

# Inside a Broadcasting Blacklist: *Kraft Television Theatre*, 1951–1955

Cynthia B. Meyers

“Anyhow, it had better not happen again,” wrote John (Jack) Platt, Kraft’s vice president of advertising, to John U. Reber, the head of the radio and television department at Kraft’s advertising agency, the J. Walter Thompson Company (JWT), in October 1952. Kraft, Platt continued, was “still getting repercussions from the last appearance of a certain subversive character on Kraft tv.” Platt was referring to the objections by an anticommunist activist named Laurence Johnson, a grocer from Syracuse, New York, to the appearance of the actor John Randolph on the program Kraft owned, *Kraft Television Theatre* (1947–1958). Reber, who was in charge of producing and casting Kraft’s program, then wrote to Edward G. Wilson, the vice president of JWT’s legal department: “Jack’s statement that ‘it had better not happen again’ seems to mean we have no alternative but to check all Kraft names against a blacklist,” though “we all had been hoping that this step would not be necessary.” Wilson complied by creating a “Master List” of 1,045 names. But Reber eventually pushed back, lobbying Platt to reduce the list. He argued that the artistic quality of *Kraft Television Theatre* was at stake, and he challenged the standards by which it was compiled. In 1955 Reber warned Platt that “the time may come when those companies who have knuckled under to the witch hunters will be exposed as organizations who have used their commercial position to deprive individual Americans of fair treatment.”<sup>1</sup>

The interactions of Platt, Reber, Johnson, and Wilson provide a unique opportunity for understanding, in all its conflicted complexity, the practical effects on a central cultural industry of the notorious anticommunist purges that followed World War II, what Ellen Schrecker has called the “longest lasting wave of political repression in American history.” Its causes are still debated. Was it, in Schrecker’s formulation, “an unfortunate

Cynthia B. Meyers is an associate professor of communication at the College of Mount Saint Vincent, New York City.

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Readers may contact Meyers at cynmey@gmail.com.

<sup>1</sup> John Platt to John Reber, Oct. 28, 1952, box 88, Edward G. Wilson Papers, J. Walter Thompson Company (John W. Hartman Center for Sales, Advertising & Marketing History, Duke University, Durham, N.C.); Reber to Edward G. Wilson, Oct. 30, 1952, *ibid.*; “Master List: All Inclusive Up to April 23, 1954,” box 87, *ibid.*; Reber to Platt, Jan. 26, June 15, 1955, box 88, *ibid.*

overreaction to a genuine threat or the product of a conscious campaign to wipe out dissent”? Richard Gid Powers contrasts the liberal anticommunists, who wanted to protect liberal values such as intellectual freedom, artistic expression, and due process from communist interference, with the activists he calls the “countersubversives,” who viewed communists as treasonous agents of a foreign power bent on undermining religion, patriotism, family, and civil society. Countersubversives popularized what Powers calls “red web fantasies,” such as Senator Joseph McCarthy’s assertion that Gen. George Marshall’s military decisions were the product of a communist conspiracy. Countersubversives were not content with finding and purging communists; they also attacked liberals as “fellow travelers” in communist “fronts” against whom persecution was therefore also justified. The anticommunist liberals deplored the countersubversives’ strategies, yet they shared the premise that communists should not enjoy civil rights or protection from firing or prosecution. Powers concludes that the countersubversives’ paranoid fantasies and insistence on political repression undermined the liberals’ anticommunist efforts. Jennifer Delton argues that it was actually anticommunist liberals who perpetrated such repression, beginning with Harry S. Truman’s loyalty oaths for federal employees and extending to the purges in unions and the entertainment industries. Delton argues that such acts were motivated by liberals’ desire to solidify the gains of the New Deal against attacks from both the Right and Left. “Liberal principles,” according to Delton, “were more effectively furthered by purging Communists than by defending their rights.”<sup>2</sup>

In this case study of *Kraft Television Theatre (KTT)*, all of these motives are at work and in combination with other complicating factors. The dynamics of purging were affected by the broadcast industry’s practices and assumptions. Sponsors and advertising agencies were for the most part corporate liberals who, as Anna McCarthy points out, believed that their sponsorship of culturally uplifting programs was a form of “public trusteeship” of the airwaves. They assumed that broadcasting, by virtue of its signals penetrating audiences’ private homes, had a stronger effect on audiences than did print media. They assumed that audiences closely associated programs with the shows’ sponsors, and this sponsor identification was expected to increase product sales. But it also created a danger—if the program offended audiences, it could cause sales to drop. These assumptions, at least as much as the sponsors’ and agencies’ politics, informed their blacklisting decisions. In the case of *KTT*, the sponsor Platt and the agency executives Reber and Wilson all agreed with the countersubversive Johnson that communists should not be hired. Their disagreements about how to implement this policy reveals conflicts not just about liberal values but also about advertising strategies.<sup>3</sup>

Despite the rich literature on blacklisting in Hollywood, our understanding of blacklisting in the broadcasting industry has been hampered by a lack of good sources. Unlike the movie industry, dominated by a handful of powerful film studios, the broad-

<sup>2</sup> Ellen Schrecker, *Many Are the Crimes: McCarthyism in America* (Boston, 1998), x. See also Susan Jacoby, *Alger Hiss and the Battle for History* (New Haven, Conn., 2009); Richard M. Fried, *Nightmare in Red: The McCarthy Era in Perspective* (New York, 1990). Richard Gid Powers, *Not without Honor: The History of American Anticommunism* (New York, 1995), 214, 254, 231, 249; Jennifer Delton, *Rethinking the 1950s: How Anticommunism and the Cold War Made America Liberal* (Cambridge, Eng., 2014), 13, 32; M. J. Heale, *American Anticommunism: Combating the Enemy Within, 1830–1970* (Baltimore, 1990); and John E. Haynes, *Red Scare or Red Menace? American Communism and Anticommunism in the Cold War Era* (Chicago, 1996).

<sup>3</sup> Anna McCarthy, *The Citizen Machine: Governing by Television in 1950s America* (New York, 2010), 25; Roland Marchand, *Advertising the American Dream: Making Way for Modernity, 1920–1940* (Berkeley, 1985), 90; Victor Herbert, “Do Listeners Associate Radio Stars with the Correct Product?,” *Sales Management*, Oct. 1, 1936, p. 465.

casting industry was spread among dozens of broadcasters, advertisers, and producers, mostly in New York City. Broadcast advertisers, or sponsors, controlled most programs. Sponsors hired advertising agencies to produce programs, and sponsors paid broadcasters to air them. Advertising agencies usually oversaw the hiring of actors, writers, and directors because broadcast programs, unlike films, existed to sell advertisers' products rather than tickets. To investigate the blacklisting activities of these multifarious industry participants, scholars have had to rely heavily on two key sources, each of which has limitations. The first, John Cogley's *Report on Blacklisting II* (1956), funded by the liberal think tank the Fund for the Republic and intended as an exposé, is based on contemporaneous voluntary interviews with employers who had incentives to dissimulate and, as detailed below, did so. The second source is the trial transcript of a 1962 libel case involving Johnson and other anticommunist activists that was brought by blacklisted radio show host John Henry Faulk. This document consists of the perpetrators' sworn testimony given ex post facto, subject to memory lapse and self-serving spin. Most analysts have assumed that contemporaneous, reliable accounts of how the blacklists functioned do not exist because blacklisters, fearing lawsuits, did not keep written records of these activities.<sup>4</sup>

In fact, I have discovered that at least one broadcast blacklister not only wrote things down but also preserved them: Wilson, the above-mentioned vice president of J. Walter Thompson's legal department who compiled the "Master List," deposited files at the John W. Hartman Center for Sales, Advertising and Marketing History at Duke University that include lists of blacklisted names; correspondence among anticommunist activists, sponsors, agency executives, and blacklistedees; the secret *Confidential Notebook: File #13* documents distributed to blacklisters to influence blacklisting decisions; internal memos among agency and sponsor executives; and affidavits from performers seeking "clearance." Unlike voluntary interviews or trial testimony, these internal private documents detail how these broadcasting employers practiced blacklisting during the height of the purges. While historians such as David Everitt have provided detailed accounts of the motivations of the anticommunist activists who influenced broadcasting blacklists, they have so far had little to say about the advertising agencies, the actual perpetrators of the blacklists. The Wilson documents give us unique and nuanced insight into the thinking of those perpetrators—business and advertising executives who, whatever their unstated, possibly conflicting, political goals, wanted mainly to please audiences and sell cheese.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup> On Hollywood blacklisting, see Victor Navasky, *Naming Names* (New York, 1980); Larry Ceplair and Steven Englund, *The Inquisition in Hollywood: Politics in the Film Community, 1930–1960* (Berkeley, 1979); and Howard Suber, "The Anti-Communist Blacklist in the Hollywood Motion Picture Industry" (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 1968). On broadcast blacklisting, see David Everitt, *A Shadow of Red: Communism and the Blacklist in Radio and Television* (Chicago, 2007); Karen Sue Foley, *The Political Blacklist in the Broadcast Industry: The Decade of the 1950s* (New York, 1979); Merle Miller, *The Judges and the Judged* (Garden City, 1952); Howard Blue, *Words at War: World War II Era Radio Drama and the Postwar Broadcasting Industry Blacklist* (Lanham, 2002); and Thomas Doherty, *Cold War, Cool Medium: Television, McCarthyism, and American Culture* (New York, 2003). John Cogley, *Report on Blacklisting II: Radio-Television* (n.p., 1956), 67; *John Henry Faulk vs. AWARE, Inc., Laurence A. Johnson and Vincent Hartnett Case Records, 1942–1975* (Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, University of Texas at Austin). See also John Henry Faulk, *Fear on Trial* (New York, 1964).

<sup>5</sup> Although Edward G. Wilson's papers document the J. Walter Thompson Company's blacklisting for clients such as Lever Brothers, Scott Paper, and Ford, what follows focuses entirely on Kraft, the most completely documented client in this collection. Everitt, *Shadow of Red*, 116–41. For a case study of blacklisting at a radio program by a different advertising agency, see Cynthia B. Meyers, "Advertising, the Red Scare, and the Blacklist: BBDO, US Steel, and *Theatre Guild on the Air, 1945–1952*," *Cinema Journal*, 55 (Summer 2016), 55–83.

