

The Strange Career of Annie Lee Moss: Rethinking Race, Gender, and McCarthyism

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Annie Lee Moss is hardly a household name. She had her fifteen minutes (or so) of fame in March 1954, when Edward R. Murrow dedicated an episode of his television news show, *See It Now*, to her appearance before Sen. Joseph McCarthy's Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations. McCarthy had charged that Moss, an African American civilian Pentagon employee who allegedly had access to top-secret coded messages, was a card-carrying member of the Communist party (CP). Murrow's broadcast went a long way toward discrediting those claims; ultimately, Moss remained an army clerk, laboring in obscurity until her retirement in 1975, at age sixty-nine. When she reappeared in George Clooney's 2005 paean to Murrow, *Good Night, and Good Luck*, she had been long forgotten by all but a coterie of McCarthy scholars and right-wing apologists for McCarthyism.¹

This seemingly unimportant federal employee had a rather strange career. Like many other Americans, she was caught up in the loyalty-security programs of the Harry S. Truman and Dwight D. Eisenhower administrations, but the extent of official attention paid to her was unusual. She was subjected to at least three investigations, three job suspensions, and several transfers for security purposes. J. Edgar Hoover believed she merited his close attention, and the secretary of defense once personally intervened on her behalf. She also appeared before both the House Committee on Un-American Activities (HUAC) and McCarthy's subcommittee. Even more strange is the enduring career of Annie Lee Moss as a symbol of Cold War politics. Long before George Clooney brought her again to the national stage, historians and pundits had offered her as a sign of McCarthy's evil or of his vindication. The debate over Moss has centered on whether or not McCarthy was correct. Was this "humble Negress" actually a Communist? And if she was, does that justify the Cold War-era red scare and the senator's part in it? For liberal commentators from Murrow to Clooney, Moss was a "little woman" who was incomprehensible as a Communist;

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¹ On the Edward R. Murrow broadcast, see Thomas Rosteck, *See It Now Confronts McCarthyism: Television Documentary and the Politics of Representation* (Tuscaloosa, 1994), 142–74; and Thomas Doherty, *Cold War, Cool Medium: Television, McCarthyism, and American Culture* (New York, 2003), 180–84. *Good Night, and Good Luck*, dir. George Clooney (Warner Independent Pictures, 2005).

her very insignificance communicated the absurdity of McCarthy's campaign. For conservative ideologues such as Fulton Lewis Jr., George S. Schuyler, William F. Buckley Jr., and, most recently, Ann Coulter, Moss's seeming obscurity was a cover for Communist cunning, a demonstration of the necessity for eternal vigilance.²

In those tellings, Moss is merely a cipher for Joe McCarthy; her life has no meaning beyond what it can tell us about the value of his crusade. Placing Moss in her social contexts, however, enables us to understand how and why she was made (and made herself) into such a potent symbol, and in a way that precluded the recognition of her own political subjectivity. Here I revisit the careers of Annie Lee Moss, as a black woman living out the early Cold War in Washington, D.C., and as a public figure in the debates about McCarthyism, to illuminate how limited the possibilities were for imagining African American citizenship in the postwar years. Never the helpless and passive victim that she was portrayed, Moss was a community activist, a woman ambitious for herself and her family, and most likely a member, briefly, of the Communist party. Yet, in a Cold War context that made African American progress contingent on black men's continued loyalty to racial liberalism and offered few opportunities for conceptualizing black women's loyalty at all, Moss's best chances for securing her bit of the American dream lay in erasing her own agency. Her interests coincided with those of McCarthy's enemies, most prominently Murrow and the border-state Democrats Stuart Symington and John McClellan, who were able to use Moss's identity as a "poor old colored woman" against the senator by positioning themselves as her chivalrous defenders. Paradoxically, Moss became simultaneously a sign of the decline of McCarthyism and of the ascendancy of a liberal racial order secured by anticommunism and enlightened white leadership. That she did so on the eve of the explosion of a mass civil rights movement is only one of the ironies of her strange career.

Before she was summoned by the McCarthy subcommittee, Moss seemed to embody the promise of postwar America for the nation's black citizens. Her beginnings were humble. Born Annie Lee Crawford in 1905 in South Carolina, she was one of six children of tenant-farmer parents.³ She began working in the cotton fields at age five while also pursuing a "scattered" education that took her into high school. After a family move to North Carolina she left school to follow a path familiar to southern black women, work-

² For views of conservative popular commentators, see George S. Schuyler, "Views-Reviews," *Pittsburgh Courier*, Aug. 21, 1954, p. 6; "Stone Cold Dead," *National Review*, Nov. 22, 1958, p. 326; and Ann Coulter, *Treason: Liberal Treachery from the Cold War to the War on Terrorism* (New York, 2003), 62–64. The scholarly literature on Joseph McCarthy generally tells Annie Lee Moss's story as a not-so-amusing anecdote demonstrating McCarthy's carelessness and vindictiveness. See, for example, Thomas C. Reeves, *The Life and Times of Joe McCarthy: A Biography* (Lanham, 1997), 548–50, 567–69; David M. Oshinsky, *A Conspiracy So Immense: The World of Joe McCarthy* (New York, 1983), 401–3; and Donald A. Ritchie, "Introduction," in *Executive Sessions of the Senate Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations of the Committee on Government Operations*, vol. V: *Eighty-third Congress, Second Session, 1954*, by U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Government Operations, Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations (Washington, 2003), xiv–xvi. For a conservative scholarly treatment, see Arthur Herman, *Joseph McCarthy: Reexamining the Life and Legacy of America's Most Hated Senator* (New York, 2000), 333–37.

³ The biographical information on Moss was compiled from several sources, including Carleton Kent, "Meet Mrs. Moss, a Target of Senator McCarthy," *Chicago Sun-Times*, April 5, 1954, p. 1; Eleanor Bontecou, "What's in a Name?," manuscript, [1955], Moss, Annie LA6-3919 Folder, box 813, Cobb, Howard, Hayes & Windsor Papers (unprocessed collection) (Moorland-Spangarn Research Center, Howard University, Washington, D.C.); and Annie Lee Moss Official Personnel Folder (Civilian Personnel Records Facility, National Personnel Records Center, St. Louis, Mo.). I obtained this record through a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request, and it is in my possession.

ing as a domestic servant and a laundress. Annie Lee married at age twenty-one, and she and her husband, Ernest Moss, moved to Durham, where they both found work in the racially segregated tobacco industry. Through the depression years, she labored at the very dirty job of operating a stemming machine, for eighteen dollars per week. Times were hard for the Mosses who moved, with their young son, five times from 1936 to 1941. Another child died in infancy.

The coming of war offered the family new opportunities, and they trekked northward to join Ernest's brother in Washington, D.C. While Ernest got a construction job, Annie Lee's choices remained limited. She worked for a time in a commercial laundry and then spent two years as a dessert cook in government cafeterias. But the war years offered the first real opportunity for African American women to enter both federal employment and white-collar work; during the 1940s, government worker became the second largest occupational category for black women in Washington.⁴ Early in 1945 Moss joined those ranks, obtaining a temporary appointment as a clerk in the General Accounting Office (GAO). The higher wages she received were especially important when her husband died in 1947, and Moss became the primary breadwinner for her family, which included a brother who was a disabled veteran. Although she was laid off in 1949, Moss was able to secure a permanent civil service position six months later, this time as a machine operator in the Signal Corps. By 1954, when Sen. McCarthy subpoenaed her to appear before his subcommittee, she was making \$3,300 a year, a wage far above the median income for black women workers and one that allowed her to become a homeowner, even as a single mother.⁵ Annie Lee Moss, it seemed, was living proof of the possibilities of the American dream.

But it was a dream accomplished only through struggle, for Washington remained a segregated and racially conservative city, and as African American migration to the city intensified, so too did the racism that pervaded the district. The Mosses' first residence was in one of the city's alley dwellings, infamous for their lack of sanitation and basic services, and they spent years in Washington's poorest neighborhoods and in racially segregated public housing. Even though Moss was among the first black women to benefit from federal employment, she was initially hired only on a temporary basis and remained mired, like other African Americans, in the lowest civil service classifications. Moss proved herself more than equal to those trials, taking night classes to compensate for the gaps in her education, passing a civil service exam, obtaining a real estate license, and skillfully using neighborhood, kin, and social service networks to improve her family's living situation. She was also a committed community activist, deeply involved in the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA), the Urban League, youth activities, and her church. Before buying a home in the 1950s, she was active on the tenants' council of her housing project, serving as its president for several years. Newspaper articles described her as a "spark-plug" of neighborhood activism, an effective and energetic leader. To all appearances, she

⁴ Spencer R. Crew, "Melding the Old and the New: The Modern African American Community, 1930-1960," in *Urban Odyssey: A Multicultural History of Washington, D.C.*, ed. Francine Curro Cary (Washington, 1996), 208-27, esp. 216.

⁵ "Table F-5: Race and Hispanic Origin of Householder-Families by Median and Mean Income, 1947 to 2005," *U.S. Census Bureau: Historical Income Tables—Families*, <http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/income/histinc/f05.html>; and "Table P 36: Full-Time, Year-Round Black Workers by Median Income and Sex, 1955 to 2005," *U.S. Census Bureau: Historical Income Tables—People*, <http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/income/histinc/p36b.html>. For purposes of comparison, in 1955 the median income for full-time, year-round female workers of all races was \$2,735; the median income for full-time, year-round black female workers was \$1,468.

was an upstanding citizen, representing the brightening prospects for black families in an America that was reaching toward equality, as well as the necessity of the continued struggle for democracy.⁶

Was this upstanding citizen also a Communist? That accusation surfaced in 1948 when Moss became subject to President Truman's recently instituted loyalty program. The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), which was responsible for conducting background checks of every federal employee, forwarded to the GAO Loyalty Board evidence that Moss had belonged to the Communist party in the mid-1940s. After taking Moss's testimony, the board determined that there were "no reasonable grounds" to believe that she was disloyal, and she was permitted to retain her job. The same charges were resuscitated in 1951, when Moss, now an employee of the Department of the Army, was reinvestigated in the wake of a revision of the army's loyalty-security regulations. She was suspended from her position on grounds that her removal was "necessary and desirable in the interest of national security." When the army's Loyalty-Security Screening Board recommended that Moss lose her job, she appealed. After a hearing at which Moss submitted testimonials from her minister and co-workers to her good character and patriotism, the secretary of the army ordered that she be returned to her position with back pay. In 1954 Moss was suspended twice—in February, after the army got wind that McCarthy was interested in her, and then in August, this time for almost six months. Finally, in January 1955, the secretary of defense reinstated her, but only in "a non-sensitive position . . . without access to classified information."⁷

Moss's encounters with the loyalty programs of presidents Truman and Eisenhower demonstrate both those programs' vast reach—every single employee of the federal government, no matter how insignificant, was subjected to a background check—as well as some of their limitations, for the programs were unevenly and often arbitrarily administered. They were shrouded in secrecy, which meant that individuals could be fired on the most tenuous kinds of evidence. As Moss's experience suggests, relatively few government employees were actually dismissed, but, as activists at the time and scholars since have pointed out, the consequences of the loyalty and security programs extended well beyond those federal workers who lost jobs or had reputations sullied. Like other aspects of the domestic red scare, they chilled political dissent and intellectual freedom. The federal

⁶ On Moss's neighborhood involvement, see "Visit of Santa Assured in 4 Southwest Projects," *Washington Afro-American*, Dec. 4, 1948, p. 4; "200 Pay Woody L. Taylor Tribute at Testimonial," *ibid.*, Nov. 18, 1950, p. 24; "Tenants Honor Southwest Housing Project Manager," *ibid.*, Aug. 19, 1950, p. 20; and Bontecou, manuscript, Moss, Annie LA6-3919 Folder, box 813, Cobb, Howard, Hayes & Windsor Papers. On postwar Washington, see Constance McLaughlin Green, *The Secret City: A History of Race Relations in the Nation's Capital* (Princeton, 1967); and Crew, "Melding the Old and the New," esp. 221–25. On alley dwellings, see James Borchert, *Alley Life in Washington: Family, Community, Religion, and Folklife in the City, 1850–1970* (Urbana, 1980).

