

Seeing Red: A Historiographical Study of the American Communist Movement During the Interwar Period

by Philip Smith

One of the most controversial subjects of the twentieth century has been the Communist Party of the United States (CPUSA). Conventionally, the party has been the subject of abuse and vilification. Traditional historians tended to portray the party as an appendage of the Soviet Union without an independent political life. Recently, historians have begun to change this view. By utilizing different historiographical methods, more modern historians have reappraised both the party's work and its importance in American history. This essay will focus on five methodologies that historians have used to examine the party. We will begin by analyzing the method in question. We will then summarize and analyze a book that embodies the particular methodology and briefly comment on the work's importance to the historiography of the party.

Empiricism has its roots in the scientific revolution of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.¹ During the scientific revolution, natural philosophers challenged the authority of established churches and held that knowledge should be gathered from observing and investigating the material world. During the eighteenth century, enlightenment thinkers applied the principles of scientific enquiry to the study of human society. From this application comes academic history and the other social sciences.² The new university-led field of professional historians emphasized evidence over abstract reasoning and promoted systematic archival research.³

One of the leading lights of this new field, Leopold von Ranke, argued that historians should only use 'primary' sources as opposed to the memoirs or second-hand sources traditionally favored by historians.⁴ It was the job of the historian to closely scrutinize these sources, and then to reconstruct the past.⁵ Ranke believed that historians should stop themselves from judging the past and emphasized that it should be understood on its own terms.⁶

The principles of empiricism then, can be understood as the rigorous examination of historical evidence, impartial research without prior prejudices, an

¹ Anna Green and Kathleen Troup, *The Houses of History*, (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2016), Location 408, Kindle.

² *Ibid.*, 408.

³ Green and Troup, 423.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 423.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 423.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 423.

inductive method of reasoning, and the presentation of one's findings in a coherent narrative.⁷ A foundational belief of empiricism is that "the past exists independently of the individual's mind, and is both observable and verifiable."⁸ If historians faithfully follow the aforementioned principles, then they should be able to present the past in an objective fashion.⁹ If one looks critically at empiricism, he or she could say that these historians believe that they have the 'God trick': they can step outside of themselves and note what is true for all time, in all circumstances.

An example of a work on the Communist Party that utilizes an empiricist methodology is *The Roots of American Communism* by Theodore Draper. Draper traces the origins of the American Communist movement to the historic American left of the late nineteenth century. In a theme that will recur throughout his work, Draper begins by studying factional fights between different left-wing groups—between reformist and revolutionary Marxists on one hand, and Marxists and Anarchists on the other.¹⁰ Draper states that, at the time, American society was disordered and in flux.¹¹ Millions of immigrants poured into the country, working conditions were atrocious, and strikes often ended violently.¹² It is within this turbulent milieu that the older communists were born. These people—raised under a particularly brutal form of capitalism—and scores of radical immigrants would create revolutionary unions and organizations out of which the future Communist Party would be formed.

Reflecting the international socialist movement, left-wing organizations in America, particularly the Socialist Party, would split over its response to the Russian Revolution and the Bolshevik's call for revolutionary socialists to join the third international. By the summer of 1919, nearly the entire left wing of the Socialist Party was either expelled or left to form two different communist parties which would eventually merge.¹³

The rest of Draper's book details the descent of the two parties into the underground due to the first Red Scare, the forced unification of the parties resulting from Russian pressure, endless factional fights, and the emergence of the party as an above-ground legal organization during the mid 1920s. For Draper, the story of the American Communist Party is that of a uniquely American radical movement being transformed into a tool of the Soviet Government. He stated as much when he said, "it was transformed from a new expression of American radicalism to the American appendage of a Russian revolutionary power."¹⁴

⁷ Ibid., 446.

⁸ Ibid., 446.

⁹ Ibid., 446.

¹⁰ Theodore Draper, *The Roots of American Communism*, (New York, Viking Press, 1957), pg. 12

¹¹ Ibid., 13.

¹² Ibid., 13.

¹³ Ibid., 180.

¹⁴ Ibid., 394.

