Introduction

When the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences announced that film director Elia Kazan would receive an honorary Oscar at the January 1999 ceremony, the Hollywood Left erupted in anger. Hollywood leftists could not believe that the Academy was going to recognize Kazan's achievement. Everyone knew that Kazan was one of the witnesses who appeared before the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) in 1952 to "name names" of communists. Kazan, the squealer, the opportunist, the careerist, and a moral coward was now getting artistic recognition for "his work." What about his other work, his work before HUAC that had destroyed lives and encouraged others to testify? So what if he had won two Academy Awards for Best Director for *Gentleman's Agreement* (1947) and *On the Waterfront* (1954)? He broke, recanting his communist past and gave names to Congress of past communist associates.

Actor Karl Malden, winner of an Oscar for his performance in Kazan's *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1951), pushed for the award. Malden believed that Kazan deserved to be in the company of people like Cary Grant, Alfred Hitchcock, and Howard Hawkes, who had won previous honorary Oscars for their life's work. Malden first proposed Kazan for the award in 1989. In the ensuing decade, Kazan was denied lifetime achievement awards from the San Francisco Film Festival and the Los Angeles Film Critics. Malden's persistence paid off. After much debate, the Motion Picture Academy agreed with Malden that Kazan deserved an honorary Oscar.

The announcement stirred up deep resentment, feelings that had never really died down for those who lived through the Hollywood Red Scare beginning in 1947, as Congress investigated Red infiltration in the entertainment industry. Good men and women with progressive views had been blacklisted from working in Hollywood once they were named in a HUAC hearing. Exactly what had these people done to have their careers ruined? The Hollywood Left believed

they had stood up against fascism before it was politically correct. They had stood up on behalf of African Americans at a time when black actors were relegated to playing stereotyped "steppin-fetchit" roles. And, after the Second World War, they came forward as witnesses for continued cooperation with the Soviet Union. For these actions, these progressives did not deserve to be placed in exile, their careers ended, and their lives ruined.

On Oscar night, directors Martin Scorsese and Robert De Niro escorted eighty-four-year-old Kazan to the stage. Many in the audience rose to applaud him. Others refused to stand. They were mostly younger actors such as Ed Harris, Nick Nolte, Ian McKellen, Ann Madigan, and Ed Begley, Jr., joined by some middle-aged actors, such as Richard Dreyfus. They viewed themselves as men and women of principle, standing for freedom of speech, witnesses to the evil done nearly a half century earlier during the Hollywood Red Scare.

Outside the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion, where the Oscar ceremony was being held, hundreds of placard-carrying demonstrators noisily denounced Kazan. Among the protesters was Norma Barzman, widow of a Hollywood blacklist screenwriter. When Norma first heard about the award, she joined forces with other surviving blacklisted artists, including Abe Polonsky, Bernie Gordon, Jean Butler, and Bobbie Lees. They collected money for ads in *Variety* and *Hollywood Reporter* and condemned the Academy for giving the award.

When Kazan received his award, the Left appeared to have won the ferocious political battles in Hollywood. The story of repression, hysteria, betrayal, the Inquisition, those scoundrel days of the late 1940s and early 1950s had become the accepted canon. On November 20, 2012, the leading Hollywood entertainment newspaper, *The Hollywood Reporter*, again picked up the story of the blacklist era in a multiple-page story, "The Most Sinful Period in Hollywood History." Left-wing actor Sean Penn, son of a blacklisted actor, recounted in another story published by the newspaper how his father suffered because of the blacklist. Children of other blacklisted actors and directors described the destructive consequences that the Hollywood Red Scare had on their families. Billy Wilkerson, publisher of *The Hollywood Reporter* and son of the former publisher who had been instrumental in attacking communists in the film industry in the 1940s and 1950s, concluded that this period was nothing short of a "Hollywood holocaust." However excessive these terms – "Hollywood holocaust" and "the most sinful period" – in an industry full of scandal, the story of the blacklist has obsessed reporters, filmmakers, and scholars over the last half century.

This book, *When Hollywood Was Right*, tells an equally dramatic story that has been ignored in the often-told history of the film industry's Red Scare: the rebuilding of the Republican Party in California. The storyline begins in the 1930s and concludes in 1980.

Ronald Reagan's election to the White House marked the culmination of an effort by a small group of Hollywood conservatives to rebuild the Republican Party in their state after the Second World War. What brought these men and

women together was a commitment to a vibrant Republican Party at a time when Democrats in the state began to surge ahead in voter registration. Those involved in the effort to reconstruct a party that had dominated California politics prior to the 1930s believed that by appealing both to the patriotic instincts of average Californians and to their desire for economic opportunity, the Republican Party could once again become the party of the people.

