



Received: 04 August 2016
Accepted: 11 November 2016
Published: 07 December 2016

*Corresponding author: Robert L. Dahlgren, Department of Curriculum and Instruction, Fredonia – State University of New York, E-270 Thompson Hall, Fredonia, NY, 14063, USA
E-mail: robert.dahlgren@fredonia.edu

Reviewing editor:
Piotr Mikiewicz, University of Lower Silesia, Poland

Additional information is available at the end of the article

EDUCATION POLICY | RESEARCH ARTICLE

Red scare in the sunshine state: Anti-communism and academic freedom in Florida public schools, 1945–1960

Robert L. Dahlgren^{1*}

Abstract: Academic freedom has long been a sacrosanct principle in higher education; however, the same rights to intellectual autonomy have rarely been afforded K-12 practitioners. In times of national political crisis, the abilities of teachers to engage students in the crucial debates about contemporary public policy issues have been stretched to the breaking point. Florida public education between 1945 and 1961 represents a model case of the southeastern political establishment's efforts to thwart progressivism in public schools between World War II and reapportionment. Under the guise of "Americanism," self-defined "patriotic" groups such as The American Legion, the Chambers of Commerce, and Daughters of the American Revolution intervened in educational policies in order to impose strict limits on academic freedom in public schools in an effort to quash what they considered the "Communist threat" in American education. Utilizing archival sources, newspaper articles and correspondence, much of it housed in the Florida State Archives in Tallahassee, this proposed paper details the last stand of segregationist and anti-communist forces in Florida education. It focuses on three important cases spanning the period and the Florida peninsula from Jacksonville to Miami in order to investigate the influence of conservative groups and individuals on postwar educational



Robert L. Dahlgren

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Robert L. Dahlgren is an associate professor of social studies education and chair of the Department of Curriculum and Instruction at Fredonia – State University of New York.

He has research interests in academic freedom and teaching controversy in social studies classrooms.

Dahlgren received his PhD in social studies education from the University of Florida in August 2008. Before beginning his doctoral studies, he taught social studies in K-12 public schools in the Boston, Massachusetts, and Jacksonville, Florida areas for seven years. In addition, he taught in the Graduate Education department of Simmons College in Boston for two years and in the College of Education at Miyazaki University in Japan for three years. In his undergraduate- and graduate-level courses, Dahlgren's goal is to provide practical instruction for pre-service teachers in order to inspire them to teach students to be lifelong learners in the social studies.

PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

During the post-WWII era, cold war fears and the burgeoning civil rights movement challenged the largely conservative political establishment in the state of Florida. This article addresses a subject largely neglected beyond the realm of higher education: the attacks on the academic freedom of K-12 public school teachers in Florida during the period of 1945–1960. It explores an intriguing dynamic involving pressure exerted on teachers by a network of national organizations tied to the Republican Party and ad hoc parents' groups, and poses the following questions: what tactics were used by anti-communist organizations operating in Florida in order to remove teachers considered subversive from classrooms? How did school administrators respond to these tests of the intellectual freedom rights of individual teachers? This article adds to the body of scholarship within educational history regarding the history of threats to academic freedom of K-12 practitioners.

policy in the state. The findings of this study are a clarion call for educators to guard themselves against future incursions into their ability to teach as they see fit.

Subjects: Education Policy; Education Studies; History of Education

Keywords: US history; academic freedom; McCarthyism; K-12 teachers

1. Introduction

Academic freedom has long been recognized as a concern in higher education. The American Association of University Professors (AAUP), founded in 1915 with philosopher John Dewey as its first president, clearly defined the pressing need for the right of university faculty to intellectual independence in its founding statement:

Institutions of higher education are conducted for the common good and not to further the interest of either individual teacher or the institution as a whole. The common good depends upon the free speech for truth and its free exposition. Academic freedom is essential to these purposes.¹

There is consequently a significant body of scholarship by educational historians who have documented the history of academic freedom and the violations of its principles on American campuses.² At the same time, however, there has been a relative absence of concern for and subsequent vacuum in the literature regarding similar challenges to the academic freedom of secondary-level public school teachers in the 1950s.³ Contemporary educational theorists have proposed a number of reasons for this lack of scholarship in regard to the right to intellectual autonomy for teachers.⁴

This paper addresses the gap in scholarship in relation to anti-Communist campaigns against public school teachers in Florida, a state that is of particular interest given its divided character between the conservative, “Bible Belt” politics of its northern section, and the influence in the southern section of Cuban-American politics after the Cuban Revolution of 1959. I focus on the late 40s and 50s, a period that represents what Karen Graves considers the last gasp of the power of “The Pork Chop Gang,” a rural alliance whose power was ended by Supreme Court ordered reapportionment (Graves, 2007). I investigate the activities of organizations such as the American Legion, the Chambers of Commerce, Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) and their affiliates in Florida from 1945 to 1960 as they relate to specific cases of disciplinary action taken against teachers. I argue against the prevalent sentiment that anti-Communism in the 1940s and 1950s was a grassroots movement supported by the mass of an American public frightened by the prospects of an impending confrontation with the Soviet Union and People’s Republic of China.⁵ Instead, I contend that the movement popularly known as “the Red Scare,” should be understood as a carefully organized campaign on the part of a network of nationally funded, self-styled “patriotic organizations” working in concert with sympathetic political figures at federal, state and local levels to drive Communist, and even merely progressive, elements out of public institutions, including public education.⁶ Those individuals who sparked local controversies were far from the ordinary “neighbors next door;”⁷ rather they were often activists connected with these national organizations and were in constant contact with leaders of these groups who monitored their activities and boasted of their achievements. The events in Florida during three distinct periods provide ample evidence to support these assertions.

