

MARTIN DIES JR., THE HOUSE UN-AMERICAN ACTIVITIES COMMITTEE, AND
RACIAL DISCRIMINATION IN MID-CENTURY AMERICA

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DEDICATION

For Chell, Kylee, and Ethan.

ABSTRACT

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As global conflicts spiraled out of control in the late 1930s, many Americans became concerned about foreign threats, particularly from fascists and communists. This study examines how U.S. Congressman Martin Dies, Jr. (D-TX) used his authority as chair of the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) to transform the fear of communism into a powerful weapon against African American civil rights. Many historians have analyzed HUAC's suppression of free speech and its adversarial role toward Hollywood, but there is little research on how Dies used anti-communist rhetoric to thwart progress on African American civil rights. This paper illustrates how Dies' work with HUAC reinforced a nativist and segregationist attitude, which appealed to many of his constituents, and thereby enabled him to shape national policy from 1931 to 1959. Dies proved so successful, in fact, that his tactics were later replicated by other legislators in the 1950s and 1960s.

KEY WORDS: Martin Dies Jr., Anti-Communism, Civil Rights, House Un-American Activities Committee

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CHAPTER I

Introduction and Historiography

On May 26, 1938, Martin Dies Jr., a little-known Representative from the Second District of Texas, introduced House Resolution 282 in Congress. Modeled on an earlier proposal by Representative Samuel Dickstein of New York, Dies' resolution called on the Speaker of the House to appoint a special committee to investigate "the extent, character, and objects of un-American ... activities in the United States." In a subsequent speech supporting the resolution, Dies highlighted the threat posed to the U.S. by communists, fascists, Nazis, and their sympathizers. He argued that these totalitarian forces were bent on infiltrating the U.S. homeland, and that "exposure in a democracy of subversive activities is the most effective weapon we have in our possession." The majority of members in the House of Representatives agreed with Dies; they approved his resolution by a vote of 191-41 and allocated \$25,000 for his seven-member committee.¹

A few months later, as Dies prepared for the first major hearing of his new committee, he delivered a statement about the character of the investigative process. "[T]his Committee," he said, "is determined to conduct its investigation upon a dignified plane and to adopt and maintain throughout the course of the hearings a judicial attitude.... We shall be fair and impartial at all times and treat every witness with fairness and courtesy.... This Committee will not permit any 'character assassination' or any 'smearing' of innocent people." Indeed, Dies told reporters, "[i]t is the Chair's opinion

¹ Martin Dies Jr. quoted in Larry Ceplair, *Anti-Communism in Twentieth Century America: A Critical History* (Santa Barbara, California: Praeger, 2011), 27.

that the usefulness or value of any investigation is measured by the fairness and impartiality of the committee conducting the investigation.”²

Despite Dies’ promises to conduct fair and impartial hearings, his House Committee on Un-American Activities (HUAC) has long been regarded as a problematic, even dangerous, detour into demagoguery and extremism. In an October 1938 poll taken during the first months of Dies’ chairmanship, a pair of New York *Daily News* columnists found that only two of the eighteen reporters who regularly covered the hearings thought they were fair; eleven said they were unfair, and other reporters were unwilling to take a stand. The Communist Party USA called the Committee an “outfit of storm troopers” in its newspaper, *The Daily Worker*, and liberal critics at the *New Republic* and the *Nation* agreed.³ As one recent critic has noted, “Dies regularly accused the U.S. government of employing Communists, showcased ex-Communist and anti-Communist witnesses brandishing long lists of names, practiced guilt by association, and attempted to intimidate and bully unfriendly witnesses.”⁴

Although civil libertarians condemned Dies and his investigatory tactics, the general public seemed to approve of his efforts. In a Gallup Poll taken in December 1938, 74 percent of those who were familiar with the Special Committee approved of its work. Many respondents said that it helped to “keep our eyes open in the midst of all this world trouble,” and to “weed out those who want to overthrow the American system.” As a

² Martin Dies Jr. quoted in Walter Goodman, *The Committee: The Extraordinary Career of the House Committee on Un-American Activities* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1968), 27

³ *Ibid.*, 30-31.

⁴ Ceplair, *Anti-Communism in Twentieth Century America*, 28.

result of this broad support, the House of Representatives renewed the Special Committee in 1939 by a vote of 344-45 and increased its funding to \$100,000.⁵

The renewal of the Dies committee's mandate did not end debate over its purposes or tactics. In 1940, as critics highlighted Dies' heavy-handed mistreatment of witnesses, the chairman responded by publishing a book of his own titled *The Trojan Horse in America*. Drawn largely from testimony by J.B. Matthews, a former member of several leftist organizations who later became a conservative anti-Communist, Dies' book argued that hundreds of fascists, communists, and Nazis had infiltrated America through labor unions and civil rights organizations. An easy-to-read series of arguments, it generated even more public support for the congressman in an election year.⁶

By the early 1940s, however, news outlets around the country had turned a critical eye on Dies' efforts to find communists in America, calling his investigations politically motivated. A 1942 special investigation by *The Nation* criticized the congressman for playing on the public's fear of communism. Specifically, Willson Whitman attacked Dies' racial and nativist biases, suggesting that they had been formed long before in the conservative district that he represented. "In Dies' boyhood," Whitman wrote, his district "included a penitentiary, afterward an insane asylum, which housed a few aliens from other parts of the state; but this would only suggest that a foreigner must be either criminal or crazy." In addition, Dies' district employed the poll tax to disenfranchise "some 70,000 Negroes, and his "committee has sought to identify poll-tax repeal with the

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Robert M. Lichtman, "J. B. Matthews and the 'Counter-subversives': Names as a Political and Financial Resource in the McCarthy Era," *American Communist History* vol. 5, no.1 (2006): 5-7. By 1953, Matthews had been forced to distance himself from government investigations when he suggested FBI director J. Edgar Hoover believed Protestant churches were being led by communists. Roughly a year later, Matthews' new ally, Senator Joseph McCarthy, resigned from office due to highly inflammatory allegations he made against the Army on the issue of communism. "FBI Asked to Rule on Charge Matthews Made," *Daily Republic* (Mitchell, South Dakota), July 21, 1953.

Communist program.”⁷ Whitman’s article and others like it illustrated how journalists were investigating Dies’ background in order to expose his many biases.

In 1944, Northwestern University professor, William Gellermann, discussed the tactics and political problems created by HUAC in his work, *Martin Dies*. Gellermann made clear that he had read all the HUAC proceedings up to that point and that under Dies' leadership the committee had limited the rights of left-leaning Americans. In particular, he argued that Dies’ efforts had eroded faith in broad-based democracy by establishing a set of narrow principles to define what it meant to be a "good" American. His analysis showed how Dies manipulated people, defamed opponents, and elided liberalism, socialism, and communism into a single, monolithic threat.⁸

Although Gellermann only addressed Dies' social views in passing, he attacked Dies' hypocrisy regarding constitutional liberties. Gellermann argued that Dies publicly announced his intention to protect American liberties as outlined in the Constitution, but then attacked people whose ideas were contrary to his own.⁹ Any idea that did not coincide with Dies' ideology was problematic. “Dies fortifies his basic intolerance for anything new or different in America,” Gellermann wrote, “by pretending that anyone who favors change in our present system is a ‘radical’ or ‘Communist.’”¹⁰ Ultimately,

⁷ Willson Whitman, “Background of a Demagogue,” in *Martin Dies and his Committee on ‘Un-Americanism,’* a special supplement published by *The Nation*, October 3, 1942, 312, Martin Dies Papers, Box 40, File 22, Sam Houston Regional Library and Research Center, Liberty, Texas.

⁸ William Gellermann, *Martin Dies* (New York: The John Day Company, 1944), 150.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 152. Gellermann wrote of Dies, “If you destroy a man's reputation by false accusation, against which he has no legal recourse, and thus deprive him of means of making a livelihood, you actually impose upon him a penalty just as if he had committed a legal crime. And after a few outstanding individuals have been destroyed in this manner, for thinking differently, or for participating in organizations which think differently, a state of fear can be created in the minds of less resolute individuals which, in time, permeates the rank and file American people and effectively discourages and stops all effort to bring about social change by constitutional means of freedom of speech, freedom of assembly, and freedom of press.” It would seem Gellermann was prophetic in that his analysis describes how McCarthy was able to grasp power in the early 1950s by using mere allegations to get what he wanted.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 252.

Gellermann argued, Dies was little better than Hitler, Stalin, or Mussolini when it came to free speech and thought.¹¹

In 1968, Walter Goodman released an even more comprehensive book, *The Committee: The Extraordinary Career of the House of on Un-American Activities*, which discussed the various stages of HUAC from the 1930s to the 1960s. Goodman argued that Nazism, fascism, and communism were the initial investigation targets, but that it was communism that became the committee's consistent focus. He discussed how different committee members directed attacks at various organizations, with Hollywood's supposed connection to communism being a favorite subject for several of the investigators.¹²

Though Goodman did not give much attention to Dies' personal story, he did address how the Congressman stifled civil liberties. Indeed, Goodman masterfully examined the groundwork that Dies laid down for Senator Joseph McCarthy's Red Scare tactics in the 1950s by showing how Dies used fear and suspicion to generate support. Furthermore, Goodman discussed how Dies was able to use the liberal policies of President Franklin Roosevelt to his own benefit so that Dies could attack liberalism and big government. Both attacks would have found favor among many in Dies' congressional district where many constituents saw big government as dangerous.

The most comprehensive scholarly treatment of Dies and his work was done by Dennis Kay McDaniel. In his 1988 University of Houston dissertation entitled *Martin Dies of Un-American Activities: His Life and Times*, McDaniel argued that Dies' personal views and prejudices shaped his efforts with HUAC. Dies' views were not only from his

¹¹ Ibid., 150.

¹² Walter Goodman, *The Committee: The Extraordinary Career of the House Committee on Un-American Activities*. (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1968).

home congressional district, however, but also from his father who had been in the House of Representatives two decades prior. Martin Dies father, Martin Dies Sr., McDaniel argued, was extremely nativist and suspicious of anything progressive. Furthermore, using here-to-fore unavailable congressional records, McDaniel illustrated how Dies' father fought to defend white supremacy, something Dies Jr. did as well, especially when it came to his stance on racial segregation.¹³

Since the fall of the Soviet Union, Cold War scholars have divided into two opposing camps on the role of government leaders fighting communism. Some have argued that U.S. officials were justified in their efforts to find and destroy communist threats by citing evidence of foreign espionage from newly-opened Russian archives. In addition, the Venona Papers, released in the mid-1990s, detailed how the U.S. had secretly intercepted years of Soviet activity and how politicians such as Martin Dies and Joseph McCarthy's efforts to investigate alleged American subversives were legitimate. The data in the Venona Papers has been confirmed by Russian sources and has had a wide impact, even on public education. Texas education leaders have since revised state standards to show how Dies and McCarthy were justified in their effort to hunt for communist spies and saboteurs.¹⁴

Other historians point out, however, that the hunt for alleged spies infringed upon citizens' rights and delayed social progress. The social equity component of communism caused some American politicians to delay reform fearing the roots of such progress were

¹³ Dennis McDaniel, "Martin Dies of Un-American Activities: His Life and Times" PhD diss., University of Houston, 1988.

¹⁴ Landon R. Y. Storrs, *The Second Red Scare and the Unmaking of the New Deal Left* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2012), 3-4.

Soviet-inspired. These historians argue that it was fear of communist subversion that stifled social progress for the next several decades.

But the Cold War had a much wider impact than just the role of communism and subversives. It was also a cultural battle. In his book *The Second Red Scare*, Landon R.Y. Storrs showed how historian Richard Hofstadter argued it was also a battle about the future of America. On the domestic scene, the conflict was between religious conservatives and nativists on one hand and liberals and social progressives on the other.¹⁵ For many Americans, foreign points of view were not to be welcomed but disdained, which had been the case for years. Therefore, when the Soviet Union became a growing and threatening force, nativists and social conservatives felt their prejudice toward outsiders was justified. To this segment of American society, liberalism was equated to communism.