⁷ Records relating to loyalty-security hearings for federal employees were not systematically retained, and some of the transcripts of Moss's hearings have been lost. This summary has been patched together from the following sources: Annie Lee Moss Official Personnel Folder (in Andrea Friedman's possession); Executive Secretary, Loyalty Review Board to Chief, Investigations Division, Jan. 4, 1952, Annie Lee Moss Case File, Records of the Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations, RG 46 (National Archives, Washington, D.C.); Herbert Hawkins to Francis P. Carr, Feb. 26, Sept. 14, 1954, *ibid.*; "Annie Lee Moss Case," typescript, Aug. 2, 1954, *ibid.*; Charles E. Wilson to Secretary of the Army, Jan. 18, 1955, *ibid.*; T. A. Flynn to Annie Lee Moss, May 26, 1948, Ann Moss File, Investigative Name Files, Records of the House Un-American Activities Committee, RG 233 (National Archives, Washington, D.C.); E. L. Fisher to Moss, June 23, 1948, *ibid.*; John G. Connell Jr. to Moss, July 23, 1951, *ibid.*; John W. Martyn to Moss, Oct. 23, 1951, *ibid.*; Mary S. Markward testimony, Moss Security Hearing [1954], Securities Activities Control Board Exhibit, Mary Markward Federal Bureau of Investigation file (in Heming Nelson's possession); and General Accounting Office Loyalty Board hearing, transcript, June 22, 1948, document 121-2900-31, Annie Lee Moss Federal Bureau of Investigation file. I obtained this record from the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) through a FOIA request, and it is in my possession.

loyalty programs presented a template for the states and private employers, who also subjected their employees to loyalty checks, forced resignations, and firings. And while the number of true "subversives" identified was likely small, individuals who had been active in progressive causes, particularly in left-leaning unions and the African American freedom struggle, were targeted and disproportionately affected. Many of the federal workers in Washington who found themselves called before loyalty boards were members of the United Public Workers (UPW), a left-leaning union for government employees, which was later expelled from the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) because the union was allegedly under Communist domination.⁸

It may very well have been her connection to the UPW that led to suspicions about Moss's loyalty. In 1942, when Moss secured a job as a dessert cook in the Pentagon cafeteria, she became a member of a UPW local. The Cafeteria Workers Union was, at the time, the largest local in the union, representing almost four thousand workers in government cafeterias, most (perhaps all) of whom were African American. These were union shops, and dues were automatically deducted from wages. But Moss did more than merely pay her dues, attending, in her words, "quite a few" monthly meetings and participating in a union-endorsed campaign demanding an end to racial discrimination in government employment. In 1954, when Moss testified before HUAC, she traced her troubles back to her union membership, asserting that "everything seems to center right around that period. Before there's nothing; afterward there's nothing. Everything seems to center right around that union."⁹

If for many Washington federal workers, their job insecurity seemed directly related to their union activities, this was in part because the UPW embraced a progressive politics that knit together worker rights and racial justice, a combination that invited heightened suspicion in the context of the early Cold War. The notorious loyalty investigation and dismissal of Dorothy Bailey exemplified how a commitment to racial equality came to signify political subversion in loyalty review cases. An employee of the United States Employment Service and the president of her local of the UPW, Bailey was accused by unnamed informants of belonging to the CP, associating with Communists, and following the Communist "line" in her union work. Members of the loyalty board questioned Bailey, a white woman, not just about her union activities and her participation in Popular Front groups during the 1930s, but also about whether she had written a letter to the Red Cross protesting their practice of "segregating" blood plasma. Apparently, the evidence gathered against Bailey included such a letter, which had been furnished to the loyalty board by the red squad of the Washington police department. The question was justified, the interrogator later argued, because "objection to blood segregation is a recognized 'party line' technic," employed by the CP to "inveigle Negroes into joining the Party." He claimed to have been offering Bailey the opportunity to demonstrate that she deviated from the party line in this instance. The presumptions behind the question, however, in-

⁸ During the Harry S. Truman administration, for example, approximately five hundred federal workers were fired for disloyalty, while about five times that many resigned in the face of charges. See David Cauter, *The Great Fear: The Anti-Communist Purge under Truman and Eisenhower* (New York, 1978); Ellen Schrecker, *Many Are the Crimes: McCarthyism in America* (Princeton, 1998), 266–305; and Carl Bernstein, *Loyalties: A Son's Memoir* (New York, 1989).

⁹ "UFWA to Protect Jobs of Negroes after War," *Washington Post*, Oct. 26, 1944, p. 9; "Testimony of Annie Lee Moss," Feb. 22, 1954, Executive Session Transcripts, Records of the House Un-American Activities Committee; U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Government Operations, Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations, *Army Signal Corps—Subversion and Espionage*, 83 Cong., 1 sess., March 11, 1954, pp. 450–52.

formed the deliberations of many loyalty board members. As one loyalty official maintained, "The fact that a person believes in racial equality doesn't *prove* that he's a Communist, but it certainly makes you look twice, doesn't it? You can't get away from the fact that racial equality is part of the Communist line."¹⁰

As, indeed, it was. Communism's attraction for America's black citizens was noted even before the CP began making inroads in African American communities. As early as 1919, right-wing politicians averred that Communists had targeted blacks for agitation and indoctrination. By the late 1920s, the Communist party had begun to develop a strategy for organizing in African American communities, and the hard times of the depression yielded rich results. Between 1931 and 1946 the proportion of party members who were African American doubled to 14 percent. The CP was able to attract a more racially diverse membership, in part, because of the party's attention to issues of concern to working-class black folk and its substantial efforts to combat racism in the party itself. Nonetheless, while many black Americans flirted with party membership, they also had a particularly high turnover rate, suggesting that they moved into and out of the party according to their own estimation of its effectiveness on issues such as racial as well as economic justice. Those trends held true in Washington, where, in the mid-1940s, it was estimated that one-third of the party's membership was African American. About 80 percent of black recruits dropped out within a year, however. Although critics of the party accused it of exploiting and misrepresenting America's racial problems, of "deceiv[ing] and delud[ing] members of the Negro race" in order to weaken the nation by dividing it from within, the assessment of one black Communist was probably closer to the mark. Far from the CP using African Americans, he observed, "it is probably more accurate to say that Negroes have used the Communist Party. It is the one party in which they feel free to speak and to act like Americans." Still, for many black citizens, the party's avowed commitment to racial equality was not enough to maintain their long-term loyalty to its particular radical vision.¹¹

While loyalty boards often flattened out the complexity of an individual's political life, collapsed ideologies and categories, and mistook dissent and progressive activism for disloyalty and subversion, they were, at least in part, responding to the reality of left-unionism, in which workers' rights advocates, antiracism activists, and Communists encountered and influenced each other. The UPW was one such milieu. It actively promoted a racial justice agenda. As one UPW official later claimed, "Everything that happened in

¹⁰ Eleanor Bontecou, *The Federal Loyalty-Security Program* (Ithaca, 1953), 137–40; Walter Gellhorn, *Security, Loyalty, and Science* (Ithaca, 1950), 152–54; Schrecker, *Many Are the Crimes*, 274–82; Alan Barth, *The Loyalty of Free Men* (New York, 1951), 111–15; Bernstein, *Loyalties*, 176–78; "Blood and Loyalty," *Washington Post*, Dec. 2, 1948, p. 10.

¹¹ Bontecou, *Federal Loyalty-Security Program*, 139; Gerald Horne, *Black Liberation/Red Scare: Ben Davis and the Communist Party* (Newark, Del., 1994), 219. On African American participation in the Washington Communist party (CP), see "Stenographic Transcript of Hearings before the Committee on the Judiciary, United States Congress, Senate, Internal Security Subcommittee, Executive Session, May 15, 1953," p. 93, Records of the Senate Internal Security Subcommittee, RG 46 (National Archives, Washington, D.C.). On the relationship between African Americans and the Communist Party of the United States (CPUSA), see Jeff Woods, *Black Struggle, Red Scare: Segregation and Anti-Communism in the South, 1948–1968* (Baton Rouge, 2004); Mark Naison, *Communists in Harlem during the Depression* (Urbana, 1983); Robin D. G. Kelley, *Hammer and Hoe: Alabama Communists during the Great Depression* (Chapel Hill, 1990); Wilson Record, *Race and Radicalism: The NAACP and the Communist Party in Conflict* (Ithaca, 1964); and Eric Arnesen, "No 'Graver Danger': Black Anticommunism, the Communist Party, and the Race Question," *Labor: Studies in Working-Class History of the Americas*, 3 (Winter 2006), 13–52. On the fluctuations in African American CP membership, see John Earl Haynes, "Reconsidering Two Questions: On Arnesen's 'No 'Graver Danger': Black Anticommunism, the Communist Party, and the Race Question," *ibid.*, 53–57.