2. Three periods of anti-communism

In the aftermath of the cataclysmic events of World War II, in which nearly 300,000 American soldiers lost their lives, the priorities of American society began to shift. The war effort necessitated an unprecedented state intervention, as had been prescribed by economists such as John Maynard Keynes.⁸ This trend continued for a short time after the war, with the introduction of the Montgomery

GI Bill, which provided millions of returning veterans with free university educations.⁹ At the same time, however, the principles of Keynesianism were gradually replaced by those hewing to a supply-side philosophy owing its fealty to the “Chicago School” of Milton Friedman and George Stigler.¹⁰ This philosophical shift involved a battle of ideas over many years, taking place in the halls of power in Washington, the pages of noted journals and, increasingly, the classrooms of universities and secondary schools across the country. As the memory of “V-J Day” faded into the frightening nuclear landscape of the cold war, this ideological battle would put enormous pressures on teachers and university professionals.¹¹ During the period from 1945 to 1960, many educators lost their jobs, their reputations, and even their lives in this struggle. Some—particularly at the university level—were politically committed dissenters; others were merely caught in the political whirlwind that came to be known colloquially as “McCarthyism.”

It is difficult to overestimate the influence of the activities of patriotic organizations in this widespread campaign against public education during the period. The American Legion, for example, has been described by Stuart Foster as “a pioneer of anti-communist sentiment” (Foster, 2000, p. 75). Many Legionnaires were prominent in state and local politics and thus their views about the dangers of progressive education and subversive teachers had a direct effect on school policies. Legion publications throughout the period fulminated against “traitors in the classroom.” In the *American Legion Magazine* of May 1949, for instance, John Dixon wrote:

Above all else we need a renaissance of patriotism in America’s history classrooms, an informed and aggressive patriotism ... No teacher should be employed in any American history classroom who does not believe whole-heartedly and without any reservation in American free enterprise, in representative government, and in the preservation of the dignity and independence of the individual citizen. (Dixon, 1949, pp. 15–16)

Three distinct apogees of anti-Communist activity in the immediate post-World War II era threatened the academic freedom of teachers: the response to President Harry S. Truman’s 1947 Executive Order 9835, the “McCarthy Era” of 1951–1954 that represented the height of the efforts of the House Committee on Un-American Activities (HUAC), and the years following the Cuban Revolution of 1959.¹² These three high-water marks of anti-Communism exhibited very different features and objectives. All three periods of activity, however, ultimately threatened the abilities of teachers to practice independent scholarship and intellectual autonomy in the classroom.¹³ Moreover, the institutions and mechanisms that had been established to protect these principles—tenure, unionization, and curricular control—were directly challenged during these periods. In all three eras, classroom teachers and university professionals were caught off guard by the ferocity of the attacks from powerful national political and business concerns (Murphy, 1990, p. 3).

3. 1945–1950

On 22 March 1947, President Harry S. Truman issued Executive Order 9835, which mandated a new national security program premised on the declared loyalty of public employees. Central to this act was the promotion of “loyalty oaths,” which would be required of all public employees, including public school teachers and faculty and staff members of state universities and colleges. Ellen Schrecker comments ironically that, “Since the security measures already in place had largely eliminated most Communists and other dissidents from sensitive positions, the new program was superfluous, except as a political gesture” Schrecker (1986, p. 4). Superfluous or not, these loyalty oaths were taken quite seriously and literally, at least by administrations of public institutions, and were often used to dismiss teachers and university faculty who either refused to adhere to or merely ignored them.¹⁴ Despite the threat, there was significant opposition and resistance to the oaths. O.L. Davis, Jr. remembers:

We college students opposed the loyalty oaths that the Texas legislature imposed upon teachers in public schools and colleges and upon all students at public colleges and universities. One of my ex-GI classmates expressed his contempt of the law by signing, across several semesters, names like “Joseph Stalin” and “Vladimir Lenin” on the copy of his oath, each of which a local official in the busy registration line duly notarized. (Davis, 2000, pp. xi–xii)

Loyalty oaths were based on new and often vaguely worded definitions of what it meant to be a “subversive person.” For example, the Ober Law, enacted by the Maryland legislature in 1949, defined as “subversive” anyone:

Who commits or aids in the commission, or advocates, abets, advises or teaches by any means any person to commit, attempt to commit, or aid in the commission of any act intended to promote the overthrow, destruction, or alteration of, the constitutional form of the government of the United States, or the State of Maryland ... by revolution, force, or violence, or who is a member of a subversive organization. (Author’s emphasis)¹⁵

As a result of the combination of the strict adherence to loyalty oaths and a broad definition of dissent and subversion, thousands of teachers and university personnel lost their jobs in the period of 1947–1950. Stuart Foster, for example, reports that over 300 teachers in the New York City public school system were fired in 1948 and 1949 after investigations into their acts of subversion or ties to the Communist Party (CP) (Foster, 2000, p. 1).

These cold war developments at the national and international level hit Florida at a particularly tense time in the state’s history. The first stirrings of a civil rights movement in the state were met with a ferocious response as white supremacist organizations rose to reassert their agendas. In Duval County, for example, there were reports of weekly cross burnings in 1947. In one week in Jacksonville, five crosses were burned around the city.¹⁶ The fear of Soviet infiltration led the local branches of many patriotic organizations to initiate campaigns to censor library materials and speakers deemed “subversive.” For example, the chief librarian of the Jacksonville Public Library responded to complaints by American Legion members about subversive library materials by stating that the items in question—copies of “Soviet Russia Today” and “Proletarian News,” for example, had not been purchased by the library staff but instead “had been left for the use of readers in the reading room without permission from the library staff.” Whether this is an indication of some CP presence in northern Florida at the time is anyone’s guess.¹⁷