Academic research and analysis of the Cold War is expansive. Numerous scholars have studied the foreign relations and economic components of the American and Soviet rivalry. But, in the United States, the modern Civil Rights Movement gained traction just as the Cold War reached its zenith. It was a daring time for social progress to become a national issue given the tense political atmosphere.

The number of scholars focused on social reform during the Cold War has grown in the past fifteen years. Mary Dudziak's *Cold War Civil Rights* (2000) and Thomas Borstelmann's *The Cold War and the Color Line* (2001), both examples of this work, examine how an emerging civil rights movement became intertwined with foreign relations during the Cold War. Dudziak, in particular, illustrates how the administrations

¹⁵ Landon R.Y. Storrs, *The Second Red Scare and the Unmaking of the New Deal Left* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2012), 2012, 5.

of Harry Truman, Dwight Eisenhower, John Kennedy, and Lyndon Johnson each handled the developments of civil rights reform amidst a growing tension with the Soviet Union. She discusses how each of the presidents handled foreign criticism over domestic racial inequities and how their reactions helped shape civil rights reform.¹⁶

Dudziak and Borstelmann's research has served as catalysts for other scholars to examine how anti-communism affected civil rights reform. For example, Jeff Woods explores how southern segregationists used anti-communist rhetoric to deny blacks' votes and racial equality. Woods describes how Martin Dies fashioned the House Un-American Activities to investigate communist threats to combat liberalism, which Dies equated to communism.¹⁷

This new perspective has had a dramatic impact and continues to inspire additional work. As far back as 1994, historian John Egerton discussed Dies' role in the anti-communist, anti-civil rights efforts of the 1930s and 1940s. In his work, *Speak Now Against the Day*, Egerton argued that Dies played a critical role in sustaining white supremacy before World War II by linking northern and southern lawmakers under the guise of anti-communism.¹⁸

Despite Egerton's work, there is more to do with Dies. This thesis links his background, family, and education to his political attitudes and resistance to change. The thesis shows that Dies was a bigoted, racist, anti-immigrant politician who used his position of authority in the Congress of the United States to stall reforms for African

¹⁶ Mary L. Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights: Race and the Image of American Democracy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 14-17.

¹⁷ Jeff Woods, *Black Struggle, Red Scare: Segregation and Anti-Communism in the South, 1948-1968* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2004), 70-71.

¹⁸ John Egerton, *Speak Now Against the Day: The Generation before the Civil Rights Movement in the South* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1994), 173-174.

American civil rights. Furthermore, I show that Dies pursued his backward-looking, Anglo-centric politics at two crucial times in our nation's history. First, as Adolf Hitler and Benito Mussolini advanced in Europe during the late 1930s and 1940s. And, then again, in the 1950s and 1960s, during the United States' early standoff with Joseph Stalin and the Soviet Union. In order to understand Dies' positions, it is my intent to illustrate how white, East Texan, segregationists supported Dies and helped him to remain in office as one of the region's most important national representatives.

One of the most difficult parts of my research was locating sources that explicitly detail Martin Dies' prejudice. The Sam Houston Regional and Research Center in Liberty, Texas was invaluable in providing a vast amount of Dies' correspondence with other legislators and constituents. His replies to constituents were fairly consistent unless those in his congressional district were writing on the issue of race. Dies' policies against racial equality were clear, but the Liberty, Texas archive does not seem to have a robust collection of his responses to clearly racist rhetoric from constituents. There could be two reasons. First, it could be Dies practicing caution in responding to inflammatory letters; he was, after all, a cunning politician. Or, it is also possible the records could have been censored by non-State actors prior to the papers' submission to the Liberty, Texas archive. Several researchers believe someone in Martin Dies' estate could have sanitized some of the more sensitive racial information before the documents were submitted to the institution. Despite this setback, I aim to show how Dies used his position to stop racial progress by instilling fear of widespread communist manipulation in the African American community.

CHAPTER II

The Dies Family

Like so many other Texas stories, the Dies' family narrative begins in the 1870s, during the tumultuous days of Reconstruction. As Radical Republicans at the state and federal levels attempted to remake Texas' racist political order, David Wesley Dies (1842-1889) moved his wife and children the 250 miles from Jackson Parish, Louisiana, to Fairfield, Texas. As a former Confederate soldier, Dies had little sympathy for the reform efforts then taking place in the Lone Star State. Rather, he had traveled with his family across the border to establish a new home on affordable land with fresh opportunity.

Born in June 1842, Dies had been raised in a farming community in Pike County, Mississippi. According to his family's oral tradition, young Dies attended Tulane University in New Orleans and then taught for a time in his home state before being drafted into the Confederate army at 19 as a Private in the Seventh Regiment of the Mississippi Infantry.¹⁹ Dies and his regiment fought in several skirmishes, including the Battle of Atlanta, when Union general William Tecumseh Sherman overwhelmed and defeated Confederate troops near the South's largest city. Dies' hatred for Sherman and union forces created a legacy for his family against federal government interference in the South.²⁰

¹⁹ Historical Data Systems, comp. *U.S., Civil War Soldier Records and Profiles, 1861-1865* [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations Inc, 2009. Dies joined the Amite Rifles Company in 1861 in Southeast Mississippi, not far from the Louisiana border. National Archives and Records Administration (NARA); Washington, D.C.; *Compiled Service Records of Confederate Soldiers Who Served in Organizations from the State of Mississippi*; Series Number: M269; Roll: 160

²⁰ "Battle Unit Details." National Parks Service. Accessed September 18, 2018. <https://www.nps.gov/civilwar/search-battle-units-detail.htm?battleUnitCode=CMS0007RI>.

Following the war, Dies married the sister of a “war-time buddy,” Sallie Jane Pyburn. The daughter of Jacob Pyburn and Catherine Pettyjohn, Sallie had gained social standing in Louisiana based on the large slave plantation that her family owned prior to the Civil War.²¹ Eventually, Dies and Sallie moved to Freestone County in East Texas with other families. There, he developed a reputation for serving as a doctor as well as an administrator for a nearby all-women's school, Fairfield College.²² Dies passed away in 1889 as a respected white citizen of the community who served both the Confederate Army as well as his new Texas community.

The East Texas region to which Dies and his family moved was a rural, heavily forested area with a extractive lumber industry. Towns were generally small, however, and the soil was only marginal, leaving many local people to lead lives as impoverished farmers. Like other parts of the South, there was a chasm between those in poverty and the ruling elite who held regional power and wealth. And it was David Dies that had set a precedent in this respect for the next two generations. His son and grandson would both try to live up to the reputation he achieved in Texas.

Martin Dies (1870-1922), the third child born to David and Sallie, moved with his parents to Freestone County, Texas, in 1876. He attended public schools in Texas and claimed to have earned a law degree from the University of Texas.²³ He was admitted to the Texas bar in the early 1890s and established his own practice in Woodville and Beaumont. After attempts at law yielded little income, he served as district attorney for

²¹ Francis White Johnson, *A History of Texas and Texans, Volume 3* (Chicago: The American Historical Society, 1914), 1520.

²² Ibid. See also: James David Carter, *Education and Masonry in Texas, 1846 to 1861* (Waco Grand Lodge of Texas, 1964); Freestone County Historical Commission, *History of Freestone County, Texas* (Fairfield, Texas, 1978); Donald W. Whisenhunt, *The Encyclopedia of Texas Colleges and Universities* (Austin: Eakin, 1986).

²³ Dennis K. McDaniel, “The First Congressman Martin Dies of Texas,” *Southwestern Historical Quarterly* vol. 102, no. 2 (Oct. 1998): 132-133.

the First Judicial District of Texas in 1898. Yet, even this did not work to his advantage. A few months later, in debt to his friend John Henry Kirby, Dies resigned his post and took his wife, Olive Cline Blackshear, and two daughters to live in Colorado City. It was there that his son, Martin Dies, Jr., was born on November 5, 1900.²⁴ Two years after his son's birth, Dies and his family moved back to the familiar Piney Woods of East Texas. Presumably the infant oil industry lured him back to the area because by 1905 he was serving as an attorney for the J.M. Guffey Petroleum Company and was an outspoken critic of Standard Oil.²⁵

In 1908, Martin Dies Sr. ran against incumbent Samuel Bronson Cooper to represent the Second Congressional District of Texas in Congress. A one-time friend of Cooper and his powerful ally, Senator Joseph W. Bailey, Dies became an anti-Bailey candidate because he said that his old colleagues refused to tell the truth about the oil industry in Texas. As an example, Dies played up allegations that Bailey had taken \$2,500 to work with the Waters-Pierce Oil Company, which had been banned from Texas for anti-trust violations linking it to Standard Oil. Sharing this story throughout the district, Dies also ridiculed Cooper's most serious achievement, a \$600,000 federal appropriation to build a waterway linking Beaumont with the Port Arthur Ship Channel. Dies argued that the cost of the project was excessive and called for a halt to federal expenditures for river improvement projects in Texas. Although the *Marshall Messenger* and other regional papers lambasted Dies, saying that he wanted to return Texas to the

²⁴ Ibid.,136-138

²⁵ "Hit the Pipe Lines: Committee Listened to Draft of New Oil Company Bill by Autrey," *Galveston Daily News*, February 25, 1905.

“Ox-Cart Days of Civilization,” he proved a tenacious candidate. Dies outspent the incumbent Cooper, \$4,724 to \$1,800, and won the election by a narrow margin.²⁶

Once in office, Dies proved to be as conservative as any of his contemporary Democrats from Texas. He was an outspoken opponent of immigration, a stance he would consistently hold throughout his congressional career.²⁷ He believed only a few countries were able to practice democracy which fueled his argument to reduce immigration by saying, “We live in a republic based on intelligence...If it is to be made a success, we must have the right kind of people in it.” “Mexico,” Dies noted, “has the same constitution, but it is a failure. I don’t care what kind of laws you give Mexico, she will be incapable of self-government. They can’t set up free government in Austria, Italy, or Russia because they haven’t citizens with the patriotism and intelligence to do it.”²⁸

Furthermore, he argued that only white, English-speaking immigrants should be widely accepted into American society. “The Irishman is one of us,” Dies told his constituents, “and [he] makes a good citizen. He is a natural politician. You don’t have to explain our form of government to him. He doesn’t have to have political bosses tell him how to vote.”²⁹

Dies could afford to speak with such open disdain for racial and ethnic minorities because his home state had established numerous procedural hurdles to keep people of color from voting. The white-only primary, for example, kept African American politicians and voters from participating in the Democratic Party -- the state’s only viable political party. In addition to the racial limitations imposed by the white primary, each

²⁶ “Col. Martin Dies,” *Marshall Messenger* (Marshall, Texas), January 28, 1908.

²⁷ McDaniel, “The First Congressman Martin Dies of Texas,” 141,144.

²⁸ “Bars Up to Aliens,” *The Washington Post*, January 31, 1914.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

Texas county could choose to employ a poll tax to help finance government functions. Obviously, this tax fell hardest on impoverished populations in Texas.³⁰ For poor blacks and whites, the franchise was a difficult right to budget for throughout the year. To Martin Dies Sr., though, upholding the white power structure was paramount, and only favored groups, he believed, would ensure the status quo. It was a stance later to be emulated by his son when he entered the House of Representatives.

Using humor and charisma, Dies Sr. ridiculed socialism, liberalism, and government activism, just as his son would do later through his House of Un-American Activities Committee.³¹ Dies Sr. also believed in white superiority over other races. He felt that racial minorities needed moral guidance that could only be found in the white community. As a result, he often spoke in support of the poll tax, racial segregation, and other limitations on African American rights. In addition, he encouraged white women to avoid the public and political spheres of power. In fact, he denounced women's suffrage, suggesting it would only inhibit the role that women played as mothers and wives at home. Anything that threatened the established order was to be met with scorn; social progress was not something to work toward, but to avoid. Again, his son took the same lead twenty years later by equating social liberalism to communism.³²

³⁰ This was an amendment to the Texas Constitution via referendum with a very divided outcome. Those supporting the poll tax amendment numbered just over 200,000 people. However, the statewide opposition vote was just over half, coming in at 107, 748. To see that big of an opposition illustrates how a large minority of voters felt the tax was oppressive in nature. 27th Congressional Session, SJR. 3. Election date November 4, 1902. <https://lrl.texas.gov/legis/billsearch/amendmentdetails.cfm?legSession=27-0&billtypeDetail=SJR&billNumberDetail=3&billSuffixDetail=&amendmentID=31>. Accessed October 10, 2018.