## J. Walter Thompson, Broadcast Advertising, and Kraft

The J. Walter Thompson Company, founded in 1864, is the oldest existing American advertising agency and pioneered key developments in its field. JWT helped build magazines into the first national advertising medium by convincing publishers to carry ads. One of the first agencies to recognize the buying power of housewives, JWT hired John B. Watson, the noted behaviorist psychologist, to develop the field of market research. In the mid-1920s, under the leadership of Stanley Resor and his wife, the copywriter Helen Lansdowne Resor, JWT created pioneering ad campaigns for Pond's and Lux personal care products, built on testimonials from socialites and movie stars and designed to appeal to consumers' aspirations to beauty, glamour, and wealth.<sup>6</sup>

By the 1930s, JWT applied this strategy of celebrity association to radio programs produced for clients such as Kraft, Standard Brands, and Lever Brothers. Radio had expanded exponentially during the Great Depression in part because it provided nominally free entertainment. Advertisers rented fifteen-, thirty-, or sixty-minute blocks of airtime from broadcasters (stations and networks) and hired advertising agencies to produce programs designed to instill "good will" in audiences and build sponsor identification in the minds of audiences. John Reber was appointed to head the JWT Radio Department in 1929, where he supervised the scripting, directing, and production of sponsored radio programs—thirty-one a week by early 1930. In a 1936 house ad, JWT asserted that its programs provided "the two steps necessary to radio advertising success: 1. They gather audiences suited to the ends of the products advertised. 2. They move these audiences to action with sales messages that SELL." JWT produced some of the top radio programs of the era, including *Lux Radio Theatre* (1935–1955), featuring film stars performing shortened audio versions of recent films, and the variety shows *The Fleischmann's Yeast Hour* (1929–1936), featuring the crooner Rudy Vallee, and *The Chase & Sanborn Hour* (1929–1948).<sup>7</sup>

When it hired JWT in 1928, Kraft was already an aggressively expanding national consumer products company. Originating in 1903 when (according to company publicity) James L. Kraft was just "a man with a vision, \$65 capital, a small stock of cheese, and a faithful horse," the company expanded rapidly through mergers and lawsuits. For example, after registering patents for packaging and processing cheese, Kraft used threats of litigation to acquire the Philadelphia cream cheese and Velveeta brands. By the time he died in 1953, the Kraft Foods Company was a major corporation employing 15,000 workers in several countries, manufacturing and distributing over two hundred different food products, and generating over \$1 billion in sales.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Stephen Fox, *The Mirror Makers: A History of American Advertising and Its Creators* (New York, 1984), 78–94; Marchand, *Advertising the American Dream*, 32; "Advertising Was Practically Forced on Magazines," *Advertising Age*, Dec. 7, 1964, p. 28; Peggy J. Kreshel, "The 'Culture' of J. Walter Thompson, 1915–1925," *Public Relations Review*, 16 (Fall 1990), 80–93; "Movie Stars, Debutantes and Archbishops Join Thompson's Testimonial Campaigns," *Advertising Age*, Dec. 7, 1964, p. 56.

<sup>7</sup> Michele Hilmes, *Hollywood and Broadcasting: From Radio to Cable* (Urbana, 1990), 78–115; Cynthia B. Meyers, *A Word from Our Sponsor: Admen, Advertising, and the Golden Age of Radio* (New York, 2014), 201–24; Calvin Kuhl, "The Grim Reber," 1971, typescript, p. 25; J. Walter Thompson Company, Writings and Speeches, 1912–2000 (Hartman Center); "Now on the Networks," advertisement, *Printers' Ink*, Jan. 16, 1936, pp. 8–9.

<sup>8</sup> For simplicity, I refer to the company as "Kraft," although its name has changed a number of times. "The Kraft Story, 1903–78," ca. 1979, pamphlet photocopy, series 1, box 1, *Kraft Television Theatre* Oral History Project (National Museum of American History Archives Center, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.); J. Walter Thompson Company, "The History of Velveeta," July 1, 1957, typescript, box KR1, p. 6; J. Walter Thompson Company, Account Files (Hartman Center).



John Reber, pictured here, was the head of the radio and television department at the J. Walter Thompson Company (JWT). Reber was in charge of casting the television show *Kraft Television Theatre* for JWT's client Kraft. While he believed that communists should not be hired, he struggled to maintain the quality of the show against the broad list of performers he was not allowed to use in the mid-1950s. *Courtesy John W. Hartman Center for Sales, Advertising & Marketing History, Duke University.*

Advertising was as important as litigation to the company's expansion. Kraft claims to have been the first national food brand to advertise in a magazine (in 1919). By 1930, it had shifted all of its product advertising accounts to JWT and placed Kraft executive Jack Platt in charge of collaboration with the agency. Platt had started at Kraft in 1919, became its advertising manager in 1924, and was vice president of advertising and public relations from 1940 to 1955. At his retirement in 1962, Platt claimed to have spent at least \$333 million over four decades marketing Kraft products. He explained his approach in a

1952 newsletter article for Kraft employees titled “Why Advertise?” Kraft advertising, he said, “is the process of getting people in a favorable frame of mind to buy Kraft products.” To build the brand, “steady and consistent advertising is needed to constantly maintain the high regard in which people hold us and our products.” Each advertisement “is our public affidavit—our solemn sworn statement—that each and every claim for our products is the truth in the literal meaning of the word.” Platt’s concern for truth reflected not only a belief that advertising should function as an educational service for consumers but also his rejection of the deceptive practices of the patent medicine purveyors who had once dominated advertising.<sup>9</sup>

Kraft was an early broadcast advertiser. Despite many advertisers’ skepticism about radio, in 1929 Kraft sponsored short daytime local station segments directed to housewives, such as *Woman’s Magazine of the Air*. Unable to estimate actual listenership, Platt measured the segments’ success by the number of listener requests for recipes. In 1933, following Reber’s advice, Kraft gambled on a two-hour nationally broadcast live program to promote its new salad dressing, Miracle Whip. *Kraft Musical Revue*, featuring celebrities such as the bandleader Paul Whiteman and vaudeville star Al Jolson, was renamed *Kraft Music Hall* in 1934 with crooner Bing Crosby as host. According to *Sponsor* magazine, the program provided “a sense of entertainment values, sensitivity to the family audience and ability to make the commercial palatable.” Platt explained in a 1938 speech that as an advertising manager who found himself in “show business,” he needed to “let the experts do their jobs,” and “in our case those expert showmen are in the J. Walter Thompson Company.” Although *Kraft Music Hall*, which ran until 1949, was produced in Hollywood (for easier access to film stars), Reber oversaw it from JWT’s New York office. Its announcer, Ken Carpenter, avoiding the loudly barked, repetitive hard-sell commercials common on other radio programs, spoke with modest self-effacement. Platt described the style as “straight, selling commercials—short, but always straight. . . . No tricks, no furbelows, no kidding.” Crosby and guest stars such as James Cagney, Cary Grant, Joan Fontaine, Joan Crawford, and Bette Davis did not present the commercials. Platt saw them as “artists . . . valuable as entertainers. When they step out of character—become commercial salesmen—we think that the listening audience may resent it, and with some justification.”<sup>10</sup>

Having found success advertising on radio, Kraft began buying television airtime in 1947, long before national television networks could reach the entire country. In that year Platt ran a test, selecting for Kraft’s first telecast a product, MacLaren’s Imperial Cheese, not advertised in any other medium. Sales rose dramatically, and thereafter so did Kraft’s investment in television. Television, at this early stage, seemed almost miraculous in its selling power. In 1952 Kraft’s public relations department trumpeted television’s extensive reach. On *Kraft Television Theatre*, Kraft “talks to more than NINE MILLION people every Wednesday night. When you realize it takes a top Hollywood film an entire year to reach six million people, or a smash Broadway hit like ‘South Pacific,’ playing to a full house every night for 17 years, to reach nine million people—then you get an idea of the

<sup>9</sup> “Platt, Kraft Ad Head 31 Years, Will Retire July 1,” *Advertising Age*, June 25, 1962, p. 113; “John H. Platt,” *Kraftsman*, Sept.–Oct. 1953, p. 27; J. H. Platt, “Why Advertise?,” *ibid.*, Feb.–March 1952, pp. 3–4.

<sup>10</sup> John H. Platt, “We Are on the Air,” *Cheesekraft*, Feb. 1929, p. 11; “Kraft Radio,” ca. 1964, typescript, box 9, Sidney Bernstein Papers, J. Walter Thompson Company (Hartman Center); “Public and Press Acclaim Kraft Radio Program,” *Cheesekraft*, July–Aug. 1933, esp. 1, 5; “How Kraft Uses the Air: 1933–52,” *Sponsor*, May 5, 1952, p. 26; John H. Platt, “52 Shows a Year,” May 5, 1938, speech delivered at the Chicago Federated Advertising Club, pp. 5, 15, 22 (Kraft Archives, Morton Grove, Ill.).



**John H. Platt**  
 Vice-President in Charge of  
 Advertising and Public Relations.

John H. Platt was Kraft's vice president of advertising who pressured the J. Walter Thompson Company to rigorously check the background of performers before hiring them to appear on his company's *Kraft Television Theatre* in the 1950s. Reprinted from *Kraftsman* (Feb.–March 1952).

effectiveness of the TV Theatre as a means of communication.” With television Kraft could reach millions of viewers simultaneously at a low cost per viewer; Kraft soon devoted a majority of its advertising budget to television. Given television's combination of sight and sound, many advertisers believed it would allow them to demonstrate products like a door-to-door salesman; as one JWT executive put it, “A product well demonstrated is more than half sold.”<sup>11</sup>

*Kraft Television Theatre*, like *The Philco Television Playhouse* (1948–1955), *General Electric Theater* (1953–1962), and *The Goodyear Television Playhouse* (1951–1957), presented a play every week with its own cast, characters, set, and story. Live anthology dramas are remembered today as the apotheosis of “golden age” television. Critics at the time lauded these programs as more authentic than episodic series or Hollywood genre films in part because they more closely resembled legitimate theater. As JWT producer Maury Holland claimed, watching *KTT* was like having free season tickets to live theater. The anthology drama format had long been a favorite of radio sponsors seeking prestige: Du Pont sponsored a docudrama about American technological progress, *Cavalcade of America* (1935–1953), and U.S. Steel sponsored the highbrow live theater program, *Theatre Guild on the Air* (1945–1953). Program sponsorship was a form of what was then called “institutional advertising”: marketing designed to improve corporate image rather than to sell specific products. Yet packaged goods advertisers such as Kraft also hoped to sell specific products by sponsoring anthology dramas. They hoped that the high quality of the programs would be associated with the quality of their products. Moreover, they hoped consumers would be impressed by, if not beholden to, sponsors for the free entertainment. As Anna

<sup>11</sup> “History of Velveeta,” 26, 26a; “Kraft TV,” ca. 1964, typescript, box 9, p. 2, Bernstein Papers; John McLaughlin, “20 Billion Salesmen,” *Kraftsman*, Feb. 1952, p. 5; Fred Fidler, “Television May Lead to Revolution in Selling,” *Advertising Agency and Advertising & Selling*, June 1949, p. 53.