In this heated climate, the loyalty oaths prescribed by Truman’s dictate were never questioned by local authorities; state school officials simply imposed them at Governor Millard Caldwell’s urging as a matter of course without any discussion at the local level.¹⁸ On 5 July 1948, a directive to begin requiring loyalty oaths of public school employees issued by Superintendent of Public Instruction Thomas D. Bailey—a key figure in Florida public education throughout the late 40s and 50s—went out to district school boards.¹⁹ While there is no record of active organization against these loyalty oaths among secondary-level teachers, defiance of the orders was frequent, especially among veteran teachers who resented their imposition.²⁰ Among national education organizations, only the National Education Association (NEA) took a stance against loyalty oaths and organized to protect teachers from the effects of their imposition.²¹ State disciplinary records show that 12 Florida public school teachers were dismissed at the end of the school year as a result of their refusal to take the mandated loyalty oath during this period.²²

Another method used by patriotic groups in Florida to stem the tide of Communist subversion in the late 1940s was the introduction of “Anti-Red” ordinances. Reminiscent of the “Sundown” ordinances deployed by southern towns in the era of segregation, these ordinances made it illegal for known CP members to live within specific county or city limits. Developed as a national strategy by the American Legion in 1949, it was formally adopted as a statewide campaign by the Florida Legion at its Mid-Winter Conference at Sanford in December 1950.²³ The response was swift. In August 1951, a Legion-dominated Jacksonville City Council adopted an “Anti-Red” ordinance that prohibited registered CP members from residing within the city limits.²⁴ Other counties, primarily in northern and central Florida, soon followed suit.

While these ordinances were not specifically designed to target public educators, teachers were nonetheless affected by the draconian measures. In Osceola County, for example, Alexander W.

Trainor, a 54-year-old substitute teacher was arrested after falling afoul of the county's new "Anti-Red" ordinance.²⁵ Interestingly, Trainor, who appears to have lived a very transient existence, had been harassed for his CP membership several times before 1950. Originally from Cleveland, he had moved frequently to avoid prosecution under similar ordinances. During the subsequent trial, Trainor never denied having belonged to the CP—and indeed spoke in court about the Party's accomplishments in the area of civil rights and its defense of the Scottsboro Boys—but claimed to have left the party in 1937.²⁶ Trainor was convicted under the county's "Anti-Red" ordinance and sentenced to four years in prison.²⁷ While Trainor's fate was unusual, the evidence shows that "Anti-Red" measures motivated by patriotic organizations and carried out by school officials adversely affected teachers in the period of 1945–1950. State archives indicate that 23 teachers lost their jobs during this period as a result of arrests under similar ordinances.²⁸

Throughout this period, then, the evidence shows that a network of public officials tied to patriotic organizations such as Caldwell and Bailey, acted upon national policies erected in the aftermath of Executive Order 9835 to establish local strategies intended to root out what little Communist or subversive element existed in Florida public schools in the late 1940s. Whether these policies were actually successful in this endeavor—or for that matter whether officials were genuinely concerned about Communist indoctrination of Florida public school students—is beside the point; local policies such as the "Anti-Red ordinances" promoted by the American Legion were primarily intended to establish a political climate in which any dissent toward the hegemonic cold war agenda expressed by public officials would be met with the harshest punishment.

4. 1951–1954

A similar picture emerges during the period often referred to as the "McCarthy Era"—1951–1954. The HUAC grew out of earlier committees, such as the Dies Committee, that responded to the growth of the CP during the years of the Great Depression (Schrecker, 1998, pp. 91–97). In 1946, HUAC became a permanent standing committee with a broad mandate to investigate charges of Communist subversion within public institutions. This corresponded with an era in which committee members and its supporters issued sensational charges that supporters of the Soviet Union existed within the top levels of the federal government. The 1950 conviction of high-ranking US State Department official Alger Hiss only served to stoke these fears among the American populace; Hiss was convicted for perjuring himself during testimony in hearings responding to the accusations made by writer Whittaker Chambers that Hiss was a Soviet spy.²⁹

The successful prosecution of Hiss established a pattern of public hearings held between 1951 and 1954, in which noted individuals in public life from writers to Hollywood producers were subpoenaed and called before the HUAC in order to testify about their subversive activities.³⁰ If they refused to appear or to answer questions before the committee—often citing the Fifth Amendment protection against self-incrimination—they were charged with contempt of Congress and held to large fines or imprisonment.³¹ While John Stephens Wood chaired HUAC during this period, these hearings are largely remembered as the arena of Joseph McCarthy, the junior senator from Wisconsin, whose spirited interrogations energized the proceedings.³²

University faculty members were often targets of these investigations. For example, Johns Hopkins University professor Owen Lattimore, a recognized expert in the field of US–China affairs, was brought before the committee in 1952 as a result of having been named a Communist conspirator by ex-CP member Louis Budenz.³³ After a lengthy hearing, the final HUAC report found that Lattimore was a "conscious, articulate instrument of the Soviet conspiracy" and cited him for perjury (Schrecker, 1986, p. 166). In the aftermath of the hearings, Lattimore was allowed to keep his position, but his reputation was severely damaged.³⁴ Dozens of academics faced a similar fate before the HUAC hearings were brought to an abrupt end in 1954 as a result of the damage to McCarthy and the committee's reputation in the popular media (Edwards & Edward, 2004).

The ongoing HUAC hearings encouraged patriotic national organizations to carry out a series of new campaigns intended to foster a sense of pride in one's own country among school children and to root out subversive teaching staff in public schools.³⁵ Principal among these was the "Americanism" campaign developed by the American Legion in the early 1950s. Undertaken as a response to the growth of progressive history teaching in the 1930s and 1940s, the "Americanism" campaign introduced a full-fledged American History curriculum that the Legion hoped would be adopted across the country.³⁶ While many states declined to introduce the recommendations, the Legion found an enthusiastic supporter in fellow Florida Legionnaire and school official Thomas D. Bailey.³⁷ In 1953, Bailey, working in conjunction with Florida Legion Chairman Robert A. Francis, developed a curriculum package that was sent to each school district for immediate adoption. In a pamphlet designed to promote the program titled, "Democracy and Americanism in Florida Public Schools," Bailey wrote in the foreword:

If Communism or socialism ever come (*sic*) to America they will not come through our schools ... The schools act as the cornerstone of popular government. The free public schools are products of our democratic society and are a bulwark against infiltration by Communism or other systems of social organization.³⁸ (Author's emphasis)

Among the stipulations of the new curriculum were that "Schools must display the flag of the United States of America daily," "Pupils learn the story of America and the American way of life," and "Schools are required to teach essentials of the United States Constitution."³⁹ Along with this was a list of textbooks recommended for instruction as well as those prohibited from use in Florida public schools. Among the materials prohibited from use were both the series of workbooks produced by Harold Rugg of Columbia Teachers College and the Magruder American History textbooks now in standard use in American high schools.⁴⁰

The "Americanism" curriculum policy, developed by American Legion members in conjunction with school officials either explicitly connected to the Legion such as Bailey or sympathetic to their cause, codified a set of procedures for teaching American History as well as a list of acceptable and unacceptable literature for use in the classroom. These measures were the primary evidence used in cases against teachers. This new policy had a dramatic effect on social studies instruction in Florida. In one case, John D. Bryan, a veteran of the Putnam County school system, was dismissed amid salacious newspaper coverage for using a textbook that carried sympathetic coverage of the civil rights struggle.⁴¹ The textbook in question, "American Problems Today," by Robert Rienow included a chapter titled "Minorities and their Rights," which cited the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People as sources for further information. This episode clearly shows the connection between the activities of patriotic organizations and incidents in specific schools.

5. 1959–1960

The Cuban Revolution of 1959, in which a peasant rebellion led by a small group of nationalist intellectuals—including Fidel Castro and his brother Raoul—overthrew the dictatorship of Fulgencio Batista, shook the political establishment of the United States to its core. The US government had for years provided support for the Batista regime and the elite class of *gusanos*, many of whom fled to Miami in the aftermath of the revolution.⁴² After a series of unsuccessful negotiations with the leaders of the "26th of May Movement," the new administration of President John F. Kennedy announced an official trade embargo with Cuba on 7 February 1962.⁴³

Given Cuba's proximity to the southern tip of the peninsula, however, the revolutionary events in Cuba had a more profound effect on officials in Florida. Florida Governor LeRoy Collins's first response to the crisis was to monitor the activities of Cuban-American organizations operating in Florida. With the sudden influx of Cuban émigrés, particularly in the Dade County area dominated by Miami, there may have been good reason for this concern. Most wealthy émigrés formed organizations that were hostile to the Castro regime and openly called for its demise. However, among families who had resided in Miami for many generations, there was a great deal of sympathy for those who had "stuck a cigar in the eye of imperialism."⁴⁴

Collins turned to the Florida Chamber of Commerce to produce a watchlist of organizations to be monitored by his office.⁴⁵ Delivered to Collins on 3 April, the commissioned list focused on youth-oriented left groups that had given nominal support to the Cuban revolutionary government such as The American Youth Congress, the International Union of Students, and the People's Educational Center. The Florida Chamber of Commerce list also included publications such as *The Pan-American Monthly* and *Cuban Society Today*, which painted a flattering portrait of revolutionary Cuban society. The accompanying commentary claimed that these publications were “CP fronts.”⁴⁶ The authors of this material placed a particular focus on the role of educators in preparing students to “defend the United States in the face of Communist aggression.”⁴⁷ Any Florida public school teacher found to be sympathetic to the Castro government was summarily dismissed without warning. In the 1959–1960 school year alone, for example, 27 teachers were dismissed in Miami/Dade County—many without any previous complaints in their files.⁴⁸

The tensions surrounding the negotiations between the United States and “a revolutionary government ninety miles off the shores of Miami” led to an expansion of the scope of earlier loyalty oaths to proscribe any relations with Cuba. In Florida, this took on a particularly intense character. Charles L. Elkins notes that the Johns Committee, originally created in 1954 by Florida state legislator Charley Johns in large part to subvert the efforts toward desegregation following the landmark *Brown vs. Board of Education* Supreme Court decision, in its later incarnations began to monitor any faculty or student groups at Florida state institutions that any way supported the Cuban Revolution (Elkins, 1998, pp. 757–765). Under this new proviso, the Johns Committee would increasingly turn its attention as well toward high school teachers who expressed solidarity with the Castro regime.

Thus, throughout these three distinct eras, incidents occurring on an international and national scale were brought to bear in cases resulting in disciplinary action against public school teachers.

6. Teachers' unions and academic freedom

In each of these cases, the record of activity on the part of the AFTs and NEA and its local affiliates seems to be virtually non-existent. This is in stark contrast to the record of groups such as the AAUP and ACLU in acting in defense of college and university faculty during the period of 1945–1960. The case of University of Florida political scientist John H. Reynolds, illustrates this point. In April 1953, Reynolds was called to testify before HUAC on the subject of his connections to Communist organizations. Reynolds, who had completed his doctoral work at Harvard University, had been identified by other figures in the “Harvard cell” of the CP in the 1940s.⁵⁰ After refusing to testify on Fifth Amendment grounds, Reynolds was suspended by University of Florida President J. Hillis Miller, who commented that Reynolds' refusal to testify was a “serious breach of moral responsibility.”⁵¹ Throughout this process, attorneys provided by the ACLU and accompanied by representatives of the AAUP, who promoted the case in its journals, represented Reynolds.⁵² Although Reynolds was subsequently dismissed along with several other Florida-based academics during the 1950s, his spirited defense assisted by professional organizations is an example of the concern for academic freedom shown in cases relating to university professors.⁵³

What then accounts for the lack of support exhibited by teachers' unions in cases in which the intellectual autonomy of teachers was under attack in the 1950s? The origins of these organizations may shed some light on this subject. The NEA from its founding in 1857, was an organization primarily composed of and representative of the interests of school administrators. It was only after the creation of the AFT in 1916 as an activist union for rank and file teachers that the NEA began to recruit classroom teachers as well. In an effort to broaden the appeal of the organization, the NEA formed the National Council for the Defense of Democracy through Education (commonly known as the “Defense Commission”). While the Defense Commission engaged in some useful investigative work in support of teachers during the 1940s and 50s, Stuart Foster argues that, “it accepted the prevailing zeitgeist that a serious internal communist threat existed. As such, the Defense Commission betrayed itself as a victim of the fear and paranoia of the red scare era” (Foster, 2000, p. 23).