³¹ "Dies on Socialism: Warns the People Against Being Led Astray by the Sophistries Advanced by Advocates of this Doctrine – Reply to Criticisms," *Marshall Messenger* (Marshall, Texas), April 2, 1912.

³² McDaniel, "The First Congressman Martin Dies of Texas," 144, 154.

In 1919, after ten years in Congress, Dies Sr. voluntarily left the House of Representatives due to health concerns and returned to private life in Kerrville, Texas. He found retirement monotonous, however, and planned to run for national office again in the early 1920s. Dies' hopes to return to Washington D.C. were not meant to be, however. In 1922, he had emergency surgery for an appendicitis, and died shortly thereafter due to complications that arose during the procedure.³³ In his obituary, one of Dies' close allies said that he "was a typical East Texan of the great pine woods kind—kind hearted, broad minded, liberal in his likes and dislikes, a hard worker and in most respects a good man, having his faults, of course, in keeping with many others, who have occupied official position."³⁴

Martin Dies Jr. was in the formative years of his career by the time his father passed away. A young man of twenty-two, he had been raised in Beaumont and Greenville, Texas, and had attended the public schools in both cities. In 1918, he graduated from Beaumont High School, and two years later completed a Bachelor of Laws degree at National University in Washington, D.C. In 1920, Dies Jr. was admitted to the Texas State Bar, and that same year he married his long-time sweetheart, Myrtle M. Adams. The couple first established a home in Marshall, Texas, before Dies moved his legal practice to Orange, Texas, at the time of his father's death in 1922.

Significant changes for Dies and the nation came in the next eight years. He became a district attorney for southeast Texas close to the Louisiana border, but he left the position in 1924 citing medical reasons.³⁵ Despite the setback, Dies helped maintain

³³ *Ibid.*, 157-158.

³⁴ *Brownwood Bulletin* quoted in "Former Congressman From Beaumont Dies Following Operation," *Comanche Chief* (Comanche, Texas), July 21, 1922.

³⁵ "State Happenings," *The Houston Post* (Houston, Texas), September 2, 1924.

a law firm with his legal partner, K.W. Stephenson. The duo appeared to handle both criminal and civil cases; *The Houston Post* indicated in late September 1924 how Dies and Stephenson yielded a positive result for a murder defendant and how defenders, "...showered with congratulations from fellow lawyers..."³⁶ A few months later, the *Corsicana Daily Sun* ran an article detailing how Dies and Stephenson were hired to represent a Harris County plaintiff suing the Sun Oil Company and others for illegally moving onto the plaintiff's Orange County land for the purpose of extracting natural resources, including oil.³⁷ After the Spindletop oil discovery almost thirty years earlier, land disputes like these were widespread in Southeast Texas.

But just as Dies was entering adulthood and establishing a professional law career, the American social fabric was being stretched and torn. Social scientists in the 1920s had developed a racial ranking system known as eugenics which placed whites at the top of an intellectual pyramid with blacks at the lowest intelligence level. For many segregationists, this "scientific" theory only confirmed their decades-long argument for the need of social stratification and division; black and white co-mingling, in their view, was not only morally reprehensible, but also contrary to science. It was in this environment that Dies came of age.

Although Dies proved to be a successful lawyer and district judge, he aspired to play a role in national politics as his father had done. In 1930, tiring of small-time life in East Texas, he ran against his father's replacement, the six-term incumbent Democrat from Texas' Second Congressional District, John C. Box of Jacksonville. During his

³⁶ "Orange Witnesses Severely Criticized," *The Houston Post* (Houston, Texas), September 24, 1924.

³⁷ "Heavy Damages are Sought in Orange Suit Against Sun Co.," *Corsicana Daily Sun*, January 26, 1925.

campaign for office, Dies sold himself as a populist who “advocated restricted immigration, relief of unemployment, curtailment of monopolies and trusts, and farm relief.”³⁸ Although Dies rarely criticized Box directly, he left no confusion about what he supported: farm laborers, small businesses, limited government, and, of course, white supremacy. Linking these ideas together in March 1930, Dies told a group of Beaumont residents that his grandfather, David Wesley Dies, had served as a valiant Confederate soldier during the Civil War. Fighting to protect his homeland and way of life from the rapacious forces of northern aggression, David Dies had proudly stood up for Texas and the South. When the war was over, Martin Dies Jr. explained, Southern troops faced many of the same economic problems that plagued the South in 1930. They had not given up, however. “[H]ad these heroes in gray [coming] home to their desolate places, set [sic] down ... and explained, 'All is lost,'” Dies told the Beaumont audience, “the south today would be ruled and governed by ignorant niggers instead of intellectual whites.”³⁹ Indeed, Dies himself promised to stand up for the South when he won election to Congress. To make his point clear, he targeted the first African American congressman to be elected in the twentieth century, Oscar De Priest, a fifty-nine-year-old native of Alabama who represented Chicago. Dies told an audience in Center, Texas, that De Priest’s election and presence in Congress presented a “gross insult to the memory of a torn and bleeding South.”⁴⁰

In July 1930, the Democratic voters of Texas’ Second Congressional District selected Martin Dies Jr. to represent them in the general election by more than 7,400

³⁸ “Many Hear Address of Martin Dies,” *Marshall News Messenger* (Marshall, Texas), June 29, 1930.

³⁹ McDaniel, “Martin Dies of Un-American Activities,” 108.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 124.

votes, thus assuring his election in November in the single-party Texas district.⁴¹

Although Dies obviously enjoyed his electoral victory, he and his new congressional colleagues faced a monumental crisis when they entered office in 1931. At that time, the United States was in the throes of the worst economic depression in the nation's history. Unemployment stood at nearly 25 percent, and thousands of banks had closed taking with them the savings of millions of Americans. The young congressman blamed big business and banks for many of the economic problems then plaguing the nation. He also denounced the three Republican administrations of the 1920s for failing to enforce anti-monopoly regulations. Dies believed that lax government oversight had allowed the economic disparities between rich and poor to grow.⁴²

As Dies began campaigning for re-election in 1932, he also spoke out in favor of his fellow Democrat, New York Governor Franklin Roosevelt, who successfully challenged the Republican incumbent, Herbert Hoover, in that year's presidential election. Following his successful bid for reelection, Dies welcomed President Roosevelt's New Deal into East Texas, highlighting programs like the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) and the Agricultural Adjustment Act (AAA).⁴³ Dies' early position on the New Deal won widespread approval in his district. In 1934, for example, a constituent wrote the congressman to request help. The elderly man said he suffered from rheumatism, had little family assistance, and needed Dies to help him secure some type of financial relief. Dies replied that he understood the man's predicament and hoped

⁴¹ "Dies Wins Congress Seat of Veteran Box," *Kerrville Mountain Sun* (Kerrville, Texas), July 31, 1930.

⁴² "Martin Dies Has a Viewpoint," *Austin American-Statesman* (Austin, Texas), June 21, 1931.

⁴³ "Congressman Assists in Caddo Park Plans," *The Marshall News Messenger* (Marshall, Texas), November 18, 1934.

to soon be able to offer some form of federal elderly relief.⁴⁴ In other letters, Dies intimated that he supported such a project to help senior citizens in his district.⁴⁵ In this case, at least, he proved open to federal intervention on the local level.

But, like his father, Martin Dies Jr. was a Southern populist who was uncomfortable with Northern liberals, foreign immigrants, and big government. As historian Walter Goodman has argued, Dies was a “representative of the hill people of east Texas, more than ninety percent of them of undiluted Anglo-Saxon stock.” As such, the congressman “epitomized an entrenched, embattled suspicion of big cities, big capital, big labor, and big government, as well as of foreigners, big and small, whom he perennially proposed to deport.”⁴⁶ In fact, Dies’ proposal in Congress, made the day after he took his seat in 1931, was to suspend immigration to the United States for five years. He believed, like some others of the era, that America’s unemployment problems were primarily the result of the flood of foreigners who had been allowed to emigrate to the United States during the previous three decades.⁴⁷

Dies linked his stance against immigration with the growing tide of labor activism taking place in the mid-1930s. In 1934, for example, he led the opposition to Congressman Samuel Dickstein’s proposal to relax immigration restrictions by allowing over 1,200 law-abiding aliens to stay in the U.S. beyond their deportation deadline. Dickstein proposed that Secretary of Labor Francis Perkins determine on a one-on-one basis which families could remain. Dies opposed the bill, however, and stated that he

⁴⁴ T.J. Smith to Martin Dies Jr., March 27, 1934, Martin Dies Papers, Box 5 File 1, Sam Houston Regional Library and Research Center, Liberty, Texas.

⁴⁵ Martin Dies Jr. to Mrs. M.E. Durrett, April 3, 1934, Martin Dies Papers, Box 5 File 1, Sam Houston Regional Library and Research Center, Liberty, Texas.

⁴⁶ Goodman, *The Committee*, 20.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

believed immigrants would popularize “un-American” ideas, such as communism, in the United States. Dickstein was furious over the defeat of his deportation bill. “Ninety-eight per cent of the members [of Congress] didn’t know what the bill contained,” he said. “They were stampeded by a handful of clannish – or Ku Klux Klannish – hypocrites posing as immigration restrictionists.”⁴⁸

Dies was not deterred by such criticism. In fact, he pushed even further in June 1935. Speaking “under the auspices of more than 100 patriotic societies ...over the National Broadcasting System,” Dies called for “immediate passage of his bill to permanently stop immigration from every country.” His bill also called for the deportation of 3,500,000 aliens, which he said were unlawfully in the United States, and the reassignment of 6,000,000 jobs from aliens to Americans.⁴⁹ Following his June 21 radio address, Dies reiterated his points on July 4 at an independence event in the central Texas town of Belton. Before a crowd estimated at 20,000 persons, Dies said that he deplored the “use of America as a dumping ground for the populations of other nations,” and insisted that his anti-immigration proposal echoed the sentiments of George Washington who said that “he wished that an ocean of fire separated America from Europe.”⁵⁰

Despite Dies fiery rhetoric and obvious distance from mainstream Democratic Party politics, he remained on good terms with President Roosevelt. In April 1936, after the president and other New Dealers had moved to the left, Dies continued to call upon the country to “keep in the White House that great leader of the plain people, the

⁴⁸ “Stay is Ordered for 1200 Aliens,” *Austin American Statesman*, June 22, 1934.

⁴⁹ “Congressman Martin Dies,” *Fredericksburg Standard* (Fredericksburg, Texas), June 13, 1935.

⁵⁰ “Martin Dies Reiterates Alien Deportation Plan,” *Waco News Tribune* (Waco, Texas), July 5, 1935.

Jefferson and Jackson of the twentieth century, our present and future president, Franklin D. Roosevelt.” Even a year later, after the failure of Roosevelt’s infamous Court Packing Plan and repeated disagreements between Southern Democrats and their nominal allies in Northern cities and industrial unions, Dies remained a Democrat.⁵¹

⁵¹ Goodman, *The Committee*, 52-53.

CHAPTER III

Martin Dies, 1938-1944

As American politicians and members of the press struggled to understand the economic recession of 1937, they also had to focus on disturbing developments in international affairs. In Russia, Joseph Stalin had consolidated power by eliminating his political rivals, and Chancellor Adolf Hitler had done the same thing in Germany. Hitler's power in Germany was growing, fascism under Benito Mussolini had Italy constrained, and Stalin's use of imprisonment and starvation was stifling any form of political competition. Social and political changes were occurring around the world and many Americans feared these forces would spread into the United States.

Taking advantage of American concerns, Representative Martin Dies Jr. called on his colleagues in the House of Representatives to create a new standing committee on Un-American Activities. Approved in 1938, Dies' committee started as an investigative force looking into the influence of communism, Nazism, and fascism in the United States. Dies was able to foster popular support for his committee by launching his investigations in the summer of 1938, when Washington newspapers were looking for news stories as congress was out for summer recess.⁵²

After gaining authorization from the House of Representatives, seven congressmen manned the House Committee on Un-American Activities. Dies served as the chairman and was assisted by Southern Democrat Joe Starnes from Alabama and two Republican House members, Noah Mason (Illinois) and J. Parnell Thomas (New Jersey).