Draper's work is a classic example of empiricism. He wrote in his introduction that to understand the party, one must look at it in historical terms because "every other approach tends to be static, one-sided or unbalanced."¹⁵ In other words, by writing a history of the party, Draper sought to give an objective account of the party's history. He did this by relying on both party publications and internal party documents.¹⁶ He stated that even these sources are problematic, but that it was his job as a historian to critically analyze these sources to get closer to the truth.¹⁷ To help him scrutinize these sources, Draper enlisted the help of expelled party leaders who, by their testimony, clarified which documents could be trusted.¹⁸ One may wonder about the reliability of their testimony since they likely had an axe to grind against the party that expelled them.

Of course, there are problems with Draper's method. He claimed to be writing an objective account of the party, yet his constant moralizing language showed his implicit hostility to it. One example of this is his belief that "communists cannot write their own history because they cannot reconcile so many changes of line and leadership with the aura of infallibility."¹⁹ This antagonism can be understood when reminded that this book was written in 1957, during the Cold War, and expresses popular attitudes towards communism. This realization illuminates one of the most important criticisms of empiricism: it is impossible for individuals to completely divorce themselves from their pre-conceived notions and values. Put simply, pure objectivity is impossible. Historians must try to portray the truth but must be honest about how prejudices and values shape historical analysis. One method that has sought to find and root out prejudice is gender and women's history. This approach would also add complexity in historical portrayals of the party.

Gender history, as a historical method, can be traced back to the women's liberation movement of the 1960s.²⁰ While many amateur historians have been writing with a focus on women since the nineteenth century, it wasn't until the 1960s that women historians began to actively address their lack of representation in academic history.²¹ These historians felt that women's history was essential to women's liberation since, according to Gerda Lerner, "to be without history is to be trapped in a present where oppressive social relations appear natural and inevitable."²² From the start, gender historians sought to highlight the oppression of women so that society could address it and overcome it.

¹⁵ Draper, 3.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 5-6.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 7.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 9.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 6.

²⁰ Green and Troup, 6089.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 6089.

²² *Ibid.*, 6089.

One thread of gender history reflected the course of the feminist movement. In the 1960s, second-wave feminists fought for equal rights—in tandem, historians began to focus on the status of women and their experiences in the past.²³ Initially, these histories focused on famous women but were eventually broadened to include ordinary women.²⁴ Gender historians began to analyze the role of patriarchy in the lives of women and how historical events affected men and women differently.

At the same time, British Marxist historians attempted to include gender within their wider class analysis.²⁵ Sally Alexander wrote about the sexual division of labor in relation to the class struggle and combined a feminist and Marxist analysis of the Industrial Revolution.²⁶ Radical feminists explained the subordination of women by focusing on male control of women's sexuality and reproduction, arguing that all human oppression could find its source in the biological family.²⁷

These early approaches tended to view women as essentially the same; they held that all women faced the same types of oppression. Beginning in the 1970s, women of color began to criticize these essentializing features of feminist analysis. Starting with bell hooks, many historians pointed out the 'intersectional' nature of the oppression faced by women of color.²⁸ Intersectionality refers to the overlapping oppression based on race, class, and gender that women of color face.²⁹ The intersection of gender and class is an important theme in Susan Ware's 1982 work *Holding Their Own: American Women in the 1930's*. To explore this intersection and its relation to the CPUSA, we will analyze the chapter in *Holding their own* titled *Women on The Left: The Communist Party and its Allies*.

During the 1930s, women made up a substantial part of the Communist Party's membership. In the latter part of the decade, the zenith of party influence, it is estimated that women made up between thirty and forty percent of the party.³⁰ While there were large numbers of women in the grassroots, these numbers were never reflected in the party leadership.

Despite this lack of female leadership, a few exceptional women did rise to leadership roles within the party. One such woman was Elizabeth Gurley Flynn. Initially, Flynn was a socialist and member of the Industrial Workers of the World before World War I.³¹ Flynn joined the party in 1936 and became a leading public

²³ Ibid., 6107.

²⁴ Ibid., 6107.

²⁵ Ibid., 6107.

²⁶ Ibid., 6131.

²⁷ Green and Troup, 6131.

²⁸ Ibid., 6131.

²⁹ Ibid., 6131.