McCarthy argues, anthology dramas “fostered the impression that their sponsors were patrons of the arts, the seemingly philanthropic relationship between corporation and viewer underscored by codified announcer phrases such as ‘brought to you by.’”<sup>12</sup>

For eleven years, from May 1947 to October 1958, *KTT* telecast about 650 live productions, featuring at least four thousand different performers, becoming the longest-running consecutive one-hour live television anthology drama. Because videotape technology was not invented until 1956, most early 1950s television programs were broadcast live and consequently faced huge technical and artistic challenges. The movements of actors, sets, and cameras had to be choreographed, rigorously rehearsed, and executed perfectly just once for broadcast. Despite these drawbacks, critics praised live broadcasting’s “sense of immediacy,” as did sponsors. During *KTT*’s opening announcement, audiences heard: “The *Kraft Television Theatre* comes to you live from New York. The play is being performed at the moment you see it: living theater for your best television entertainment.” Unlike a stage or screen actor, seen at a distance in a public venue, the television actor, according to one critic, “is coming into the home and joining an intimate family group,” and “the television camera goes inside of an actor’s mind and soul,” presumably providing audiences with a more authentic experience.<sup>13</sup>

JWT producer Holland claimed that for *KTT* “the play’s the thing” rather than special effects, elaborate visuals, or stars. Nothing should interfere with the show’s “intimacy”: “TV audiences, unlike those for movies and legitimate theatre, are usually small groups of people at home,” explained Kraft’s public relations department, and this affected the types of plays they would produce. JWT script supervisor Edmund Rice, choosing from among thousands of scripts, farmed out those he selected to JWT writers for television adaptation. Given an initial budget of only about \$6,000 per show, Rice preferred “tightly knit drama[s] with a good degree of suspense and emotional impact” that needed only small casts. Designed to provide “family-type drama featuring everyday people in unusual circumstances” and to project an atmosphere of artistic “quality,” the actual plays ranged across many genres, from the frivolous, such as a comic vaudevillian version of “Alice in Wonderland” hosted by Edgar Bergen and Charlie McCarthy (1954), to the ultraserious, such as Rod Serling’s “Patterns” (1955), a social critique of competition in the executive suite. In every case, the play needed to appeal to a family audience.<sup>14</sup>

Although the radio program *Kraft Music Hall* had depended on celebrity guest stars, *KTT* usually employed not Hollywood stars but New York theater actors. Kraft was infamous for paying performers badly, sometimes with gifts of cheese. Platt was averse to promoting stars over Kraft products and argued that bidding up the price of star talent

<sup>12</sup> William Hawes, *American Television Drama: The Experimental Years* (Tuscaloosa, 1986); William Hawes, *Filmed Television Drama, 1952–1958* (Jefferson, 2002). For critiques of anthology dramas as “golden age” television, see William Boddy, *Fifties Television: The Industry and Its Critics* (Urbana, 1990), esp. 80–92; and Molly Schneider, “Americanness and the Midcentury Television Anthology Drama” (Ph.D. diss., Northwestern University, 2016). Donald R. Boyle, “An Evaluation and Historical Survey of *Kraft Television Theatre, 1947–1958*” (M.A. thesis, Temple University, 1964), 62; Meyers, *Word from Our Sponsor*, 180–86; McCarthy, *Citizen Machine*, 39.

<sup>13</sup> “The Kraft Mouthpiece,” *Kraftsman*, March 1966, p. 7; Boddy, *Fifties Television*, 81; “Alice in Wonderland,” dir. Maury Holland, written by Jack Roche (episode of *Kraft Television Theatre*) (NBC, May 5, 1954). The critic Donald Curtis is quoted in Boddy, *Fifties Television*, 82.

<sup>14</sup> Boyle, “Evaluation and Historical Survey of *Kraft Television Theatre*,” 61; “Kraft’s Living Theatre,” *Kraftsman*, July–Aug. 1955, p. 3; Boyle, “Evaluation and Historical Survey of *Kraft Television Theatre*,” 52, 64, 51; “Kraft Television Theatre History,” ca. 1955, typescript, folder 464, series 1, box 1b, *Kraft Television Theatre Oral History Project*; “Alice in Wonderland”; “Patterns,” dir. Fielder Cook, written by Rod Serling (episode of *Kraft Television Theatre*) (NBC, Jan. 12, 1955).



★ ★ Gala performance tonight ★ ★  
celebrating the beginning of the 8<sup>th</sup> year!

**KRAFT TELEVISION**  
**THEATRE**

PRESENTS


*“Alice in Wonderland”*

Starring **EDGAR BERGEN**  
and **CHARLIE MCCARTHY**

Telecast live from New York

See Charlie McCarthy, America's most-beloved "woodenhead", follow Alice in her adventures down the rabbit hole. (Can't you let the children stay up for it, too?)

**NBC 8:00 P.M.**  
**WNBQ CHANNEL 5**



1-4-9-54—CP1868—2755—TV Guide—April 30, 1954—(Wed. Program Page)—4 1/2 x 6 1/2 in.—  
©—11-7144—(C)

This advertisement from 1954 featured the “Alice in Wonderland” episode of the *Kraft Television Theatre*. Courtesy John W. Hartman Center for Sales, Advertising & Marketing History, Duke University.

did not pay: “After all, we’re in the business of selling cheese—and we still think the dog ought to wag the tail.” *KTT* was initially successful reaching audiences while keeping costs down. In October 1950, when only about 8 million U.S. households had a television set, *KTT* reached an estimated 2.36 million homes. By February 1955, when *KTT* reached an estimated 8.14 million homes (about a third of the nation’s viewing audience), its budgets had increased to about \$40,000 per show. *KTT*, however, was still produced with a lower budget than other prestigious anthology dramas, precluding *JWT* from hiring “name” stars.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>15</sup> “How Kraft Uses the Air,” 62; Platt, “52 Shows a Year,” 17; Boyle, “Evaluation and Historical Survey of *Kraft Television Theatre*,” 156; “A Review of Kraft Television,” ca. 1957, typescript, box 2, Maury Holland Papers, J. Walter Thompson Company (Hartman Center); Hawes, *Filmed Television Drama*, 178.

Kraft did not rely solely on sponsor identification; every episode included three two-minute live commercials demonstrating Kraft products and recipes as a “service” to viewers. Rather than merely extol the products, these live commercials were designed to educate and inform homemakers. To prevent the products from being too closely associated with a specific spokesperson or performer, no faces were shown, and “no actors of any kind would be used to grimace in glee over the goodness of the foods.” Viewers saw only close-ups of the product and the hands of models preparing food. Instructions for requesting the demonstrated recipes by mail appeared at the end of the program, and Kraft measured success by the number of recipe requests. But the company also tracked sales: in 1953, for example, after *KTT* commercials demonstrated cream cheese cake frosting recipes, sales of Kraft’s Philadelphia cream cheese increased. It was this strongly held belief in close audience identification of Kraft products with Kraft’s program that would make the company vulnerable to the pressures of anticommunist activists determined to turn sponsor identification to their purpose of purging political opponents from the broadcasting industry.<sup>16</sup>

### Blacklisting in the Broadcasting Industry

In 1947 an organization calling itself American Business Consultants, founded by John Keenan, Kenneth Bierly, and Theodore Kirkpatrick, began publishing a weekly newsletter, *Counterattack: Facts to Combat Communism*, to alert readers to hidden “subversives.” Initially covering a variety of fields, *Counterattack* editors soon noticed that their accusations against the broadcasting industry garnered the most attention. In June 1950 *Counterattack* published a handy guide to their coverage called *Red Channels: The Report of Communist Influence in Radio and Television*. Most of it was probably compiled by Vincent Hartnett, a countersubversive who specialized in researching communists and who in 1953 would found his own organization, Aware, Inc. *Red Channels* listed the names of 151 actors, writers, directors, musicians, and journalists alongside organizational affiliations and activities. Many forgotten names appear, along with the likes of Orson Welles, Edward G. Robinson, John Garfield, Arthur Miller, Pete Seeger, Lena Horne, and Leonard Bernstein. Despite *Red Channel*’s suggestive cover illustration, a bright red hand grasping a microphone, the editors disingenuously claimed they did not accuse anyone of being a secret communist; they simply listed affiliations and activities with organizations rumored to be communist fronts, leaving readers to draw their own conclusions. The editors claimed to have compiled only “a record of ACTIONS performed by individuals—it says nothing of their thoughts.” They meant to provide information helpful to advertisers: “Broadcasters, sponsors and advertising agencies DO have a right to protect their business by putting on shows staffed with performers who will sell their product.” Worried about the power of sponsor identification, many in the ad industry agreed. In broadcasting, a trade magazine writer argued, the “public identifies sponsor with everything appearing in time slot advertiser uses; unlike print media which public realizes separate identities of advertising and editorial.” Association of a “controversial person” with a product might be a “detriment to sales.” *Red Channels* quickly earned

<sup>16</sup> Margaret Buchen, “Ten Years of Kraft Television Commercials,” ca. 1957, typescript, series 1, box 1B, esp. 1, 17, 4, *Kraft Television Theatre* Oral History Project; Boyle, “Evaluation and Historical Survey of *Kraft Television Theatre*,” 155.

its nickname, the “Bible of Madison Avenue,” as agencies consulted it for blacklisting purposes.<sup>17</sup>

*Counterattack* did not bother to argue that programs sponsored by such corporate stalwarts as U.S. Steel disseminated communist propaganda. Instead, it accused sponsors of financially supporting communism (or “Stalin”) by employing communists. It complained of the “dodging of responsibilities” by companies that were hiring communists: networks pointed to sponsors, sponsors to producers or ad agencies, and producers and ad agencies back to sponsors. The sponsor, argued *Counterattack*, should take “responsibility to see that his (or his stockholders’) money is not used, directly or indirectly, to finance” communism. Otherwise, the audience “good will” sponsors hoped to reap would turn bad: “All sponsors gladly accept full responsibility for the favorable publicity and good will that derives from their programs. They revel in it and congratulate themselves for their business acumen in finding effective selling media for their product. And as long as they do that they must also accept full responsibility for the bad publicity that comes of their helping finance [the Communist party] by using Fifth Columnists and their abettors on their programs.” Sponsors who hired “Fifth Columnists” risked product boycotts.<sup>18</sup>

The publication of *Red Channels* shaped purges already underway. Colgate had notified its advertising agencies in 1949 that its policy was not to hire “any one who is known to be Red or ‘pink.’” In May 1950 the Campbell-Ewald advertising agency required NBC, which produced *The Chevrolet Tele-Theatre* (1948–1950), to submit for approval its scripts and the “names of all actors and actresses to be cast for all performances.” According to the advertising trade magazine *Tide*, most ad men agreed that “agencies have the right and duty to consider the political ideologies of the people who write and act in the sponsor’s show.” After *Counterattack* accused CBS of being “the most satisfying network for the Communists,” all CBS employees were required to sign a loyalty oath by December 1950. By 1951, all entertainment industry guilds and unions had instituted some form of loyalty oath.<sup>19</sup>

But the industry had to be careful, while placating the countersubversives, not to expose itself to public obloquy. The public firing of actress Jean Muir from the Young & Rubicam–produced General Foods–sponsored television comedy, *The Aldrich Family* (1949–1953), just before a broadcast in August 1950, generated widespread revulsion. Negative newspaper editorials caused one General Foods executive to exclaim, “All hell seemed to break loose.” So agencies, sponsors, and networks became more secretive about the process. Although some advertisers, such as Hallmark, may have ignored *Red Channels*, and other advertisers claimed to disregard it, most of them were using it to blacklist. Fearful of potential lawsuits for libel or conspiracy, those blacklisters simply denied they were blacklisting.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>17</sup> *Red Channels: The Report of Communist Influence in Radio and Television* (New York, 1950); *Counterattack*, Sept. 13, June 23, 1950, May 4, 1951; “Blacklisting: One Agency Man Answers,” *Advertising Agency Magazine*, March 1, 1957, p. 17; Cogley, *Report on Blacklisting II*, 2.