⁵² Goodman, *The Committee*, 27.

Each of these officials proved to be highly critical of President Franklin Roosevelt and complained that he had usurped too much power.⁵³

One of the men curiously absent from Dies' committee was New York congressman Samuel Dickstein. A few years earlier, Dickstein had helped form a committee to investigate the threat of fascism in the United States. Dickstein was a Lithuanian Jewish immigrant who was concerned by the growing threat Hitler posed to religious minorities in Europe and believed the dictator could attract followers in America. Dickstein's committee tried to investigate over 100 fascist organizations but was unable to garner substantial congressional support.⁵⁴ That Dickstein was Jewish does not seem to have been an issue for Dies. Dennis McDaniel, for instance, points out that Dies held no prejudice toward a Jewish neighbor in East Texas as a youth.⁵⁵ However, Dickstein's liberal leanings in addition to his immigrant status posed an ideological threat to Dies.

In August 1938, Dies started his committee by declaring a non-partisan approach. "This committee is determined to conduct [its operation] upon a dignified plane and to adopt and maintain throughout the course of the hearings a judicial attitude. The committee is determined at all times to be fair and impartial and to be concerned solely with one objective, the ascertainment of truth."⁵⁶ Dies knew he would have to create a neutral public display of investigation. If not, there was a high probability his efforts would be criticized by opponents.

⁵³ Gellermann, *Martin Dies*, 65.

⁵⁴ Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore, *Defying Dixie: The Radical Roots of Civil Rights, 1919-1950* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2008), 71-72.

⁵⁵ McDaniel, "Martin Dies of Un-American Activities," 96.

⁵⁶ "Dies Committee to Open Probe Friday," *Leader-Telegram* (Eau Claire, Wisconsin), August 10, 1938.

Dies began investigating Nazi sympathizers who had ties to Hitler by summoning witnesses to testify in Washington. Soon after, he and his colleagues began looking into the suspected connection between the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) and the Communist Party.⁵⁷ Dies had been an outspoken opponent of the CIO's sit-down strikes in major plants during 1936 and 1937, and had even complained that President Roosevelt had not done more to address the issue. "If there ever was a time when men in high public office should come out against a threat to law and order," Dies told the press, "that time is now."⁵⁸ He demanded an investigation into the causes of the strikes and an evaluation of their legality.⁵⁹ As a result of his consistent opposition to the CIO and the strikes, the *El Paso Times* described Dies as a "young Texas Red-baiter...[who led]...a group of super-patriot flag wavers."⁶⁰

Throughout the rest of 1938, the Dies committee continued to investigate what it deemed suspicious activity. Dies and his colleagues found a new target in the fall of 1938 in the form of Michigan governor, Frank Murphy. Dies accused Murphy of being weak on communism by alleging that Murphy had not done enough to curb the CIO's sit-down strikes in General Motors plants. But as Walter Goodman points out, Dies' attack was political in nature. Murphy was a liberal friend of Roosevelt's, and Dies could not stand to see the Democratic Party associated with the CIO strikes in Michigan. Dies believed

⁵⁷ Goodman, *The Committee*, 25-29.

⁵⁸ "Chrysler and Lewis to Confer: Both Agree to Meet with Murphy – Auto Magnate Insists on Rights," *The Times-Tribune* (Scranton, Pennsylvania), March 23, 1937.

⁵⁹ "Senate Splits on Amendment Hitting Strikes," *The Pittsburgh Press* (Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania), April 3, 1937.

⁶⁰ "The Daily Washington Merry-Go-Round: Revenge," *El Paso Times* (El Paso, Texas), July 1, 1934.

he could use his investigation to prevent Murphy's re-election as governor in 1938 and thereby curb any linkages between the sit-ins and the Democrats.⁶¹

President Roosevelt responded to the attack on Murphy. In a long statement, he called Dies' hearings "a flagrantly unfair and un-American attempt to influence an election" and defended his friend Murphy against the attack. Roosevelt also asked that the committee "abandon the practice of merely providing a forum for those whose political purposes, or otherwise, seek headlines which they could not otherwise attain." Unfortunately, however, Roosevelt compared Murphy's refusal to use the National Guard to dislodge the CIO demonstrators at the Fisher body plants in Flint, Michigan, to the recent agreement British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain had secured in Munich, Germany, with Adolf Hitler. "People may properly differ as to the results of such negotiations," Roosevelt said, "but the fact remains that bloodshed was diverted."⁶²

Dies was not convinced. When two of his colleagues on the House Committee requested that he temper his remarks about Murphy and other "radicals" until after the November 1938 election – in which they both faced considerable opposition – Dies responded defiantly. "I wish to make in plain," he said, "that I shall continue to do my duty undeterred and unafraid."⁶³

By 1939, Dies had shifted his focus to Earl Browder, the secretary of the American Communist Party. This move was prompted, in part, by the fact that the Soviet Union signed a non-aggression pact with Hitler's Germany in the summer of 1939. Browder, the Communist Party U.S.A. secretary, was summoned by the Dies committee to testify on Russia's intentions and to say if there were subversives currently residing in

⁶¹ Goodman, *The Committee*, 49-52.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 50-51.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

the United States. His testimony revealed that a fractious relationship existed between the Communist Party of the United States and Moscow. But Browder's information also led to other high-ranking Communist Party officials' testifying about their existence in the United States. This helped reaffirm Dies' allegations of a domestic communist presence during a time of great international instability.⁶⁴

As Dies pressed for more information, the committee also learned of the American League for Peace and Democracy, an organization with some communist members originally focused on international peace in the early 1930s. Dies had the organization's chairman, Dr. Harry Ward, testify to the committee about communist activity within the league, which Ward denied. Ward, a Methodist preacher, did acknowledge to Dies though that he believed Soviet workers would have stood a better chance of a peaceful life as compared to living in a fascist state. Goodman argues Ward's soft stance did not satisfy the committee's investigators, which led to Dies calling for the league's names, mostly government officials with ties to New Deal.⁶⁵

By September 1939, Dies' accusations against the American League for Peace and Democracy, along with his committee's interrogation of Earl Browder, was yielding attention. The *Philadelphia Inquirer* noted how Dies had to calm a hearing involving Browder's testimony when Republican New Jersey congressman J. Parnell Thomas argued the New Deal was colluding with communists. The league had attracted positive attention of high profile New Deal proponents, such as Secretary of Interior Harold Ickes.⁶⁶ But Thomas' allegation was countered by a New Mexico congressman,

⁶⁴ Ibid, 64-67.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 69-71.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 66.

Democrat John Dempsey, who argued that Thomas' rhetoric was highly inappropriate.⁶⁷ Dies was creating an atmosphere of division to bolster his image as a patriotic American.

Dies' committee gained notoriety by summoning people to testify to the congressmen on allegations of fascist, Nazi, or communist ties. Even though three ideologies were targeted, it was mainly the threat of communism that became the committee's focus, a product of a lack of congressional oversight. This was to be a problem throughout Dies' chairmanship.

Opponents of Dies denounced his committee because they believed his efforts trampled personal freedoms. If a group of Americans wanted to adhere to radical ideas, some commentators said, they were protected by the First Amendment. Dies and his fellow committee members argued otherwise. "True liberals have nothing to fear from an honest investigation," Dies said. "They are as much opposed to Communism as the rest of us."⁶⁸ While Dies and his colleagues believed that the First Amendment was critically important to the republic, they did not believe that its protections were absolute. Subversive forces bent on undermining American democracy could be discovered and defeated only through vigilance

People summoned to testify about their fascist, Nazi, or communist ties did so in Washington and not in a criminal court. The Dies committee had no power to find someone guilty or sentence them to jail time. However, the atmosphere was judicial in nature. Those testifying were allowed to be examined by the congressmen, giving the hearings a courtroom aura. Furthermore, if the committee felt the person testifying

⁶⁷ "Dies Group in Furor in New Deal Attack," *The Philadelphia Inquirer* (Pennsylvania, Pennsylvania), September 7, 1939.

⁶⁸ "Dies Probe Extended Year by 344-35 Vote," *The Morning News* (Wilmington, Delaware), February 4, 1939.

violated a federal law, they could turn their case over to the Federal Bureau of Investigation, headed by J. Edgar Hoover.

One target Dies and his colleagues addressed from the start was the International Labor Defense (ILD). In August 1938, HUAC committee members questioned Margaret Kerr, executive secretary of the Los Angeles Better America Federation, about her affiliations with communists. In the hearing, she named, among others, the ILD as a communist organization.⁶⁹ The link between the ILD and the communist party was no secret. J.B. Matthews, the lead investigator for the House committee, identified the ILD as a communist organization, and the ILD's efforts on behalf of the ill-fated Scottsboro Boys were well known.

In 1931, nine black teenagers riding on a train in northern Alabama were arrested for allegedly raping two white women who were prostitutes. Although there was no physical evidence against the boys, a local all-white jury decided that all but one of the "Scottsboro Boys" was guilty. As a result, the Communist Party U.S.A., looking to build support among southern black Americans, came to the prisoners' assistance through the ILD.⁷⁰ The ILD paid for attorneys to represent the Scottsboro Boys and ridiculed America's pretentious claims of equality for all and due process of law. Although one of the white women eventually recanted, several of the accused boys sat in prisons for years. Dies was not bothered by the obvious miscarriage of justice that occurred in the Scottsboro trials. What alarmed him and most other white segregationists was the communist connection to the case. As Thomas Borstelmann has argued in his book, *The*

⁶⁹ "Fight Officials Designated 'Red,'" *Gaffney Ledger* (Gaffney, South Carolina), August 20, 1938.

⁷⁰ Jeff Woods, *Black Struggle Red Scare: Segregation and Anti-Communism in the South, 1948-1968* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2004), 19-20.

Cold War and the Color Line, many southern whites believed that “blacks [were] especially inclined to subversion or to manipulation by revolutionaries because of their secondary status.”⁷¹ To counter this threat, the Dies committee “assumed legislative, executive, and judicial powers in dealing with minority groups in the United States. In doing so, it ... followed the totalitarian pattern which it so vigorously condemn[ed] across the water [in Nazi Germany, fascist Italy, and communist Russia.]”⁷²

Although Dies believed African Americans were inferior to whites, he adopted an inclusive tone in regard to white Americans in 1939. He commented on the subject at a business-owners meeting in Baltimore.

When you strike down the liberties of the humblest among us, you strike down the rights of the greatest among us. The United States is a land of minorities, religious and racial, so when you hit at one of these groups you injure the rights of the individual citizen.... We must get away from the talk of Italian-Americans, German-Americans or Jewish Americans. We are all Americans who love this country and we must affirm our faith in this country by an aggressive belief in the doctrines of the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence.⁷³

Everyone did not buy into Dies’ public rhetoric concerning equality. A week later, the *Pittsburgh Courier*, an African American newspaper, ran an article that discussed how the NAACP had recently sent Dies a letter asking him to investigate the Ku Klux Klan (KKK) and lynching, especially after his committee had recently been re-authorized by Congress with a \$100,000 budget.⁷⁴ The NAACP had developed a reputation for using

⁷¹ Thomas Borstelmann, *The Cold War and the Color Line: American Race Relations in the Global Arena* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2001), 24.

⁷² Gellermann, *Martin Dies*, 148.

⁷³ “Hatred in U.S. Will Destroy Democracy, Dies Declares,” *The Evening Sun* (Hanover, Pennsylvania), February 13, 1939.

⁷⁴ “Dies Again Asked to Probe Ku Klux,” *The Pittsburgh Courier* (Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania), February 18, 1939.

the court system as a means of fostering equality, and it was now using the publicity of Dies' committee to do the same. Dies was silent on the NAACP's request though.

Dies' silence helped racially charged groups. Three days after the *Pittsburgh Courier's* story involving the NAACP, a North Carolina newspaper, *The Rocky Mount Telegram*, printed an article describing how the German-American Bund, a white nationalist group, had met in New York's Madison Square Garden and applauded when Martin Dies' name was mentioned. According to the same article, Francis Perkins and other influential FDR advisors and supporters' names were jeered at by the same crowd.⁷⁵ Dies' relative silence on specific racial reform was giving ammunition to openly prejudiced groups.