In rebuilding the Republican Party, an informal alliance took shape gradually among Hollywood studio moguls, movie stars, and Southern California businessmen. These allies contributed celebrity, money, media expertise, and political involvement to the Republican cause. This project called for each group – moguls, celebrities, businessmen – to become involved in contributing money, organizing rallies, speaking to local Republican clubs, developing party organization, and acting as media consultants. Movie producers involved themselves directly in state party organization and political campaigns.

Hollywood actors, directors, and screenwriters provided celebrities for political rallies, local party clubs, and campaign advertising, even as they were tapped for huge donations by party fundraisers. Big money donors, such as Justin Dart of Rexall Drugs, played an important role in shaping party organization on the precinct level in Southern California. He also coordinated the disbursement of campaign contributions to various Republican candidates. Rebuilding the California Republican Party took money, lots of money. Political advertising was costly in such a sprawling state, but California's media-driven politics would eventually become a national model. The project also called for rebuilding the party on a grassroots level, especially in populous Southern California. Southern California business interests joined with Hollywood to provide this money. Film stars gave money and attracted crowds at fundraisers and rallies. Republican strategists and party leaders used celebrities to foster enthusiasm for the party at the grassroots, and Republican politicos sent stars to speak to local women's groups, Rotary Clubs, the American Legion, and party clubs throughout the state as luncheon and evening speakers. The party relied on a stable of superstars such as John Wayne, Ronald Reagan, Robert Taylor, and Fred Astaire's dance partner and Academy Award–winning actress Ginger Rogers to mobilize the Republican grassroots and the general electorate. Republicans lauded June Allyson, a popular star of the 1950s and wife of actor/producer Dick Powell, for her work for the party. *Los Angeles Times* gossip columnist Hedda Hopper organized Republican women throughout Southern California and spoke frequently at campaign events. Dozens of actors urged citizens to become politically active Republicans.

George Murphy, a longtime actor whose film career waned in the postwar period, served as a liaison between business and Hollywood. He arranged for celebrities to attend rallies, appear at fundraisers, and make radio and television ads for Republican political candidates. Republican movie stars were not simply trotted out during election years. In off-election years, party officials and strategists arranged through Murphy to have film celebrities speak to local Republican

groups and community organizations throughout the state. Many involved in these campaign activities remained lesser lights, such as character actor Adolphe Menjou. Spanish-speaking Leo Carrillo, whose acting career had been resuscitated playing sidekick "Pancho" in the popular western television series *The Cisco Kid*, appeared as a frequent speaker. In the 1960 presidential campaigns, he spoke before large Hispanic crowds. Murphy's work for the party laid the foundation for his own career in politics; he won election to the U.S. Senate in 1964, and this victory set the stage for Reagan's election as governor in 1966.

The drama of rebuilding the California Republican Party cast many players: studio heads such as Louis B. Mayer, Darryl Zanuck, Cecil B. DeMille, the Warner brothers, and Walt Disney; Southern California businessmen such as Justin Dart, Leonard Firestone (heir to Firestone Tires), Walter Knott (founder of Knott's Berry Farm), oil man Henry Salvatori, and Patrick Frawley, owner of Schick razor and Technicolor. The endorsement of Norman Chandler, publisher of the *Los Angeles Times*, proved necessary for any Republican candidate running for office in California. Actors such as Gary Cooper and Bob Hope played leading roles in this campaign to resurrect the Republican Party. Beginning in the 1970s, Charlton Heston, a former Democrat, assumed the conservative banner by becoming a Reagan Republican who supported strong national defense and gun rights.

Western stars had particular appeal because of their movie and television roles. Randolph Scott, who at the age of fifty-eight was still playing the leading man after appearing in close to a hundred films, remained a conservative who gave money and time to the party when he could. Ward Bond, who appeared in NBC's hit television series *Wagon Train*, was notorious for his right-wing sentiments, as was Walter Brennan, star of the heartwarming *The Real McCoys* television series. Movie and television actor Richard Boone, who played the suave gunslinger Paladin in *Have Gun Will Travel*, was no less vociferous in his political views. Former major league baseball pitcher Chuck Connor from *The Rifleman* proved to be a favorite in Republican circles, and many saw him as an up-and-coming political candidate.

A few film aficionados and film historians remember these stars, but, for the most part, history has forgotten many of these celebrities of movies and early television. Most of the other stars are unknown to younger movie audiences, and, if remembered for their films, few know of their politics.

