



# INSIDE THE VAULT

Harry Truman and the Rise of “Pathological Liar”  
Joseph McCarthy in 1950

with Dr. Barbara Perry

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 7, 2023

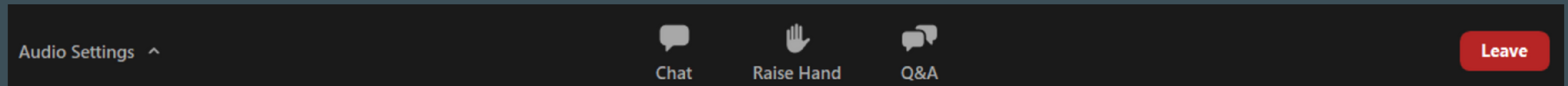
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THE  
GILDER LEHRMAN  
INSTITUTE  
of  
AMERICAN HISTORY

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# How to Participate



- If you would like to ask a question, you can use the Q&A feature.
- We will be answering audience questions throughout the session.
- The views expressed here are those of the historian.

## For Security and Privacy

- Your microphone is automatically muted.
- Your camera is automatically turned off.



# Barbara Perry



Barbara A. Perry is the Gerald L. Baliles Professor of Presidential Studies at the University of Virginia's Miller Center, where she co-chairs the Presidential Oral History Program. She served as the Judicial Fellow at the US Supreme Court and received the Justice Tom C. Clark Award as the outstanding fellow. Professor Perry has authored or edited seventeen books, including *Freedom and the Court: Civil Rights and Liberties in the United States* (2003), with Henry J. Abraham; *The Michigan Affirmative Action Cases* (2007); *Edward M. Kennedy: An Oral History* (2018); and *Unlikely Allies: How Eleanor Roosevelt and Jack Kennedy Found Common Ground and Launched a Women's Rights Movement* (forthcoming). Dr. Perry is a frequent commentator for national and international media and served as the lead expert for CNN's documentary *The Kennedys*.





# Today's Document

008975

THE WHITE HOUSE  
WASHINGTON

At Key West, Florida  
March 31, 1950

Dear Dean:

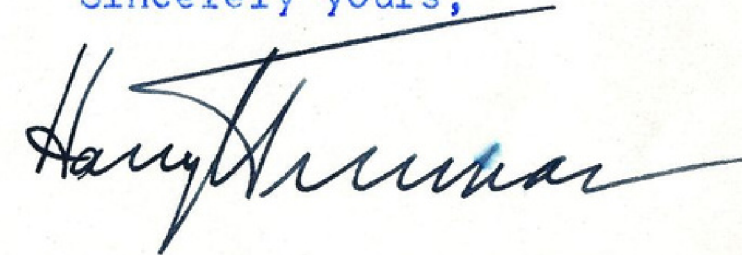
I appreciated most highly your letter of the 28th, and what I appreciated most was the fact that Mrs. Acheson had good news with regard to your daughter. Mrs. Truman and I have been very much interested in her welfare and recovery.

I am attaching a copy of the press conference which I held yesterday. I want you to know exactly what was said, so there can be no misinterpretations.

I tried my best to nail the issue down, as you and Vandenberg and Stimson have been outlining it, and as I outlined it to Bridges and Vandenberg in my two personal letters.

I think we have these "animals" on the run. Privately, I refer to McCarthy as a pathological liar, and Wherry as the block-headed undertaker from Nebraska. Of course, we can't do that publicly, but there's no doubt that's exactly what they are.

Sincerely yours,



Hon. Dean Acheson  
Secretary of State  
Washington, D. C.

President Harry S. Truman to Dean Acheson, March 31, 1950,  
(Gilder Lehrman Institute, GLC00782.22)