Three months later, the *Pittsburgh Courier* reported that HUAC committee members indicated they would look into a letter from the NAACP about Florida KKK members who were intimidating black voters. The newspaper indicated several committee members signed onto the NAACP investigation, but Dies' name did not appear on the response to the civil rights organization. Dies' inaction spoke volumes on how he felt on racial inequality.⁷⁶

Dies continued to make investigations into un-American, subversive activities throughout 1939. In January, he was named one of greatest Americans, coming in fifth place, even out-performing President Franklin Roosevelt.⁷⁷ And by the fall of that year, his public comments were helping him with a Gallup poll indicating fifty three percent of

⁷⁵ "Nazis Stage Demonstration in Madison Square Garden," *Rocky Mount Telegram* (Rocky Mount, North Carolina), February 21, 1939.

⁷⁶ "Members Promise Investigation if Action is Decided," *The Pittsburgh Courier* (Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania), May 27, 1939.

⁷⁷ "Cordell Hull Voted Greatest American," *Jefferson City Post-Tribune* (Jefferson City, Missouri), January 19, 1939.

those surveyed favored his committee with only fourteen percent against it.⁷⁸ It appeared Dies' investigations were welcomed by the majority of Americans. And, the next year would prove to be even more fruitful.

The summer of 1940 helped Dies remind southern white prejudiced supporters he wanted their support. A McAllen, Texas newspaper, *The Monitor*, published an article which seemed to substantiate Soviet influence among southern blacks. The newspaper cited how John Leech of Portland, Oregon, had once been a California Communist party leader and testified to Dies' committee. "Leech said it was one of the absolute requirements of the Los Angeles branch of the party that Negroes be on an equal social footing with whites. He said members of the two races mingled at dances, picnics and other social functions, as well as at meetings." Further, he reported that "Enfranchisement of Negroes was planned....There were three methods of doing this: abolish poll tax, pass legislation to assure rights for Negroes, and repeal all existing Jim Crow laws. The plan presently calls for education and persuasion, but force will be used when the party has more power, to obtain these privileges, Leech asserted."⁷⁹

Leech's testimony certainly fed into Dies' manic feelings about African American subversion and the communist threat. With the 1940 presidential election just a few months off, Dies claimed that he was going to ask the American people to demand that Franklin Roosevelt and Wendell Willkie promise to "outlaw these un-American organizations." Dies said the candidates were "scared stiff, both of them, that they might

⁷⁸ "Public Backs Dies: Majority Tells Gallup 'Ism' Probe Should Go On," *The Atlanta Constitution* (Atlanta, Georgia), November 1, 1939.

⁷⁹ "Equal White, Negro Rights Held Red Aim," *The Monitor* (McAllen, Texas), July 19, 1940.

antagonize a few votes in next month's election."⁸⁰ By claiming both candidates were afraid, Dies appeared determined to "purify" American politics no matter the costs.

At the same time, Dies told reporters that he had thousands of names of suspected traitors living in the United States and was ready to hand them over to FBI. "His committee, he said, is preparing a list of 300,000 alleged fifth columnists which will be turned over to the State department and Federal Bureau of Investigation. 'Unless we wake up and act to purge public pay rolls and defense industries of fifth columnists, we will find ourselves confused and helpless like France,' he said."⁸¹ Both actions, his pressure on presidential candidates and his information for the FBI, made it seem Dies was becoming more bold in his interactions with the rest of the government. But Dies also needed a central place to distribute his ideas on Communism's threat to southern whites. In late October, he would release his analysis of what he had discovered in the previous two years in his role as chairman of HUAC.

He expanded his publicity even more by releasing a book, *The Trojan Horse in America*, which was designed to showcase foreign influences in the United States. Even though Dies' name appeared on the cover, the work was mainly the product of former communist sympathizer-turned- HUAC investigator, J.B. Matthews. And Matthews' bias came through in the book. Although Dies' committee was authorized to investigate any foreign subversion, Matthews would use his knowledge of communist activities to help guide public opinion toward Dies' criticism of communism in the United States.

J.B. Matthews was a perfect mouthpiece for Dies. Matthews had been born into a conservative Kentucky family and entered missionary work in Asia in his twenties; it was

⁸⁰ "Dies Reveals 5th Column's Power in U.S.," *Palladium-Item* (Richmond, Virginia), October 20, 1940.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

this global experience which liberalized him.⁸² By the late 1920s, Matthews was back in the United States teaching in a Tennessee college and becoming more vocal about the racist treatment of southern blacks. He became active in the Socialist Party and over time came to believe violent revolution was the only way to deal with wealth inequality.⁸³ He went on to visit the Soviet Union, but over time in the 1930s, his views changed: he witnessed massive Eurasian poverty with little government relief. He returned to the United States, wrote an autobiography entitled *Odyssey of a Fellow Traveler* in which he described his political change of heart.⁸⁴ This was the perfect writer for Dies to use against communism.

Dies and Matthews also discussed the threats of Nazism and fascism to America but focused most of their attention and page space on communism. They rejected the concepts of social equality and centralization of power that, they said, communists believed. An entire chapter -- "A Trojan Horse For Negroes" -- focused on how civil rights for African Americans was a Soviet-inspired program, giving a detailed portrait of Dies' feelings about racial equality. Dies explained how he believed Russian instigators lured southern blacks into the communist front. The black man "is told the only country which recognizes his rights is Soviet Russia," Dies wrote, "and that the only political party which will battle for his emancipation is the Communist Party of the United States."⁸⁵ Dies viewed the arguments as absurd and went on to attack communist Russia's history as a reason to delay civil rights reform. "[N]o pains have been spared to condition the Negro people for revolutionary doctrines and plans....Negro publications are

⁸² Nelson L. Dawson, "From Fellow Traveler to Anticommunist: The Odyssey of J.B. Matthews," *The Register of the Kentucky Historical Society* 84, No. 3 (Summer 1986): 281-283.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 287.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 287-294.

⁸⁵ Martin Dies, *The Trojan Horse in America* (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1940) 119.

encouraged to attack the white race; and communist publications, pamphlets, and throw-aways are distributed on a large scale among the Negro citizens of the United States.”⁸⁶

Dies' rhetoric here is again part of the residual disdain for outside interference in the South, especially through empowering blacks. East Texas and the rest of the South, according to Dies and other Southern Democrats, was best under white control so blacks could be monitored, not liberated. His attitude was still very reminiscent of the concerns of many former southern white political leaders, including his father and grandfather: blacks given any form of freedom would result in all-out race war. And by no means should an outside entity be allowed to comment on the social situation and white power in the south. Outside questioning often did not cause self-reflection in the white south status quo but elicit a posture of defense.

Dies understood the limitations of East Texas blacks, but chose not to act on their behalf. He conceded this by including a passage from a communist publication describing political power in the south. “It is they [the whites] who appoint all officials, it is they who dispose of public property, it is they who determine the taxes, it is they who govern and make the laws,” the pamphlet said. “Therefore, the overthrow of this class rule in the Black Belt is unconditionally necessary in the struggle for the Negroes' right of self – determination.”⁸⁷

Following the inclusion of this pamphlet excerpt, Dies argued that “only reformists and foreign agents who seek to capitalize upon prejudice...to promote the interests of their foreign masters” make such arguments.⁸⁸ By no means was this a congressional attempt to address political reform for blacks. Dies had already proved he

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 123-124.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 118.

was uninterested in minority reform. In fact, this just shows how he was dismissive of any type of action in the name of racial equality. But it does illustrate the more the Soviets seemed to push for equality, the more Dies resisted in the name of southern white autonomy and prejudice.

At the national level, even Franklin Roosevelt was reluctant to act on civil rights; he believed taking such a public stand on the issue would jeopardize support from Southern Democrats. His relative inaction was a product of what he believed was political survival. However, Eleanor Roosevelt, known for her role in social causes, advocated for civil rights reform. Dies criticized her willingness to speak before the National Negro Congress (NNC), which was considered one of the most radical black civil rights groups in the country. Mrs. Roosevelt's speech advocated racial equality, and Dies argued that her acceptance of the NNC speaking opportunity placed her in league with well-known communists.⁸⁹ He was ready to denounce any type of social reform, fearing communist infiltration while at the same time not addressing African Americans' concerns. And, by citing the First Lady as being complicit with an alleged communist infiltration, he was able to create a narrative that made him appear more patriotic than even the those affiliated with the White House.

While Dies conceded that there were occasional tensions between the races in the South, he dismissed them by saying, "but upon the whole there is no other country on the face of the earth where two distinct races enjoy such friendly relationships."⁹⁰

Gellermann points out how Dies tried to defend his stance on protecting blacks.

Communist forces using race as an attack "would not be willing to stop with economic

⁸⁹ Ibid., 292-293.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 118.

regimentation. They would interfere with our religious and personal rights as well. These people were fanatical and drunk with power."⁹¹

While Dies went after groups and individuals who wanted to empower southern blacks, one well-known African American stood up for blacks' civil rights. A. Philip Randolph, who organized the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, fought for black workers to get fair pay for their work. When World War II broke out, Randolph even threatened President Roosevelt with a March on Washington if black defense workers continued to be racially discriminated against. But he had ties to communist supporters, making him a threat.⁹²

Randolph was attacked in *The Trojan Horse in America* with Dies denouncing strikes as “an important method of sabotaging the whole capitalist system...strikes are, from the standpoint of the Communist Party, indispensable for developing class consciousness in the minds of workers.”⁹³ For Dies, an influential black equal rights activist was extremely problematic for keeping the white southern status quo; he viewed Randolph as a threat to the southern white power machine to organize blacks that could jeopardize whites' power.

However, Jennifer Luff, author of *Commonsense Anticommunism: Labor and Civil Liberties Between the World Wars* suggests Randolph was once critical of Dies' committee but became quasi-supportive when the National Negro Congress came under the direct influence of the Communist Party. She argues Randolph was upset the civil

⁹¹ Gellermann, *Martin Dies*, 250.

⁹² Woods, *Black Struggle, Red Scare*, 177-178.

⁹³ Dies, *The Trojan Horse in America*, 128, 136.

rights organization had been corrupted by Moscow's influence.⁹⁴ However, Gellman suggests Randolph denounced HUAC and Dies for what he saw as Dies' racist and anti-union's stances. Instead, he wanted to continue to fight institutionalized racism through "liberal anti-Communism."⁹⁵ Either way, Randolph wanted to fight Jim Crow and racism without becoming involved with the Communist Party or Moscow. But, even the slightest connection to communism was enough for Dies to blow out of proportion and defame civil rights reform and leaders as pure communists.

Dies tried to address how the South was a great place for African Americans. He argued, "It is certain that the Negroes in the United States enjoy more liberties and a higher standard of living than the Negroes in any other country, and that communist success in this country would plunge the Negro race into slavery." Further, he argued, "The thinking Negroes of our country realize this, and they are successfully combating the insidious wiles of Moscow's influence. Under our free institutions, the Negro has made great progress in the United States. Despite propaganda and misrepresentation, he lives in peace with the white people of the South."⁹⁶

Dies attempted to show how the southern blacks and whites were harmonious with one another, when in actuality, there had been centuries of degradation and prejudice. Publicly, he tried to make himself appear as sympathetic to African

⁹⁴ Jennifer Luff, *Commonsense Anticommunism: Labor and Civil Liberties Between the World Wars* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 177. Luff discusses how the National Negro Congress had slowly become more open to communist ties. But it is also interesting to note how the organization also denounced the extension of Dies' committee under Congress' approval. See also: Gellermann, *Martin Dies*, 188. Dies' overt racism had not yielded him positive results. Had he addressed the group's concerns, perhaps he would have more moderate support; but that would have also alienated him from much of his electorate.

⁹⁵ Erik S. Gellman, *Death Blow to Jim Crow: The National Negro Congress and the Rise of Militant Civil Rights* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 151, 158.

⁹⁶ Dies, *The Trojan Horse in America*, 118.

Americans. For example, as a metric, Dies argues there had been a decrease in black lynching. He suggested that such a decrease in deaths was a banner of reform, not legal protection. Dies was clearly for the status quo and against any social reform.

