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| **FEATURE ARTICLE** | | | |
| Paul Bergman is Professor of Law, UCLA Law School, and co-author of *Reel Justice: The Courtroom Goes to the Movies.*                **"**     The Blacklist was the studios' way of **reassuring** the public that pictures were **"clean."**    **"** |  |  | **Striking Back at McCarthy: *Goodbye, My Fancy***  By Paul Bergman     Many people think of the 1950's as a time when nothing happened. An old joke characterizes Dwight Eisenhower as a "do-nothing President" and goes on to add that "of course, nothing was what the country needed done."     However, the post-World War II years were anything but placid for the motion picture industry. Actors, writers and others were summoned to testify before the House Un-American Activities Committee beginning in 1947, and those who refused to renounce past suspicious activities or "name names" of those who had ties to communism were "blacklisted," or prevented from working in movies. The Blacklist was the studios' way of reassuring the public that pictures were "clean." By cooperating with HUAC, the studios undoubtedly also hoped to deter the enactment of laws regulating the motion picture industry as well as avoiding boycotts and other negative publicity. Joseph Breen, the powerful administrator of the Production Code and a committed anti-communist, worked to remove political material in films that might get Hollywood in trouble.     The studios sometimes went even farther, making movies that depicted in exaggerated form the evils of Communism. For example, *Big Jim McClain* (John Wayne, 1952) depicted a struggle to root out communist subversives operating in Hawaii. *Trial* (Glenn Ford and Arthur Kennedy, 1955) depicted a Communist defense attorney secretly trying to have his client convicted of a murder he didn't commit in order to create a martyr to the Communist cause and dupe followers into donating money to the party.     To many people who lived through the Blacklist era, HUAC investigations were less about a real threat of communism and more about right wing zealots trying to suppress free speech and control the minds and lawful activities of ordinary citizens. *Goodbye, My Fancy* (Warner Brothers, 1951), made at a time when HUAC and McCarthyism were at their peak but without even mentioning them, effectively and entertainingly argues that an open-minded and informed citizenry is the best guarantee of a strong country. It also strikes a powerful blow for academic freedom, a value that was very much in jeopardy in that era of the loyalty oath and anti-communist crusades on the campus.     Dr. James Merrill (Robert Young) is the President of an exclusive women's private college; all events in the film take place during Graduation Weekend. Agatha Reed (Joan Crawford), an alumna of the college, a former journalist and now a Congresswoman (itself rather unusual in 1951!), has agreed to speak at the graduation on the condition that she be allowed to show her recently-completed documentary film on injustice and suffering. Merrill is thrilled that Reed is returning to the campus; they were once secret lovers and he hopes to convince her to marry him. However, Matt Cole (Frank Lovejoy), another journalist, is also on the scene, camera in hand, ostensibly to memorialize the graduation events, but in reality hoping to rekindle his own relationship with Reed.     While the romantic triangle furnishes a good deal of drama, the political issues emerge through the controversy that develops concerning whether Reed will be allowed to show her film at graduation. The school's trustees screen the film for themselves and decide that it cannot be shown. The trustees fear that the film will put dangerous thoughts in the minds of the women students (whom they think of as girls) at a time when they still need to be protected from social problems. Reed is very disappointed when she realizes that, while Merrill has seen the film and disagrees with the trustees' decision, he is willing to accept it. After all, Merrill has been the most successful fundraiser in school history and his priority is never to antagonize the trustees.     Reed argues that the trustees' financial control over the school doesn't give them the right to make educational decisions, and points out that Merrill had made those same arguments when he was a younger man and they'd been in love. Reed argues passionately but without success that education for future leadership requires exposure to different ideas and awareness of what's going on in the world. When logical argument fails, Reed decides to play hardball: she'll reveal their affair to the world unless Merrill allows the film to be shown.     Another important subplot in the film involves a mildly liberal professor at the school who is about to get the sack because he insists on introducing topical material into his classes. He has the odd idea that his job is to get the women to think, not just to stuff their pretty heads with information and prepare them for marriage. Here again, the filmmakers quietly make a much-needed political argument in favor of academic freedom--another highly unpopular value at the time. My host institution, UCLA, was then known as "the little red schoolhouse" in the press and in the University of California's board of regents.     Will Reed's film be shown at graduation? Will she end up with Merrill or Cole, or perhaps neither of them? What happens to the endangered liberal professor? You'll find out for yourself if you watch *Goodbye, My Fancy*. But no matter how its plot points are resolved, the film plays as a strong (and highly unusual) counter-point to the 1950's anti-communist hysteria.  \_\_\_\_\_\_  Published July 1, 2000     |  | | --- | | **Other Links** |  |  |  | | --- | --- | |  | [**The House Committe on Un-American Activities**](http://www.moderntimes.com/palace/huac.htm)  [**McCarthy - Anti-Communist**](http://history.freeyellow.com/mccarthy.htm)  [**Goodbye, My Fancy**](http://us.imdb.com/Title?0043595) **- The Internet Movie Database** | |  |  | |  |  | |  |  | |  |  | |  |  | |  |  |  |  | | --- | |  | |

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