# Key Players

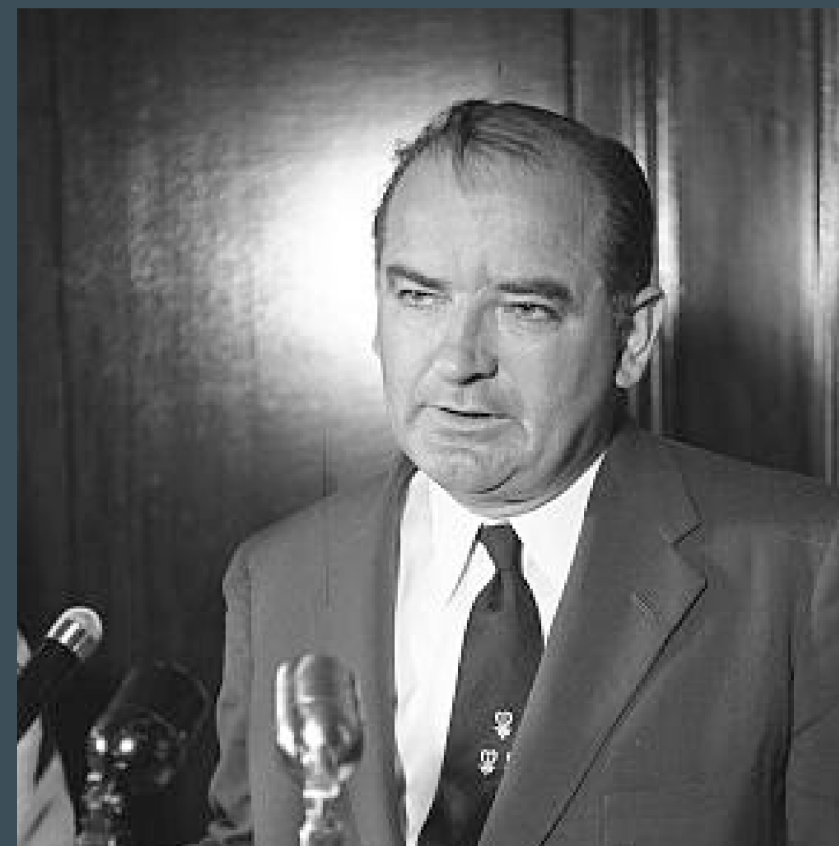
- President Harry Truman (1945-1953): Implemented the Marshall Plan, created NATO and the Truman Doctrine to contain communism after World War II
- Secretary of State Dean Acheson (1949-1953): Cold War diplomat, Truman's senior foreign policy advisor, led Truman administration's foreign policy
- Senator Joseph McCarthy (R-WI) (1947-1957): accused State Department officials of being Communists, lent his name to "McCarthyism," the Red Scare
- Senator Kenneth Wherry (R-NE) (1943-1951): called for an investigation of homosexuals in federal employment, creating the Lavender Scare



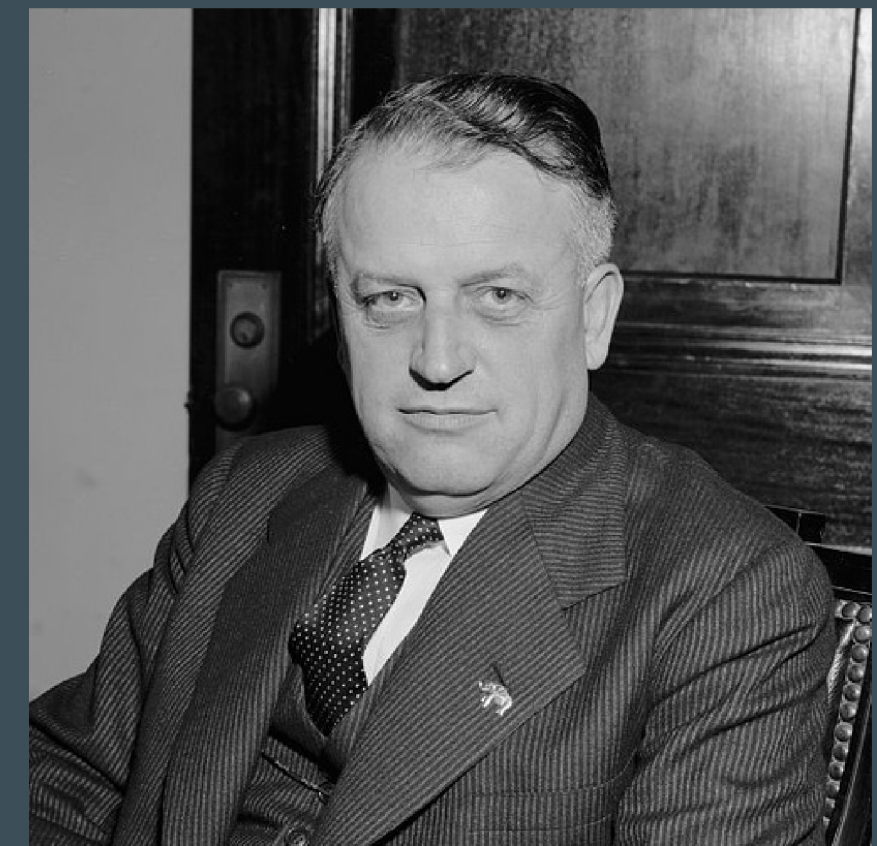
Harry Truman, June 27, 1945.  
(Library of Congress)