<sup>18</sup> *Counterattack*, Jan. 30, 1948; *Red Channels*, 5–6; *Counterattack*, March 14, 1952.

<sup>19</sup> James C. Douglass, July 6, 1949, memo, Colgate-Palmolive Company folder, box 567B, NBC Records (Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison); Winslow Case to Sylvester Weaver, May 19, 1950, folder 46, box 118, *ibid.*; *Tide*, Sept. 29, 1950; *Counterattack*, July 1, 1949; Sally Bedell Smith, *In All His Glory: The Life of William S. Paley, the Legendary Tycoon and His Brilliant Circle* (New York, 1990), 303; Rita Morley Harvey, *Those Wonderful, Terrible Years: George Heller and the American Federation of Television and Radio Artists* (Carbondale, 1996), 96, 144.

<sup>20</sup> “The Truth about Red Channels, Part One,” *Sponsor*, Oct. 8, 1951, pp. 29, 76, 77; James L. Baughman, *Same Time, Same Station: Creating American Television, 1948–1961* (Baltimore, 2007), 207; Cogley, *Report on Blacklisting II*, 58.

The blacklisting process usually began with the compilation of information about a suspected communist or “fellow traveler” by countersubversive researchers such as Hartnett. While *Red Channels* was publicly available and those listed could see their names, Hartnett also compiled secret addenda named *Confidential Notebook: File #13*, updated irregularly and distributed to paying subscribers such as advertisers and agencies. Since *File #13* was not publicly available, those who were named in it could not access it or contest Hartnett’s information. Subscribing employers denied using *File #13*, leaving some blacklistees with few clues about why they may have been accused.<sup>21</sup>

The second stage of blacklisting occurred when countersubversive “pressure groups” organized letter and telephone campaigns to contact sponsors, agencies, and networks. For the broadcasting industry, the main leader of such campaigns was Laurence Johnson, a countersubversive who owned a few supermarkets in Syracuse. According to Everitt, Johnson was inspired to found his group, the Veterans Action Committee of Syracuse Super Markets (VAC), by his daughter, Eleanor Buchanan, who was outraged by communist-affiliated performers appearing on television while her husband served in the Korean War. The VAC regularly sent out circulars, flyers, and letters to sponsors complaining about “subversives.” By including “Super Markets” in his group’s name, Johnson alerted advertisers that he represented a potential constituency of boycotters. Most effectively, Johnson threatened to cancel merchandising agreements for in-store displays and instead set up his own displays comparing brands and announcing which had hired “Stalin’s Little Creatures.” Many advertisers of consumer packaged goods assumed, without evidence, that Johnson had the ability to marshal armies of boycotting housewives through his supermarkets, and so they agreed to meet with him and listen to his blacklisting demands. Allied with a local Syracuse American Legion chapter, Johnson and his associates were often referred to as “the Syracuse group.” They often made trips to New York City to visit sponsors and agencies, using Hartnett’s information to pressure them to fire or blacklist.<sup>22</sup>

In the third stage, a broadcast employer, having met with countersubversives, developed an in-house system of blacklist management. The BBDO agency, for example, hired an executive named Jack Wren to oversee “Personnel Research.” At JWT, the legal department maintained a “name check” list of people who could not be hired without being “checked.” The legal department also maintained files of potential evidence: news clippings, *File #13* installments, and sworn affidavits denying communist affiliations from performers such as Eli Wallach, Lee Grant, Kim Hunter, and Robert Cummings. The agency also received correspondence from performers unsure if they were being blacklisted and hoping to clear themselves, such as Hume Cronyn, whose wife, Jessica Tandy, was listed in a secret *File #13*. As a result of this secretive process, some were blacklisted and could not be hired anywhere. Others, however, were “greylisted,” employable by some sponsors but not others, because each sponsor and agency managed its secret lists differently and did not share information with the others. To avoid the appearance of conspir-

<sup>21</sup> Everitt, *Shadow of Red*, 165. [Vincent Hartnett], *Confidential Notebook: File #13*, March 12, 1954, box 88, Wilson Papers.

<sup>22</sup> Everitt, *Shadow of Red*, 123; John Foster to John Carter, June 22, 1954, box 88, Wilson Papers; Laurence Johnson to John Dungey, April 17, 1953, *ibid.*; Foley, *Political Blacklist in the Broadcast Industry*, 12; Everitt, *Shadow of Red*, 128.

ing to deny employment, some agencies, such as Foote, Cone & Belding, maintained “whitelists,” preapproved names from which to select casts.<sup>23</sup>

Karen Foley notes that “blacklisting could be justified as a legitimate operation because there were clearance avenues open to those falsely accused.” But the process of “clearance” was as inconsistent and variable as that of getting blacklisted. Usually blacklistees had to court countersubversives such as Hartnett or Johnson, or anticommunist journalists George Sokolsky or Victor Riesel, or Jack Wren, the BBDO executive, and provide them with evidence or perform an action such as delivering a speech to disprove communist associations. Clearance specialists such as Hartnett sometimes charged fees for their “investigations,” which some viewed as extortionate. As Thomas Doherty notes, “Stripped of ideological trappings, the blacklist operated as a classic protection racket.” Even then, to disclaim responsibility, the clearance specialists often refused to announce that a blacklistee had been cleared. As a result, the “cleared” were often unable to benefit.<sup>24</sup>

The broadcasting industry’s reactions to blacklisting were conflicted. *Sponsor*, a trade magazine, published a three-part analysis and exposé in 1951. Asking, “Are American advertisers being blackmailed?” *Sponsor* blamed *Red Channels* for creating “pressure group hysteria” and a “Kangaroo Court.” *Sponsor* quoted a “veteran radio man” who complained, “This industry has fought to stay free of government control for 25 years. To allow private blacklisters into the picture now is to risk our freedom.” Most in the industry, however, assumed that communists deserved to be purged: revulsion at blacklisting was focused on the collateral damage to noncommunists. Some argued that, if *Red Channel*’s data were flawed, a more official, perhaps governmental, process should be created for identifying and purging communists. Having instituted their own internal communist purges, industry guilds and trade organizations attempted to establish procedures for “clearing” accused innocents. However, because these procedures were rarely followed, the blacklisting process became more secretive, not less.<sup>25</sup>

### Blacklisting at Kraft Television Theatre

Back in 1938, when Kraft sponsored *Kraft Music Hall*, Jack Platt, Kraft’s vice president of advertising, gave a speech explaining the importance of carefully casting performers for a program designed to reflect well on the brand: “You must insure against any *resentment* or *disapproval* of the people on the show as Persons, whether for their public or private lives, past reputations, or present conduct, or the kind of things that have been printed about them in the papers.” Thus, when countersubversives took up this principle, they found a ready audience in Platt. On May 7, 1951, a Kraft executive named E. S. Hillman wrote Platt, noting that Laurence Johnson, “owner of the Johnson Super Markets in Syracuse,” had called Kraft to complain about the appearance on *KTT* of the actor John Randolph, who Johnson claimed was “actively engaged in Communist activities.”

<sup>23</sup> Cogley, *Report on Blacklisting II*, 120, 121; Eli Wallach, Sept. 10, 1953, affidavit, box 88, Wilson Papers; Hume Cronyn to JWT, Jan. 10, 1955, *ibid.*; Foley, *Political Blacklist in the Broadcast Industry*, 16; Fairfax Cone, *With All Its Faults: A Candid Account of Forty Years in Advertising* (Boston, 1969), 265.

<sup>24</sup> Foley, *Political Blacklist in the Broadcast Industry*, 420; Cogley, *Report on Blacklisting II*, 62; Doherty, *Cold War, Cool Medium*, 36; Foley, *Political Blacklist in the Broadcast Industry*, 194.

<sup>25</sup> “Truth about Red Channels, Part One,” 27–29, 75–81; “The Truth about Red Channels, Part Two,” *Sponsor*, Oct. 22, 1951, pp. 30–31, 76–86; “How to Keep Reds off the Air—Sanely,” *ibid.*, Nov. 5, 1951, pp. 32–33, 84–88, esp. 85; Cogley, *Report on Blacklisting II*, 198; Harvey, *Those Wonderful, Terrible Years*, 78–79, 96, 144.

Hillman asked Platt how to respond, explaining that Johnson “is a crusader, with considerable influence, in the Super Market Association and particularly in New York State.” Though Johnson owned only a few supermarkets in a medium-sized market, Hillman assumed Johnson’s influence without investigating.<sup>26</sup>

David Everitt wonders why so many advertisers, such as these Kraft executives, immediately responded to “crusaders” such as this obscure “grocer from Syracuse.” One factor is that Johnson, like his associates at *Counterattack*, knew how to play upon sponsors’ belief in the powerful effects of television and sponsor identification. The advertising industry had touted television’s potential for “tremendous intimacy,” as more like “person-to-person selling than any other medium.” Sponsored programs would be the door-to-door salesmen who come into the home. Johnson noted: “Wouldn’t a sponsor be foolish to put a person on their advertising program advertising his product into a home where that very same person would be denied admittance if they rang the doorbell?” The audience’s “good will” might easily sour if the product were associated with “Communist Fronters.” To be sure, some sponsors, such as Procter & Gamble, merely paid lip service to Johnson and, as Everitt notes, local Syracuse broadcasters actively resisted him. But Hillman and Platt were worried.<sup>27</sup>

A month later, on June 12, 1951, Johnson’s daughter, Eleanor Buchanan, wrote the Syracuse American Legion Post 41 that “I fail to understand why Kraft Cheese Company is apparently unconcerned by John Randolph’s activities”; she urged members to call the sponsor and complain. Buchanan’s letter prompted a memo between Kraft executives three days later, asking what they should do “to pacify Mrs. Consumer.” One executive wryly noted that “nothing short” of “a personal letter of apology to Mr. Johnson because of the appearance of John Randolph on our program” would be able to “satisfy his ego.” Already in 1951, then, Kraft executives were simultaneously intimidated by Johnson and annoyed by his self-importance. By October 20, 1952, at the latest, Johnson had supplied Kraft and JWT with names of performers he deemed acceptable; he apparently expected JWT to cast from his list.<sup>28</sup>

On October 28, 1952, Platt signaled his intention to cooperate with Johnson. After a September 1952 broadcast of *KTT* that included Randolph—cast again despite Johnson’s 1951 directive—Platt wrote a blistering letter to John Reber, the head of JWT’s radio-television department and in charge of casting: “We’re still getting repercussions from the last appearance of a certain subversive character on Kraft tv. Because the criticism is coming from leading customers of ours, I’ve had a pretty rough time here with our executives trying to explain why this character was put on the show the second time after the severe criticism we got when he appeared in 1951. It’s a tough one to explain without admitting that someone in the agency went to sleep, and my only purpose in writing now is to emphasize the importance of setting up a checking system to prevent the appearance of any questionable characters on any of our shows.” Platt characterized Johnson as a “leading customer,” which helps explain why he and John Kraft, the brother of Kraft’s founder, had

<sup>26</sup> Platt, “52 Shows a Year,” 11. Italics in original. E. S. Hillman to Platt, May 7, 1951, box 88, Wilson Papers.