The trajectory of the NEA and its Defense Commission during the McCarthy era shows a disturbing tendency to overcompensate in its efforts to appear respectable at a time when it felt weakened by the attacks of patriotic organizations. Marjorie Murphy argues that teachers' unions in the United States have traditionally faced three obstacles in their efforts to represent teachers and educators: "the ideology of professionalism, the recurrent red-baiting, and the also recurrent and not unrelated fiscal crisis."⁵⁴ Murphy's second point—teachers' unions' persistent cravenness in the face of anti-Communism—begins to explain its reluctance to embrace the cases of attacks on academic freedom during the McCarthy period. Indeed, largely due to the influence of formerly left-wing intellectuals around the influential journal *Partisan Review*, the NEA and AFT developed policies that specifically precluded the defense of those members found to be connected to the CP⁵⁵ For example, a statement on "Academic Freedom" adopted at the 1952 Annual Convention of the AFT states:

The danger is still imminent that manipulation of public aversion to Communism may and can be used as a means of silencing, intimidating, or eliminating progressive, liberal teachers from public schools.⁵⁶

In other words, teachers influenced by socialist or communist ideas were themselves a threat to academic freedom, and thus, could not be afforded the rights of other teachers.⁵⁷ The AFT Secretary-Treasurer Irving R. Kuenzli in a December 1951 editorial titled, "How about the attacks on the classroom teacher?" explicitly voiced this stance. In the article, he blamed the attacks on progressive education on the presence of "Communists in schools."⁵⁸ Thus, while the AFT issued public policy statements through its journals that formally opposed the use of loyalty oaths and the practice of forcing teachers to testify before HUAC, neither the NEA nor the AFT took principled stands against the terminations of teachers accused of CP membership.⁵⁹

7. Conclusions

The documentary evidence cited above from the Florida State Archives and contemporary newspaper articles leads to several important conclusions that cut against the dominant view that a popular anti-Communist sentiment stoked a censorious response approved of by most Americans. First, cold war tensions were largely responsible for developing national policies that would negatively affect the abilities of teachers to conduct independent teaching in the classroom. For example, the Truman administration's Executive Order 9835, which led directly to the adoption of "Loyalty Oaths" within school districts in Florida, was a response to the prevalent view in Washington that the offices of power had been infiltrated by Soviet spies. The fact that the CP was on the wane at the time, while ironic, does not alter the intention of these public policies.

Second, national self-styled "patriotic" organizations such as the American Legion, DAR and US Chambers of Commerce enthusiastically participated in the period's anti-Communist activities. McCarthyism must therefore be viewed as a hierarchical phenomenon, with policies flowing from the political elite in Washington down to the provinces, often through the direction of these organizations. While there were obvious fears of Communism among the population at large, doubtless inflamed by the national media, McCarthyism was not a popular movement.⁶⁰ Those who participated in its activities at the local level, such as the parents who criticized John P. Bryan's selection of textbooks, did so as adjuncts of the national organizations to which they belonged.

Last, and most important, the evidence shows that those organizations specifically established to protect teachers from attacks on their abilities to act as independent, intellectual advocates in their classrooms were as weak, timid, hesitant, and ineffective as anti-Communist organizations were strong, dynamic, purposeful, and highly effective in their efforts. An understanding of this balance of power and the consequences of it are imperative if future threats to the academic freedom of secondary-level public school teachers are to be combated.

Funding

The author received no direct funding for this research.

Author details

Robert L. Dahlgren¹

E-mail: robert.dahlgren@fredonia.edu

¹ Department of Curriculum and Instruction, Fredonia – State University of New York, E-270 Thompson Hall, Fredonia, NY, 14063, USA.

Citation information

Cite this article as: Red scare in the sunshine state: Anti-communism and academic freedom in Florida public schools, 1945–1960, Robert L. Dahlgren, *Cogent Education* (2016), 3: 1262307.