Harris & Ewing, Dean Acheson, ca. 1949-1953.  
(Library of Congress)



Thomas J. O'Halloran, Senator Joseph McCarthy, June 1954.  
(Library of Congress)



Harris & Ewing, Kenneth Wherry, April 1940.  
(Library of Congress)



# Timeline Leading to Truman's Letter

**February 9, 1950**

Senator McCarthy delivers speech attacking Communists in the State Department

**March 8, 1950**

Tydings-MacMahon Committee begins to investigate McCarthy's claims

**March 28, 1950**

Secretary of State Dean H. Acheson is served subpoena to appear before the Committee of Foreign Relations

**February 13, 1950**

Department of State rejects accusations in a press release

**March 21, 1950**

McCarthy accuses Owen Lattimore, former State Department advisor, of being a Russian agent

**March 30, 1950**

President Truman has press conference in Key West regarding McCarthy





008975

# Harry Truman to Dean Acheson

March 31, 1950

THE WHITE HOUSE  
WASHINGTON

At Key West, Florida  
March 31, 1950

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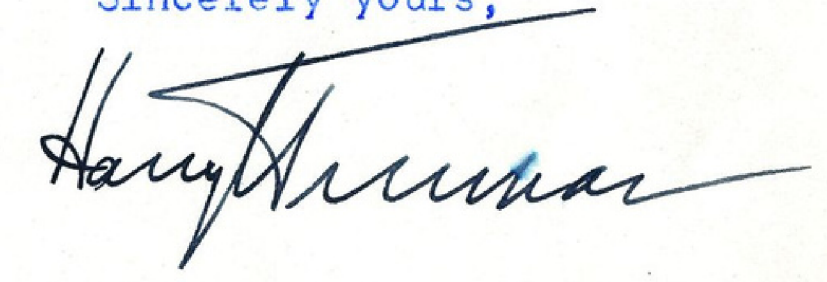
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Sincerely yours,



Hon. Dean Acheson  
Secretary of State  
Washington, D. C.





# Millard E. Tydings to Secretary of State Dean H. Acheson

March 28, 1950

## UNITED STATES OF AMERICA Congress of the United States

To Dean H. Acheson, Secretary of State, Department of  
State, Washington, D. C.

, Greeting:

Pursuant to lawful authority, YOU ARE HEREBY COMMANDED to appear  
established by the  
before the Subcommittee/Committee on Foreign Relations  
pursuant to S. Res. 231, 81st Congress,  
of the Senate of the United States, on April 4, 1950,  
at 10:30 o'clock a m., at their/committee room F 53,

United States Capitol, then and there  
to produce all original books, records, reports, memoranda, and  
~~to testify what you may know relative to the subject matters under consid-~~  
other documents and papers in the custody of the Department of  
~~eration by said committee.~~  
State or any officer or employee thereof (or, in the absence

of the originals thereof, true and correct copies thereof) of the  
categories described in Appendix I hereto (which is attached hereto  
and is made a part hereof) which pertain to any individual named  
in Appendix II hereto (which is a sealed instrument attached hereto  
and made a part hereof).

Hereof fail not, as you will answer your default under the pains and pen-  
alties in such cases made and provided.

To JOSEPH C. DUKE, Sergeant at Arms of the Senate of the United States,  
to serve and return.

Sub  
Given under my hand, by order of the/Committee, this  
28th day of March, in the year of our  
Lord one thousand nine hundred and fifty

*Millard E. Tydings*  
Sub  
Chairman, Committee on Loyalty of State  
Department Employees

Millard E. Tydings to Dean H. Acheson, March 28, 1950  
(Harry S. Truman Library)





# Truman and the Red Scare

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- Created the Temporary Commission on Employee Loyalty
- Compiled lists of involvement in protests or labor strikes
- Resulted in 2,700 dismissals and 12,000 resignations from US government service



Report of the President's Temporary Commission on Employee Loyalty, November 26, 1946.