Washington, opening up the cafeterias to black people, breaking out of the counting rooms, beginning a consumer movement, hiring black bus drivers in the city, setting up the restaurant picket lines—that was our people.” Certainly, the UPW was not responsible for “everything that happened”—Washington was home to a diverse civil rights community that also included groups such as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), the Urban League, and the Coordinating Committee for the Enforcement of the D.C. Anti-Discrimination Laws, headed by Mary Church Terrell—but UPW members did play an active part in the city’s movement for racial equality. Further, the UPW may not have been “dominated” by Communists, but it did not exclude them. This was also true of the cafeteria workers union to which Annie Lee Moss belonged. Several men and women affiliated with the local were active in the Washington, D.C., Communist party. In fact, the party worked hard to attract cafeteria workers, recruiting enough women to constitute a cafeteria employees’ “club” for a time.¹²

The UPW, then, was a potential pathway into the Communist party for Moss, but as a black resident of segregated Washington she had others. The neighborhood south of Capitol Hill where she lived when she became a cafeteria worker was a focus of CP organizing. Party members went door to door, selling the *Daily Worker*, circulating petitions on police brutality, employment discrimination, and antilynching legislation, and trying to gauge individuals’ openness to the CP. The party also held meetings in that neighborhood, for a time at a black church a block or two from Moss’s home. While Moss sometimes attributed the suspicions about her loyalty to her union membership, at other times she highlighted neighborhood contacts. At her first loyalty hearing, for example, she admitted going to a meeting with a white woman who lived in her neighborhood. Moss claimed that she expected it would be a “social affair,” but she ultimately realized it was a Communist meeting. Four years after receiving pamphlets at that meeting she could still name their authors—James Ford and Doxey Wilkerson, two prominent black Communists. In 1954, she told HUAC that she had accompanied another neighborhood acquaintance, a black woman in whose home she was boarding, to yet another meeting, this time at the church down the street that hosted CP meetings. She claimed not to know that the woman was an active member of the Communist party.¹³

In sum, as a cafeteria worker living in predominantly black neighborhoods, Annie Lee Moss had a number of contacts with Washington Communists, and any of those contacts can explain the substantial, if contested, evidence possessed by the U.S. government of her involvement in the party. That evidence—consisting of perhaps a dozen pieces of paper—included a list of “party recruits” that identified Moss by name, race, age, and occupation; membership lists from two Communist party branches, the Communist Political Association, and various ad hoc committees containing Moss’s name and address, as well as the number of her CP membership book; and receipt records from 1945 for *Daily*

¹² Bernstein, *Loyalties*, esp. 175; Crew, “Melding the Old and the New,” 208–27; “Hearings before the Committee on Un-American Activities,” Feb. 15, 1951, House Un-American Activities Committee Executive Session Transcripts, Records of the House Un-American Activities Committee.

¹³ “Hearings before the Committee on Un-American Activities,” Feb. 16, 1951, pp. 89–90, House Un-American Activities Committee Executive Session Transcripts, Records of the House Un-American Activities Committee; “Stenographic Transcript of Hearings before the Committee on the Judiciary . . . May 15, 1953,” p. 93; General Accounting Office Loyalty Board hearing, transcript, June 22, 1948, document 121-2900-31, Annie Lee Moss Federal Bureau of Investigation file (in Friedman’s possession). FBI agents questioned Moss’s claim about accompanying a white neighbor to the meeting, concluding that there were no white individuals living in the block Moss identified as the neighbor’s home. See C. H. Stanley to A. Rosen, April 1, 1954, document 121-2900-90, *ibid.*

Worker subscriptions that included Moss's name and amounts paid.¹⁴ In 1954, Moss and her lawyer suggested that, as a result of her union participation, her name became associated with the Communist party without her knowledge or permission. More likely, Moss was a casual recruit to the CP—attracted by its social and economic justice politics—who encountered party members in her workplace and neighborhood. She attended a few party-sponsored events, paid a few month's dues, and read the pamphlets she received and the copies of the *Daily Worker* that were mailed to her for more than a year. Perhaps, during the war, while the United States and Soviet Union were allies and party membership was climbing, she did not perceive her activities as subversive. But as the Cold War heated up, Moss may have decided to leave such activities behind for more acceptable civic work in Boy Scouting and neighborhood improvement. Or, perhaps, like the 80 percent of black recruits who left Washington's Communist party within a year, Moss discovered that it was not what she had imagined. In later years, when her hard-won government job was threatened by reports of a dalliance with the CP, she believed it necessary to deny knowing even "just what Communism means."¹⁵

To interpret Moss's encounters with federal loyalty-security programs and Sen. McCarthy as part of the raced and gendered narratives of loyalty, citizenship, and democracy that were uniquely showcased in the nation's capital during the early Cold War, it is necessary to place her personal history in a broader context. The postwar global remapping and the Cold War that emerged from it ensured that domestic race relations would be critically enmeshed with international issues. U.S. officials were concerned with America's reputation overseas, particularly with how it affected the nation's ability to compete with the Soviet Union for the allegiance of emerging independent African and Asian nations. They realized it was necessary to present a convincing narrative of U.S. racial progress in order to defend America's claims to democratic leadership in the face of unrelenting Soviet criticism of American racism. Those global politics coincided with a sea change already underway in American racial ideology that was fueling the ascendancy of racial liberalism. That creed identified white racism as the central challenge to American democracy, promoted integration as a solution, and invested the government with responsibility for solving the nation's racial dilemmas, primarily through the guarantee of "equal opportunity." Racial liberalism, promulgated most famously in Gunnar Myrdal's *An American Dilemma*, was increasingly influential in national politics, even as it was sometimes bitterly contested at the local level. Indeed, the perception that racial reform was a "Cold War imperative" revealed not just a recognition of the enduring racial contradictions on which American democracy was founded (and foundering) but also a rising sense that those contradictions could not be sustained. That sentiment was detectable in the increase of black member-

¹⁴ Feb. 1, 1944, memo, document 100-12968-145, Markward Federal Bureau of Investigation file; "Recruits," handwritten ledger, [1943?], *ibid.*; untitled lists, [1944?], *ibid.*; "dues paid," [1944?], *ibid.*; membership by branches, stamped "F.B.I., October 23, 1945," *ibid.*; "Partial List of Members, North East Branch, Communist Party," [1944], *ibid.*; "CPA Members, Exclusive YWB, as of 10-25-44," *ibid.*; "Membership Record, Communist Political Association, July–Dec. 1944," *ibid.*; "Old Record, Stanton Park Club, Communist Party, January–July 1944," *ibid.*; list of book numbers and dues paid, [1944?], *ibid.*; "Composition of the Communist Political Association of Washington," Aug. 31, 1944, *ibid.*; receipt book page, [Jan. 1944], *ibid.*; Stanley to Rosen, April 1, 1954, document 121-2900-90, Moss Federal Bureau of Investigation file.

¹⁵ Moss admitted to the General Accounting Office (GAO) Loyalty Board that she read the *Daily Worker*, though she denied it before the McCarthy subcommittee. See General Accounting Office Loyalty Board hearing, transcript, June 22, 1948, document 121-2900-31, p. 10, Moss Federal Bureau of Investigation file. "Stenographic Transcript of Hearings before the Committee on the Judiciary, May 15, 1953," p. 93.

ship in the Communist party, in the fivefold growth of the NAACP during the war years, and in the beginnings of a multiracial antiracist movement on the left.¹⁶

Within the morality play of Cold War racial politics, Washington's status as the nation's capital, home to a growing black population, and a bastion of racial segregation made the city exceptionally consequential. The District of Columbia was, as many commentators have noted, a "portal into the practice of American democracy," and, in the context of the Cold War, it was an increasingly troublesome portal. A racially segregated Washington, President Truman's Committee on Civil Rights acknowledged, was "a graphic illustration of a failure of democracy." Grassroots activists were only slightly more acerbic, noting that the "eyes of the whole world" saw the city as "the capital of white supremacy." The experience of black Washingtonians such as Moss was highly symbolic, not only of the nation's racial history, but also of the federal government's commitment (or lack thereof) to equality and justice. At the same time, however, racial reform in Washington and throughout the nation was disciplined to the demands of the Cold War and constrained by white resistance. Because change in the racial order was simultaneously so threatening to many white Americans and so crucial to international legitimacy, the emerging national paradigm for racial reform privileged moderate goals and strategies that could be reconciled with the familiar modes of white paternalism and civility. Ironically, the internationalization of American race relations required African American leaders to forswear an anticolonialist politics and the capacious language of "human rights" in order to show allegiance to the more constrained rhetoric of civil rights, anticommunist politics, and incremental change.¹⁷

By the late 1940s, the meshing of racial reform with Cold War concerns had, in large part, turned the American debate about race into a debate about Negro loyalty. The loyalty of African Americans to the prevailing social order had long concerned white southerners, but black intellectuals and activists also recognized a troubled relationship to Americanness. W. E. B. Du Bois wrote famously of the "twoness" of the American Negro, "two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body." For Du Bois that double consciousness was both a curse and a blessing. It forced

¹⁶ Thomas Borstelmann, *The Cold War and the Color Line: American Race Relations in the Global Arena* (Cambridge, Mass., 2001), 78; Mary L. Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights: Race and the Image of American Democracy* (Princeton, 2000); Brenda Gayle Plummer, ed., *Window on Freedom: Race, Civil Rights, and Foreign Affairs, 1945–1988* (Chapel Hill, 2003); Gunnar Myrdal, *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy* (2 vols., New York, 1944); Walter A. Jackson, *Gunnar Myrdal and America's Conscience: Social Engineering and Racial Liberalism, 1938–1987* (Chapel Hill, 1990); David W. Southern, *Gunnar Myrdal and Black-White Relations: The Use and Abuse of An American Dilemma, 1944–1969* (Baton Rouge, 1987). For the view that racial liberalism was less potent in local politics, see Arnold R. Hirsch, "Massive Resistance in the Urban North: Trumbull Park, Chicago, 1953–1966," *Journal of American History*, 82 (Sept. 1995), 522–50; and Thomas J. Sugrue, "Crabgrass-Roots Politics: Race, Rights, and the Reaction against Liberalism in the Urban North, 1940–1964," *ibid.*, 551–78. Mary L. Dudziak, "Desegregation as a Cold War Imperative," *Stanford Law Review*, 41 (Nov. 1988), 61–120.

¹⁷ Kenesaw M. Landis and the National Committee on Segregation in the Nation's Capital, *Segregation in Washington: A Report, November 1948* (Chicago, 1948), epigraph, 88; U.S. President's Committee on Civil Rights, *To Secure These Rights: The Report of the President's Committee on Civil Rights* (Washington, 1947), 89. For similar language, see William L. Patterson, ed., *We Charge Genocide: The Historic Petition to the United Nations for Relief from a Crime of the United States Government against the Negro People* (New York, 1951), 178–79. On the ways that Cold War discourses constrained civil rights activism, see Carol Anderson, *Eyes off the Prize: The United Nations and the African American Struggle for Human Rights, 1944–1955* (New York, 2003); Horne, *Black Liberation/Red Scare: Woods, Black Struggle, Red Scare*; George Lewis, *The White South and the Red Menace: Segregationists, Anticommunism, and Massive Resistance, 1945–1965* (Gainesville, 2004); and William A. J. Cobb, "Antidote to Revolution: African American Anticommunism and the Struggle for Civil Rights, 1931–1954," (Ph.D. diss., Rutgers University, 2003). On civility, see William H. Chafe, *Civilities and Civil Rights: Greensboro, North Carolina, and the Black Struggle for Freedom* (New York, 1980).