³⁰ Susan Ware, *Holding Their Own: American Women in the 1930's*, (Boston, G.K. Hall and Company, 1982), pg. 126

³¹ Ware, 121.

speaker for the party.³² She was elected to the party's national committee in 1936 and served on the party's Women's commission; her duties on the commission included writing a column for the *Daily Worker* covering women's issues.³³

Women in the party also contributed to the development of a Marxist Feminist analysis. One such woman was Mary Inman. The leaders of the party held that working class women faced the same interests as men since capitalism created the same problems for both: unemployment, imperialism, exploitation, etc.³⁴ Women were supposed to fight capitalism "side by side" with men until the revolution occurred, after which the working class would work together to eradicate any lingering discrimination.³⁵

Inman disagreed with this analysis. She believed that while women did share problems with men, they also faced oppression as women apart from their class.³⁶ Inman also attempted to analyze the domestic work within the broader economic system.³⁷ For Inman, unpaid domestic work was the "pivot of the system."³⁸ In other words, it was unpaid domestic labor which allowed the entire capitalist system to flourish, since it took this responsibility away from working class men, allowing them to participate fully in capitalism.³⁹ Party leadership was hostile to Inman's work since it suggested a divergence of interests between working class men and their wives; Inman would eventually leave the party due to her unwillingness to accommodate the leadership on this matter.⁴⁰

In her final analysis, Ware states that the Communist Party during the 1930s had a mixed legacy on women's rights. Certain women reached the upper echelons of party leadership, and many women played leading roles in grassroots struggles.⁴¹ Through its publications, the party provided a forum to air women's issues both within the party and the wider public.⁴² However, individual women continued to face sexism from their male comrades, while the largely male leadership of the party never made women's issues a top priority. Despite these limitations, the party's work among women in the 1930s was extensive and theoretically valuable enough to be considered an essential part of the struggle for women's liberation.

³² Ibid., 120.

³³ Ware, 120.

³⁴ Ibid., 124.

³⁵ Ibid., 124.

³⁶ Ibid., 125.

³⁷ Ibid., 125.

³⁸ Ibid., 126.

³⁹ Ibid., 126.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 126.

⁴¹ Ware, 133.

⁴² Ibid., 133.

Ware relies on the party's publications and the testimonies of women who were involved with the party to construct a history of women in the Communist movement. She seems to straddle two different sides of gender history. On the one hand, she uncovers the experience of women leaders and intellectuals within the party. On the other hand, she pays attention to the experiences and involvement of ordinary party members and the struggles they faced. She points out the role of patriarchy in holding women back within the party and at the same time pays attention to the theoretical advances made within it. Utilizing these dual approaches, Ware constructs a women's history that focuses on both heroic individuals and ordinary women and points out discrimination while noting advances. The result is a balanced, hopeful work that marks a change in the way the party was analyzed. Much of Ware's analysis depends on the testimonies of the women involved in the Communist movement. In fact, many histories of the party depend on the oral testimonies of party members. As such, the next section of the essay will deal with the school of oral history and its implications.

Oral history is a historiographical tradition that predates nineteenth century empiricism.⁴³ By establishing empirical research protocols, written primary sources became the favored source for historians and oral history was abandoned by the discipline.⁴⁴ The recording of oral traditions and customs continued, unabated among anthropologists and folklorists.⁴⁵ Beginning in the twentieth century, however, historians would again become interested in oral history.

Oral history would find its rebirth in the recording of the narratives of ex-slaves by the Works Progress Administration during the 1930s. In the 1940s, Alan Nevins began to record the reminiscences of top politicians, military officers and business leaders.⁴⁶ This focus on elites was contrasted by the 'history from below' approach of historians in the 1960s.⁴⁷ Oral history was seen as a valuable tool to empower women, the working class, and people of color since it allowed them to tell their own stories.⁴⁸

While seen as a valuable tool, the empirical legitimacy of oral history would not be established until the 1970s. The two Italian historians Luisa Passerini and Alessandro Portelli argued that the perceived weakness of oral history, the subjective memory of individuals, was actually its strength.⁴⁹ Passerini argued that oral history should not be viewed only as a collection of facts, but as an expression and representation of culture.⁵⁰

⁴³ Ibid., 8761.