Notes

1. Quoted in Tierney and Lechuga (2005, p. 9).
2. The definitive work on the effect of anti-Communist activities on university campuses is: Schrecker (1986). Among the other works I have consulted are: Carleton (1985), Cauter (1978), Dee Kille (2004), Sanders (1979).
3. One notable exception is the work of Stuart Foster in the New York City public school system: Foster (2000).
4. Gloria Pipkin has pointed to the obvious absence of research requirements for high school instructors as an explanation for this discrepancy (Pipkin, 2002, p. 13). Alternatively, University of Wisconsin critical theorist Michael Apple has suggested that the lack of concern for academic freedom at secondary level is connected to the persistent trend in the twentieth century toward what he has labeled the “de-skilling” of teachers; that is, removing the ability of teachers to develop curriculum for their own classes in favor of mandating the use of pre-packaged curricular materials (Apple, 2000, p. 51).
5. John Henry Faulk, for example, voices this opinion when he states: “It was a time when intimidation and repression overwhelmed orderly political processes, a time when denigrating epithets and vicious labels were substituted for rational, political dialogue, a time when mindless fear and hysteria swept away common sense and resulted in a terror whose repercussions were felt in all branches of the government and in the minds of the people of the United States. Above all, it was a time when vigilantism took over our national life.” From Faulk’s preface to Carleton (1985, p. ix).
6. In the following discussions, I will refer to organizations such as the American Legion, Chambers of Commerce, and DAR as “patriotic,” although my own view is that they were anything but patriotic in their activities.
7. This reference is from a DAR activist quoted in Kille (2004, p. 27).
8. Clarke (1988, pp. 5–15) argues in his introduction that the imperatives of “total warfare” led to a statist trend within Western capitalism between 1920 and 1950. This need dovetailed with the rise of Keynesian economics in the West.
9. Clark (1998) neatly summarizes the contradictory impulses involved in the GI Bill’s introduction: “The GI Bill did inspire a cultural rethinking of the value of higher education upon which the increasing postwar demand for a college education was built, but the legacies of the GI Bill cannot be said to have been entirely democratic ... It made college seem more democratic and practical and, at the same time, encouraged public expectations and aspirations that they could attain the trappings of middle-class status” (p. 189).
10. Leeson (2000) presents a clear explanation of the ways in which supply-side economics fit the needs of American capital during the post-World War II boom.
11. Stuart Foster comments: “In this troubled climate, education came under the suspicious microscope of the national media. Television, radio, newspapers, and magazines accorded increasing attention to public schools” Foster (2000, p. 57).
12. Although I have developed this understanding as a result of looking at the documentary evidence from the period, my thinking in this area has also been influenced by the work of David Cauter in his book *The Great Fear*.
13. Ellen Schrecker writes: The academy’s enforcement of McCarthyism had silenced an entire generation of radical intellectuals and snuffed all meaningful opposition to the official version of the cold war (Schrecker, 1986, p. 341)
14. Although there were many variants of these ubiquitous loyalty oaths of the 1940s and 1950s, the following California loyalty oath was typical: “I further swear (or affirm) that I do not advise, advocate or teach, and have not within the period beginning five (5) years prior to the effective date of the ordinance requiring the making of this oath or affirmation, advised, advocated or taught, the overthrow by force, violence or other unlawful means, of the Government of the United States of America or of the State of California and that I am not now and have not, within said period, been or become a member of or affiliated with any group, society, association, organization or party which advises, advocates or teaches, or has, within said period, advised, advocated or taught, the overthrow by force, violence or other unlawful means of the Government of the United States of America, or of the State of California.” *Garner v. Los Angeles Board*, 341 US 716.
15. Quoted in Gerald (2000, p. 106).
16. “Five Crosses Burned in Jacksonville,” *Florida Times-Union*, 12 February 1947, p. 62.
17. “Red Writings Disavowed at City Library,” *Florida Times-Union*, 22 November 1948.
18. Directive to Superintendent of Public Instruction, 14 August 1947, Retrieved from Florida State Archives, Tallahassee, FL 25 March 2006, Group #000100, Series 509, Box 3, File 25. Caldwell was a prominent member of several patriotic organizations including the American Legion, the Freemasons, and Elks Club.
19. Bailey writes: “Chapter 25046 of the Florida Statute, Acts of 1948, requires that all employees and elected officers of the States, including the Governor and constitutional officers and all employees and elected officers of all cities, towns, counties, and political subdivisions, including the educational system take an oath in a prescribed form.” This oath stated: “I, name as it appears on payroll, a citizen of the State of Florida and of the United States of America, and being employed by or an officer of the State of Florida, State Department of Education and a recipient of public funds as such an employee or officer, do hereby solemnly swear or affirm that I will support the Constitution of the United States and of the State of Florida; that I am not a member of the CP; that I have not and will not lend my aid, support, advice, counsel or influence to the CP; that I do not believe in the overthrow of the Government of the United States or the State of Florida by force or violence.” Retrieved from Florida State Archives, 11 February 2006, Group #000400, Series 1127, Box 1, File 8.
20. “Teachers Angered With Oaths,” *Orlando Morning Sentinel*, 4 March 1948, p. 27.
21. The NEA used its Defense Commission as its principal organizing nexus against loyalty oaths. Stuart Foster comments: “Through a steady stream of bulletins, reports, surveys, and articles, the Commission helped