African Americans to look at the world—and themselves—through the eyes of their oppressors, yet it also made possible a more complete understanding of that world and the place of their nation in it. But to many white observers, the twoness of black Americans cast into doubt whether it was possible, as Du Bois put it, “for a man to be both a negro and an American.” During the Cold War, when “the loyalty of [all] free men” was a subject of national anxiety, the loyalty of African Americans was even more so, especially as challenges to the American racial order intensified. Black loyalty to the nation, despite the inequities of its racial past, became proof of the rightness of gradualist reform, and cases that demonstrated African American loyalty or disloyalty took on exaggerated import.¹⁸

The furor over Paul Robeson’s reported remarks to the 1949 World Peace Congress in Paris offers the most notorious example of how black loyalty—and its opposite—could be marshaled in support of racial liberalism. Quoted (or, as his biographer Martin Duberman insists, misquoted) as stating that it was “unthinkable that American Negroes would go to war [against the Soviet Union] on behalf of those who have oppressed us for generations,” Robeson was harshly attacked by both the mainstream press and many African American leaders. The controversy provided an excuse for HUAC to hold a widely publicized set of hearings on “Communist infiltration of minority groups,” a subject that had commanded the attention of the committee periodically since its inception. Significantly, the hearings were dominated as much by declarations of faith in the unshakable loyalty of African Americans as they were by denunciations of Robeson, and those declarations came from both HUAC members and the mainstream race leaders who testified. At the outset of the hearings, the HUAC investigator Alvin Stokes reported that, despite relentless “attempts to . . . recruit, capture, and control outstanding Negroes,” the Communist party had failed miserably in its efforts to divide the American people, because “the Negroes of this country . . . realize that, despite certain inequalities and conditions which exist, the American way of life provides ample opportunity to correct these conditions through democratic processes. The American Negro, down to the poorest sharecropper, is better off than the vast majority of Stalin’s subjects.” The representatives on the committee—from liberals to segregationists—fell over themselves to agree, averring that the “loyalty of the Negro race . . . is above reproach.”¹⁹

The black men who testified before the committee also defended African American loyalty against Robeson’s reported comments, but they used the opportunity to argue as well for the importance of an assault on racial inequality. The Urban League director Lester Granger, for example, condemned the Communist party as the Negro’s “enemy,” but nonetheless advocated for “less worry about Robeson and more concern for democracy.” The most celebrated witness, Jackie Robinson, censured those who talked about “Communists stirring up Negroes to protest,” since “Negroes were stirred up long before there was a Communist Party, and they’ll stay stirred up long after the party has disappeared,” as long as segregation, job discrimination, police brutality, and lynching were facts of American life. Still, while they ridiculed the notion that one could generalize about the loyalty of “the Negro,” these men often found themselves doing just that. The Fisk University president Charles Johnson declared that, while it made as much sense to ask about

¹⁸ W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York, 1982), 45; Barth, *Loyalty of Free Men*.

¹⁹ Martin Duberman, *Paul Robeson* (New York, 1989); Cobb, “Antidote to Revolution,” 222–30; Ronald A. Smith, “The Paul Robeson–Jackie Robinson Saga and a Political Collision,” *Journal of Sport History*, 6 (Summer 1979), 5–27; U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, Committee on Un-American Activities, *Hearings Regarding Communist Infiltration of Minority Groups*, 81 Cong., 1 sess., July 13, 14, 18, 1949, pp. 427–28, 455.

the loyalty of the Negro as about the loyalty of "Tennesseans, or Presbyterians . . . or persons with freckles," the nation's black citizens had consistently shown "not only an unshakable loyalty, but a persistent faith in the future and destiny of the Nation and all its people." George K. Hunton, the director of the Catholic Interracial Council of New York, affirmed black loyalty unreservedly: "The Negro . . . is perhaps the only group in this country who has absolutely no background of memory of a fatherland or motherland. He is an American and nothing else."²⁰

Yet HUAC members seemed equally eager to assuage fears about black loyalty, even as they excoriated black Communists. Their assurances that none of the congressmen doubted the fidelity of the nation's racial minorities were, perhaps, merely politic, a means of soothing balky witnesses, but they were also a testament to the importance of demonstrating black loyalty in defense of American democracy. Both the racial liberals and the racial conservatives on the committee seemed to have found such demonstrations necessary. John McSweeney of Ohio and John Wood of Georgia praised the nation's black soldiers, associating their service with the "unquestioned" loyalty of the race. McSweeney, a decorated veteran of both world wars, noted the "rapid rise" of the race since "the days of emancipation" and wondered aloud whether "the Unknown Soldier may be a Negro boy." Such an observation coming from a northern Democrat may have caused the witnesses relatively little discomfort. But when HUAC chair Wood, a Democrat from Georgia and a defender of the Ku Klux Klan, reminisced about "having had the privilege of association with the Negro race all of my life" and asked one witness to "carry back to your people that there never was any doubt on the part of this committee as to the patriotism of your race," it must have been harder to take.²¹

Because Robeson's purported comments raised an issue on which "race men" had long staked their own claims to full citizenship, African American leaders made the difficult decision to testify before HUAC, whose anticommunism they may have shared but whose ultraconservative politics they did not. From the earliest days of the black freedom struggle, the demand for "manhood rights" rested firmly on black men's readiness to shed their blood "freely and willingly in the cause of democracy." When Robeson said *something* that could be translated into the threat that black men might no longer be disposed to lay down their lives for their country, he eroded the foundation of those gendered claims to equal citizenship. Thus, much of the testimony of the race men (and they were all men) who spoke before HUAC referred to their own and their brothers' military service; indeed, C. B. Clark was apparently chosen to testify because the men of his family had fought "in every war since the Revolution," including in the Confederate army.²²

If the HUAC hearings were ostensibly held to provide black leaders with the opportunity to prove their loyalty to the nation, Robeson functioned not just as the bad Negro in contrast to their good Negro, but as an icon of disloyalty, a traitor to his race as well as his nation. In his statement in Paris, the investigator Stokes alleged, Robeson spoke not for himself, but in "the voice of the Kremlin." That image of Robeson, famed for his forceful voice, now speaking in a voice that was neither his own nor that of an "authentic" Negro, was evoked by witnesses—black and white. They argued that Robeson's "betrayal" of "the masses of the Negro people" robbed him of any claim to be a spokesman for his race.

²⁰ Committee on Un-American Activities, *Hearings Regarding Communist Infiltration of Minority Groups*, 464–65, 481, 472, 451.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 452, 478.

²² *Ibid.*, 476, 475.

Manning Johnson, a black ex-Communist who was a frequent witness before investigative committees and went on in later years to claim that the civil rights movement was nothing but a Communist plot, told HUAC that Robeson had "sold himself to Moscow." The editors of the *New York Times* agreed, noting that by "attach[ing] himself to the cause of a country in which all men are equal because they are equally enslaved," Robeson had effectively made himself a slave to his Communist masters. As that language suggests, the very terms of the Cold War—which opposed "freedom" and "slavery"—were racialized, making the question of black loyalty particularly fraught.²³

The 1949 HUAC hearings revealed on a national stage the stark limits that the anti-communist crusade put on African American citizenship. Race men's claim to speak for their people depended on their continued willingness to place their bodies and their lives on the line for the nation. Their struggle for the American dream of freedom and equality was subordinated to their loyalty to national leaders, who promised gradual change and counseled patience in the meantime. Robeson's disloyalty was intelligible because it was presented against the familiar backdrop of black men's claims to citizenship through military service. Men such as him who refused to fight for "freedom" did not just abrogate their own claims to citizenship, they were slaves.

That framework left precious little space for black women to demonstrate their loyalty. In the African American community, black women enacted their citizenship in a wide range of educational, social welfare, religious, economic, and political practices and institutions, but those were not methods that would be widely recognized (or even seen) by whites. Extraordinarily few African American women could claim any sort of national prominence, and the citizenship of women of all races was widely understood as filtered through their family roles. The possibilities for interpreting black women's relationship to the nation were narrow indeed, as the experiences of other African American women who captured public attention in the mid-1950s suggest. Mamie Till Bradley's political decision to open her son Emmett's casket could only be imagined as the hysterical response of an overwrought mother. Josephine Baker's opportunities to denounce racial discrimination were limited by behind-the-scenes government harassment that featured sexual gossip about her and ultimately restricted her vision of racial harmony to the domestic sphere. And when Rosa Parks, a seasoned activist and trained organizer, engaged in civil disobedience to protest racial segregation in public accommodations, she was recognized and remembered only as a woman too tired to stand up. Similarly, when Annie Lee Moss appeared before Congress, she found that her long history of activism on behalf of her family and community meant less to her vindication than her willingness to confirm white fantasies of black passivity. Black women's political subjectivity was almost unimaginable.²⁴

²³ "Black Stalin' Aim Is Laid to Robeson," *New York Times*, July 15, 1949, p. 13; "Dr. Bunche and Mr. Robeson," *ibid.*, July 19, 1949, p. 28. On Manning Johnson, see Cobb, "Antidote to Revolution," 266–67.

²⁴ On Mamie Till Bradley, see Ruth Feldstein, "I Wanted the Whole World to See": Race, Gender, and Constructions of Motherhood in the Death of Emmett Till," in *Not June Cleaver: Women and Gender in Postwar America, 1945–1960*, ed. Joanne Meyerowitz (Philadelphia, 1994), 263–303. On Josephine Baker, see Mary L. Dudziak, "Josephine Baker, Racial Protest, and the Cold War," *Journal of American History*, 81 (Sept. 1994), 543–70. One exception to that rule was Mary McCleod Bethune, whose relatively prominent role in the Franklin D. Roosevelt administration gave her a different position from which to speak. On Bethune, see Joyce A. Hanson, *Mary McLeod Bethune and Black Women's Political Activism* (Columbia, Mo., 2003). My thinking here has been informed by several important studies of African American women as political subjects, including Darlene Clark Hine, "Rape and the Inner Lives of Black Women in the Middle West: Preliminary Thoughts on the Culture of Dissemblance," in *Unequal Sisters: A Multicultural Reader in U.S. Women's History*, ed. Ellen Carol DuBois and Vicki L. Ruiz (New