Cameo performances by an array of other stars, movie moguls, screenwriters, politicos, and fat-cat Republicans appear in this drama. Even Hollywood's most attractive leading man in the late 1950s and early 1960s, Rock Hudson, was a right-wing Republican. His party affiliation might have surprised his myriad of female fans who projected themselves into the characters played by his co-star, singer Doris Day (another Republican) in their numerous romantic comedies. Movie stars like Hudson kept their personal lives separate from their film personas, but their politics were often on public display in political rallies and in their involvement in political causes. Hudson appeared at anticommunist

rallies and campaigned for conservative Republican presidential candidate Barry Goldwater in 1964. If Hudson's fans would have been surprised by his politics, they were even more surprised when it was revealed in 1985 that he was a homosexual dying of AIDS.

Surprisingly many conservative Republicans once populated Hollywood. Given the relatively few in Hollywood today who are declared Republicans, this appears to be a historical anomaly, a brief period in the film industry. The Hollywood Right is important because Hollywood conservatives led the way in taking control of the California Republican Party and eventually changing the political landscape of modern America.

Anticommunism brought many conservatives in Hollywood together in the postwar period. Contrary to the perceived history of the Red Scare in Hollywood, anticommunists in the film industry were not united as to the extent of the problem in 1947, in how to treat the issue of communists in the industry, or in their support of congressional investigations. Hardline anticommunists, such as screenwriter Ayn Rand, were less forgiving. Neither was Hedda Hopper, whose nationally syndicated newspaper column influenced millions of movie fans; she proved unforgiving of former communists. Others proved more generous in their attitudes and behavior toward former party members. Among the anticommunist Right in Hollywood, members were divided over basic issues such as whether the Communist Party should be outlawed. Anticommunism in Hollywood remains only a small part of what was happening behind the scenes. By focusing on the Hollywood Red Scare in the early Cold War years, the larger story of Republican mobilization in postwar California has been neglected.

The ascendancy of the Republican Party in California was by no means a straight advancement. Factionalism characterized the Republican Party in these years, reflected within the Hollywood Right and among Southern California businessmen. Often these divisions revolved around personalities and politicians. Ideology divided some. Schisms and profound differences appeared at every step of the Republican advance – and retreat. There were hardline anticommunists who supported the blacklist. Others believed the communist issue had been taken care of even before HUAC swept into town to investigate alleged communist influence in the film industry. The Hollywood Right and its allies in the Southern California business community were divided over who to support in the 1952 Republican primaries, Dwight D. Eisenhower or Robert Taft, and divisions reemerged between Nelson Rockefeller backers and Barry Goldwater supporters in 1964. These divisions were seen among studio moguls, Hollywood celebrities, and the business community. They stood united in rebuilding the Republican Party. The question was how and which candidates would best serve this goal.

When Hollywood Was Right tells how men and women dedicated to a conservative political cause transformed American politics and the course of American history. The story is one of courage and disappointment, but ultimately about politics and power displayed in the elections of Vice President

Richard Nixon, U.S. senator George Murphy, and Governor Ronald Reagan. Nixon or Reagan were on the national ballot for every election from 1952 to 1984, except in 1964 and 1976. Between them, they won six national elections, including four presidential victories. California's ascendancy was Hollywood's, too. For the Hollywood Right, Nixon and, especially, Reagan marked Hollywood's true Golden Age.

These men and women of the Hollywood Right viewed themselves as patriots and defenders of American values of individualism, patriotism, and free enterprise. They accepted an abiding faith in the American dream and the spirit of American individualism, even though some were motivated by personal advancement, careerism, vindictiveness, financial gain, and political calculation. This book tells of electoral victory, and, more frequently, defeat at the polls and a minority at odds with a liberal political culture that prevailed throughout most of this period in the film industry. Theirs is a drama of striving and ultimate political success – one that began in the mid-1930s as Hollywood became politicized and then continued into the Cold War and the anticommunist fight. There was a steady and eventually successful effort to rebuild the Republican Party in California in the following years that led to significant state and national power.

In the end, Hollywood itself was more about making movies and money than it was about politics, and politics is only a small part of the overall Hollywood story. The history of the Hollywood Right remains worth telling because it reveals how a small group of dedicated men and women, often at odds with one another, changed the course of politics in a democracy and remade both their state and their country.