<sup>27</sup> Everitt, *Shadow of Red*, 128; Bob Foreman, “Listening and Looking,” *Advertising Agency and Advertising & Selling*, 42 (Sept. 1949), 21; Bill Hendricks and Montgomery Orr, *Showmanship in Advertising* (New York, 1949), 217; Johnson to Godfrey Schmidt, Jan. 14, 1954, box 88, Wilson Papers; Everitt, *Shadow of Red*, 131, 132.

<sup>28</sup> Eleanor Buchanan to Allen Martin, June 12, 1951, box 88, Wilson Papers; Foster to Hillman, June 15, 1951, *ibid.*; “Kraft List,” Oct. 20, 1952, typescript, *ibid.* The names on this list do not appear in *Red Channels*, and on the list is a handwritten note, “OK—Johnson,” which I interpret to mean that this is a list of names Laurence Johnson wanted the J. Walter Thompson Company to hire from.

made a “special trip to Syracuse” to meet with Johnson, who is “leading the fight against subversive activities in show business.” Platt was not the only food advertiser to trek upstate to curry favor with the presumably influential Johnson—so did executives from Borden, Seabrook Farms, and Minute Maid. During this “pleasant visit,” as Platt explained to Reber, he tried to convince Johnson “that we’re on the same side of the fence—that we’ll do anything we know how to keep these so-and-so’s off our show.” Then Platt returned to scolding Reber: “This is a serious matter, John, and it is important that steps be taken to prevent the hiring of any undesirables on Kraft TV. . . . It is important that we do a careful job of screening when casting our weekly shows.” Platt continued, moving from the companionable “we” to the accusatory “you”: “We thought we had this thing licked and that your group would catch any subversive before he was signed. And then you signed up this character for the second time within a year. . . . Anyhow, it had better not happen again.” Platt not only blamed the agency for not “catching” the “subversive,” but he implied that he might fire JWT if they cast Randolph again. If Reber had been tacitly ignoring Johnson’s demands to hire only from his list of preapproved actors, Platt was no longer allowing him to do so without risking JWT’s relationship with Kraft.<sup>29</sup>

Two days later Reber wrote Wilson, JWT’s head lawyer, to put Platt’s demands into effect, calling forthrightly for a blacklist: “Jack’s statement on the second page to the effect that ‘it had better not happen again’ seems to mean that we have no alternative but to check all Kraft names against a blacklist. We all had been hoping that this step would not be necessary. In the course of more than five years we have only had two minor cases. We seem to have believed, up to now, that with a record like this we would not want to incur the danger of an actual blacklist.” Apparently, JWT executives had been alert to this issue since 1947 but hoped to avoid the threat of lawsuits for conspiracy to deny employment that might come with implementing an “actual blacklist.” Reber asked Wilson if JWT should have the *Counterattack* staff check names for them, avoiding responsibility by subcontracting the work out to a private group of unaccountable activists.<sup>30</sup>

Within two weeks, on November 11, 1952, Reber wrote to reassure Platt. Reber had just met with Johnson and his associate, Harvey Matusow, and they had given him “a lot of information.” A handwritten comment on Reber’s letter indicates that Matusow was a “member of Communist party for 5 yrs,” perhaps Wilson’s note to himself that Matusow was a reliable informant. (In fact, by 1955, Matusow admitted that he had fabricated much of his “information.”) Reber concluded: “Everything ran off very well and I can assure you that the relationship you established has not been injured”; that is, Reber had not angered the easily angered Johnson and had preserved Platt’s good relationship with him. Thus, JWT, under Platt’s direction, began to rely on Johnson and his associates for information on whom to blacklist.<sup>31</sup>

However, about a year later, Platt began to chafe against Johnson’s demands. Johnson had complained about the actress Beatrice Straight, who appeared on the November 25, 1953, *KTT* broadcast, because she had publicly opposed blacklisting. Platt defended her in a December 2, 1953, letter to Johnson, noting that she came from a prominent family, that her brother was a war hero, and that she had divorced her leftist husband years

<sup>29</sup> Platt to Reber, Oct. 28, 1952, box 88, Wilson Papers; Everitt, *Shadow of Red*, 128, 133.

<sup>30</sup> Reber to Wilson, Oct. 30, 1952, box 88, Wilson Papers.

<sup>31</sup> Reber to Platt, Nov. 11, 1952, *ibid.* Harvey Matusow recanted in Harvey Matusow, *False Witness* (New York, 1955).

before. Platt insisted there are “no doubts about the artist’s loyalty” and concluded plaintively: “I’m a little disturbed with the last paragraph of your note about being discouraged, etc. It doesn’t seem to make sense with my all-out effort to cooperate with you in keeping questionable characters from appearing on our TV shows.” By complying with Johnson, Platt had revealed himself an acquiescent target, and Johnson, like any bully, had responded by stepping up the pressure. Despite Platt’s defense of Straight, she did not appear on *KTT* again and remained on the blacklist. Not until 1958 did Wilson ask that Straight be removed: “When the Syracuse situation was hot, she, of course, was very much disliked by them.” But, Wilson continued, there’s nothing in Hartnett’s “File 13 which outweighs her own affidavit, and it seems to me that Kraft or Ford would be in a completely untenable position if they were on record for turning her down.”<sup>32</sup>

A week after his letter defending Straight, Platt again argued with Johnson: “We’re just as loyal and interested in fighting Communism as you are . . . and any suggestion to the contrary is not worthy of the work you claim to be interested in.” At this time (Oct. 1953–Jan. 1955), Kraft and JWT produced two different weekly episodes of *KTT*, Wednesdays on NBC, Thursdays on ABC. Platt pointed out to Johnson the difficulty of casting “104 shows a year” without the “occasional borderline case.” He wanted credit for having succeeded in not hiring any “known” communists. Instead, Johnson was bothering him about actors who might not be communist at all. Although he objected to Johnson’s assumption of guilt by association, Platt also complained about the communist policy of secretiveness, including lying about their affiliation, a policy that alienated liberals: “You know as well as I do that there have been a lot of innocent people on the ‘Blacklist.’ They’re there because they were seen talking to someone or other ten or twelve years ago, or they attended some meeting, or they did something else. By those standards I am tainted too, because I’ve dined with a certain character you and I have talked about on many occasions, and I used to be seen in public with him frequently. But I hadn’t the faintest idea he was a Communist at the time.” Reiterating that “we’re not on opposite sides of the fence, Larry, we’re on the same side,” Platt scolded Johnson for “this constant bickering over an occasional person.” Promising to continue “scrutenizing all talent very carefully,” Platt insisted that “no known Communist will ever appear on any of our shows.”<sup>33</sup>

After more written complaints from Johnson’s associates, Platt replied on December 30, 1953, to one of them, Francis Neuser, Johnson’s produce buyer, in a more conciliatory tone. Explaining that a few “objectionable” performers are “no indication of lack of rigid control,” Platt insisted that JWT was “exercising most rigid control.” Turning to flattery, Platt concluded, “You and Mr. Johnson have been of inestimable help to us in establishing the fine record the Kraft TV Theatre enjoys in this respect, and we’re grateful to both of you for directing our attention to performers of questioned loyalty who occasionally slip through.” Platt implicitly shifted the blame to JWT and pretended that Johnson’s harassment was helping Kraft.<sup>34</sup>

JWT’s list-keeping system was well developed by the spring of 1954 at the latest. Earlier “name check” lists dating from 1951 seem to be casual notes on information from *Counterattack* and *Red Channels*. But by 1954, Wilson was maintaining a thirty-odd-

<sup>32</sup> [Hartnett], *Confidential Notebook: File #13*, March 12, 1954, box 88, Wilson Papers; Platt to Johnson, Dec. 2, 1953, *ibid.*; untitled memo, Feb. 6, 1956, *ibid.*; Wilson to John Devine, March 11, 1958, *ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> Platt to Johnson, Dec. 11, 1953, *ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> Dungey to Platt, Dec. 16, 1953, *ibid.*; Platt to Francis Neuser, Dec. 30, 1953, *ibid.*





Edward G. Wilson was the vice president of the J. Walter Thompson Company (JWT) legal department who, in the 1950s, maintained the “Master List” of performers who JWT needed to check for possible communist affiliations before the company could hire them as performers on *Kraft Television Theatre*. *Courtesy John W. Hartman Center for Sales, Advertising & Marketing History, Duke University.*

page “Master List” that he updated every few months from Hartnett’s *File #13* and other sources. “Master List—All Inclusive Up to April 23, 1954” included approximately 1,045 names that were to be “checked” before hiring for any of JWT’s programs. As Wilson explained in a later memo to a colleague, “No actor can be cast if his name appears on the list which I am sending you unless he is cleared through my office. The fact that a person is on the list does not necessarily mean he cannot be used.” Such a person, however, did need to be vetted. These 1,045 names belong to people famous and obscure, to people

closely associated with leftist movements, to people whose only sin was taking a stand against blacklisting, to people suspected by the countersubversives of not being “loyal” enough. The names appear alphabetically on a separate page for each letter of the alphabet, and the juxtaposition of the unknown, famous, and infamous from a variety of fields would be amusing if the list’s purpose were not so harmful. The existence of multiple versions of this list in Wilson’s papers conclusively disproves the claim, maintained by perpetrators (including, as detailed below, Wilson himself), and some historians, that there were no “formal or official” lists.<sup>35</sup>

Among the better known on the “Master List” are Stella Adler, Nelson Algren, Lucille Ball, Harry Belafonte, Yul Brynner, Lee J. Cobb, Ossie Davis, Ruby Dee, Albert Einstein, Max Ernst, Jose Ferrer, John Garfield (who, having died in May 1952, is accordingly listed as “deceased,” suggesting the list was begun before his death), Ruth Gordon, Lee Grant, Jack Gould, Lena Horne, Langston Hughes, Kim Hunter, Chet Huntley, John Huston, Burl Ives, Mahalia Jackson, George Kaufman, Lincoln Kirstein, Burt Lancaster, Owen Lattimore, Arthur Laurents, Philip Loeb, Sidney Lumet, Walter Matthau, Burgess Meredith, Arthur Miller, Merle Miller, Henry Morgan, Zero Mostel, Jean Muir, Lewis Mumford, Arch Oboler, Clifford Odets, Dorothy Parker, Sidney Poitier, Anthony Quinn, Martin Ritt, Diego Rivera, Jerome Robbins, Paul Robeson, Norman Rosten, Jean-Paul Sartre, Meyer Schapiro, Budd Schulberg, Pete Seeger, Irene Mayer Selznick, Ben Shahn, Artie Shaw, Irwin Shaw, William Shirer, Upton Sinclair, Maureen Stapleton, Rod Steiger, Helen Tamiris, Studs Terkel, James Thurber, Dalton Trumbo, Eli Wallach, Orson Welles, Frank Lloyd Wright, and William Wyler. Since it is unlikely that Einstein or Sartre would have appeared on a JWT-produced television program, this list is probably a compendium of all people in public life whose politics were questioned by countersubversives.