Moss's Communist connections were reported to the government long before she came to Sen. McCarthy's attention and even before her first loyalty investigation. The informer was another local woman who seemed, on the surface, to be similarly insignificant: Mary Stalcup Markward.²⁵ In May 1943, Mary Stalcup was a soon-to-be-married hairdresser in suburban Virginia, an attractive and bright young white woman, but otherwise undistinguished. Her life changed dramatically when an FBI agent approached her, seemingly out of the blue, and asked her to join the Communist party as an informant. Markward became an exceptionally successful secret agent. She threw herself into party work and rapidly rose in the ranks, holding positions as membership director and treasurer; for a time she earned a small salary from the CP while also being paid by the FBI. From 1943 to 1949 she regularly reported to the FBI, providing copies of party documents, membership lists, and detailed accounts of meetings and activities. In 1949 serious illness forced Markward to withdraw from CP activities, but there were already suspicions about her loyalty to the cause. In February 1951 Markward was denounced in the *Daily Worker* as a "stool pigeon." Just a week later she began talking, with the FBI's consent, to HUAC investigators. Soon she was the star witness at a series of congressional investigations of Communist activities in Maryland and the District of Columbia.²⁶

Attentive to detail and a hard worker, Markward took her job as an FBI informant seriously, sacrificing her career and her social relationships to become, on the surface, a full-time crusader for the Communist cause. Her ability to live a double life is quite remarkable. Even as she was winning prizes for her successful recruiting efforts, she was secretly burning the Communist publications she had not sold in her Sunday afternoon canvassing; even as she built what seemed to be intimate friendships with her party colleagues, she told her daughter that she never met a Communist she did not hate.²⁷ As a witness, Markward was poised, articulate, and relatively careful in her assessments; unlike some professional witnesses, she sought to distinguish between membership in front organizations and in the party itself. Nonetheless, there are reasons to be dubious about her testimony. Because she did not keep copies of the records and reports she sent the FBI from 1943 to 1949, she had to rely on her memory in her congressional appearances in the 1950s. And, of course, as a woman deeply committed to the anticommunist crusade, she was hardly unbiased. Markward named hundreds of individuals as Communists, names

York, 1990), 292–97; Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow: Women and the Politics of White Supremacy in North Carolina, 1896–1920* (Chapel Hill, 1996); and especially Nell Irvin Painter, "Hill, Thomas, and the Use of Racial Stereotype," in *Race-ing Justice, En-gendering Power: Essays on Anita Hill, Clarence Thomas, and the Construction of Social Reality*, ed. Toni Morrison (New York, 1992), 200–214.

²⁵ The FBI opened a file on Moss after receiving Mary Stalcup Markward's reports on February 7, 1944. "Summary Report," Feb. 7, 1944, file 100-13581, Annie Lee Moss Federal Bureau of Investigation File (in Friedman's possession).

²⁶ On Markward's career as an informant, see Vernon L. Pedersen, "Uncommon Witness: Mary Stalcup Markward and the Dilemmas of Anticommunism," paper delivered at the Missouri Valley History Conference, Omaha, March 5, 2004 (in Friedman's possession); Vernon L. Pedersen, *The Communist Party in Maryland, 1919–57* (Urbana, 2001); U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, Committee on Un-American Activities, *Communism in the District of Columbia–Maryland Area (Testimony of Mary Stalcup Markward)*, 82 Cong., 1 sess., June 11, 1951, pp. 4467–76; Heming Nelson, "Pointing the Way in the Hunt for Communists," *Washington Post*, July 5, 1999, p. 1; and Frank R. Kent Jr., "FBI Agent Now Housewife in Quiet Chesterbrook, Va.," *ibid.*, July 7, 1951, p. 7. On Markward's denunciation by the CP, see "CP Expels 'FBI Agent,'" *ibid.*, Feb. 8, 1951, p. B8; "Brass Runs Up the White Flag," *Daily Worker*, Feb. 28, 1954, p. 6.

²⁷ Pedersen, "Uncommon Witness," 2. On Markward's double life and particularly her conversation with her daughter, I draw on a conversation with Heming Nelson in Washington, D.C., in November 2005.



Senator Joseph McCarthy's case against Annie Lee Moss rested on the testimony of Mary Stalcup Markward, shown here being sworn in on June 11, 1951, before the House Committee on Un-American Activities. Markward's reputation as a star witness in a series of government investigations of Communism in the Washington, D.C., area was seriously harmed by her role in the Moss investigation. *Photograph by Arthur Ellis. Courtesy Washington Post.*

that were reprinted in local newspapers, and in the process she ruined reputations and careers. It was on her testimony that Sen. McCarthy relied when he named Annie Lee Moss a Communist in 1954. Yet in Markward's encounter with Moss, it was Markward's reputation that suffered.

Sen. McCarthy was in the midst of his campaign against the Department of the Army when he learned about Markward's reports concerning Moss. One of McCarthy's primary targets was the army's loyalty-security program, and he identified a number of minor personnel with suspicious backgrounds who had nonetheless received security clearances, blaming the army brass for failing to protect the nation from Communist spies at the very heart of its defenses. Moss's case apparently came to McCarthy's attention at the same time as another case that served him well in this campaign. The army dentist Irving Peress had been promoted to major even though he had refused to answer questions con-

cerning membership in organizations deemed subversive by the U.S. attorney general. By glossing over the facts of Moss's employment history, McCarthy was able to present the two cases similarly. He asked of Moss: "Who in the military, knowing that this lady was a Communist promoted her from a waitress to a code clerk?" While that question did not have the alliterative ring of "Who Promoted Peress?" it reinforced his claims about army shoddiness. After receiving a tip about Moss's case (most likely from an FBI agent or disgruntled army intelligence officer), the senator's staff began investigating Moss, and his chief counsel, Roy Cohn, interviewed both Moss and Markward. McCarthy must have envisioned a showdown between the two women that could only make him look good. Foregoing his usual practice of auditioning witnesses in executive session, he summoned them both to appear before his committee at a public hearing.²⁸

The showdown did not go as intended. The first sign that McCarthy's plans had gone awry came when HUAC staff, who had heard rumors about his investigation, beat him to the punch, calling Markward and Moss to testify in executive session. The House committee did not pursue the matter, but McCarthy proceeded with his own hearings just a few days later. Markward played her part, testifying that she had "absolutely . . . no doubt" that the Annie Lee Moss who was now employed by the Signal Corps had been a "card-carrying, dues paying member" of the Communist party in 1943 and 1944, even though, she admitted, she could not positively identify Moss by sight. McCarthy also managed to get into the record that J. Edgar Hoover had informed the army's Loyalty-Security Screening Board in 1951 that Markward was available to testify as to Moss's Communist connections, but the army had not followed up. But Moss, who was suffering from bronchitis and nervous exhaustion, arrived at the hearings looking so bedraggled that McCarthy deemed it prudent to delay her testimony. One can imagine that he thought her illness would invite public sympathy, but he sought to turn the situation to his own advantage. McCarthy warned Moss and her attorney that he had no interest in allowing a sick woman, in no condition to use her best judgment, to perjure herself by denying that she was a Communist when, "clearly, she has been a member of the Party." In subsequent weeks, Moss, who had been suspended from her job shortly after being subpoenaed, repeatedly requested a chance to testify, but the senator, who thought he had already gained the upper hand in his conflict with the army, seemed uninterested.²⁹

²⁸ L. B. Nichols to Mr. Tolson, Feb. 15, 1954 [document number illegible], Moss Federal Bureau of Investigation file; Joseph McCarthy to Philip Young, Feb. 4, 1954, Case File 47-8 (Annie Lee Moss), Records of the Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations; "Testimony of Annie Lee Moss Taken during Interrogatory on Feb. 16, 1954," *ibid.*; Markward Interrogatory, Feb. 16, 1954, *ibid.*; Memorandum for the Chief Signal Officer, Feb. 10, 1954, Mom-Moz Folder, box 390, Records of the Secretary of the Army, RG 335 (National Archives, College Park, Md.); Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations, *Army Signal Corps*, Feb. 24, 1954. In 1952 the House Committee on Un-American Activities (HUAC) had received a tip that Moss was a former member of the Communist party employed by the Pentagon, but declined to pursue it. See C. E. Owens to Louis J. Russell, Jan. 27, 1952, Ann Moss File, Investigative Name File, Records of the House Un-American Activities Committee. For overviews of McCarthy's conflict with the army, see Reeves, *Life and Times of Joe McCarthy*; and Oshinsky, *Conspiracy So Immense*. On Irving Peress's case, see Reeves, *Life and Times of Joe McCarthy*, 537-46.

²⁹ Owens to Thomas W. Beale, Feb. 17, 1954, Mary Stalcup Markward Folder, Investigative Name File, series 2, Records of the House Un-American Activities Committee; Mary Stalcup Markward testimony, Feb. 19, 1954, House Committee on Un-American Activities Executive Session Transcripts, *ibid.*; Annie Lee Moss testimony, Feb. 22, 1954, *ibid.*; Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations, *Army Signal Corps*, Feb. 23, 1954, esp. 314-15, 321; *ibid.*, Feb. 24, 1954, esp. 336. HUAC's decision not to pursue the case appears to have been based in large part on Moss's lack of access to "top secret" messages, despite McCarthy's allegations. See Norman Dorsen, "Velde Subcommittee Hearing on Annie Lee Moss," memo, Feb. 25, 1954, Mom-Moz Folder, box 390, Records of the Secretary of the Army. For media discussion of the HUAC testimony, see "McCarthy Says Red Decodes Secrets, but Army Denies It," *New York Times*, Feb. 24, 1954, p. 1. McCarthy went from the session at which Moss appeared to the famous "chicken luncheon," at which Secretary of the Army Robert T. Stevens seems to have capitulated to the senator's

But Moss was not without powerful friends, and on March 11 she had her hearing. In her dealings with the McCarthy committee, Moss was represented by George E. C. Hayes, one of Washington's most influential African American lawyers. His firm represented, on occasion, both Paul Robeson and W. E. B. Du Bois, and Hayes was also an important participant in the NAACP's campaign against school segregation. In 1955, he was nominated by President Eisenhower to serve on Washington's Public Utilities Commission, making him the highest-ranking black official in the district's government. He and Moss apparently met while she was president of her tenants' council, and, although she had not sought legal advice in her earlier encounters with the government's loyalty-security program, she must have turned to Hayes when she was subpoenaed to testify before Congress. She chose well. Hayes, media savvy and well connected, worked behind the scenes to get Moss the "opportunity to be heard."³⁰

McCarthy's political instincts were surely failing him by late February 1954, but he had been right to try to stonewall Moss's appearance. Her testimony was calamitous for the senator: not because Moss was "innocent" (much less evidence had been needed to cast suspicion on others caught up in the anticommunist purge) and not because McCarthy—or the Democrats on the subcommittee, for that matter—was caught by surprise by Moss's testimony. Other commentators have made much of the fact that McCarthy excused himself from the hearing early in Moss's testimony, suggesting that, like a rat escaping a sinking ship, he had sensed a disaster in the making. But weeks before Moss testified before McCarthy's subcommittee in open session, she had been questioned by Cohn, the transcript of her HUAC testimony had been made available to subcommittee staff, and the Democrat Henry Jackson (but not Cohn or McCarthy) had been briefed by FBI officials on the specific evidence against Moss, evidence that he declared convincing. And before McCarthy's departure, Moss fulfilled Cohn's expectation that she would "play dumb" when she testified, denying CP membership, payment of dues, attendance at Communist meetings, or subscribing to the *Daily Worker*, although she did admit that it was delivered to two of her addresses. Moss's testimony was so damaging, not because it revealed truths previously unknown—truths regarding McCarthy's villainy or Moss's victimization at his hands—but because McCarthy's enemies staged her appearance in a way that hurt McCarthy while it simultaneously sustained the broader political and racial imperatives of the domestic Cold War.³¹

Much of the media coverage and many historical accounts of the hearing focused on McCarthy's (and Cohn's) incompetence, as exposed by two stories of mistaken identity put forth by the subcommittee's Democratic senators. The first concerned a man (or perhaps two) named Rob Hall, who had allegedly delivered the *Daily Worker* to Moss's home. The Democrats used confusion over Hall's identity—was he a black union official or a white Communist?—to undermine confidence in McCarthy's case against Moss. If

demands for free reign in questioning army witnesses.