The Trojan Horse in America was released a week prior to the 1940 election. He hoped his book would sell well and garner both attention and respect. Dies, running unopposed, won 43,597 votes.⁹⁷ The spring of 1941 was especially fruitful for Dies when it came to support from fellow white southern political leaders. In February, Dies' committee was attacked by another congressman on the issue of extending HUAC's authorization. The *Altoona Tribune* reported how "Representative Rankin of Mississippi leaped to his feet as a defender of the Chairman of the Dies Committee and administered a verbal spanking to the defamer that found great favor with the entire House."⁹⁸ What is noteworthy about the interaction is that Rankin would later come to chair HUAC in the late 1940s after Dies' departure from Congress. He was one of the most racist and intolerant of the members, even more so than Dies himself. However, Rankin's actions make it seem both were from the same cloth.

A month later in March, Dies found more support from Mississippians. The *Stone County Enterprise* ran an opinion piece from the *Winona Times* outlining how the South's current social conditions were satisfactory for blacks and how Dies felt communism had not infected the south to any serious degree. The newspaper quoted Dies as saying, "It is a tribute to the negroes that they have withstood the most part of the work of these [communist] agents." The newspaper went on to elaborate, "The South is the

⁹⁷ Compiled by Leroy D. Brandon and South Trimble, "Statistics of the Presidential and Congressional Election of November 5, 1940," <http://history.house.gov/Institution/Election-Statistics/Election-Statistics/>, accessed June 16, 2018.

⁹⁸ "News from Washington," *Altoona Tribune* (Altoona, Pennsylvania), February 19, 1941.

least non-American section of the country, her population being composed largely of either native-born, straight-out Americans or their direct descendents [sic]; and the negroes of the South, as a rule, being better satisfied with their condition and treatment than are the negroes of the North.” In addition, the paper reported, “Any Southern negro, who behaves himself, works and attends to his business without meddling in politics, is sure of plenty of work and living among congenial surroundings. When the mealy-mouthed politicians from the North talks to negroes about their place in politics, their equal social rights and privileges, it is then that the trouble begins and the negro alienates himself from his best friends, the white people of the South. Communism has no chance among satisfied people.”⁹⁹

The tone of the opinion piece is similar to that of Dies’ opinions found in *The Trojan Horse in America*. Dies and the *Winona Times* writer were distrustful of foreign countries and the federal government. And both parties failed to acknowledge the inequities between southern blacks and whites. It is also interesting to note Winona, Mississippi, is located around forty miles east of Money, Mississippi, the site of the brutal murder of Emmett Till fourteen years later. Social hierarchy meant everything to some in the south and found a mouthpiece through Dies.

Dies was given another racial gift two months later when *The Oshkosh Northwestern* published a story detailing how a HUAC investigator testified that the American Peace Mobilization “sought to sabotage production of the Glenn L. Miller aircraft factory by infiltration of Negro communist workers.”¹⁰⁰ The newspaper included

⁹⁹ “Communism and the Negro,” *Stone County Enterprise* (Wiggins, Mississippi), March 13, 1941.

¹⁰⁰ “Move to Sabotage Plane Production Revealed in Probe,” *The Oshkosh Northwestern* (Oshkosh, Wisconsin), May 22, 1941.

specific totals provided by investigator Mary Spargo of those involved with the alleged sabotage creating even more credibility to the article. The paper described the infiltrator's motivation as an effort to "exploit racial and social prejudices [to] foment strikes and hamper defense efforts." Reportedly, "The plan was to have 30 to 100 Negroes with communist sympathies apply at the Martin plant each day.... By that method the A.M.P. hopes to get 7,000 Negro workers into the plant... [She said] 'They [alleged communist organizers] talked of strikes continually. They said they were out to get General Motors. They talked about [subverting] big and little steel [companies].'"¹⁰¹

Dies was already against civil rights reform. And he also opposed workers organizing. He spent two chapters in *The Trojan Horse in America* to attack unionists by arguing they were similar to communists in terms of worker unity on the grounds of equality. But, the alleged use of black workers to organize strikes only cemented his fear of collectivized efforts among one of America's impoverished groups. Many white southerners rejected black labor's participation in unions.¹⁰² Less than a week later, Dies objected to the A.M.P.'s presence in the United States on the premise it served as a Soviet organization.¹⁰³ The episode with the A.M.P. was another example Dies could use to shape white southern public opinion against black equality and was used by other southern politicians to retain power.¹⁰⁴

In February 1942, Dies faced criticism for his lack of action on the Ku Klux Klan. Though the KKK was historically an American group, some feared the members' far-

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Robert Woodrum, "The "Culture of Unity" Meets Racial Solidarity: Race and Labor on the Mobile Waterfront, 1931-1938," *Journal of Southern History* 84, No. 4 (November 2018): 886.

¹⁰³ "Dies Brings His Senate Campaign to Austin Park," *The Austin American* (Austin, Texas), May 29, 1941.

¹⁰⁴ Gilmore, *Defying Dixie*, 351.

right stance on race could be considered an arm of Hitler's Nazi party. According to *The New York Age*, the National Negro Congress wrote an open letter asking citizens to contact their representatives to end Dies' committee because of the lack of attention given to the terroristic actions of the KKK.¹⁰⁵ The National Negro Congress was a group that had a Communist connection; it was a group Dies was correct on. But, because it had a Communist influence, it helped many against equal rights to be against civil rights legislation. The timing of the letter though is unmistakable. Dies' committee had to be re-authorized each year, and it was up for renewal. In early March, Dies succeeded with a 331-46 vote and an expense account granted for \$300,000.¹⁰⁶

By late March though, Dies' investigative credibility started to wane. On March 30, the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* reported how Dies squared off with Vice President Henry Wallace by accusing Wallace's Board of Economic Welfare of employing almost forty people with ties to communist organizations. Wallace, who assisted President Roosevelt throughout World War II, retaliated by saying "Mr. Dies and others of his kind with an intense itch for publicity' might as well come from Paul Joseph Goebbels, the Nazi propaganda chief."¹⁰⁷ The Vice President was starting to chip away at Dies' credibility.

Less than a week later, Samuel Dickstein, the congressman who laid the foundation of Dies' committee in the 1930s, was quoted in *The Times* from Shreveport, Louisiana, criticizing Dies by saying, "[the committee] has outlived its usefulness and become a prime instrument for disunity...Personally I have never been able to believe

¹⁰⁵ "National Negro Congress Urges Scrapping of Dies Committee as 'A Menace' to Unity," *The New York Age* (New York, New York), February 21, 1942.

¹⁰⁶ "Dies Committee Given Renewal," *Miami Daily News-Record* (Miami, Florida), March 12, 1942.

¹⁰⁷ "Dies, Wallace Hurl Counter 'Smear' Claims," *The Brooklyn Daily Eagle* (Brooklyn, New York), March 30, 1942.

that being a liberal is a crime in a democracy.... With really dangerous people still available for his activities, Dies still is hunting Communists, forgetting that the Communists of Russia are turning a war job that may be the salvation of the democracies.”¹⁰⁸

It appeared Dies’ history of attacking his enemies was catching up with him. Attacks against the committee persisted, and in the fall of 1942 the *Lubbock Morning Avalanche* reported Dies was criticized by the National Federation for Constitutional Liberties (NFCL) when it urged the Justice Department to investigate Dies for using “his high office to shield and protect persons now charged with active participation in conspiracy to impair the ‘loyalty, morale and discipline of the military and naval forces of the United States’ through publication and dissemination of literature urging the obstruction and defeat of our national defense against aggression and invasion.”¹⁰⁹

The article suggested that Dies had not been completely truthful when it came to investigating potential American threats. In other words, the civil liberties group believed his committee’s reputation had been compromised. And with the United States at war, the NFCL appeared to insinuate Dies’ divisive actions were “un-American.” Less than a month later, *The Pittsburgh Courier* explained how the NFCL asked Attorney General Francis Biddle to investigate a Beaumont beating and shooting of a black soldier that was allegedly assisted by the KKK and local police. The article went on to cite how the action created social division that would damage the war morale and how Dies represented the district.

¹⁰⁸ “Dies Sponsor Says Committee Not Useful,” *The Times* (Shreveport, Louisiana), April 3, 1942.

¹⁰⁹ “Probe of Dies is Asked by Group,” *Lubbock Morning Avalanche* (Lubbock, Texas), August 8, 1942.

By 1943, Dies appeared to be somewhat more attentive to the role KKK was playing in the United States. That was in large part due to the growing number of race riots breaking out across the country in response to African Americans feeling marginalized during the war. The *Detroit Free Press* reported in June that after riots had broken out in Detroit, Dies was investigating whether foreign agents had any role in the violence. The article at first discussed the HUAC testimony of the possibility of Japanese agents serving as race-baiters to cause trouble. But the article went on by saying, “Recent testimony given the committee by officials of the Ku Klux Klan...that the KKK had enrolled many members in the Detroit area. Whether the committee would inquire further into the KKK activities, Dies did not say”¹¹⁰.

According to the newspaper, Dies did not take a stand on the rise of Detroit’s KKK. After the war started, thousands of southern blacks had moved to northern cities to find jobs. Racial tension was an issue. But the newspaper went on to describe John Rankin’s view of Detroit. Rankin was an adamant supporter of Dies, and the *Detroit Free Press* quoted him on the issue of eliminating the poll tax. Rankin complained that “those ‘who supported the anti-poll tax measure’ recently passed by the House [were seeing] ...‘their chickens are coming home to roost.’” “Detroit,” he said, had “suffered one of the most disastrous race riots in history. This trouble has been hastened by the crazy policies of the so-called Fair Employment Practices Committee in attempting to mix the races in all kinds of employment.”¹¹¹

Though Dies did not make a public statement regarding the KKK’s actions, the fact that Rankin weighed in on the issue of race is telling. Both men benefitted from the

¹¹⁰ “Riots to Be Probed by Dies Committee,” *Detroit Free Press* (Detroit, Michigan), June 1943.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

poll tax as it prohibited poor black voters from participating in politics. But Dies was a cunning politician who knew when to keep quiet on such sensitive issues, while Rankin was quite vocal about his prejudices. Despite pressure on Dies to stand up for equality, his political alliances illustrated on how he stood firm on an anti-civil rights platform.

CHAPTER IV

Dies: Leaving and Re-Entering Politics

As the United States turned the tide of World War II in 1944, Martin Dies decided not to run for re-election. His credibility had slipped during the early war effort, and he had been defeated by Wilbert Lee "Pappy" O'Daniel in the 1941 U.S. Senate race. Dies also feared that the consistent throat pain he suffered might be cancer.¹¹² Depressed and dejected, he gave up his congressional seat and returned to Texas.

Although Dies was out of Congress, he had created an important legacy that remained in place in Washington D.C. Dies' House of Un-American Activities Committee was still present and in need of another spokesperson. At the same time, the Roosevelt administration and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People had been slowly securing more civil rights for blacks. Fearing a change in regional leadership, HUAC found a new cheerleader in Mississippi House member, John Rankin who was adamantly anti-civil rights and made the committee a permanent part of the House.¹¹³ When Rankin ran for the Senate in 1947, a Greenwood, Mississippi newspaper, *The Greenwood Commonwealth*, ran an election ad trying to garner votes based on Rankin's anti-communist stance and opposition to blacks civil rights by denouncing perceived northern mass black political activism.¹¹⁴ Rankin employed the

¹¹² McDaniel, "Martin Dies of Un-American Activities," 493-494, 502-511.

¹¹³ Woods, *Black Struggle, Red Scare*, 25-27.

¹¹⁴ The newspaper article is entitled, "Choose Your Senator Wisely" with a sub-section entitled "Communism" describing Rankin as congressman who, "did not wait until these traitors [embedded communists] could get their hands on the ATOMIC BOMB, and plant one under every public building in America. Being a skilled parliamentarian, he took time by the forelock, and forced through an amendment to the House Rules, creating the Committee on Un-American Activities." The advertisement goes on to discuss the issue of race in another sub-section called "White Supremacy" which explains Rankin's stance on civil rights as, "Everyone who believes in WHITE SUPREMACY should support John Rankin for every enemy of the white people of the South is opposing him. A gang of Northern negroes, headed by Joe Louis, the negro prize fighter, are circulating a petition, and asking for a million signers, to deny MR. RANKIN

same tactics as Dies. The Texas Democrat's concerns about communism and race had now become a permanent component of the federal government, legitimizing racist white southerners' efforts.