The countersubversive campaign against Kraft and JWT escalated a few months later in May 1954. Johnson’s VAC sent out a circular, probably distributed to VAC members and allies, as well as to advertisers, accusing “Account Executive, John Reber” and “Mr. John Kraft and Mr. John Platt of Kraft Foods Company” of hiring “Communist-helpers” on *KTT* even after the Syracuse visit in October 1952 in which they “thanked this Committee” for alerting them. Companies such as Kraft, the circular continued, “help lend substance to [Vladimir] Lenin’s remark that the Capitalist class would supply its own grave diggers.” Readers were to write letters complaining to Kraft. Subsequent correspondence between Kraft executives shows the effect of this campaign: one executive cited a Mrs. Ruse, who wrote that “she would not have any more Kraft products in her home until Kraft changes their policy in selecting players for their TV shows.” How many Mrs. Ruses might boycott Kraft was unknown.<sup>36</sup>

In a July 1954 letter to a colleague, Platt detailed the Kraft-JWT collaboration on screening actors; he showed again both his exasperation with the countersubversives and his eagerness to placate them. Noting that “I believe it best not to put too much in writing on this particular subject,” Platt explained that “the only difference of opinion between Mr. Johnson and us is that we are not willing to accept his accusations or statements as sufficient reason for putting any individual on a blacklist.” Kraft and JWT, he explained,

<sup>35</sup> “Name Check Lists,” Feb. 9, 1951, *ibid.*; “Master List”; Wilson to Arthur Farlow, Aug. 26, 1955, box 88, Wilson Papers; Richard A. Schwartz, “How the Film and Television Blacklists Worked,” n.d., <http://comptalk.fiu.edu/blacklist.htm>.

<sup>36</sup> Veterans Action Committee of Syracuse Super Markets circular, May 1954, box 88, Wilson Papers; Foster to Carter, June 22, 1954, *ibid.*

“have organized a special committee” to review “any questionable character and either decide for or against him. On this committee are top legal people of the J. Walter Thompson agency, as well as people in show business who know most of this talent intimately.” Blacklisting procedures, then, were fully institutionalized by 1954; unnamed show business colleagues were analyzing reputations for Kraft’s blacklist. Platt complained that Johnson also demanded his friends be hired: “He also has asked us from time to time to hire certain talent, people active in this same crusade, but, unfortunately, people with questionable talent, most of whom we cannot use.” Johnson’s demands may have also reflected a countersubversive belief that before and during World War II anticommunists had been blacklisted by procommunists. But Platt was resolved to resist Johnson’s desire to “dictate our policies.”<sup>37</sup>

Later that month Platt wrote to a fellow Kraft executive expressing frustration with Johnson again. Although he and Johnson had “got along extremely well” for “a long while,” Johnson’s group had now “written me off as ‘hopeless,’ and a ‘dupe of the agency.’” Of course, Platt had invited this attack by attempting to shift the blame from Kraft to JWT. He complained that one group of actors, recommended by Johnson, cannot be used “because they just aren’t good performers,” while another group cannot be used because “for one reason or another they are on Johnson’s blacklist.” Again he mentioned that he had “set up an active screening committee” with JWT. Casting “104 shows a year, using as many as 1,500 artists in a twelve-month period,” they had cleared many artists the “Syracuse group” had objected to and only a “half dozen” had even been questionable. “That’s why I am so amazed at Johnson’s attitude, for truly we are a living example of cautious and careful casting in our TV productions.” Platt ended by promising, somewhat despairingly, to “bust a gut in trying to figure out some kind of procedure or deal to pacify the Syracuse group. Just what it might be, I haven’t the faintest idea.”<sup>38</sup>

Meanwhile, Reber at JWT pushed back at Platt. On October 27, 1954, he appealed Platt’s blacklisting of Anthony Ross, an actor who had appeared on *KTT* several times. Ross had approached a *KTT* director to ask if he was blacklisted and why. Reber wrote, “The thing that is driving him almost out of his mind is that he doesn’t know of what he is accused.” The only evidence against Ross that Reber had been able to find was a claim in a *File #13* that Ross had acted in plays, “mostly during the thirties,” with actors “who later were accused of Communist leanings.” This, argued Reber, is “a frightening thing to realize that an accusation of this kind can keep a man out of work.” He continued: “It seems as though this sort of thing should not be allowed to happen in America.” Appealing to Platt’s exasperation with Johnson, Reber proposed that *KTT* use Ross “occasionally without asking permission from Syracuse.” If Platt did not want to do that, then Reber proposed that Platt allow JWT to tell Ross “exactly what it is of which he is being accused” and give him the opportunity to deny it directly so he could be cleared. But doing that would acknowledge there was a blacklist. The secrecy that protected the blacklisters from lawsuits from noncommunist blacklist victims was also the main obstacle for victims seeking “clearance.”<sup>39</sup>

A few days later, to clarify JWT’s blacklisting policy for Kraft programs, Wilson wrote Platt a letter summarizing it. JWT would not hire for *KTT* a “known Communist” or

<sup>37</sup> Platt to Julian Jones, July 1, 1954, box 88, Wilson Papers; *Counterattack*, Sept. 13, 1950.

<sup>38</sup> Platt to Carter, July 13, 1954, box 88, Wilson Papers. Emphasis in original.

<sup>39</sup> Reber to Platt, Oct. 27, 1954, *ibid.*

Hagen, Uta	Hellman, Lillian	Howard, Charles P.
Hall, Juanita	Hemingway, Ernest	Huberman, Leo
Hallinan, Vivian	Heym, Stefan	Hubs, Edward F.
Hallinan, Vincent	Higley, Philo	Huebsch, Edward
Halsey, Margaret	Hiken, Nat	Hughes, Kenneth De P.
Hambleton, T. Edward	Hilberman, David	Hughes, Langston
Hamlin, Talbot	Hill, Charles A.	Hunt, Marsha
Hammer, Alvin	Hill, Steven	Hunter, Kim
Hammer, Don	Hirsch, Joseph	Hunter, Ian
Hammett, Dashiell	Hirschman, Ira A.	Huntley, Chet
Harari, Hannah	Hobart, Rose	Hunton, W. Alpheus
Harbury, E. Y. ("Yip")	Hodgson, Chester E.	Hurwitz, Leo T.
Harrett, Debbie	Hoff, Syd (Sidney)	Huston, John
Harkavy, Minna	Hoffman, Jane	Hyans, Eddie
Harkness, Georgia	Holliday, Judy	
Harmon, Hi (Alexander)	Holland, Charlotte	
Harris, Lou	Hollister, Carroll	
Hart, Jim	Holman, Libby	
Hart, Pearl M.	Holmes, Eugene C.	
Harvey, John	Holmes, Wendell	
Hathway, Marion	Holmgren, Roderick B.	
Hauser, Dwight	Holt, Lee Elbert	
Hays, Lee ("The Weavers")	Hopkins, Pauline	
Hayter, Stanley	Honig, Nat	
Hecht, Harold	Horne, Lena	
Heidelberger, Michael	Houghton, Norris	
Heilwell, David	Houseman, John	
Heller, Robert P.	Hovey, Serge	
Hellerman, Fred ("The Weavers")		

Above and on the facing page are two of the pages of the long "Master List" maintained by the J. Walter Thompson Company (JWT) by the mid-1950s. JWT was required to check the background of anyone who appeared on this list, which eventually ran to over one thousand names, before he or she could be cast on any JWT production. This list confirms that agencies did, indeed, keep actual blacklists of performers that they actively tracked, revised, and used in hiring decisions. *Courtesy John W. Hartman Center for Sales, Advertising & Marketing History, Duke University.*

"sympathiser." However, Wilson pointed out, the problem was how to determine who qualified: "We do not want to attempt to put ourselves in the position of judge and jury"; for that, he continued, we do not have the "facilities" or "right." As a lawyer, Wilson noted that, on the one hand, if JWT announced "we were not using a man because he was a Communist, we might subject ourselves to suits for libel and slander." Because of this,

Rahn, Muriel	Richards, Robert	Roth, Ann
Rainer, Frances	Richards, Sylvia	Rothschild, Lincoln
Randolph, John	Richton, Addie	Royle, Selena <i>Parkinson, Helen DeAnnatta</i>
Ransome, Arthur	Riegger, Wallingford	Rukeyser, Muriel
Rapf, Maurice	Rinaldo, Frederick	Ruskin, Coby
Raphaelson, Samson	Ritt, Martin	Ruskin, Shimen
Ratner, Herbert	Rivera, Diego	Russell, Rose
Rattner, Abraham	Robbins, Jerome	Ruthven, Madeline
Rautenstrauch, Walter	Roberts, Holland	Ryan, Edmund
Raven, Robert	Roberts, Ken	Ryder, Alfred
Rawley, Callman	Roberts, Kenneth	
Raymond, Judy	Roberts, Marguerite	
Reed, Bob (Caille, Robt.)	Roberts, Stanley	
Reed, Susan	<i>Robeson, Calanda Jovide</i> Robeson, Paul	
Redfield, William	Robinson, Earl	
"Redfield, A." (Hoff, Sidney)	Robinson, Edward G.	
Refregier, Anton	Robinson, Jack	
Reid, Frances	Robinson, Mary	
Reid, Ira De A. <i>Keim, Walter</i>	Robson, William N.	
Reinhardt, Ad	Rodman, Howard	
Reis, Bernard	Roger, Sidney	
Reis, Nita	Rogge, O. John	
Relph, Paul	Rome, Harold	
Revere, Anne	Rosebury, Theodor	
Revueltas, Rosaura	Rosenfield, Jonas, Jr.	
Reynolds, Bertha C.	Rosinger, Lawrence K. <i>Ross, Anthony</i>	
Ribak, Louis	Rossen, Robert	
Rich, Allen	Rosten, Norman	

“our reason for failing to use a particular actor cannot be that we have determined that he is a Communist.” On the other hand, Kraft and JWT were legally permitted to use or not use an actor without saying why; and their unstated reasons might include, in addition to a lack of ability, the fact that “his activities . . . would reflect unfavorably upon the program” or upon Kraft because it could undermine the positive associations between brand and content. If an actor had ability, wrote Wilson, “we must then decide whether a substantial segment of the public would object to his being used” or would stop buying Kraft products. Wilson’s proposed policy, then, focused on how advertising, rather than political goals, could be advanced through blacklisting.<sup>40</sup>

