appeal of the Communist Party, the Communist view of the world, and the growing official intolerance of Communist Party activities from the mid-1940s onward. Her view is very much that of the left-liberal critic of the anti-Communist movement, and she ends by quoting Justice William O. Douglas’s condemnation of the “witch-hunt.” As any responsible scholar would, she takes account of recent findings that probably caused her some pain on their initial discovery, especially the Venona records. Based on these decrypts of Soviet intelligence cables, she concedes it is “likely” that Alger Hiss was the Soviet agent Ales, and she has no alternative but to accept the federal case against Julius Rosenberg (though not the draconian sentence). Yet her book has a painfully split personality: although she knows
and often cites the evidence of a genuine Communist menace, she can never bring herself to internalize the fact, and she recites ancient leftist pieties about “the alleged threat of domestic Communism” (p. 106).

Why does “McCarthyism” feature in the title of a book that has remarkably little to do with McCarthy? (And why, on the same theme, is the Senator pictured on the cover?) Schrecker’s argument is that the term has basically come to be synonymous with anti-Communism. She may be right about popular usage, but the equation of the two terms does a grave disservice to historical realities. From the mid-1930s through the late 1950s, many sane and nonfanatical Americans were powerfully opposed to Communism because they feared its influence in the labor movement and in ethnic communities, and they worried that the Communist Party might become a subversive fifth column in time of war. None of those fears was irrational, nor was the sense that something had to be done to curb Communist influence. The more we know about Communist espionage activities in this era, the more realistic the anti-Communists appear. From 1945 to 1949 the Truman administration and the Democratic Party launched a highly effective and widely popular campaign to remove Communists from positions of influence.

Schrecker’s selection of documents is unfair in its almost exclusive emphasis on the work of official and administrative agencies such as the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), to the virtual exclusion of the many public organizations and labor groups that enthusiastically wanted to see Communists kicked out of public life. Her selection gives the impression that anti-Communist activism was purely a top-down ploy by federal law enforcement and political adventurers, presumably inflicted on a passive or terrified public. The events are presented as a “purge,” a mirror image of the Stalinist repression of 1937–1938. Contrary to what Schrecker claims, however, it was not just “the nation’s political and social elites” (p. 2) that had a soundly based dread of Communists domestic and foreign. By blaming these sinister elites for provoking anti-Communist sentiment, she seeks to discredit the views they held. Throughout the book we find sentences like this: “The American Legionnaires, right-wing politicians and other spokespersons for the anti-Communist network charged that Communists had infiltrated the New Deal” (p. 15). But can anyone really deny that there is now such abundant evidence about the presence of Communists throughout the New Deal enterprise, from Alger Hiss down, that it makes the infiltration claim quite plausible? By implying that this view was the delusion of a mysterious group of right-wing fanatics, Schrecker can dismiss any suggestion about left-wing activism in the New Deal as paranoid and “McCarthyite.” Rational anti-Communism deserves a far better hearing than it receives in this collection.

So where does McCarthyism come into all of this? By 1950, after the anti-Communist movement had accomplished most of its objectives, Senator Joseph McCarthy entered the fray. As the term “McCarthyism” was commonly used, it was not synonymous with anti-Communism as such, but was merely a description of an unacceptable form of expose politics. It was an irresponsible and dangerous tactic characterized by vague and unsubstantiated accusations for political ends, the exploi-
tation of hysterical public fears, and the reckless persecution of innocent or relatively harmless dissidents. Critics used the term in the sense of witch-hunting or demagoguery, and, as such, McCarthyism deserved utter repudiation.

Only after McCarthy’s career had crashed in flames did the Left succeed in attaching the “McCarthyite” label to the whole anti-Communist enterprise, gaining a mighty historical victory in the process. Any cause that could be linked to McCarthy—spuriously or otherwise—was, by definition, wrong. The suggestion that Communists might have been highly placed in the federal government (as in fact they were) was deemed McCarthyism. The suggestion that Julius Rosenberg, Alger Hiss, and others were Soviet spies was deemed McCarthyism (though spies they were). The notion that the Soviet Union was operating hundreds of spies on American soil (as has now been confirmed beyond any doubt) was deemed McCarthyism. The distortions go on and on—even to suggest that the government was targeting authentic Communists rather than well-meaning liberals was “McCarthyism.”

In short, to label the whole anti-Communist movement as “McCarthyism” is to accept a highly loaded and inaccurate picture of the era, as if all anti-Communists were paranoid “witch-hunters”—and Schrecker even uses the disreputable “witch-hunt” language herself. She knows perfectly well the realities of the Communist presence and the whole pernicious mythology that is associated with the language of McCarthyism. Why, then, does she perpetuate the McCarthyism myth?


**Reviewed by Steven Aftergood, Federation of American Scientists**

Shortly after the U.S. Atomic Energy Commission (AEC) voted in 1954 to deny reinstatement of J. Robert Oppenheimer’s security clearance in the wake of a tumultuous four-week hearing, a reporter asked the eminent physicist for his assessment of the AEC decision against him. “People will study the record of this case and reach their own conclusions,” Oppenheimer replied. “I think there is something to be learned from it.” Indeed there is. The Oppenheimer case was the very template of an official security investigation run amok, in which the full weight of the government security bureaucracy was brought to bear against a single individual on a questionable and shifting pretext, the norms of due process were discarded, and an absurd conclusion was reached: that Oppenheimer, the man who did more than anyone else to ensure the success of the U.S. nuclear weapons program, was unfit to hold a security clearance.

The transcript of the proceeding is a dark jewel of many facets. It is, to begin with, an exceptionally engaging legal drama, featuring a resplendent cast of characters who come to praise or to bury Oppenheimer. “It is only the great sinners who become the great saints,” observed George F. Kennan (p. 147), when urging the AEC Person-