CHAPTER 1

Setting the Stage in the 1930s

Republicans on Defense

The economic depression of the 1930s transformed America into a nation of haves and have-nots. This was especially the case in Hollywood, where movie moguls made huge profits, film stars such as Gary Cooper received salaries that were the highest in the nation, and screenwriters earned incomes of more than $100,000 a year. Beneath the Hollywood elite, as novelist Nathaniel West so graphically captured in his haunting *Day of the Locust* (1939), swarmed actors looking for bit parts, extras hoping to be used in crowd scenes, old vaudeville performers looking to resuscitate their careers, and young writers hoping to break into the business.

In the first years of the Great Depression, Hollywood remained a generally nonpolitical town. A few studio chieftains, such as Louis B. Mayer, head of MGM, actively participated in Republican Party politics, but Mayer stood out in this regard. As the Depression continued, the nation swung to the left in support of Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal and in response to the growing threat of fascism in Europe. Hollywood became increasingly politicized by the mid-1930s. The change in Hollywood's political atmosphere accelerated when socialist author Upton Sinclair won the Democratic Party nomination for governor in 1934, and studios and the Republican establishment successfully organized to defeat him in the general election. Other factors contributed to this growing politicization: the unionization of studio technicians, cartoonists, screenwriters, actors, and directors split Hollywood into warring camps, and the anti-Semitic rhetoric of Nazi leader Adolph Hitler, who came to power in Germany in 1933, pushed many in Hollywood further to the left. In this environment, some in Hollywood joined the Communist Party. Embattled Hollywood Republicans fought a rearguard action to thwart what seemed to be the shifting tide of history as the political left gained momentum in Hollywood and California and global capitalism seemed to many to be in its final death throes. The political battles of 1930s Hollywood set the stage for a historic confrontation between the left and

the right that followed the Second World War. In 1930s Hollywood, nobody foresaw just how deeply divided Hollywood would become just one decade later. The left in the 1930s seemed ascendant and the right in decline.

The New Deal hit California Republicans like an earthquake. A seismic shift occurred as Democratic registrations soared in the state, leaving Republicans worried about the future of their party. Republicans everywhere fought back as best they could, aided in their efforts by Hollywood Republicans, who were mostly studio executives and a few movie stars. California Republicans kept believing victory was just around the corner, but it never quite came.

In the 1930s, the state Republican Party – reflecting the national party – began suffering from a severe, perhaps unavoidable, identity crisis, not quite sure whether to mimic the Democratic Party or declare itself the last remnant in opposition to the perceived advance of socialism that had occurred under Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal. Although Republican candidates continued to have success in statewide and local elections, California Republicans were divided into an array of nearly indecipherable and shifting factions that cut across ideological lines. The Roosevelt years left California Republicans reeling as party registration in the state fell precipitously and Democratic registration grew.

Within Hollywood, Republicans had become a distinct minority in the movie industry. For the most part, studio executives remained loyal to the party. Louis B. Mayer, head of MGM and the highest paid executive in the country, personified the Republican Old Guard, and producer Cecil B. DeMille, who had voted for Roosevelt in 1932, later shifted his loyalties to the Republican Party, even going so far as trying to promote himself as a senatorial candidate. But even studio executives were no longer unanimously anti–New Deal. The Warner brothers, upstarts who had only made it into the big time with the invention of sound, were considered by most Hollywood insiders pro–New Deal.

The real strength of the Democrats in Hollywood – and progressives in general – rested with the actors, screenwriters, and studio technicians. Furthermore, the Communist Party, although small in numbers, had made considerable advances in Hollywood, especially in unions such as the Screen Writers Guild (SWG) and a number of studio technicians' unions. Even so, communism in the film industry was not much of a concern to many in the early 1930s. Anticommunist voices within the industry remained isolated and did not play much of a role in Hollywood politics, nor, for that matter, within the California Republican Party. Anticommunism was, however, vociferously articulated by conservative Democrat William Randolph Hearst's newspaper chain, whose five California daily papers had circulations that equaled that of all other newspapers in the state combined.[1] Many California Republicans, as well as many Hollywood studio heads, did not like Hearst for personal and political

[1] Greg Mitchell, *The Campaign of the Century: Upton Sinclair's Race for Governor of California and the Birth of Media Politics* (New York, 1992), p. 5.

reasons, especially when his papers ignored or panned their films. Hearst endorsed Roosevelt in 1932 and continued to enjoy good relations with the Roosevelt administration until the late 1930s, when Hearst's isolationism crashed head-on with the administration's interventionist policies.