⁴⁴ Green and Troup, 8761.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 8761.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 8761.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 8761.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 8761.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 8784.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 8784.

It follows then that oral history is not only a narration, but a study of memory, ideology, and subconscious desires.⁵¹

Attention must also be paid to the role of narrative in oral history, specifically how that narrative is created. In “Confessing Animals,” Alexander Freund studied the interview method and placed it within western confessional practices. He rejected the view that the interview is a “timeless, neutral tool for eliciting or soliciting information.”⁵² He pointed out the potentially coercive role that the interviewer can take when gathering information from an interviewee and the power that the historian has in co-creating a narrative.⁵³ This is a problem if your purpose in doing oral history is to record the stories of the marginalized and oppressed. How can historians make sure that they are not exercising so much power in creating the narrative that they damage the authenticity of their subject’s story?

Neil Irvin Painter seems to have solved this dilemma in her 1979 work *The Narrative of Hosea Hudson: His Life as a Negro Communist in The South*. Hosea Hudson was born on April 12, 1898 in Wilkes, Georgia.⁵⁴ Hudson grew up in a family of impoverished sharecroppers. His earliest memories included hearing his grandfather preach and his Uncle Ned’s trouble with the law.⁵⁵ Hudson lived in abject rural poverty until he left Wilkes County for Atlanta in 1923.⁵⁶ Unable to find work, he would move on to Birmingham where he would eventually land a job as an iron founder.⁵⁷

Hudson’s move to Birmingham would coincide with the Scottsboro Boys case. The Scottsboro Boys were a group of nine African American teenagers that were falsely accused of rape in Scottsboro, Alabama. The trial, and the activism around it, would radicalize a new generation of African Americans. Hudson was no different. In 1931, impressed by the party’s work around the Scottsboro Boys Case, Hudson joined the Communist Party.⁵⁸ From the beginning of his membership, Hudson played a leading role within the party in Alabama.⁵⁹ He was educated by the party and sent to Georgia to do party work.⁶⁰ Hudson later returned to Birmingham, where he took a leading role in organizing the United Steelworkers union.⁶¹ Eventually Hudson would be elected President of the Birmingham Local of the United Steelworkers, and remained a union

⁵¹ Ibid., 8784.

⁵² Alexander Freund, ““Confessing Animals”: Toward a Longue Durée History of the Oral History Interview,” *Oral History Review*, Volume 41, Issue 1, (Winter/ Spring 2014): 1-26, 4.

⁵³ Ibid., 23-24

⁵⁴ Neil Irvin Painter, *The Narrative of Hosea Hudson: His Life as a Negro Communist in the South*, (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1979), pg. 2

⁵⁵ Ibid., 2-3.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 13.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 13.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 87.

⁵⁹ Painter, 22.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 236.

⁶¹ Ibid., 244.

leader until he was stripped of his position in 1947.⁶² Hudson was still a party member at the time of the book's publication.

Painter did something unique with her work. All the words are Hudson's. Her job as the historian was to take Hudson's words, re-arrange the syntax to make it readable, and organize the book into a coherent narrative. After recording an interview, Painter would write down the narrative and then read it back to Hudson, only including it if he agreed with what she wrote.⁶³ She included a note section which provides context to what Hosea is saying along with primary sources to either corroborate Hosea's narrative, or show where his story contradicts the official record. Painter has seemingly avoided the problem of co-creating the narrative by allowing Hudson to tell his story, in his own words. He was allowed tell a personal story of the party that would have been impossible twenty years earlier. For his entire adult life, Hudson's political beliefs were underpinned by his theoretical grounding in Marxism. In this next section, we will explore Marxism and its contributions to historical methodology.