³⁰ "200 Pay Woody L. Taylor Tribute at Testimonial"; "Negro Nominated for Job in Capital," *New York Times*, Feb. 13, 1955, p. 4; "George Hayes, 74, a Rights Lawyer," *ibid.*, Dec. 21, 1968, p. 37; George E. C. Hayes to McCarthy, March 5, 1954, Case File 47-8 (Annie Lee Moss), Records of the Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations; "Attorney Begs Sen. McCarthy to give Mrs. Moss a Chance," *Washington Daily News*, March 6, 1954, p. 8; "Mrs. Moss Gets Hearing," *ibid.*, March 9, 1954, p. 8; "Joe Takes a By-Pass," *Chicago Defender*, March 20, 1954, p. 2.

³¹ Nichols to Tolson, Feb. 15, 1954 [document number illegible], Moss Federal Bureau of Investigation file; Nichols to Tolson, Feb. 24, 1954, document 121-2900-20, *ibid.*; Nichols to Tolson, March 30, 1954, document 121-2900-39, *ibid.*; Robert F. Kennedy to Stuart Symington, March 9, 1954, folder 2455, Stuart Symington Papers (Western Historical Manuscript Collection, University of Missouri, Columbia).

Cohn and McCarthy did not know the difference between a white man and a black one, they insinuated, how could they tell the difference between a Communist and a loyal American citizen?³² The second case of mistaken identity concerned Moss herself. Linking Markward's inability to identify Moss personally with the confusion over Rob Hall, Senator Stuart Symington of Missouri asked Moss, "Isn't it possible that there are some other people named Moss, just like apparently there are some other people named Hall?" Her response—that "there are three Annie Lee Mosses" in Washington—has survived to this day as the allegedly definitive piece of evidence that McCarthy and Cohn were wrong about her. Although that exchange seemed to have come as a complete surprise at the end of the hearing, it was likely choreographed, since in her HUAC testimony Moss had related a long story about being mistaken for other Annie Mosses, when she ordered telephone service, when she applied for her real estate license, and when she worked in the cafeteria. In any case, none of the other Anne Mosses lived at the three addresses contained in the CP records—but this Annie Lee Moss had lived at all of them.³³

If those mistaken identity narratives demonstrated that McCarthy's carelessness threatened the rights of American citizens, the performance of the Democratic senators in the hearings suggested that there were others in the American government committed to defending those rights. Moss's status as a "colored" woman was hardly mentioned in the hearings, but it was key both to revealing the dangers posed by McCarthyism to the American way of life and to indicating the benefits of defending that way of life. It may have served McCarthy's purposes to cast Moss's career moves as "sudden," but senators Henry Jackson, Symington, and John McClellan emphasized the long hard road that Moss took to her job as a government clerk, a job uniquely evocative of the postwar opening of economic opportunity to the nation's black citizens. Under their questioning, she testified about her migration from South Carolina to North Carolina to Washington, her lack of education as a girl in the South, and her rise from a low-paid cafeteria worker to her current position, which, the Democrats encouraged her to report, she got through her "own efforts [and] qualifications." That trajectory from poverty to self-sufficiency was jeopardized by McCarthy's investigation. Although it was the secretary of the army who had suspended Moss from her job, the Democrats laid the blame at McCarthy's feet. When Moss admitted to Symington that, if she could not regain her job soon, she would be "going down to the welfare," she invoked the specter of an America in which postwar progress was tenuous. And when Symington replied, "If you are not taken back in the Army, you come around and see me, and I am going to see that you get a job," he showed

³² If Moss's memory was correct during her HUAC testimony—that "Hall" had delivered the *Daily Worker* to her in 1943—then it most likely had not been the CP member Robert Hall, who was in Alabama at the time. In the wake of the hearing, FBI agents spent much time trying to discover who had delivered the newspaper; they suspected that it was not Rob Hall, but another CP member, whose name has been redacted from FBI investigative reports. Stanley to Rosen, March 21, 1954, document 121-2900-29, Moss Federal Bureau of Investigation file; Stanley to Rosen, March 22, 1954, document 121-2900-31, *ibid.*

³³ Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations, *Army Signal Corps*, March 11, 1954, esp. 416. Washington city directories (1948 and 1954) and telephone directories (Dec. 1952 and Sept. 1954) list several women with similar names, including Mrs. Anna L. Moss, Mrs. Addie Moss, Annie Moss, and Mrs. Abbie Lee Moss. *Polk's Washington (District of Columbia) City Directory* (Richmond, 1948), 815, 817; *Polk's Washington (District of Columbia) City Directory* (Richmond, 1954), 142, 877, 879; *Washington Metropolitan Area Telephone Directory* (Washington, 1952); *Washington Metropolitan Area Telephone Directory* (Washington, 1954), 796. On the FBI's detailed investigation into the possible mistaken identity of Moss, see C. D. DeLoach to Tolson, March 16, 1954, document 121-2900-67, Moss Federal Bureau of Investigation file; untitled report, March 22, 1954, document 121-2900-81, *ibid.*

his own (and by extension, his party's) commitment to fair treatment and upward mobility for loyal African American citizens.³⁴

Embedded in the senators' questions were assumptions of black inferiority and white paternalism that were refracted and magnified when the hearing made it to national television a week later. Murrow's show—broadcast just as the dispute between McCarthy and army officials heated up—brought Moss's testimony to 3.3 million homes, the largest audience for any of his shows on McCarthy.³⁵ In the hands of Murrow and his colleagues, the mistaken identity narrative of the hearings was accentuated and simplified, but the story of the Annie Lee Moss who struggled up from poverty by her own efforts was transformed into a myth of an ignorant, illiterate, and incompetent victim. Indeed, Murrow's introduction of Moss removed her from the mainstream of American life. He conjectured that, until she was named before the committee, this District of Columbia resident and Pentagon employee knew "very little about Senator McCarthy, General Zwicker, [or] Mr. Cohn." Murrow cast her as oblivious to the events that gripped the rest of the country.³⁶

The core of the broadcast—film from the hearing—can be divided into four segments. In the first, Moss denies any connection to the Communist party. The second segment presents, in simplified form, the confusion over Rob Hall, communicating McCarthy's and Cohn's ineptitude and drawing a clear line between the African American "Rob Hall" and Moss, on the one hand, and white Communists such as "Rob Hall," on the other. The third segment, departing most significantly from the upward mobility narrative of the hearings, reveals Moss's incompetence, even her foolishness. It is comprised almost wholly of an interchange between Moss and Sen. Symington. Under Symington's questioning, Moss plays the part of the clown to the merriment of the Democratic senators and assembled observers. A rare voice-over by Murrow prepares us to interpret a series of failings, as Moss stumbles over words while reading her suspension notice and then, to frequent laughter and indulgent smiles, claims not to recognize the name "Karl Marx" and must ask her lawyer the meaning of the word "espionage" (though Symington pronounced it rather oddly as "esp'e'niĵ"). Framed by that performance, Moss's insistence that she is a "good American" becomes an admission that she lacks the wit or skills to be a bad American. If, in the overall narrative of the hearing, Annie Lee Moss emerged as a hard-working, ambitious woman whose entry into the mainstream of American society was menaced by McCarthy's unsubstantiated accusations, in the Murrow broadcast she came across as a dull, naïve person who could not possibly be a threat. The final segment focuses on the Arkansan John McClellan, who passionately denounces "hearsay evidence," trumpets Moss's citizenship rights, and condemns McCarthyism as "evil," returning Murrow to his purported central theme of due process. But it is Symington who has the last word. He delivers the verdict in what has become a mock trial: "I have been listening to you testify this afternoon, and I think you are telling the truth." In finding Moss "innocent," he renders McCarthy and Cohn guilty of something akin to a lynching.³⁷

³⁴ Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations, *Army Signal Corps*, March 11, 1954, esp. 457–62.

³⁵ Rosteck, *See It Now Confronts McCarthyism*, 162; Fred W. Friendly, *Due to Circumstances beyond our Control* . . . (New York, 1967).

³⁶ "Annie Lee Moss before the McCarthy Committee," script, March 16, 1954, in *Edward R. Murrow Papers, 1927–1965* (microfilm, 50 reels, Microfilming Corporation of America, 1982), reel 40; and "Annie Lee Moss before the McCarthy Committee," March 16, 1954, *See It Now*, prod. Edward R. Murrow and Fred Friendly, in *The Edward R. Murrow Collection: The McCarthy Years* (videotape; Ambrose Video Publishing, 1991). For a compelling interpretation of the broadcast as "proletarian discourse," see Rosteck, *See It Now Confronts McCarthyism*, 142–74.

³⁷ "Annie Lee Moss before the McCarthy Committee," in *Edward R. Murrow Collection*.