(Harry S. Truman Library)

The President's Temporary Commission on Employee Loyalty respectfully submits this report pursuant to Executive Order No. 9806<sup>1/</sup>, dated November 25, 1946.

## I. INTRODUCTION

The President's Temporary Commission on Employee Loyalty, hereinafter referred to as the Commission, was created to inquire into (a) the standards, procedures, and organizational provisions for the investigation of persons who are employed by the United States Government, or who are applicants for such employment, (b) the removal or disqualification from employment of any disloyal or subversive person, and to prepare a report incorporating any recommendations deemed appropriate in order to improve existing legislative and administrative arrangements in connection with loyalty investigations, administrative responsibility in loyalty cases, standards of loyalty, loyalty adjudications and related matters, so as to protect the government against the employment or continuance in employment of disloyal, or subversive persons, and assure fair hearings to persons against whom such charges are brought.

The Commission was organized following the issuance of

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<sup>1/</sup> Annexed as Exhibit 1.



# What's going on at this time in the world?

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- Cold War
- Korean War
- Communist Chinese Revolution and “Red China’s” involvement in the Korean War, along with Soviet Union



Bowman Gum Company, Fight the Red Menace:  
The Children's Crusade against Communism  
trading cards; 23. Ghost City, 1951. (Gilder  
Lehrman Institute, GLCo9706)





# Julius and Ethel Rosenberg

- Accused of sharing information about the atomic bomb
- Convicted of spying for the Soviet Union
- Executed in 1953 for espionage during Cold War & McCarthy Era



Roger Higgins, *Julius and Ethel Rosenberg, separated by heavy wire screen as they leave US Court House after being found guilty by jury, 1951.* (Library of Congress)



# Robert F. Kennedy and the McCarthy Hearings

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- Served on the staff of the Senate Subcommittee on Investigations, chaired by Senator Joseph McCarthy in 1953, and resigned after six months
- Served as chief counsel for the Senate Subcommittee on Investigations
- Wrote a report condemning McCarthy's investigation of alleged Communists in the Army
- Brother of then Senator John F. Kennedy (D-MA)



Warren K. Leffler, *Attorney General Robert Kennedy testifying before a Senate subcommittee hearing on crime, January 1, 1963.*

(Library of Congress)



# Claude G. Bowers to President Harry Truman

August 28, 1951

When home I had an hour in the apartment of Hull and later in that of Baruch, and in discussing the villianous campaign against Acheson both used precisely the same words:--

"We have reached a new low in American politics". It was not quite "new" since the campaign against Jefferson was quite as low, but we have had to wait 159 years to find anything as low.

These attacks on Acheson have made no impression, even on the man in the streets, and in governmental and political circles Acheson is greatly admired. Horacio Walker, then Foreign Minister, has spoken to me in terms of admiration of the perfect way he reconciled little differences in the conference of the Foreign Ministers of the American Republics.

Your own status as the leader of the democratic world has never been so great as it is today, and it is generally assumed here that you will be renominated and reelected. You have made the fight and the issue on which we can win. I know of no other possible Democrat who makes such an appeal to the "common man" who is not only backbone of the Party but of the country. I hope that at the proper time you respond to the general demand of the Party. It is crystal clear that the Republicans fear you as they fear no other possible candidate.

Warmest regards,

Sincerely,



Claude G. Bowers

Claude G. Bowers  
American Ambassador

Claude G. Bowers to President Harry S. Truman, August 28, 1951.

(Harry S. Truman Library)





# “Disclosure of Loyalty Files to the Tydings Subcommittee”

1951



Harry S. Truman, "Disclosure of Loyalty Files to the Tydings Subcommittee," 1951.,  
(Harry S. Truman Library)

COPY

## DISCLOSURE OF LOYALTY FILES TO THE TYDINGS SUBCOMMITTEE

Senator Tydings has asked John Peurifoy that he be advised by Monday, March 20th, of the terms and conditions under which the loyalty and security files in connection with Senator McCarthy's charges of Communists in the State Department will be made available to the Committee. He stated that on two different occasions the President had informed him that pertinent files would be furnished to the Committee at the White House. The Senator indicated also that the files would be made available to the Committee's investigative staff. It is, therefore, important, in the event that a commitment has in fact been made for voluntary disclosure, to consider the nature of the agreement that was entered into by the President and Senator Tydings and just what method of procedure should be followed in making the files available.