Marxism was initially developed by Karl Marx and his life-long collaborator, Friedrich Engels. Their most important theory for our purpose was Historical Materialism. Historical Materialism holds that the primary need for humans is to provide for their material and physiological sustenance: humans need food, shelter, clothing, etc.⁶⁴ The way in which we organize our social systems to meet these needs forms the basis upon which all of society rests.⁶⁵

For Marx, the most important aspects of society were the forces of production; the "tools, technology, raw materials—which when combined with human labour power—are transformed to meet human needs."⁶⁶ It is the interaction between raw materials and labor that creates relations of production between people, which rests on either cooperation or subordination.⁶⁷ Marx believed that the superstructures of society—our legal systems, government system, religious systems, etc.—arise from the material world and the relations of production.⁶⁸ The source of rights, government, and beliefs about the world can be found in the material world and are not imposed from outside of it. Furthermore, a dialectical relationship exists between the ideas that people hold, and the material and cultural structures: our ideas about justice, rights, and struggle are honed and shaped by the material conditions in which we live.

⁶² Ibid., 354.

⁶³ Ibid., 42.

⁶⁴ Green and Troup, location 1140.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 1140.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 1140.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 1140.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 1140.

Marx divided human history into four epochs, each epoch is separated by progressively more advanced modes of production: primitive communism, ancient society, feudalism, and capitalism.⁶⁹ The process of dialectical materialism explains how a society transitions from one stage to another. Each mode of production creates contradictions which lead to class conflict that can lead to the system's downfall.⁷⁰ Each stage of history contains a dominant class and one that struggles against it leading either to the dominant class's downfall or the mutual destruction of both classes. Marx called for the overthrow of the capitalist class by the working class and the replacement of capitalism with socialism and eventually, communism.⁷¹

Class conflict is an important theme in Marxist historiography. This theme proves to be incredibly important in Robin D.G. Kelley's 1990 work *Hammer and Hoe*. Kelley's work traces the growth and evolution of the Communist Party in Alabama during the 1930s. He pays particular attention to the work of the party amongst the African-American community.

From the beginning of Alabama's industrialization, the workforce was largely black. Kelley tells us that by 1900 fifty-five percent of Alabama's coal miners, and sixty-five percent of its iron and steel workers were black.⁷² Black middle-class leaders created alliances with white industrialists to keep the peace.⁷³ Post-war turmoil, and the Great Depression would break this uneasy peace.

The party would organize both industrial workers and rural sharecroppers. One defining feature of the party would be the racial composition of its membership. Black membership was so common that the CP was known as the "nigger party" throughout the South.⁷⁴ The white ruling class would use the traditional weapons of racial violence, the police, and the Klan to try to eradicate the Communist movement.⁷⁵

Despite the violence, the party made serious inroads in both the black community and the labor movement. They took a prominent role in the struggle for civil rights, becoming especially known for their work with the Scottsboro Boys.⁷⁶ Communists also played a major role in organizing interracial unions in Birmingham.⁷⁷ However, after World War II both legal and extra-legal repression would prove to be too much for the party; by 1951 the state party had largely disappeared.⁷⁸

⁶⁹ Ibid., 1140.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 1140.

⁷¹ Green and Troup, 1140.

⁷² Robin D.G. Kelley, *Hammer and Hoe: Alabama Communists During The Great Depression*, (Chapel Hill, The University of North Carolina Press, 1990), pg. 2

⁷³ Kelley, 3.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 92.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 72-74.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 79.

⁷⁷ Kelley, 142.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 227.

As noted above, class conflict plays a central role in Kelley's narrative. He used primary sources (both party or otherwise) and the testimonies of individual communists to paint a picture of class warfare that often involved bullets instead of placards. Kelley also succeeded at showing how the nature of that class struggle was changed by the material conditions on the ground. The Alabama Communist Party was a largely black organization and their members saw the fight against racism and the fight against capitalism as one and the same. One can see this dual struggle in the demands of the communist-led Cotton Farmworkers Union. They not only demanded economic concessions, but a nine-month school year for black children and free transportation to and from school.⁷⁹ We see here, in a very direct way, the intertwining of the struggle against the forces of capital and the struggle against Jim Crow. Their opponents made this connection as well, since they fought the communists with the language and tactics of white supremacy. Kelley paints a vivid picture of a community which interpreted the class struggle, Marxism, and communism to fit the realities in which they lived. Exploring the realities and lived experiences of minority peoples is a preoccupation of Ethnohistory, our final method of historical analysis.