<sup>40</sup> Wilson to Platt, Nov. 5, 1954, *ibid.*

Because predicting the public's reaction was difficult, Wilson's solution was to examine what had "been said in public print about a man. Our appraisal is not whether a man is guilty or not guilty, but whether the things which have been printed and which have not been denied" would be publicized to the detriment of Kraft. Under this logic, a communist who had not publicly taken any procommunist stances could be cleared for hiring. The problem with this solution was that noncommunists had taken public stances on issues that the countersubversives insisted were signs of communist sympathy. What, then, in the public record would be sufficient to put an actor on a blacklist? According to Wilson, accusations alone were not sufficient: "If the record, from published sources, indicates that an individual has signed a petition for the Hollywood Ten, been on a committee in favor of Paul Robeson, and perhaps done a number of other things" that would lead the audience to assume that "he was a Communist sympathizer," that person's hiring "could almost certainly reflect adversely on Kraft and the sale of Kraft's products." By Wilson's standards, then, a noncommunist could be blacklisted for publicly endorsing the rights of communists. However, an allegation that an actor had merely been in plays someone "alleges are Communistic" would not "influence many people" and so could be ignored. In other words, mere association was not guilt, but the public defense of actual communists, whatever the actor's beliefs, could prevent him or her from being hired because the "public" could react by refusing to buy Kraft products.<sup>41</sup>

Echoing Reber, Wilson warned Platt against allowing Johnson to control casting: "If we shift the making of these decisions to Mr. Johnson . . . and thereby deprive a good American who has nothing in his published record . . ., the injury to Kraft's reputation would be irreparable." Wilson emphasized the necessity for secrecy. If Kraft became known as truckling to countersubversives, its reputation would suffer. As to Reber's desire that actors be allowed to clear themselves, Wilson's position finessed the issue: Kraft's decision would be based on "public" information available to all. Whether an accusation of communist affiliation was true or false was less important to Wilson than the perception of how Kraft had handled the allegation. Maintaining secrecy was the only way, in Wilson's view, to preserve Kraft's reputation among both the countersubversives and any wronged innocents, who might sue or curry sympathy with the opponents of blacklists. After approving the use of Ross on *KTT*, Wilson concluded that "we should make our decision, stand on it, and not approach Johnson in advance." If Johnson objected after the broadcast, then the Kraft executive in Syracuse should ask Johnson, "What is the matter with Ross? Has he done anything more than having been seen with supposed fellow travelers? Are we to deprive him of work and ourselves of a good actor for that reason?" It is unlikely that Wilson's suggested response would have satisfied Johnson.<sup>42</sup>

In a thirteen-page letter to Platt dated January 26, 1955, Reber requested the removal of forty-seven names from the "Master List." He began by pointing out that casting someone only when "all doubts [are] resolved . . . does not meet the principles for which Kraft stands." Kraft, noted Reber, "is already gathering a reputation of being under the thumb of a small, extreme and un-American group in Syracuse." Moreover, the quality of the program was at stake: "The list of actors not available for use by Kraft has been extended

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.* The Hollywood Ten were writers and directors who in 1947 refused to answer questions from the House Un-American Activities Committee. See Edward Dmytryk, *Odd Man Out: A Memoir of the Hollywood Ten* (Carbondale, 1995). For more on Paul Robeson, see Martin Duberman, *Paul Robeson* (New York, 1989).

<sup>42</sup> Wilson to Platt, Nov. 5, 1954, box 88, Wilson Papers.

to such a point that it is a genuine handicap in casting.” For each of the forty-seven actors he wanted removed, Reber provided a brief summary of the putative evidence and then argued why that person should be considered for *KTT*. Some actors, such as Burgess Meredith, even if they appeared in *Red Channels*, had only vague or flimsy charges laid against them, or they had been “cleared” by other sponsors or agencies and were being used on other programs. Other actors, such as Vincent Price, were on the list only because of vague accusations by “the Syracuse people.” Actors such as Anne Jackson were on the list only because they publicly called for a presidential pardon of a black man, Willie McGee, sentenced to death for the rape of a white woman. These actors, argued Reber, were motivated not by communist sympathies but by “their sensitiveness about discrimination against a Negro.” Another group of actors, including Sidney Poitier, publicly took a position against blacklisting, perhaps by voting for or running as a member of an antiblacklisting slate at one of the guilds, or by not publicly supporting blacklisting by voting for the problacklist slate.<sup>43</sup>

Reber was particularly adamant about actors Lee Grant, Uta Hagen, Maureen Stapleton, and Rod Steiger. Grant, an “exceptionally good ingénue,” was blacklisted because she had supported the antiblacklisting platform at the American Federation of Television and Radio Artists and because she spoke at the funeral of a close friend, J. Edward Bromberg, who was listed in *Red Channels* as having joined many communist fronts. Reber, simultaneously blaming Grant for carelessness and praising her for bravery, argued: “In our opinion there is no doubt but that this person is extremely careless about avoiding associations or identification with causes which would injure her career, but certainly there is nothing in her record that we know about that could label her as a Communist. She is simply a very excellent young actress who refused to kowtow to the pressure being brought upon her. We think she should be rewarded by being used by Kraft.”

Hagen, whose *Lady Macbeth* on *KTT* was, in Reber’s opinion, “one of the great Kraft shows of all time,” was on the list, he said, primarily because she had been married to José Ferrer and as “Mrs. Ferrer she went along with Jose on everything that he did, and he did plenty. After they separated, Jose saw the writing on the wall and somehow managed to get himself white-washed.” Stapleton drew complaints from “Syracuse” because she not only signed the Willie McGee petition but also ran on an antiblacklist guild slate. Reber explained: “There is no doubt in our minds but that she is entirely loyal, but she is insistent on her right to express her opinions as a free American.” Steiger “is one of the great young actors of the American stage,” and yet a *File #13* document accuses him of “having played in plays in which performers were accused of being Communists. This is perhaps the very most vicious sort of all types of accusation. Mere association with others seems to have made him guilty in someone’s eyes.” The next week *KTT* producer Art Farlow wrote Reber that he had reviewed the requests with Platt, who “agreed that we are free to use any of the names in your memorandum to January 26” with the proviso that Reber should also “send a brief note to that effect so we will be alerted.”<sup>44</sup>

This apparent success for Reber did not, however, do away with the blacklist or challenge the necessity for screening potential performers. As the historian Erik Barnouw points out, executives such as Reber “scarcely considered that *ad hoc* chipping at the list really conceded the principle.” But Farlow’s letter showed how *JWT*’s attitude toward the

<sup>43</sup> Reber to Platt, Jan. 26, 1955, *ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*; Farlow to Reber, Feb. 1, 1955, *ibid.*

countersubversives was shifting. Johnson's protégé, the former communist Matusow, had just confessed in his 1955 memoir *False Witness* that he had lied about many of his claims. As Farlow noted to Reber, "Seems to me this pretty much repudiates the whole Syracuse matter, and certainly we should take the position that undoubtedly he has misled Johnson and us as well." Farlow's suggestion that JWT should not accuse Johnson of knowingly spreading falsehoods may have been a tactic for both Johnson and JWT to save face.<sup>45</sup>

In a February 19, 1955, letter to John Kraft (stamped as having never been answered), Francis Neuser of the VAC reproached *KTT* for hiring Ossie Davis, an actor listed in an attached *File #13* document as having spoken at a communist front rally. "Mrs. Buchanan," Johnson's daughter, complained to the VAC on April 9, 1955, that Kraft's responses to their accusations back in 1951 were inadequate and "even at this late date, [Kraft] is still using Communist front talent." Reiterating her threat to boycott Kraft products, Buchanan claimed that Kraft must not "care one 'little cheese curd worth'" about hiring communists. Buchanan's repetition of old complaints indicated that Kraft and JWT's blacklisting had prevented the countersubversives from making new ones.<sup>46</sup>

Meanwhile, in private correspondence Platt expressed increasing dissatisfaction with the Syracuse activists. Referring to the spring 1955 VAC and Buchanan letters, Platt wrote a fellow Kraft executive on May 3, 1955, to explain why Kraft should not buckle under any longer. He noted that although Buchanan is referred to as a "housewife," she is Johnson's daughter, the man "who is back of all this fanatical crusade. So Mrs. Buchanan is not a typical 'housewife,'" and the group from Syracuse was a small coterie, not a widespread movement. He also noted that Johnson's primary source, Matusow, was being prosecuted for committing perjury during Senate hearings: "On many occasions Johnson quoted Mr. Matusow to me." In response to the other executive's concern that the VAC circulars would harm Kraft sales, Platt mentioned a forthcoming "study" by the Fund for the Republic, Inc. (which would be released in 1956 as Cogley's *Report on Blacklisting II*). This report, funded by a liberal think tank to expose the problem of blacklisting, cited another study that claimed, "while most people object to Communists . . . and would fire any one of them used 'as a singer on a radio program,' the majority of them interviewed would not refuse to buy the product 'he' advertised." Platt was not alone in his questioning of the boycott threats. In 1951, concerned that certain story lines on its anthology drama *Studio One* (1948–1958) might result in decreased product sales, the sponsor Westinghouse had asked its ad agency, McCann-Erickson, to study this problem and the agency concluded that "the public does not hold a sponsor liable for story content." Additionally, widespread product boycotts as threatened by the countersubversives simply had not occurred.<sup>47</sup>

A couple of weeks later, on May 16, 1955, Platt wrote an executive at the Chrysler Corporation to explain his changing view of the countersubversives. Noting that Ma-

<sup>45</sup> Erik Barnouw, *The Golden Web: A History of Broadcasting in the United States, 1933–1953* (New York, 1968), 270; Matusow, *False Witness*; Farlow to Reber, Feb. 1, 1955, box 88, Wilson Papers.

