

In Calmer Times: The Supreme Court and Red Monday

Arthur J. Sabin



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In 1951, at the height of the Red Scare, Justice Hugo Black predicted that the Supreme Court would one day change its view on the balance between the need to ensure domestic security against subversive influences and an obligation to preserve First Amendment principles. Justice Black predicted that "in calmer times" the Court would favor protecting the rights of political dissenters. He was right: six years later, FBI director J. Edgar Hoover named June 17, 1957, "Red Monday" for the four Supreme Court decisions announced that day, meaning that the "Reds" had won.

Arthur J. Sabin investigates the decisions after 1955 in which the U.S. Supreme Court repudiated its earlier endorsement of the political prosecutions that had engulfed the nation after World War II. Those prosecutions had sent hundreds to jail, reflecting a widespread belief that the nation was in serious danger of internal subversion and revolution. He does so in the context of the larger political culture of the times—and also in the context of the history of political dissent in America, from World War I through the McCarthy era and beyond.

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