Annie Lee Moss and her attorney, George E. C. Hayes, appeared before Senator Joseph McCarthy's Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations on February 24, 1954. McCarthy excused Moss from testifying, claiming that her illness might tempt Moss to perjure herself by denying her membership in the Communist party. *Courtesy Bettmann/Corbis.*

The response to the Murrow broadcast reveals how compelling white Americans found this narrative in which Moss was reduced to a hapless victim, and the Democratic senators became her chivalrous rescuers. Ordinary citizens wrote hundreds of letters condemning McCarthy for "pillorying" Moss, and praising her defenders.³⁸ They echoed Murrow when he described the broadcast as a "little picture about a little woman," and they lauded senators Symington and McClellan for defending the "little people."³⁹ But Moss was not just "little" in stature (she was under five-feet tall), fame, or power. She was also described in terms that were belittling: "weak," "pitiful," "helpless," "bewildered," "defenseless."⁴⁰

³⁸ Upwards of twenty-two thousand letters were received by CBS in response to Murrow's shows on McCarthy, but only a few dozen have been preserved. In addition, John McClellan's papers are unprocessed and difficult to use. This discussion, therefore, draws mainly on correspondence contained in the Stuart Symington Papers. For the "pillorying" language, see Mercer R. Roach to Symington, March 13, 1954, folder 2458, Symington Papers; and Anne B. Hemmeter to Symington, March 17, 1954, folder 2460, *ibid.*

³⁹ Arthur R. Ramey to Symington, March 16, 1954, folder 2459, Symington Papers; Eleanor G. Williams to Symington, March 17, 1954, folder 2461, *ibid.*; Mrs. Gladys F. Compton to Senator Fulbright [sic], March 16, 1954, folder F19-B-5, John L. McClellan Collection (Riley-Hickingbotham Library, Ouchita Baptist University, Arkadelphia, Ark.); Shirley Been to John McClellan, March 16, 1954, folder F16-C-2, *ibid.* Even before the broadcast, many of Symington's correspondents frequently invoked similar language to explain why they felt compelled to write him. See, for example, Axel B. Graven to Symington, March 11, 1954, folder 2456, Symington Papers; and L. R. Jordan to Symington, [March 1954], folder 2458, *ibid.*

⁴⁰ Erwin W. Smith to Symington, March 12, 1954, folder 2457, Symington Papers; Frances Boudreaux to Symington, March 17, 1954, folder 2457, *ibid.*; Pleasant Gray to Symington, March 17, 1954, folder 2460, *ibid.*; Theodore F. Baer to Symington, March 20, 1954, folder 2464, *ibid.*; George T. Hally to Symington, March 22, 1954, folder 2465, *ibid.*; Mrs. Homer D. Myers to McClellan, March 17, 1954, folder F16-C-2, McClellan Collection.

Most strikingly, these citizens referred to her almost universally as "poor": "that poor woman," "the poor soul," "this poor person," "that poor Mrs. Moss," "a poor Negro," "the poor colored lady," "that poor old colored woman," "that poor old colored lady."⁴¹ Media pundits echoed such appraisals while being even more disparaging of Moss's capacities. For example, the critic Marya Mannes, who had been given access from CBS to some of the letters to Murrow, characterized their sentiments: American citizens were "sickened" at McCarthy's abuse of "this elderly, soft-spoken 'nobody' (who could hardly read English, let alone code)." And in a widely circulated column, the media critic John Crosby concluded a listing of Moss's illiteracies with the observation, "I greatly doubt whether Annie Lee Moss knows she has any rights. Yet, they were being so clearly violated in front of our very eyes that she won every heart."⁴² In all of those accounts, Moss was immobilized and pathetic; it was the defense by Symington and McClellan (aided by Murrow) of a persecuted woman that restored faith in democracy.⁴³

The belittling of Moss was one way to portray her as a victim of McCarthy, but there were less degrading ways to frame her case. The African American press, in particular, abjured references to a "poor old colored woman," offering, instead, a portrait of a "perfectly loyal American citizen," active in her community and surrounded by supporters. Black journalists foregrounded her relationships with her son, a Korean War veteran, and her pastor at the Friendship Baptist Church, who attested that she was both a "staunch Christian [and] a good American." They recounted her struggles for upward mobility, including her efforts to continue her education and her rise to the "comparative security" of a civil service job. Moss's role as a community leader, her charitable activities, and her record as a long-standing supporter of the Democratic party were also featured. Those accounts emphasized her firm voice, calm demeanor, and composure during her appearance before McCarthy's committee. And, while her good name may have been "sacrificed on the altar of McCarthyism," she was also portrayed as a worthy foe to the senator, the "toast of the nation's capital" who got "the upper hand" on McCarthy and Cohn. Her "triumphant session" before the subcommittee was heralded as "the stumbling block in the insane quest of McCarthy to rule."⁴⁴ The differences between the dominant portrayal

⁴¹ I. F. Stone to Symington, [March 1954], folder 2455, Symington Papers; Walter B. Simon to Symington, March 16, 1954, folder 2459, *ibid.*; Mildred R. Levy to Symington, [March 1954], folder 2460, *ibid.*; Mrs. Walter J. Orlikoski to Symington, March 18, 1954, folder 2463, *ibid.*; Louis Potsdamer to Symington, March 21, 1954, folder 2464, *ibid.*; G. E. Munger to Symington, [March 1954], folder 2645, *ibid.*; Blanche S. Hamilton to McClellan, March 17, 1954, folder F19-B-5, McClellan Collection; Ernest Angell to Edward R. Murrow, March 19, 1954, in *Edward R. Murrow Papers*, reel 41.

⁴² "Committee v. Chairman," *Time*, March 22, 1954, p. 27; Marya Mannes, "The People vs. McCarthy," *Reporter*, April 27, 1954, pp. 25–28; John Crosby, "That Aroma of Decency Had Been Missing a While," *Washington Post*, March 20, 1954, p. 37; see also Irwin Holloway to Murrow, March 17, 1954, folder 2460, Symington Papers.

⁴³ Mr. and Mrs. Maurice Harris to Symington, March 15, 1954, folder 2458, Symington Papers; Nisson A. Finkelstein to Symington, March 16, 1954, folder 2459, *ibid.*; Ruth Carbone to Symington, March 17, 1954, folder 2460, *ibid.*; Mrs. John R. Carey to Symington, [March 1954], folder 2463, *ibid.*; Marguerite Kehr to Symington, March 22, 1954, folder 2645, *ibid.*; Paul Butler to McClellan, March 26, 1954, folder F19-B-5, McClellan Collection; Marion R. [last name illegible] to McClellan, March 20, 1954, *ibid.*; Edith Pascal to McClellan, March 20, 1954, *ibid.*; Louis R. Hochberg to McClellan, March 13, 1954, folder F16-C-2, McClellan Collection.

⁴⁴ "McCarthy Walks Out on Mrs. Annie Moss," *Washington Afro-American*, March 13, 1954, p. 1; "Who Is Annie Lee Moss?," *ibid.*, Feb. 27, 1954, p. 6; "Mrs. Annie Lee Moss: Loyal or Subversive? \$64 Question," *Washington Afro-American*, Sept. 28, 1954, clipping, folder 2474, Symington Papers; "Eisenhower Must Stop McCarthy," *Washington Afro-American*, March 20, 1954, p. 21; "Sen. McCarthy Fails to Crack Mrs. Moss," *Pittsburgh Courier*, March 20, 1954, p. 1; "Sic Semper Tyrannis!," *Chicago Defender*, March 13, 1954, p. 2. See also "Never a Red, Says Mrs. Moss," *Pittsburgh Courier*, March 6, 1954, p. 1; "McCarthy-Army Red Feud Rages around Ill Widow," *Chicago Defender*, March 6, 1954, p. 1; "Moss Case Flops; Exit McCarthy," *ibid.*, March 20, 1954, p. 1; "The Truth Prevails," *ibid.*, March 27, 1954, p. 11; and "5-Month Ordeal Ends for Mrs. Annie Moss," *Washington Afro-American*, Jan.

of Moss and that more respectful portrait can be summed up by comparing two photographs. A brief report of her testimony in *Time* magazine was accompanied by a photo of a worried-looking Moss speaking into a sea of microphones; "Karl Marx? Who's that?" was the caption. The *Washington Afro-American* newspaper, on the other hand, featured a formal head shot of a well-groomed, determined-looking Moss gazing directly out of the photograph, with the legend, "The truth shall prevail."⁴⁵

That alternative narrative rejected the charges against Moss by recognizing her as the hero of her own life, but it remained a minor voice in the chorus of denunciations of McCarthy's brutality, in part because Moss chose to collude in her portrayal as an ignorant victim. Whether or not she ever "knowingly" joined the Communist party, she knew more about it than she pretended. But Moss also knew a great deal about how to survive in the racist milieu of the nation's capital. She drew on well-learned lessons about racial etiquette as well as her political skills and community connections to respond successfully to this attack on her livelihood and her loyalty. What appeared as stupidity was really an effective act of self-preservation, and it is not in the least surprising that presumptions of African American incompetence shaped both the presentation and the reception of Moss's testimony.⁴⁶ It is, however, tragic. Moss's strategies at the hearing almost certainly played a part in diminishing her effectiveness as a community leader, even if it was McCarthy's investigation that brought her under suspicion. After her encounter with the senator, Moss remained involved in her church, but, to her regret, her days as an activist were over.⁴⁷

It was precisely because black women's agency remained nearly incomprehensible to many observers of American politics that Annie Lee Moss proved so useful as a political symbol. Even in the 1950s, Democratic senators could not question African American men in the patronizing way that they had questioned Moss, but their condescension toward her was interpreted by many Americans as "kindness" and "decency," proof to the world that "chivalry still lives and breathes in our beloved land." For those citizens, Moss's identity as a black woman signified her utter powerlessness; the advocacy of men such as Symington, McClellan, and Murrow on her behalf demonstrated the nation's commitment to racial fair play and progress. Objecting to "kicking around" or "picking on" a member of a minority race, those Americans seemed particularly troubled by the denial of economic opportunity represented by Moss's job suspension. As one letter writer put it, "after serving a long life in cafeterias and having worked up to the glorious heights of teletyping for the army for just enough money to keep body and soul together in dignity, she was to be canned in disgrace." Thus, when McClellan and Symington defended Moss's "right . . . to earn a living," they confirmed that the American way was the best path toward racial equality, for even John McClellan, who built a political career on the bulwark

22, 1955, p. 1. Rarely, similar stories appeared in the mainstream press. See, notably, "Mrs. Moss Confused, but Feels No Anger," *Washington Post*, March 14, 1954, p. M1; and "Meet Mrs. Moss, a Target of Sen. McCarthy," *Chicago Sun-Times*, April 5, 1954, p. 1. While African American journalists tended to offer a more nuanced portrait of Moss than did most white journalists, I found only one who explicitly took issue with the mainstream reporting (as well as with the reporting of most black journalists): the conservative columnist George S. Schuyler, who believed that Moss was a Communist. See Schuyler, "Views-Reviews," 6.

⁴⁵ "Committee v. Chairman"; "McCarthy Walks Out on Mrs. Annie Moss." The *Washington Afro-American* had earlier used the formal head shot with the caption, "I am not now and never have been a Communist." "McCarthy Retracts 'Red' Accusation against Hayes," *Washington Afro-American*, Feb. 27, 1954, pp. 1, 4.

⁴⁶ For a parallel argument that Moss donned a "Sambo mask" to fool her inquisitors, see Doherty, *Cold War, Cool Medium*, 184.

⁴⁷ Bontecou, manuscript, Moss, Annie LA6-3919 Folder, box 813, Cobb, Howard, Hayes & Windsor Papers.



