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Red Pepper & Gorgeous George by James C. Clark and The Second Red Scare and the Unmaking of the New Deal Left by Landon R.Y. Storrs

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Clark, James C. *Red Pepper and Gorgeous George: Claude Pepper's Epic Defeat in the 1950 Democratic Primary*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2011. xvi + 206 pages. Cloth, \$29.95.

Storrs, Landon R. Y. *The Second Red Scare and the Unmaking of the New Deal Left*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013. 404 pages. Cloth, \$39.50.

Historians remain animated by the Red Scare of the 1940s and 1950s, and with good reason. According to Landon R. Y. Storrs, anti-communist hysteria “stunted the development of the American welfare state” by forcing the resignation—and/or ideological reorientation—of many left-leaning civil servants (p. 1). In a similar vein, James C. Clark demonstrates how the 1950 Florida Senate primary resulted in the replacement of Claude Pepper, an ardent New Dealer, with George Smathers, a Democratic standpatter. Together, these two historians explore separately how issues of race, class, and gender intersected with anti-communism to heighten a politics of fear and narrow the range of policy choices available to federal officials. Their books also highlight the philosophical, political, and personal costs of the post-1945 Red Scare.

The personal and political aspects of the Red Scare assume center-stage in Clark's *Red Pepper and Gorgeous George*. Claude Pepper's defeat at the hands of George Smathers in Florida's 1950 Senate Democratic primary is the stuff of legend. Exploiting Pepper's support for organized labor, an array of federal domestic programs, and a conciliatory approach toward the Soviet Union, Smathers tagged him the “Red Pepper” (p. 121). The young, handsome, and aggressive Smathers won the primary, a seat in the Senate, and a long-term, indelible reputation as “the South's Golden Hatchetman” (p. 155). In one speech, he allegedly tapped into the ignorance of Floridians: “Are you aware that Claude Pepper is known all over Washington as a shameless extrovert? Not only that, but this man is reliably reported to practice nepotism with his sister-in-law, and he has a sister who was once a thespian in wicked New York. Worst of all, it is an established fact that Mr. Pepper before his marriage habitually practiced celibacy” (p. 150). As Clark explains, the speech was fiction, the product of an imaginative reporter for *Time* bent on showing that “Smathers was capable of going to any length in campaigning” (p. 151). Partly as a result, a “consensus” of observers later came to view Pepper as a saintly figure “victimized by a brutal, unfair opponent” (p. 155).

To correct the record, Clark paints a nuanced portrait of Pepper and Smathers. Pepper was a candidate weakened by self-inflicted wounds. The senator alienated doctors when he backed national health insurance, civil rights advocates when he championed white supremacy, racists when he voted to continue the Fair Employment Practices Commission, and business leaders when he opposed the anti-labor Taft-Hartley Act. Pepper also made powerful enemies when he broke with Florida businessman Ed Ball and resisted President Harry S. Truman's nomination in 1948. Truman, in revenge, encouraged Smathers to challenge Pepper in 1950. By the late 1940s, Pepper had lost touch with constituents and the national mood, a fact accentuated by his often naïve pronouncements on Soviet-American relations. Between 1945 and 1946, he called for peaceful coexistence between the two countries, favored a loan for Russia, attacked British (rather than Soviet) imperialism, hailed Josef Stalin as “one of the great men of history,” and proclaimed himself a “friend of the Soviet people” (p. 44). But an intensifying Cold War, along with Pepper's ambition for national office, prompted a change of course. In a political switcheroo worthy of John Kerry (or, on second thought, Mitt Romney), Pepper criticized Truman's aid package for Greece and Turkey, then promised to vote for the measure, and then

did not. Following the Communist takeover of Czechoslovakia in 1948, he denounced the “Russian onslaught,” advocated increased expenditure on arms, and endorsed the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. But, as Clark argues, it was “too little, too late” (p. 95). Pepper’s newspaper support in Florida had dwindled, and Smathers “ran a brilliant, flawless campaign” against him (p. 155).

Clark has written a savvy, persuasive book. His command of Florida politics is expert, and he has an eye for the ironies of American politics. Smathers served three terms in the Senate where he was little more than an empty-suit—someone so vacuously affable that he managed to befriend both John F. Kennedy and Richard Nixon. “He remains best remembered for the 1950 campaign,” Clark concludes, “and perhaps for the speech he never gave” (p. 167). Pepper, in contrast, won a seat in the U. S. House of Representatives in 1962, chaired the Rules Committee, and defended Social Security, the New Deal’s signature reform, until his death in 1989. In his later years, Pepper refrained from addressing foreign policy issues except with respect to Cuba, for his South Florida district contained numerous émigrés from Fidel Castro’s regime. On that issue, the man once derided as the “Red Pepper” had morphed into a staunch anti-communist.