Dies had left Congress just prior to a tumultuous period of international activity. By 1945, President Roosevelt had died, propelling the relatively new politician, Harry Truman, to the White House. World War II had ended, and the United States had become a superpower with the use of two atomic bombs dropped over Japan. Although the Truman administration kept America's atomic program top secret, the Soviet Union was able to detonate its own atomic bomb in 1949, much sooner than Americans had predicted.

On the domestic front, Truman seemed to give at least tacit support to civil rights activists. Thomas Borstelmann argues that while Truman was a product of a Missourian, he had held intolerant, racist views about African Americans when he was younger. But, he largely dismissed these ideas while working in the White House by supporting blacks' civil rights, a trend slowly started under the Roosevelt administration.¹¹⁵ But Dudziak argues many white southerners believed he would support them racially because of his border state background; they were mistaken.¹¹⁶

One of his notable actions was his work toward equality in the military. He understood the pressures of war; he had served in World War I as part of the Missouri National Guard and believed the experience shaped who he was. He understood the importance of military unification and integrated the military branches in 1948 by

his seat in the Senate...They have even carried their campaign into Kentucky." "Choose Your Senator Wisely," *Greenwood Commonwealth* (Greenwood, Mississippi), October 28, 1947.

¹¹⁵ Borstelmann, *The Cold War and the Color Line*, 48-49.

¹¹⁶ Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights*, 24.

executive order, thus ending the decades-long tradition of separating white and black servicemen. Civil rights supporters praised his actions while racial equality critics denounced his actions, which will come up later.¹¹⁷

Civil rights activists also found new hope after World War II ended. While black soldiers fought racism in Europe, many carried the same sentiment back with them, causing many whites to bolster their support for Jim Crow, even over spreading democracy abroad.¹¹⁸ Blacks had economically benefitted from the war too. Many had become accustomed to earning "fairer" pay for their work on the home front.¹¹⁹ While the war had caused massive destruction in Europe and the Pacific and created hardship at home, it also helped democratize pay to a degree across the racial spectrum.

But, Truman was also able to garner support from both races when he made the controversial move toward using loyalty review boards for those in government positions. While civil libertarians denounced his policy as intrusive, his actions legitimized efforts from civil rights groups like the NAACP who had been denouncing communism and trying to disprove the narrative that racial equality was a Soviet idea, a narrative promoted by Dies a decade earlier.

But, the NAACP's efforts after the war to totally end the publicized link between civil rights reform and communism was unsuccessful. HUAC, under the influence of white Southern Democrats, kept investigating the supposed communist connection to the civil rights movement. Under the leadership of Rankin, HUAC created two reports after the war purporting to show how communists had infiltrated the South. One focused on

¹¹⁷ Brian Burnes and Donna Martin, *Harry S. Truman: His Life and Times* (Kansas City, MO: Kansas City Star Books, 2003), 46-47.

¹¹⁸ Borstelmann, *The Cold War and the Color Line*, 54.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*

the Southern Conference for Human Welfare, or SCHW, which was formed in response to a Roosevelt project tracking poverty levels in the South and was conducted by southerners. Opponents dismissed the SCHW because they felt some whites and blacks had combined efforts to fight for equality with communists' help.¹²⁰ The other HUAC attack was on the Civil Rights Congress in 1947. The committee attacked the CRC for having communist members who were bent on disrupting the United States. Some, upset by the committee's label, left the group, but others remained active in the organization.¹²¹ Having the reputation of being a communist front was not going to be easy to confront institutionalized racism. What was also troubling for the CRC was that it did in fact have communist members, giving HUAC some credibility in its allegations.¹²²

However, a year earlier the National Negro Congress, a CRC affiliated group, asked the United Nations (UN) for assistance. The UN had recently been formed in the aftermath of World War II to help promote peace and the rule of law. Knowing the UN's mission, the NNC called on the organization for support in reaction to years of racist treatment of southern blacks in the United States. A year later, The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People acted similarly, appealing to the UN to look into prejudiced policies against blacks.¹²³ To make matters worse for many Southern Democrats, a former US ally said the NAACP allegations should be investigated.¹²⁴

Southern Democrats ridiculed the NNC and NAACP for taking their complaints to the United Nations. White Southerners despised outsiders looking into the South, especially in the name of reform. The legacy of Reconstruction still had many on edge; in

¹²⁰ Woods, *Black Struggle, Red Scare*, 29-30.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 31.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 31

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 44.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 44-45

their minds, a broad and foreign organization had no business criticizing the South. And, now that the Soviets appeared to be siding with the NAACP's argument, many Southern Democrats became even more opposed to civil rights. The country that had been seen as an enemy, now seemed to officially want to look into the South.

Much of this southern resentment toward the UN is seen in Dies' constituent and support letters. One Dallas woman wrote to him from the mid-1950s, when he returned to Congress, urging him to, “get us out of that dreadful evil foe – the United Nation, [sic] and get it out of the United States.”¹²⁵ It was just this type of independent and isolationist mentality which helped him return to Congress.

The 1948 presidential election proved to be divisive for the Democratic Party. Although President Truman was from a border state, his moderate stance on civil rights fostered anxiety among many white Southern Democrats. He had already desegregated the military and civil service, and southerners feared he might do more. A schism erupted with several Southern Democrats splintering from their traditional party to create a short-lived third party, the Dixiecrats. Although Truman ultimately won the election, the surge of support for Dixiecrats in the South revealed how contentious cold war civil rights would become.

Making matters worse, in the early 1950s, U.S. Senator Joseph McCarthy of Wisconsin was struggling in his re-election bid, so he used the press to allege numerous Americans were colluding with the Soviets to subvert the United States. His actions were well-timed. The USSR had a growing atomic weapons program, and China had recently

¹²⁵ Mrs. Donald Martin to Martin Dies Jr., Martin Dies Papers, Box 138 File 13, Sam Houston Regional Library and Research Center, Liberty, Texas.

turned to communism. As a result, McCarthy garnered widespread support when he accused high profile Americans of being communist sympathizers.

It was at this time, in 1952, that Dies re-emerged on the political scene.¹²⁶ Running for an at-large congressional seat from Texas, he had local and national support. Anti-communists and white conservatives in Texas voted for him, and Senator McCarthy even said he was happy to see him running for office again.¹²⁷ When the votes were counted in the seven-man at large race, Dies won the election by a wide margin. Four days after the July 26 Democratic primary, Dies had received 601,998 votes, John Lee Smith of Lubbock had 218, 660, and Phil Hamburger of Houston, in third place, had 102,123.¹²⁸ Smith conceded the election, even though it was not clear that Dies had received a majority of the vote. “Accept my congratulations on your splendid victory,” Smith wrote Dies. “While the returns indicate a runoff, in such event I will not contest, believing that you deserve the victory by virtue of your great vote of confidence.”¹²⁹

Dies wasted no time capitalizing on his win. On August 1, he told the International News Service: “I propose to resume where I left off and finish the job of House-cleaning I started in 1935. I am better prepared than 15 years ago, better informed, [and] more mature.” He blamed communist control “over much of the earth on the Red ‘fifth column’ rather than on military conquest,” and provided a key reason for returning to the fight. “[S]ome of our finest youths are shedding their blood [in Korea] to stop

¹²⁶ McDaniel, "Martin Dies of Un-American Activities," 548-566.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 548-550.

¹²⁸ “Smith Concedes Victory To Martin Dies; Runoff Election Is Not Necessary,” *Vernon Daily Record* (Vernon, Texas), July 30, 1952.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*

[Communism],” Dies said. “We stand committed to resist the aggression of Communism” all over the globe.¹³⁰

Upon his return to Congress in 1953, however, Dies encountered another issue that became the central focus of his second stint in congress: school desegregation. Two years earlier, in 1951, a class action lawsuit had been filed against the Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas, in U.S. District Court. The named plaintiff, Oliver Brown, and twelve other parents represented 20 children. Together, they called for the school district in Topeka to end its policy of racial segregation in the schools. Although the District Court ruled against the parents and children, the NAACP appealed the *Brown* case to the U.S. Supreme Court, where it was merged with four other cases: *Briggs v. Elliott* (South Carolina), *Davis v. Prince Edward County* (Virginia), *Gebhart v. Belton* (Delaware), and *Bolling v. Sharpe* (Washington, D.C.).¹³¹

As the Supreme Court prepared to hear oral arguments in the case, President Truman’s Justice Department submitted a friend of the court brief in December 1952 emphasizing foreign-policy concerns related to school segregation. In particular, the brief noted that racial segregation in schools had negative effects on the U.S. in the Cold War struggle with the Soviet Union. People of color around the world then gaining independence from European colonial powers looked to the United States for support and leadership. Yet, the Truman administration’s brief warned that the “existence of discrimination against minority groups in the United States has an adverse effect upon our relations with other countries. Racial discrimination furnishes grist for the Communist propaganda mills, and it raises doubts even among friendly nations as to the

¹³⁰ “Dies Blames Control on Fifth Column,” *Courier-Gazette* (McKinney, Texas), August 1, 1952.

¹³¹

intensity of our devotion to the democratic faith.”¹³² Likewise, the brief devoted almost two pages to a lengthy quote from acting Secretary of State Dean Acheson who said that the “United States is under constant attack in the foreign press, over the foreign radio, and in such international bodies as the United Nations because of various practices of discrimination in this country.”¹³³

After two sets of oral arguments in 1953, the Supreme Court issued a unanimous decision against racial segregation in schools on May 17, 1954. The new Chief Justice, Earl Warren, wrote the landmark decision, which overturned the longtime precedent established in *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896). Writing that racial segregation of schools was “inherently unequal,” Warren sided with the NAACP’s argument that the 14th Amendment’s Equal Protection Clause required an end to public school segregation. The Supreme Court had, thus, declared that domestic constitutional arguments and foreign policy concerns united to make it clear that the white south must change its ways.

Dies had been back in office for over a year when the *Brown* ruling was handed down. Anger among many white southerners erupted. An Amarillo attorney wrote to Dies on the court ruling saying, “I think the Great? United States Supreme Court has committed the greatest SIN OF THE WORLD. God made the negro to be a servant, and NOW, a lot of Bishops and a lot of preachers want to make the negro socially equal to white people. I don't have even polite contempt for this great court. I have contempt and I don't believe there is even one of this court is a Christian. It is a political question and nothing else.”¹³⁴

¹³² Mary Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights*, 100.

¹³³ *Ibid.*

¹³⁴ W.A. Askew to Martin Dies Jr., March 1, 1956, Martin Dies Papers, Box 138 File 13, Sam Houston Regional Library and Research Center, Liberty, Texas.

Like many Southern Democrats, Dies publicly denounced integration by claiming that segregation was a states' rights issue and that the federal government should stay out of the south. After the Supreme Court issued its ruling in *Brown II* (1955), holding that public-school systems must desegregate “with all deliberate speed,”¹³⁵ Dies and one hundred other Senators and Congressmen from the South issued the Southern Manifesto. Issued in March 1956, the Manifesto declared that the Supreme Court’s decision in the *Brown* case was a “clear abuse of judicial power,” and the signatories promised to use “all lawful means to bring about a reversal of this decision which is contrary to the Constitution.”¹³⁶

White Texas residents wrote Dies supporting his position on the issue. Dallas resident Elizabeth Simmons, for example, wrote to Dies saying, “many of us are greatly upset over the prevailing conditions in our country, and especially the insults being heaped upon the South. Why should we, in the face of known facts including the source to which the Supreme Court went for its decision, accept integration as the law of the land?” Simmons went on to say that “The Supreme Court is not empowered to make laws. Look at what this Court is doing to make it easier for the subversive. We are witnessing entirely too many encroachments upon States' Rights....We are looking to some extent to you and to our conservative Southern Senators.”¹³⁷

Dies responded to Simmons a few days later. He was totally in favor of segregation, and conveyed that message to her by saying, “I am in full agreement with the views you express, and I am doing everything I can to halt this dangerous trend which

¹³⁵ *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*, Implementation Decree (May 31, 1955).