Ethnohistory traces its origins to a 1941 Supreme Court decision that recognized the validity of Hualapai land claims against the Santa Fe Railroad.⁸⁰ This ruling led to the founding of the Indian Claims Commission in 1946.⁸¹ The commission enlisted the help of anthropologists and historians to investigate land claims.⁸²

Most American ethnohistorians research the point of contact between two or more cultures, but this does not necessarily define the field.⁸³ The journal *Ethnohistory* states that the foundational commitment in ethnohistory is to "those analyses and interpretations that seek to make evident the experience, organization, and identities of indigenous, diasporic, and minority peoples that otherwise elude the histories and anthropologies of nations, states, and colonial empires."⁸⁴ Ethnohistory can be read as the history of oppressed groups which are usually not included in the dominant discourse. Ethnic identity and the question of ethnicity is important in the field of ethnohistory.⁸⁵ As it is currently understood, ethnicity is "relational and based upon perceptions of cultural distinctiveness."⁸⁶ However ethnicity is defined, the crowning achievement of ethnohistory has been the recasting of minority and indigenous peoples as active agents in history.⁸⁷

⁷⁹ Ibid., 80.

⁸⁰ Green and Troup, 4704.

⁸¹ Green and Troup, 4704.

⁸² Ibid., 4728.

⁸³ Ibid., 4728

⁸⁴ Ibid., 4728.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 4728.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 4728.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 4778.

One book that engages in this recasting is Mark Solomon's 1998 work *The Cry Was Unity: Communists and African Americans, 1917-1936*. Solomon traced the beginning of Marxism in the black community to the African Blood Brotherhood (ABB). ABB head Cyril Briggs used his journal *The Crusader* to espouse Revolutionary Socialism.⁸⁸ Despite being denounced by Marcus Garvey, Briggs' group actively cooperated with and received money from the communists.⁸⁹

As African Americans joined the party, they soon made a massive impact on the Comintern. Lovett Fort-Whiteman called for an American Negro Labor Congress (ANLC) which was supported by the Comintern.⁹⁰ The ANLC would work to advance civil rights and recruit black members into the party.

At home, the CPUSA made a concerted attempt to root out white chauvinism (racism).⁹¹ Party members who were accused of white chauvinism were purged. At the same time, the party fought Jim Crow racism in the south, and organized to stop the execution of the Scottsboro Boys. They organized within the black community to fight evictions and demonstrate against the hunger and unemployment of the Great Depression.

Solomon paid particular attention to the Haywood-Nasanov thesis. The thesis stated that because African Americans share a common history of sharecropping, domination, and segregation they form a "Nation within a Nation."⁹² As such, the oppression of African Americans was "National Oppression."⁹³ The thesis held that since blacks formed a nation, they had a right to self-determination—what exactly that meant was never fully articulated with party leader Earl Browder claiming in 1943 that black members had exercised their right to self-determination "by rejecting it."⁹⁴ Despite the vagaries around the "nation within in a nation" thesis, it galvanized the party to make civil rights and black liberation a priority. It also shows that black party members, such as Harry Haywood, were adapting Marxism to fit their own experiences.

Solomon utilized a dearth of primary and secondary sources from both the United States and Russia. His work focuses on the experiences of black Americans and their interactions with the Communist Party. He shows how African Americans used Marxism to interpret their own struggle for survival and civil rights and how their theoretical contributions changed how black party members saw themselves, not only as individuals, but as a people with a distinct national identity. The picture of the party painted by Solomon is much richer and complex than traditional narratives.

⁸⁸ Mark Solomon, *The Cry Was Unity: Communists and African Americans, 1917-1936*, (Jackson, University Press of Mississippi, 1998), p.7

⁸⁹ Solomon, p. 25.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 47.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 132.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 70.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 87.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 86.

One of the most important developments in American history over the last thirty years has been the reappraisal of the Communist Party. While the first historian Theodore Draper used the guise of objectivity to make moralizing attacks on the party, later generations have applied different methodologies to show that the party was more complex and more important than previously thought. A study of the historiography of the CPUSA shows revisionism at its best—forgotten stories have been uncovered and our perception of a historical episode has been changed through careful analysis and research. This study of the party shows a group of people who, while not perfect, believed in and actively fought for a better world.