Reinvention is also one of the themes in Storrs’ *The Second Red Scare and the Unmaking of the New Deal Left*. The author considers how the federal government’s loyalty program ensnared sub-cabinet officials of leftist persuasion, often forcing them to deny, alter, or conceal their core convictions. The book has a haunting tenor as one witnesses a recurring cycle of accusation, investigation, defense, dismissal (or resignation), shame, and silence. Among the “prime targets of the anticommunist right” were Leon Keyserling, chair of Truman’s Council for Economic Advisers, and his wife, Mary Dublin Keyserling, an economist at the Department of Commerce (p. 107). Investigators at the House Un-American Activities Committee and Senate Internal Security Subcommittee chased hearsay about the Keyserlings’ supposed Communist associations. They were not Communists but pro-labor progressives who had been entranced by socialism and sought to reform capitalism by increasing the purchasing power of the masses. They were guilty, not of disloyalty to the United States, but of supporting programs such as the Marshall Plan (which right-wingers disliked as socialistic, state-centered planning), of being close to Truman during an era of hyper-partisanship, and of being married to each other. Many conservatives equated professional women and feminists like Dublin Keyserling with the disruption of traditional gender roles. The Keyserlings’ story consumes two chapters—the heart of the book—as Storrs explores charges against them, their defense, their appeals, and their resignations. The Keyserlings refrained from discussing their ordeal as they drifted into the ideological mainstream, becoming Lyndon Johnson Democrats “who favored Cold War military spending, backed U.S. policy in Vietnam, and argued that poverty could be eliminated through economic growth rather than redistribution” (p. 147). The “transformation of these New Dealers into Cold War liberals” recurred in numerous other cases which Storrs recounts in exhaustive and, for this reader, exhausting detail (p. 176).

Storrs achieves much in *The Second Red Scare and the Unmaking of the New Deal Left*. She demonstrates the extent to which anti-feminism, anti-socialism, and anti-labor sentiments drove the anti-communist crusade. She documents a pattern in which many loyalty defendants expunged material about their ordeals from their private papers. And she captures the trauma that loyalty investigations inflicted on individuals and the federal bureaucracy. But Storrs fails to prove two of her arguments. For example, the degree to which loyalty investigations caused individuals to shift ideological direction is uncertain; the transformation of New Deal leftists into postwar liberals may not be as pronounced, self-interested, or awkward as Storrs implies given

both groups' aversion to totalitarianism, commitment to activist democratic governance, and engagement with Cold War realities. Moreover, it is difficult to measure the "loyalty program's constricting effect on public policy" (p. 2). No doubt, the harassment of left-leaning officials chilled dissent, removed socialists from government, and narrowed policy debates. But would those who departed government have been able to shift public policy in fundamental ways? If Felix S. Cohen (another of Storrs' case studies) had remained at the Department of the Interior, would he have been able to halt the federal government's postwar efforts to terminate Indian tribes? Would he even have tried to do so, given the continuities between the supposedly tribal-friendly Indian New Deal of the 1930s and the tribal-hostile policy of termination that prevailed during the 1950s and 1960s? It is extremely doubtful.

Like Storrs, Clark at times claims too much for his subject. Clark credits George Smathers, rather than Joe McCarthy, with pioneering the use of anti-communism in political campaigns. But he overlooks Richard Nixon's House race against Jerry Voorhis in 1946 and the earlier red-baiting of Texas Democrat Martin Dies—a topic covered by Storrs. Clark furthermore asserts that Nixon's 1950 Senate contest against Helen Gahagan Douglas was "a carbon copy of the Florida election" (p. 161). That is not true because, unlike in the Pepper-Smathers showdown, Nixon's attacks also alluded to the issue of gender as he dubbed Douglas the "Pink Lady" (p. 162). An appreciation of the nexus between anti-feminism and anti-communism—a theme emphasized by Storrs—would have saved Clark from this error. Yet even when Storrs and Clark stretch and strain in their arguments, they force readers to ponder the myriad dimensions and harmful ramifications of the Second Red Scare. At a time when respect for civil liberties in America seems tenuous, these provocative books deserve a wide audience.

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