¹³⁶ Brent J. Aucoin, “The Southern Manifesto and Southern Opposition to Desegregation,” *Arkansas Historical Quarterly* vol. 55, no. 2 (1996): 173-193.

¹³⁷ Mrs. Elizabeth Simmons to Martin Dies Jr., October 11, 1957, Martin Dies Papers, Box 138 File 20, Sam Houston Regional Library and Research Center, Liberty, Texas.

threatens to destroy us.”¹³⁸ Dies, like many Southern Democrats, wanted to be able to control what has happening in their respective states without federal intervention. An ironic notion, since Dies had been open to federal relief during the Great Depression.

In 1957, the controversy over school desegregation reached the national stage, when Arkansas Governor, Orval Faubus, refused to allow Little Rock’s Central High School to be desegregated. Although Faubus had been regarded as a moderate,¹³⁹ when nine black teenagers organized together to walk to Central High School, many white parents protested in anger. In response, Faubus called the Arkansas National Guard to keep the peace; their mission was to provide public safety, not ensure integration. Historian Mary Dudziak points out that the "Little Rock Nine" had been granted permission to attend the school due to a federal court ruling, but Faubus was adamant on resistance.¹⁴⁰ Pro-segregationists near the school yelled and threatened the African American teens if they tried to attend class, all in front of domestic and foreign reporters.

As the Little Rock drama unfolded, President Dwight Eisenhower grew more worried, believing that the incident might damage the United States' international credibility.¹⁴¹ In a move that was as significant to the segregationist cause as *Brown v. Board of Education*, President Eisenhower ordered portions of the 101st Airborne into Little Rock to forcibly desegregate the school and allow the black teens to attend class. His move helped cement many white segregationists' views that the federal government had illegally overreached its powers by interfering in state affairs. Those in favor of

¹³⁸ Martin Dies Jr. to Mrs. Elizabeth Simmons, October 27, 1957, Martin Dies Papers, Box 138 File 20, Sam Houston Regional Library & Research Center, Liberty, Texas.

¹³⁹ Woods, *Black Struggle, Red Scare*, 72.

¹⁴⁰ Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights*, 113.

¹⁴¹ Mary L. Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights*, 121.

segregation saw the President's actions as open hostility to the South, a notion Dies quickly used to his advantage.

A Dallas resident in 1957 wrote to Dies outraged at Eisenhower's action. Though Eisenhower was clearly a patriotic politician, especially with his critical role in World War II, it did not matter to this constituent. He wrote, "I believe it is time for all freedom-loving people to strongly protest the action of President Eisenhower. I can see no difference between his action and that of Russia sending troops into Hungary 'to quell a disorder.'" In addition, the Dallas resident wrote that "I certainly appreciate our Governor taking his stand on the side of Texas and the South. It is nauseating to have to pay Federal Income Tax to support the enslavement of the South by federal troops. I hope you will voice your opposition to this form of dictatorship."¹⁴² Dies wholeheartedly agreed with the constituent. Four days later, the Congressman responded to him via letter by saying, "I agree 100% with your fine letter of September 26th. You may be assured that I will protest this outrageous violation of state rights with all the power and forces of my command."¹⁴³

Pro-segregation constituents were not the only ones interested in Dies' support. In 1957, the *Galveston Daily News* ran an article describing Dies' speech to the National Secretaries Association. In that address, Dies detailed his disdain for *Brown v. Board* and Eisenhower's reaction in Little Rock. He said, "It was absolutely shocking for the United States to try to enforce anything with paratroopers....There is no law compelling school

¹⁴² Fulbright Mays, Jr. to Martin Dies Jr., September 26, 1957, Martin Dies Papers, Box 138 File 17, Sam Houston Regional Library and Research Center, Liberty, Texas.

¹⁴³ Martin Dies Jr. to Fulbright Mays, Jr. September 30, 1957, Martin Dies Papers, Box 138 File 17, Sam Houston Regional Library and Research Center, Liberty, Texas.

integration, just a court ruling....This ruling can be reversed or changed and citizens have a right to seek to overthrow the decision.”¹⁴⁴

Such talk made Dies a popular speaker with right-wing groups in the South. The Mississippi Citizens Councils, for example, invited him to “address a statewide meeting of the Mississippi Citizens’ Councils in Jackson” in October 1957.¹⁴⁵ At the event, Dies said: “The [integration] movement was carried on by do-gooders, politicians and the National Assn. for the Advancement of Colored People,” and he added (incorrectly) that the “NAACP grew out of the National Negro Congress, a Communist organization created to carry out the Moscow program. I won’t say the NAACP is a Communist group but the leaders of the Negro Congress had a great influence on the NAACP after the Negro Congress dissolved.”¹⁴⁶

As he spoke against school desegregation, Dies also attempted another run for the U.S. Senate. When the vote was cast in April, however, Dies lost to Ralph Yarborough to link arms with Lyndon Johnson.¹⁴⁷ Both overwhelmingly supported civil rights reform. Yarborough’s liberal stance on the issue would have made him a direct opponent to Dies. To Dies, Yarborough’s ideas were in stark contrast to the social stratification Dies was pushing so hard for. Dies felt leaders like Yarborough were using the social movement as outlined in the *Enterprise-Journal* article when he said, ” [the Civil Rights Movement] is

¹⁴⁴ “Dies to Seek Laws Against Use of Troops,” *Galveston Daily News* (Galveston, Texas), October 17, 1957.

¹⁴⁵ “Martin Dies Will Speak to Citizens’ Councils.” *Clarion-Ledger*, October 22, 1957.

¹⁴⁶ “Martin Dies Speaks: Integration Move Termed Political,” *Enterprise-Journal* (McComb, Mississippi), November 5, 1957.

¹⁴⁷ Mark Odintz, “YARBOROUGH, RALPH WEBSTER,” *Handbook of Texas Online*, <http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/fyags>, accessed August 14, 2018.

a political move to capture the Negro vote and not to help the Negro.”¹⁴⁸ Yarborough was the type of leader Dies feared would erode the power of southern white voters.

Despite his loss, Dies continued to advocate for the South. In Mississippi, for example, he said that the movement for states rights “was begun in the South because that area is ‘the bulwark of Americanism,’ that is, limited sovereignty.” Dies described the South as the “balance of power between the northern Democrats and Republicans.” In addition, he “said the South could keep segregation indefinitely if its united for the best interests of the nation rather than on a sectional basis.” On other fronts, Dies said, “The main question is not integration but whether the federal government will take over the schools and ultimately tell us what to teach...The U.S. Supreme decision outlawing segregation “merely focused attention on a trend toward centralization of government which had been under way for some time.”¹⁴⁹

Just as Dies inflated the egos of many white southerners in *The Trojan Horse* almost twenty years earlier, he was using the same tactic here by calling the south “the bulwark of Americanism.” Dies knew he could collect many white southern supporters through complimentary gestures as this. And like earlier, Dies was also reiterating the fears among many white southerners had that the federal government was going to unilaterally dominate the south.

Lastly, the *Enterprise Journal* recorded how little Dies regarded the plight of African Americans. The newspaper cited Dies saying, “...the Negro is not ready for integration...” The solution, he said, is “common sense...The same common sense that

¹⁴⁸ “Martin Dies Speaks: Integration Move Termed Political.” *Enterprise-Journal*, November 5, 1957.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

built this country.”¹⁵⁰ According to the paper, the way Dies felt the country should move forward with integration was to be outlined in how he felt Washington, D.C. would look like over time regarding integration. “All integrated schools in Washington, D.C., will become segregated in two years because all of the white students will have gone and only the Negroes will remain.”¹⁵¹

Dies felt there was nothing wrong with the *Plessy v. Ferguson* case regarding black and white facilities. And though he was against integration, he was prophetic of what was later to be termed, “white flight”, whereby white families left inner cities for the suburbs, leaving central business districts to racial minorities. Such was the case for many southern cities during the mid-twentieth century.

Altogether, it was clear Dies was against integration, especially after Central High School’s integration in Little Rock. And his segregationist view regarding Little Rock provided fuel to other opposition groups, like Citizens Councils. In other words, Dies’ stance on race relations had helped groups like Citizens Councils flourish in the South to help stoke racial division.

Though Dies lost the Senate race, he remained in the House of Representatives. He might have lost votes around the state, but he had a core following in East Texas with other supporters sprinkled throughout more than the 200 counties. And many of his supporters backed his actions when he combined efforts with other southern politicians regarding integration.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

CHAPTER V

Conclusion

Martin Dies Jr. left the House of Representatives in 1959 in a Washington D.C. that had been confronting the issue of racism in the land of freedom. His anti-communist rhetoric and actions against civil rights groups seeking equality in the 1930s helped set the tone for future segregationists twenty years later. Citizens Councils were able to flourish throughout the Deep South, and Jim Crow laws still divided a dichotomous country. He showed other segregationist politicians how to use the allusion of freedom to maintain the status quo; it was through fear. To court fear was to deny freedom by design.

At the heart of HUAC under Dies was the use of fear. He cited his committee would investigate suspicious activity as a safeguard for American security in an unbiased manner, but he was able to use the fear many in his congressional district harbored against outsiders and new ideas as a means of power and re-elections. New ideas that challenged old social norms were to be feared which stifled growth and progress. He engendered tribalism: an “us” versus “them” mentality. And because he gained such national attention for his interrogation tactics, others have tried to emulate his style. The post-Pearl Harbor hysteria against Japanese Americans was one such episode, a product of the fear-mongering created by Dies. Sixty years later, similar hysteria erupted in 2001 after the 9/11 attacks. Dies’ legacy of fear-baiting surfaced again with the sharp rise of anti-Muslim American sentiment.

His prejudice was only partly his own; Dies’ father clearly illustrated a disdain for any form of social progress. But unlike his father, Dies was able to use his prejudice through congressional leadership to advance his career and stonewall civil rights reform.

While other governmental leaders may have publicly denounced equality and desegregation, Dies generated a much bigger following. His supporters were not just in his congressional district but from across the country.

Dies' strategy of publicly accusing people he thought were dissidents was replicated several times. Mississippi congressman John Rankin used his status on HUAC to continue attacks on civil rights reform using Dies as a model, albeit Rankin was far more aggressive on the topic. Ten years later, Arkansas governor Orval Faubus believed he had enough popular support for segregation and politically benefitted regionally from many like-minded citizens who prescribed to the legacy of Dies who saw civil rights reform as communist. Five years after that, George Wallace felt he had a similar situation when black students wanted to attend the University of Alabama. Wallace decided to take a public stand against social progress like Dies had done twenty years prior.

The influence Dies had on his resistance was even more widespread than just on politicians though. His rejection of civil rights reform in the riots of 1943 helped foster a social resistance against the prejudiced status quo. The Vietnam conflict is one such example. Social conservatives often rejected African American concerns when many blacks openly denounced military service citing how a part of their country did not see them as equals while America's enemy appeared to welcome social progress. For many against equality, these black soldiers were 'un-American' for not wanting to serve their nation; outside agitation was blamed instead of domestic introspection, another remnant of Dies' time in Congress.

Dies' aversion to communism and social progress also helped lead some southern whites to denounce Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. as a communist. King's entry into the

national spotlight in his organization of the Montgomery Bus Boycott, an act blacks collectively working together was enough for some prejudiced southerners to view him as a Soviet agent. As time progressed and King's reputation grew as a demonstrator, the more some saw him as a proponent of social equality under communism as opposed to a change agent working toward racial justice. Dies helped shape an atmosphere of distrust of civil rights opponents, which made many of his district supporters question reform, not welcome it. Dies certainly played a role in the anti-integration argument; therefore, some came to believe King an agent of threat, not freedom.

Had Dies taken a more moderate stance on civil rights reform, perhaps equality could have been achieved sooner. Because some in his congressional district were prejudiced toward blacks, immediate equality may have not been politically beneficial. At least addressing the inequity may have started a district conversation about how to ensure equal constituent representation. But his perpetual refusal toward any form of social equality hindered social progress within his district. It was this approach which aided in his re-election yet alienated his district's racial minority.

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