



Film stars such as Lauren Bacall and Humphrey Bogart went to Washington, D.C., in 1947 to protest the HUAC investigation of communism in Hollywood. (© UPI/Bettmann/Corbis.)

depression: They now branded the Democrats unfairly but effectively as the party of treason.

In the congressional elections of 1946, the Republicans gained control of both houses of Congress, and in California seven Democratic incumbents lost their seats in the House to Republicans. One of the victorious Republicans was Richard M. Nixon of Whittier, a political newcomer who defeated Jerry Voorhis, the liberal Democrat who had represented the district for 10 years and had been one of the most effective supporters of the New Deal.

Richard Nixon would later become the first native son of California to win the presidency of the United States. He was born in 1913 to Quaker parents at Yorba Linda in Orange County. In 1922 the family acquired a general store and gasoline station in Whittier, and there Nixon and his brothers worked long hours after school. He worked his way through Whittier College, won a scholarship that enabled him to attend and graduate with honors from the law school of Duke University, practiced law in his hometown, and served during the war as a Naval Reserve officer.

In his campaign against Voorhis in 1946, Nixon followed a strategy of innuendo that the Republican National Committee had recommended to the party's candidates. He accused his Democratic opponent of disloyalty to America, not directly but through guilt by association. He charged that Voorhis was "one of those who front for un-American elements, wittingly or otherwise, by advocating increased federal controls over the lives of the people"; that Voorhis had the endorsement of the CIO Political Action Committee; and that the CIO-PAC was Communist-infiltrated. "Of course I knew that Jerry Voorhis wasn't a Communist," Nixon remarked afterward, "but I had to win. . . . Nice guys and sissies don't win many elections." Adlai

Stevenson, a later victim of similar attacks, would describe them more harshly: "Nixonland, a land of slander and scare, of sly innuendo, of a poison pen, the anonymous phone call, and hustling, pushing, shoving—the land of smash and grab and anything to win."

As a member of HUAC during his first term in Congress, Nixon rendered a service of enormous practical value to his party. He discovered convincing evidence that Alger Hiss, a Democrat who had served in the State Department during the war, had been a secret Communist during the 1930s, when he had engaged in an espionage scheme to transmit government documents to the Russians. Eventually, on January 21, 1950, Hiss was convicted of perjury for denying these charges. Republicans now argued that under the Democrats, a one-time Communist spy had been able to infiltrate the upper levels of the federal government, even the Department of State, and that therefore the Democratic party in general must be tainted with communism.

The nation's fear of world communism intensified with the explosion of the first Russian atomic bomb in 1949 and the outbreak of the Korean War in 1950. In this period many Americans were even willing to credit the wild charges of Senator Joseph McCarthy of Wisconsin, who made a series of speeches in which he "held in his hand a list" alleged to contain the names of "card-carrying Communists now employed in the State Department." McCarthy never turned up a single person who was or ever had been a Communist in the government service. Nixon, on the other hand, had actually uncovered one such person, according to the verdict of a jury.

In 1950 Nixon won election to the United States Senate over the Democratic nominee Congresswoman Helen Gahagan Douglas, a former Broadway actress. Nixon's most effective campaign weapon against Douglas was the charge that her voting record in the House of Representatives corresponded with the Communist party line. Nixon had chanced on the most rapid political escalator that the times provided. In 1951, after his election as senator, and again in 1953 after his further elevation to the vice presidency, nearly every Republican member of the House of Representatives applied for a seat on the committee on un-American activities.

The California legislature established its own joint Fact-Finding Committee on Un-American Activities in 1941, with Jack B. Tenney of Los Angeles as chairman. Tenney was a piano player and songwriter whose first widely known achievement was the composing of a popular song called "Mexicali Rose." As chairman of California's un-American activities committee, Tenney set himself up as prosecutor, judge, and jury. He bullied witnesses and denied them the rights of due process that they would have had in a normal legal proceeding. He bracketed the innocent with the guilty, convicted by accusation, punished by publicity, and tried to silence criticism by directing these methods against every critic.

The reports of the Tenney committee often included charges of communist influence in the University of California. Early in 1949 the regents of the University of California adopted a loyalty oath, which embroiled the university in the bitterest controversy in the history of American higher education up to that time. The new oath required the professor or other university employee to swear that he or she did "not believe in," was "not a member of," and did "not support any party or organization