- teachers to articulate a response to the teacher oaths and investigations, To keep them fully informed of new developments, and, above all, to comfort professional educators that the commission was on hand to protect and defend their interests” (Foster, 2000, p. 126).
22. Record of terminations, 30 June 1948. This record indicates that 12 teachers were dismissed as a result of “breaches of loyalty.” Retrieved from Florida State Archives, Tallahassee, Florida, 11 February 2006. Record Group 000496, Series 243, Box 1, File 18.
 23. “Florida Legion to Develop Battle Against Communism at Mid-Winter Conference,” *Florida Times-Union*, 3 December 1950, p. 28.
 24. “City Council Slates Move to Oust Reds,” *Florida Times-Union*, 9 August 1951, p. 12.
 25. “First Arrest Made Under Red Statute,” *Orlando Morning Sentinel*, 21 August 1951, p. 5.
 26. “Trainor Claims No Red Involvement,” *Orlando Morning Sentinel*, 15 October 1951, p. 11.
 27. Trainor was imprisoned at Zephyr Hills Correctional Facility in Pasco, County and was tragically found hanged in his cell in 1952. “Trainor, Red Convict, Found Dead,” *Orlando Morning Sentinel*, 11 February 1952, p. 3.
 28. Record of terminations, 30 June 1945–1950. Retrieved from Florida State Archives, Tallahassee, Florida, 11 February 2006. Record Group 000496, Series 243, Box 1, File 18.
 29. Schrecker (1986, p. 7) comments that the successful prosecution of Hiss made the political career of Richard Nixon and led to the phenomenon in 1952 when 185 of the 221 Republicans in Congress applied for seats on HUAC.
 30. Don Carleton notes the “great irony ... that the Red Scare’s most virulent phase developed in the absence of any actual Communist organization” Carleton (1985, p. 63).
 31. Universities also often used these refusals as pretexts for firing university faculty. Jane Sanders reports that six members of the English Department at the University of Washington were dismissed after refusing to give testimony before the committee (Sanders, 1979, pp. 89–91).
 32. The most vivid account of the activities of HUAC is found in: Goodman (1968, pp. 321–322).
 33. Ellen Schrecker argues that the choice of noted academics such as Lattimore indicates the desire on the part of anti-Communist groups to eliminate the protections of tenure and seniority. Schrecker (1986, p. 8).
 34. Schrecker (1986, pp. 164–166) comments that, “His graduate students and even his former secretaries had trouble getting jobs. And he had trouble getting published. The mainstream press closed its doors to him ...” (p. 166).
 35. Stuart Foster raises the important issue of just how many CP members existed in the faculties of public schools in the 1950s: “In truth, the number of those committed to the Communist cause in the 1950s was miniscule in comparison to the number of teachers in the country as a whole. In the early 1950s, just over one million teachers worked in public schools in the United States. Even if one accepts the inflated calculations of Bella Dodd, the once communist activist turned Congressional investigation informer, the grand total amounted to no more than 1,500 teachers” (Foster, 2000, p. 18).
 36. Evans (2004) includes a thorough discussion of the controversy surrounding the series of texts and workbooks produced by Teacher’s College professor Harold Rugg.
 37. In a letter dated 18 April 1963, Bailey identifies himself as “an active member of the American Legion for forty-five years.” Letter to James E. Powers, National Commander American Legion, 18 April 1963, Retrieved from the Florida State Archives, Tallahassee, FL, 11 February 2006, Group #000400, Series 1127, Box 1, File 5.
 38. Thomas D. Bailey, “Democracy and Americanism in Florida Public Schools,” p. 2. Retrieved from Florida State Archives, Tallahassee, FL, 11 February 2006, Group #000400, Series 1127, Box 1, File 8.
 39. Thomas D. Bailey, “Democracy and Americanism in Florida Public Schools,” pp. 3–4.
 40. Thomas D. Bailey, “Democracy and Americanism in Florida Public Schools,” pp. 10–11.
 41. “School Text Praises Communist Fronts,” *The Putnam Sun*, 30 March 1954, p. 1.
 42. Huberman and Sweezy (1961, pp. 17–21) argue that this class went on to influence the anti-Castro activities of “patriotic” organizations in southern Florida.
 43. Gonzalez (1992, pp. 83–124) argues that the embargo resulted from the Castro Government’s policy of nationalizing US-owned industries.
 44. Quoted in Richard Gott, *Cuba: A New History*, (New Haven, CT, Yale University Press, 2004), p. 128.
 45. Correspondence between Collins and Florida Chamber of Commerce chairman Henry Jonas, 17 February 1960. Retrieved from Florida State Archives, Tallahassee, Florida, 25 March 2006, Group Record #000102, Series 776, Box 5, File 11.
 46. Retrieved from Florida State Archives, Tallahassee, Florida, 25 March 2006, Group Record #000102, Series 776, Box 5, File 11.
 47. This material included an accompanying essay, “The Price of Leadership” authored by Earl H. Bell, a professor of Sociology at Syracuse University, who led the project. In his comments, Bell put the responsibility for combating Communism squarely on education: “Special action rather than mechanical and structural programs, are necessary for stimulation of the production of excellent scholars.” Bell, “The Price of Leadership,” p. 4. Retrieved from Florida State Archives, Tallahassee, Florida, 25 March 2006, Group Record #000496, Series 295, Box 3, File 18.
 48. Disciplinary records indicate that these teachers were terminated because of “subversive activities.” Few were even given the opportunity to appeal their cases at hearings, a standard practice. Nor is there any indication that they were defended by the Miami/Dade Teachers United—the local affiliate of the American Federation of Teachers (AFT). Disciplinary records, 30 June 1960. Retrieved from Florida State Archives, Tallahassee, Florida, 11 February 2006. Record Group 000496, Series 243, Box 1, File 24.
 50. For example, an AAUP official defended Reynolds at an internal meeting in March, stating that, “Mr Reynolds, a graduate of Harvard University, has exemplary qualifications and a fine record of service to the university and its students.” “UF Professor to Testify,” *Florida Times-Union*, 13 April 1953, pp. 11 and 25.
 51. Miller stated: “I regard Mr Reynolds’ refusal to answer questions of a duly constituted agency of the government as a serious breach of his moral responsibility to the University, his colleagues, and the public which the university serves.” “UF Professor Suspended for Ducking Red Question,” *Florida Times-Union*, 28 April 1953, p. 13.
 52. Quoted in “UF Professor Suspended for Ducking Red Question,” *Florida Times-Union*, 28 April 1953, p. 13.

53. This view is in contrast to that voiced by Ellen Schrecker, who writes: "Whether timelier action by the AAUP would have actually prevented any firings, given all of the other pressures on university administrations, faculties, and trustees during this period, is hard to tell. Nonetheless, the failure of the AAUP to take any public action at all until the worst of McCarthyism was over certainly did not advance the cause of academic freedom, and it is entirely possible that prompt condemnation of some of the more egregious violations of academic freedom might have deterred some administrations or stimulated more resistance by faculty members at schools where such resistance might have been effective" (Schrecker, 1986, p. 315).
54. Marjorie Murphy, *Blackboard Unions*, p. 3. Murphy further comments that the decentralized nature of the AFT hindered its organizational efforts. "Its (the AFT's) state organizations were weak, and had little presence on the national scene."
55. Alan Wald argues that the writings of Sidney Hook were particularly influential in NEA circles in New York. Wald, *The New York intellectuals: The rise and decline of the anti-stalinist left from the 1930s to the 1980s*, (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1987). Ellen Schrecker further comments: "In fact, many of the nation's leading intellectuals were directly involved with one or another aspect of McCarthyism. The American historian and present Librarian of Congress Daniel Boorstin named names for HUAC; Lionel Trilling, perhaps the leading literary critic of the day, chaired a Columbia committee that developed guidelines for congressional witnesses; and Talcott Parsons, whose formal paradigms shaped much of American sociology, participated in the AAUP's special survey of the Cold War academic freedom cases" (Schrecker, 1986, pp. 339–340).
56. "Report of the Legislative Committee, AFT," *The American Teacher*, October 1952, p. 18.
57. Gerald (1971) has documented the influence of social constructionist writer and theorist George Counts in developing this idea.
58. Kuenzli comments: "The AFTs, which by its constitution bars from membership Communists, Fascists, and others subject to totalitarian control, cannot logically insist that Boards of Education employ or retain such persons as teachers in the public schools." Irving R. Kuenzli, "How about the attacks on the classroom teacher?" *The American Teacher*, December 1951, pp. 4–5.
59. The AFT platform adopted at the 1951 Annual Convention states: "Resolved, that the American Federation of Teachers in convention assembled reiterate its disapproval and condemnation of loyalty oaths demanded of teachers individually or as a group ..." *The American Teacher*, October 1951, p. 28.
60. I do concede that there is evidence of popular support for the efforts of anti-Communist activists. For example, a poll conducted by Harvard University professor Samuel Stouffer showed that, among other things, 52% of Americans were in favor of imprisoning all Communists, while 73% felt that it was legitimate for Americans to report friends and neighbors they suspected of Communist activities to the FBI. Stouffer's survey cited in Cate (1978, p. 215).