<sup>46</sup> Neuser to John Kraft, Feb. 19, 1955, box 88, Wilson Papers; Buchanan to Neuser, April 9, 1955, *ibid.*

<sup>47</sup> Platt to W. Harvey, May 3, 1955, *ibid.*; J. Gilbert Baird, ca. 1951, speech, box 2, Holland Papers. Ironically, despite his defensive citation of John Cogley's *Report on Blacklisting II* before its publication, Jack Platt had only months before refused to be interviewed by Cogley's researchers, claiming falsely that Kraft was not involved in blacklisting: "At no time do we enter into problems of this sort, and consequently the company has no policy affecting the problem. The production of our television and radio programs are the sole responsibilities of our advertising agencies . . . and we do not interfere with their established policies in this area," Platt to Michael Harrington, Feb. 8, 1955, box 88, Wilson Papers.



tusow had “recently testified that he made up a *false* blacklist of radio and television actors,” Platt went on to defend Ossie Davis: “It is understandable that a Negro would be fighting against a blacklist. A Negro who feels, either with or without foundation, that he is ‘blacklisted’ simply because he is a Negro is a most susceptible target for other anti-blacklisting activities.” The phrasing here is revealing: Platt did not believe blacklisting to be wrong or Davis to be justified in attacking it; he only thought that Davis’s “susceptibility” to wrongheaded antiblacklisting activity was excusable under the circumstances.<sup>48</sup>

Platt was, however, astute enough to understand the self-serving impulse that makes opposition to discrimination fair grounds for further discrimination: “Since the Syracuse group itself in effect prepares blacklists, they are even more vociferous against those who condemn blacklists” than they are opposed to putative communist sympathizers. Platt reiterated Kraft’s policy of not hiring “any known Communist,” but, like many anti-communist liberals, he also argued that Kraft must “uphold the American system of justice and fair play. There is no central government agency which will tell us whether a man is or isn’t Communist,” so Kraft and JWT must make “their own decision” and “use every precaution.” Moreover, Platt claimed, hiring an occasional actor “associated with a Communist activity” is “less of an evil than to have done an injustice to any single person. In the case of Ossie Davis we found no evidence that he isn’t a loyal American citizen.” On the one hand, Platt upheld liberal standards of fairness even at the risk of employing a “fellow traveler”; on the other hand, he used a blacklister’s logic in claiming that Davis may be hired because JWT’s secret investigation did not turn up any evidence of guilt.<sup>49</sup>

Meanwhile, in his correspondence with countersubversives, Platt kept his anti-“Syracuse” reservations to himself, continuing to claim that he was cooperating with them. Herbert Philbrick, well known as the inspiration for the television program about an undercover anticommunist, *I Led 3 Lives* (1953–1956), had written in May 1955 to a retailer urging a boycott of Kraft products because of the appearance of Ossie Davis and Rex Ingram on *KTT*. Despite his spirited defense of Davis a few weeks before, Platt wrote Philbrick in June that Kraft would “never knowingly employ” a subversive and that Davis and Ingram were cast before the complaints arrived, when it was “too late to make any change.” He implied Davis would never be cast again. Johnson, he wrote, had alerted Kraft to “undesirable” actors, and “as a result of this we have eliminated those controversial people.” He concluded with gratitude to “Mr. Johnson for his help.”<sup>50</sup>

On June 15, 1955, Reber took Platt to task for this craven attitude. Starting out mildly, Reber wondered if “we had been too solicitous in the direction of Syracuse.” Pointing out Platt’s claim that Johnson’s complaints led to the “elimination of these controversial people from consideration,” Reber argued that Kraft and JWT should never admit to hiring anyone “unintentionally” whom Johnson then identified as subversive, lest they give Johnson the satisfaction of having casting control. The only issues they had been having with Johnson recently, Reber noted, concerned JWT’s intentional hiring of people already on Johnson’s blacklist (such as Anthony Ross) “whom we use in spite of the opposition of Syracuse.” We “should not,” Reber wrote, “deny ourselves the use of good actors whom we ourselves believe are loyal citizens.” As a practical matter, Reber was acknowledging

<sup>48</sup> Platt to K. Keller, May 16, 1955, box 88, Wilson Papers. Emphasis in original.

<sup>49</sup> Platt to Keller, May 16, 1955, *ibid.*

<sup>50</sup> Herbert Philbrick to Otis Radley, May 17, 1955, *ibid.*; Platt to Philbrick, June 9, 1955, *ibid.*

that there were not enough good actors willing to accept the low pay who were not subject to Johnson's complaints. But then Reber went further, evoking American values:

More important than this, however, is the really great danger that the time may come when those companies who have knuckled under to the witch hunters will be exposed as organizations who have used their commercial position to deprive individual Americans of fair treatment. The thing that makes the United States greater than Russia—and we had better keep it that way—is that we have freedom of expression, and that each individual American dares to enjoy the God-given and man-fought-for privilege of freedom of thought.

Reber's assertion of the liberal values of free expression and due process, as well as his warning that future observers would not look back favorably on blacklisting, reflected the conflicted views of most of the broadcasting industry. However, although both Reber and Platt worried about fairness and Reber insisted that Americans enjoyed "freedom of thought," both also believed communism a treasonous conspiracy deserving of discrimination rather than seeing it as a political belief protected by right. Furthermore, their faith in the strength of sponsor identification and in television as the most powerful medium ever known made such discrimination seem necessary.<sup>51</sup>

For his 1956 *Report on Blacklisting II*—a key source for subsequent accounts of the broadcast blacklists—John Cogley interviewed an anonymous source called "Harry Law," a "legal vice-president" at a "Big Agency." "Harry Law" was in fact Wilson, as the JWT executive admitted in a 1956 letter. As "Harry Law," Wilson denied that the agency kept any lists, a direct lie. "Harry Law" also claimed never to have "read through a copy of *Counterattack*," a publication Wilson demonstrably often consulted. "Harry Law" claimed to base his information for screening actors on newspaper clippings and "other sources," but Wilson clearly relied on Hartnett's secret (and therefore irrefutable) *File #13* documents. "Harry Law" claimed the agency was not involved in "clearance" procedures; in reality, JWT "cleared" talent by the "special committee" Platt described in his correspondence. "Harry Law" explained that sponsors must be "good citizens" and not employ communists; however, Wilson's focus was not on citizenship but on public relations and legal consequences. If the public rejected a performer, then JWT's advertising strategy—building a favorable association between program and product—would be destroyed. Perhaps Wilson's most egregious misrepresentation as "Harry Law" was his statement that he was "concerned only with over-all policy, not with operating details." Wilson's papers show that JWT's legal department maintained research files, lists, and affidavits, filled with specific details. Cogley's report, then, based on voluntary disclosures by partial, defensive, and self-serving perpetrators such as Wilson, must be regarded with skepticism. Wilson's papers at the Hartman Center provide a rare means of comparing the disclosures to Cogley with the evidence in contemporaneous documents.<sup>52</sup>

John Reber died suddenly in July 1955. Later in 1955 Platt became Kraft's senior vice president of new product development, and he retired in 1962. Within a few years, JWT had reorganized its television department to focus on selecting rather than producing programs for clients. *Kraft Television Theatre* ended in 1958. Its ratings had declined precipitously as audiences shifted their attention to filmed episodic series such as westerns and situation comedies. The expense and difficulty of producing live anthology dramas

<sup>51</sup> Reber to Platt, June 15, 1955, *ibid.*

<sup>52</sup> Wilson to S. A. Armstrong, July 20, 1956, *ibid.*; Cogley, *Report on Blacklisting II*, 119.

no longer made sense. Kraft went on to sponsor a variety of television programs, but JWT no longer scripted, cast, or produced them.<sup>53</sup>

Platt's collaboration with Reber had lasted twenty-five years. The pair helped shape some of the most influential programs in American broadcasting, and when the pressures to blacklist intensified, they debated how to manage the brand, the blacklist, and their principles. As these documents show, Reber resisted the countersubversives' pressures more consistently and cared more about the integrity of the program and the casting process than Platt, who, as the manager of a major corporation's brand image, was more susceptible to fears of consumer boycotts, though he was at least intermittently aware of the injustice of the countersubversives' demands. He was, no doubt, the victim of a belief in the powerful effects of electronic media that was also the basis of his long career. As he noted in 1938, when describing how he made decisions about the use of broadcasting: "I'm not a mystic either—just a cheese salesman harnessing a modern invention for reaching into the living rooms of my customers."<sup>54</sup>

## Conclusion

As ad agencies gradually withdrew from direct program production, the dynamics of the blacklist shifted. Independent producers such as David Susskind, more interested in program quality than advertising goals, resisted blacklists. Although the countersubversive influence had waned long before, John Henry Faulk's successful 1962 libel suit against Johnson, Hartnett, and Hartnett's Aware, Inc., apparently brought an end to blacklisting in broadcasting. Johnson, by then retired and ill, died just as the trial ended, having lost all the intimidating power he had once exercised over agencies and sponsors. A 1964 episode of the television courtroom drama *The Defenders* (1961–1965) signaled the new consensus that blacklisting was a shameful chapter in broadcasting history.<sup>55</sup>

By the time the broadcast blacklists petered out, so had the sponsor identification strategy; as one ad executive put it, that "sacred cow . . . was ground to hamburger." By the mid-1960s, instead of creating programs to attract audience attention, advertisers could simply buy that attention with commercial time on a variety of network programs. Agencies produced commercials instead of programs; and thus both advertisers and agencies were relieved of the burden of adjudicating the possible political ramifications of program casting. Television evolved from a medium for promoting corporate liberal ideals of cultural uplift and education into a medium of mass entertainment characterized by generic filmed episodic series regularly interrupted by unrelated commercials. Traditional sponsors bemoaned what they viewed as the increased commercialization of broadcast programming.<sup>56</sup>

According to the journalist Jack Gould, "The strength of the blacklists never rested with the compilers of the lists; it always rested with those who patronized them"—the sponsors, their agencies, and the networks. For a few years, a small group of activists,

<sup>53</sup> Don Vogt, "Kraft's Broadcast History," 1978, press release, series 1, box 1, *Kraft Television Theatre* Oral History Project.

<sup>54</sup> Platt, "52 Shows a Year," 24.

<sup>55</sup> Faulk, *Fear on Trial*, 91–94. David Susskind testified against Vincent Hartnett and Johnson in John Henry Faulk's libel suit. Doherty, *Cold War, Cool Medium*, 244. "Blacklist," dir. Stuart Rosenberg (episode of *The Defenders*, ex. prod. Herbert Brodtkin), CBS Television (CBS, Jan. 18, 1954).

<sup>56</sup> Charles Brower, *Me, and Other Advertising Geniuses* (Garden City, 1974), 213; Frank Reel, *The Networks: How They Stole the Show* (New York, 1979), xvi.

claiming to represent a significant segment of the otherwise invisible vast television audience, convinced Platt, for one, of the urgency of their cause—a cause that Platt understood not as preventing the dissemination of communist propaganda but as protecting Kraft's brand from ruinous associations that would lead to a decline in sales. Everitt points out that “Johnson enjoyed only as much power as others were willing to give him.” However, Johnson fooled Platt—and many others—into believing he had more influence than he did; his threatened national boycotts never materialized. When he insisted to JWT that any resistance to blacklisting was a reason to blacklist someone, Johnson showed himself far more interested in exploiting his leverage over sponsors than in defending Americans from the communist threat.<sup>57</sup>

The correspondence of two ad agency executives, a cheese company executive, and an activist countersubversive grocer gives us a unique glimpse into the detailed workings of the postwar anticommunist purges. We find in it various shades of political belief—in freedom from communism, in freedom of expression, in due process, in the grave national responsibilities of the television medium—all of them susceptible to commercial pressures that operated through a specific set of industry practices. We find two of the main actors—Platt in his contradictory letters to Johnson and Reber, Wilson in his persona of “Henry Law”—expressing their sense of conflict and ambivalence by simply lying. We find actual blacklists based on secret allegations, defended as protection both against communism and bad publicity, while they are simultaneously regretted and denied. As historians continue to reevaluate the impact of anticommunism during the Cold War era, this case study should help illuminate some of the nuanced, complex, and conflicted ways individuals operating in a polarized environment ended up violating their own values while pursuing the goals they believed were in the best interests of their organization if not of the public.

<sup>57</sup> Jack Gould, “The Faulk Victory,” *New York Times*, July 15, 1962, p. 73; Everitt, *Shadow of Red*, 130.