I. If a commitment has not been made by the President, it is believed that consideration should be given as to whether, under any circumstances, the files should be made available to the Committee. The arguments for not making any disclosure are as follows:

(1) Derogatory information necessarily appearing in investigative reports will be subject to disclosure or to leaks by the Committee members with the result that persons who have already been cleared will be needlessly injured.

(2) Much of the derogatory information in the files is based on rumor, gossip and hearsay.



# President Harry S. Truman to A. Barr Comstock

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October 18, 1951

October 18, 1951

Dear Mr. Comstock:

Ever so many thanks for your kind letter of October fifteenth. I am glad to read again Jefferson's famous declaration of eternal hostility against every form of tyranny over the mind of man. That is a sentiment that is deeply engraved on my heart.

I like also the observation of your German friend that there is no difference in kind between Hitlerism and McCarthyism, both being the same form of bacteriological warfare against the minds and souls of men.

Cordially and sincerely,

(Sgd) HARRY S. TRUMAN

President Harry S. Truman to A. Barr Comstock, October 18, 1951.

(Harry S. Truman Library)





# Albert Einstein to Rose Russell

May 28, 1953

“That is why I argued that there is no way other than revolutionary noncooperation, like Gandhi used with great success against the legal powers of the British Authorities.”

Ihre geschw. Rose Russell.

Ihre fühle eine Verpflichtung, Ihren freundlichen Brief vom 21. Mai zu beantworten. Meine Meinung war nicht das, dass ich das 5. Amendment bzw. dessen Gebrauch an sich als unbeschädigt betrachten wollte.

Das 5. Amendment war wohl acceptiert, um es den Richterlichen Instanzen möglichst zu machen, dem Angeklagten <sup>ein</sup> durch Expression gegündet Geständnis zu Fall zu bringen.

In den gegenwärtig vorliegenden Fällen handelt es sich aber nicht um die <sup>gewaltfreie</sup> Expression von Geständnissen sondern darum, unter Missbrauch der Staatsgewalt Menschen zu Weisagen der Verfolgung von anderen zu machen, die man als „unorthodox“ auf wirtschaftlichen Wege verfolgen bzw. deren Existenz vernichten will.

Es ist ein Missbrauch der Parlamentarisch - Regierung, wenn Praktiken durchzuführen, die für das Gebiet der des richterlichen Gewalt (Polizei) fallen. Dies Verfahren widerspricht dem Geiste der Verfassung, wenn auch nicht dem Buchstaben der Verfassung, doch dem Wesen, wenn auch nicht der äusseren Form der Verfassung.

Dem Individuum ist kein legales Mittel geboten, sein natürliches Recht zu verteidigen. Deshalb habe ich behauptet, dass es hier nur den revolutionären Weg der non-cooperation gibt, wie er von Gandhi gegenüber der englischen legalen Macht mit so grossem Erfolge verwendet worden ist.

A. E.



# What are other Americans saying?

## Paul Robeson & Eleanor Roosevelt

“I will discuss Stalin when I may be among the Russian people someday, singing for them, I will discuss it there. It is their problem.”

Testimony of Paul Robeson before the House Committee on Un-American Activities, June 12, 1956.  
(George Mason University's History Matters)

“Whether he knows it or not, the Senator is doing harm in many ways to the standing of the United States throughout the world.”

“My Day, August 8, 1953,” August 8, 1853.  
(Franklin D. Roosevelt Library)





# Upcoming Programs

**INSIDE THE VAULT:** Join us in 2024!

- January 4, 2024: The San Francisco Earthquake and Fire with award-winning author Matthew Davenport
- February 1, 2024: Abraham Lincoln's refusal to pardon slave trader Nathaniel Gordon with Dr. Jonathan White (Christopher Newport University)
- March 7, 2024: The Overland Trail with Dr. Sarah Keyes (University of Nevada, Reno)
- April 4, 2024: Japanese Servicemen in World War II with author Bruce Henderson (winner of the 2023 Gilder Lehrman Military History Prize)

**BOOK BREAKS:** December 10 at 2 p.m. ET (11 a.m. PT)

- Theresa Runstedtler will discuss her book *Black Ball: Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, Spencer Haywood, and the Generation that Saved the Soul of the NBA*.