Correction

This article was originally published with error. An incorrect ORCID was included on this article. It has now been removed.

References

- Apple, M. (2000). *Official knowledge: Democratic education in a conservative age*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Carleton, D. E. (1985). *Red scare: Right wing hysteria, fifties fanaticism and their legacy in Texas*. Austin, TX: Texas Monthly Press.
- Cate, D. (1978). *The great fear: The anti-communist purge under Truman and Eisenhower*. New York, NY: Simon and Shuster.
- Clark, D. A. (1998). The two Joes meet – Joe college, Joe Veteran: The G.I. Bill, College Education, and Postwar American Culture. *History of Education Quarterly*, 38, 165–189.
- Clarke, S. (1988). *Keynesianism, modernism, and the crisis of the state* (pp. 5–15). Aldershot: Gower Publishing.
- Davis, Jr. O. L., (2000). *Foreword to Stuart Foster, Red Alert!: educators confront the red scare in American public schools 1947–1954* (pp. xi–xii). New York, NY: P. Lang.
- Dee Kille, J. (2004). *Academic freedom imperiled: The McCarthy era at the University of Nevada*. Reno, NV: University of Nevada Press.
- Dixon, J. (1949, May). What's wrong with U.S. history? *The American Legion Magazine*, 15–16.
- Edwards, B., & Edward, R. (2004). *Murrow and the birth of broadcast journalism*, Hoboken, NJ: Wiley Publishers.
- Elkins, C. L. (1998). From plantation to corporation: The attack on tenure and academic freedom in Florida. *Sociological Perspectives*, 41, 757–765. Retrieved January 17, 2006, from https://www.jstor.org/stable/1389667?seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents
<http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/1389667>
- Evans, R. (2004). *The social studies wars*. New York, NY: Teacher's College Press.
- Foster, S. (2000). *Red Alert!: Educators confront the red scare in American public schools 1947–1954*. New York, NY: P. Lang.
- Gerald, L. G. (1971). *The educational theory of George S. counts*. Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press.
- Gerald, L. G. (2000). *American education – 1945–2000*. Chicago, IL: Loyola University Press.
- Gonzalez, M. (1992). Deflected permanent revolution in Cuba. *International Socialism*, 2, 83–124.
- Goodman, W. (1968). *The committee*. New York, NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.
- Graves, K. (2007). Doing the public's business: Florida's purge of gay and lesbian teachers, 1959–1964. *Educational Studies: Journal of the American Educational Studies Association*, 44, 7–32.
- Huberman, L., & Sweezy, P. M. (1961). *Cuba: Anatomy of a revolution*. New York, NY: Monthly Review Press.
- Leeson, R. (2000). *The eclipse of Keynesianism: The political economy of the Chicago counter-revolution*. New York, NY: Palgrave. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1057/9780333985656>
- Murphy, M. (1990). *Blackboard unions: The AFT and the NEA, 1900–1980*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Pipkin, G. (2002). *At the schoolhouse gate: Lessons in intellectual freedom*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Sanders, J. (1979). *Cold war on campus: Academic freedom at the University of Washington, 1946–1964*. Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press.
- Schrecker, E. (1986). *No ivory tower: McCarthyism and the universities*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Schrecker, E. (1998). *Many are the crimes: McCarthyism in America*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Tierney, W. G., & Lechuga, V. M. (2005). Academic freedom in the 21st century. *Thought and Action*, 21, 9.



© 2016 The Author(s). This open access article is distributed under a Creative Commons Attribution (CC-BY) 4.0 license.

You are free to:

Share — copy and redistribute the material in any medium or format

Adapt — remix, transform, and build upon the material for any purpose, even commercially.

The licensor cannot revoke these freedoms as long as you follow the license terms.

Under the following terms:

Attribution — You must give appropriate credit, provide a link to the license, and indicate if changes were made.

You may do so in any reasonable manner, but not in any way that suggests the licensor endorses you or your use.

No additional restrictions

You may not apply legal terms or technological measures that legally restrict others from doing anything the license permits.



Cogent Education (ISSN: 2331-186X) is published by Cogent OA, part of Taylor & Francis Group.

Publishing with Cogent OA ensures:

- Immediate, universal access to your article on publication
- High visibility and discoverability via the Cogent OA website as well as Taylor & Francis Online
- Download and citation statistics for your article
- Rapid online publication
- Input from, and dialog with, expert editors and editorial boards
- Retention of full copyright of your article
- Guaranteed legacy preservation of your article
- Discounts and waivers for authors in developing regions

Submit your manuscript to a Cogent OA journal at www.CogentOA.com