On January 19, 1955, Annie Lee Moss jubilantly received the news that Secretary of Defense Charles E. Wilson had ordered that she be restored to employment by the army. She had been suspended without pay since August 1954, on charges that she had been a member of the Communist party. Wilson concluded that there was no evidence that Moss was “actually subversive,” but he ruled that she should be employed only in a “non-sensitive” position. *Courtesy Bettmann/Corbis.*

of racial segregation, was committed to economic opportunity and due process for all citizens, black or white.⁴⁸ During the 1949 HUAC hearings, congressmen from South and North used black men’s political agency—their willingness to fight for their country—both to signify the fundamental rightness of American approaches to racial equality and to further a virulent anticommunist politics that excluded the possibility of radical challenge to white supremacy. In 1954 Democrats from the upper South and assorted liberals used the imagined passivity of this black woman to marginalize the most virulent anti-communist politician by linking him to the persecution of African Americans.⁴⁹ Their

⁴⁸ Doris Jackson to Symington, March 12, 1954, folder 2456, Symington Papers; Smith to Symington, March 12, 1954, folder 2457, *ibid.*; Winifred Scott to Symington, March 12, 1954, *ibid.*; Roach to Symington, March 13, 1954, folder 2458, *ibid.*; Jerry Marconi to Symington, March 16, 1954, folder 2459, *ibid.*; Ramey to Symington, March 16, 1954, *ibid.*; Donald W. Carruthers to Symington, March 20, 1954, folder 2464, *ibid.*; “Sic Semper Tyrannis!”; Ethel Payne interview by Kathleen Currie, Sept. 8, 1987, transcript, p. 39, *Washington Press Club Foundation Oral History Project: Women in Journalism*, <http://wpcf.org/oralhistory/payn2.html>; Crosby, “That Aroma of Decency Had Been Missing a While.” On Stuart Symington’s racial politics, see Christine S. McCreary interview by Donald A. Ritchie, May 19, 1998, transcript, pp. 11–24, *U.S. Senate. Art & History: Oral History Project of the Senate Historical Office*, http://www.senate.gov/artandhistory/history/resources/pdf/McCreary_interview.pdf. On McClellan, see Woods, *Black Struggle, Red Scare*, 5, 25.

⁴⁹ As one commentator noted, McCarthy had never been considered a racist, but the Moss case threatened that reputation. McCarthy’s attacks on Moss brought him to the attention of the African American press, which, until then, had largely ignored the “McCarthyism” phenomenon. National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) officials also saw his attack on Moss as evidence of his “bigotry.” See “Sic Semper Tyrannis!”; Walter White to Symington, March 12, 1954, telegram, folder 2456, Symington Papers; and Payne interview, 40.

efforts were appreciated by citizens who defended Moss as representative of the continuing "loyalty of the Negro," even in the face of mistreatment by whites.⁵⁰ Thus, Annie Lee Moss did triple duty within Cold War rhetoric: appearing as the perfect victim of McCarthy's evil, a symbol of the imperviousness of African Americans to the Communist party's enticements, and a sign that the nation was committed to uplifting the Negro.

There was, of course, another racialized narrative articulated in response to those hearings: the story of a devious black woman who had been taught as a Communist to lie, had inherited "colored folks' . . . cunning," and had fooled the Democratic senators into believing that "there must be another ANNIE LEE MOSS hiding somewhere in the wood-pile." Even as his reputation came crashing down, Sen. McCarthy had his passionate defenders, and this narrative resurfaced in correspondence whenever Moss made it back into the news—for example, in August 1954, when the army suspended her yet again, only to reinstate her five months later, or in 1958, when a ruling of the Security Activities Control Board in a related case was misreported as proving that Moss was a Communist.⁵¹ The ugly racism contained in much of this correspondence was echoed by William F. Buckley Jr., writing in the *National Review* in 1958. Annie Lee Moss, he said,

is one of the symbols of our age. A middle-aged, sad-faced, distracted, harassed colored woman, plucked from the obscurity of her government job and publicly terrorized by Senator McCarthy . . . accused, would you believe it? of being a Communist. Have you read the writings of Karl Marx, Senator Symington asked her? Karl Marks? I don't believe ah know who he is, suh, she said sadly. . . . From that moment, Mrs. Moss became a symbol, here and abroad, of the typical victim of the ruthless wanton human destructiveness of the McCarthy machine.⁵²

⁵⁰ Anne B. Hemmeter to Symington, March 17, 1954, folder 2460, Symington Papers.

⁵¹ Wilhelmina Logan to Symington, March 11, 1954, folder 2456, *ibid.*; "Annie" to Symington, Aug. 6, 1954, folder 2471, *ibid.* See also "Kingsley Kid Rides Again," *Le Mars (Iowa) Globe-Post*, Jan. 5, 1959, available at NewspaperARCHIVE.com; Dorothy Demmer to Symington, [March 1954], folder 2458, Symington Papers; Dana Weer to Symington, March 16, 1954, folder 2459, *ibid.*; E. B. Thompson to Symington, March 18, 1954, folder 2462, *ibid.*; Elizabeth Dudes to Symington, March 19, 1954, folder 2463, *ibid.*; [name illegible] to Symington, March 22, 1954, folder 2465, *ibid.*; M. C. Donaldson to Symington, March 22, 1954, *ibid.*; Mildred Wilson to Symington, March 27, 1954, folder 2466, *ibid.*; Stan Fiske, "Statement by Fulton Lewis on Mutual," handwritten transcription, Aug. 4, 1954, folder 2467, *ibid.*; J. H. Hill to Symington, Aug. 4, 1954, folder 2468, *ibid.*; R. E. Williams to Symington, Aug. 4, 1954, folder 2469, *ibid.*; K. G. Judson to Symington, Aug. 5, 1954, *ibid.*; Andy Larman to Symington, Aug. 6, 1954, folder 2471(a), *ibid.*; Lucy Tsivoglou to Symington, Aug. 8, 1954, folder 2472, *ibid.*; James Pool to Symington, [Aug. 1954], *ibid.*; postcard beginning "Hey, 'Stu,'" [Aug. 1954], folder 2473, *ibid.*; "Annie Lee" to Symington, [Aug. 1954], *ibid.*; Mrs. Albert Brown to McClellan, April 6, 1954, folder F19-B-5, McClellan Collection; and postcard postmarked Berwyn, Ill., [March 1954], *ibid.* For many other negative letters, see folders 2470, 2474, and 2475, Symington Papers. On the Security Activities Control Board ruling, see Eve Edstrom, "U.S. Baring Secret Files on Mrs. Moss to Reds," *Washington Post*, May 23, 1958, p. 19; "Recommended Decision of Board Member Francis A. Cherry on Second Remand Proceeding," Sept. 19, 1958, *William P. Rogers, Jr., Attorney General of the United States, Petitioner, v. The Communist Party of the United States of America, Respondent*, Moss-1958 Folder, box 298, Symington Papers; "Modified Report of the Board on Second Remand," [1958], *Rogers v. The Communist Party of the United States*, Moss-1959 Folder, *ibid.*; *Communist Party of the United States v. Subversive Activities Control Board*, 254 F.2d 314 (D.C. Cir. 1958); and *Communist Party v. Control Board*, 367 U.S. 1 (1961).

⁵² "Stone Cold Dead." For other examples of the argument that Moss's race allowed her to escape detection as a Communist and/or spy, see Coulter, *Treason*, 62–64; Alice Widener, "FBI Files Prove Annie Was a Red," *U.S.A.: An American Magazine of Fact and Opinion*, Nov. 7, 1958, clipping, Moss Folder, box 127, Alfred Kohlberg Papers (Hoover Institution Archives, Stanford University, Palo Alto, Cal.); "Depends on the Way You've Been Brought Up," *National Review*, Dec. 20, 1958, p. 395; Jerry Greene, "U.S. Admits Ex-Red Stays in Army Job," *New York Daily News*, Oct. 30, 1958, *Edward R. Murrow Papers*, reel 40; "Who Promoted Moss," [1958?], *ibid.*, reel 41; Edward J. Mowery, "Reds Call Annie Lee Moss a Red," [1958?], *ibid.*; Fulton Lewis Jr., "McCarthy Was Correct," [1958], *ibid.*; William V. Shannon, "The Heirs," *New York Post*, Dec. 4, 1958, clipping, Moss-1958 Folder, box 298, Symington Papers; Joseph W. Donohue to Symington, Nov. 17, 1958, *ibid.*; Rose Grenwald to Symington (including *Los Angeles Times* clipping), Dec. 15, 1958, *ibid.*; "New Chapter in the Case of Annie Lee Moss," *U.S. News &*

There is a grain of truth in Buckley's analysis: that the racial discourse ascendant in the United States in 1954 overdetermined the response to Annie Lee Moss. She was transformed from a community leader and productive citizen into a passive victim of the "McCarthy machine." As that victim, she conveyed not only that extremist anticommunism lay outside the political mainstream, but also the inherent rightness of a racial liberalism that, even as it problematized white racism, invested white Americans (particularly the men who ran the federal government) with the responsibility, the authority, and the capacity to save the nation's darker citizens both from the Communists and from themselves. Race men could invoke their military service (and, soon, their social movement leadership) to attest both their loyalty and their capacity for political subjectivity. Black women such as Moss had fewer symbolic resources for proving themselves faithful Americans, or, indeed, for showing themselves political subjects at all.

Forty-seven years after Annie Lee Moss triumphed over Sen. McCarthy, Nell Irvin Painter reflected on the fate of Anita Hill, another black woman who testified before Congress: "Silence and invisibility are the hallmarks of black women in the imagery of American life. . . . Because black women have been harder than men to fit into clichés of race, we often disappear."⁵³ Painter referred to gendered clichés, circulating in both the African American community and American culture more generally, that positioned black men as the true victims of racism (such as lynch victims). The case of Annie Lee Moss complicates that observation, for Moss's visibility as a symbol of McCarthy's crusade can be traced to the efficacy with which she could be made to fit an enduring "cliché of race": that of Negro ineptness and passivity, and white paternalism and benevolence. This was a cliché wholly consistent with the paradigm of racial liberalism. It was a cliché that the debate about black loyalty engaged in the most conservative of ways. And it was a cliché that the building civil rights movement aimed to disrupt. Ironically, it was also a cliché that made Moss invisible as a political subject. Only when we recognize her as a real person can we more fully comprehend the ways that the racial and anticommunist politics of postwar liberalism intersected to create gendered narratives of loyalty and democracy, narratives that constrained the possibilities of citizenship for all African Americans.

World Report, Dec. 26, 1958, clipping, *ibid.*; Westbrook Pegler to Symington (two letters, [1960], [Oct. 1960]), Moss-1960 Folder, *ibid.*; Symington to Pegler, Oct. 10, 1960, *ibid.*; Westbrook Pegler, "Fair Enough," *Odessa (Tex.) American*, Nov. 8, 1960, available at NewspaperARCHIVE.com; and William F. Buckley Jr., "New Book Revives Old Myths," *Syracuse Herald-American*, Oct. 3, 1965, p. 21.

⁵³ Painter, "Hill, Thomas, and the Use of Racial Stereotype," 211.

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