Although the American Legion, the Los Angeles Police Department's Red Squad, a few fundamentalist radio ministers, such as gun-packing Martin Luther Thomas, and isolated eccentrics kept up a steady anticommunist drumbeat, for the most part, the great mass of Californians in the 1920s and early 1930s were not given to anticommunist fervor. This was not surprising, given the small numbers of Communist Party members in California in these years: when twenty-five-year-old Sam Darcy was appointed California state organizer of the Communist Party in 1930, there were only an estimated fifty party members in the Los Angeles area.[2]

CALIFORNIA POLITICS IN THE '30S: REPUBLICAN DISORIENTATION, PROGRESSIVE REVIVAL

In 1928, California was a Republican state, and Hollywood was a Republican town. A decade later, the political fortunes of the Republican Party had reversed. Although Republicans continued to enjoy political success in state races, by the mid-1930s, Hollywood and the Golden State were overwhelmingly Democratic when it came to voting for president and in voter registration. In the 1924 presidential election, Democratic presidential candidate John W. Davis received only 8 percent of the vote in California, but by 1936, 60 percent of the state's voters were registered Democrats. In 1936, Franklin Roosevelt won an overwhelming 67 percent of the California vote, compared to the 32 percent who voted for Alf Landon, the Republican candidate.

For Republicans in the 1930s, the real problem was not communists in the state or in Hollywood. What frightened them was the sheer popularity of Roosevelt in California and growing Democratic registrations. Republicans held on to state offices, but to do so they had to absorb and condone much of the New Deal program.

The disorientation of Republican leadership brought about by the popularity of Roosevelt and the New Deal was evident in *Los Angeles Times* owner Harry Chandler's correspondence with the forlorn former Republican president Herbert Hoover in the 1930s. In 1933, a year after the presidential election that had thrown Hoover out of the White House with a resounding victory to Roosevelt, Chandler wrote that so many experiments and programs had been brought forward by the administration that "millions of average citizens" had "lost their bearings." He feared that "erratic and radical thinkers and actors everywhere feel that they are in the saddle and the millennium is just around the

[2] This figure is given in Mitchell, *The Campaign of the Century*, p. 264.

corner. . . . No poison so deadly as mental poison." He adamantly believed that the electorate would quickly reject the New Deal once it was "demonstrated false" and then turn to Republican leadership that had been "proven to be safe, wise, and practical."[3]

Underestimating the extent of the Depression, as did many businessmen in 1933, Chandler was convinced that New Deal spending programs were going to lead to inflation. So certain was he that he prepared a "simply-worded" inflation primer for readers of the *Los Angeles Times*.[4] A year later, Chandler was still predicting a turn around in the electorate and a "very definite swing away from the 'New Deal.'"[5] What Chandler actually meant was that none of his rich friends, including the paper's advertisers and a few of the paper's readers, liked the administration's policies.

Following the trouncing that the GOP received in the 1936 election, the sobered Chandler accepted the fact that the Republican Party had become a minority party. He sent Hoover, who had risen in national politics through California ties, a long memorandum prepared for him by the Southern California Republican Campaign Committee. The memo declared the need to organize a "militant minority to speak for the great mass of voters who would not accept the New Deal." The core of this militant minority, the memo urged, should be a "powerful group of business and professional leaders representing the soundest heads of the minority thought." The Republican Campaign Committee observed that, before 1932, nomination on the Republican ticket was tantamount to election. Personal political machines were effective merely because a Republican could not be beaten. Since 1932, however, "the times have changed."[6] Chandler and Southern California Republicans understood that the party, in the state and nationally, was going to have to be rebuilt from the ground up, beginning with business and professional groups and then moving toward capturing the average voter.

California Republicans enjoyed surprising electoral successes in the '30s, given the surge in Democratic registration and the precipitous decline in Republican registration. Despite Democratic-leaning voters, Republicans still claimed the loyalty of many attorneys, physicians, and successful businesspeople. The educated elite from which many statewide candidates tended to be drawn were often Republicans.

One of the saving factors for Republicans was a state system of candidates being able to cross-file in both parties during primaries and the general election.

[3] Harry Chandler to Herbert Hoover, December 14, 1933; and Chandler to Hoover, April 15, 1933, Herbert Hoover Papers, post-presidential files.
[4] Harry Chandler to Herbert Hoover, April 26, 1933, Herbert Hoover Papers, post-presidential files.
[5] Harry Chandler to Herbert Hoover, November 19, 1934, Herbert Hoover Papers, post-presidential files.
[6] Southern California Republican Committee to Harry Chandler, November 18, 1936, Herbert Hoover Papers, post-presidential files.