arena stage | **LEARNING** GUIDE

Are You Now or Have You Ever Been?

AN AMERICAN DOCUDRAMA

BY ERIC BENTLEY

DIRECTED BY ANNA D. SHAPIRO

IN THE KREEGER THEATER

OCTOBER 17 – DECEMBER 6, 2026



What's Inside? | The Play • Say What? Key Terminology • Meet the Creatives • The Seventeen Witnesses • The World of the Play • In the Classroom • Three Big Questions • Resources

The Play

It's 1947. Fear of Communism is spreading across the United States. The government is investigating people suspected of having Communist connections, including people in one of America's most famous industries: **Hollywood**.

Actors. Writers. Directors. Choreographers.

They are called to testify before Congress and questioned about what they believe, who they know, and whether they have Communist connections.

As the investigations continue, the pressure grows. The witnesses face difficult choices:

Protect yourself? ***Or protect your friends?***
Stay silent and risk going to jail?
Or tell everything you know?

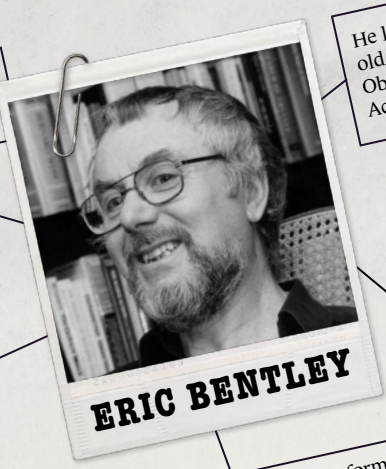
MEET THE CREATIVES

MEET THE PLAYWRIGHT: ERIC BENTLEY

Eric Bentley (1916–2020) was a British-born American playwright, theater critic, director, teacher, and author. Born in England, Bentley moved to the United States after graduating from Oxford University.

He often wrote about people who challenged authority and questioned society.

He lived to be 103 years old and received an Obie Award for Lifetime Achievement in 2006.



ERIC BENTLEY

He met playwright Bertolt Brecht in 1942, whose work influenced his ideas about theater. Brecht was also questioned by HUAC in 1947, the same year the hearings at the center of this play began.

He was inducted into the American Theatre Hall of Fame in 1998.

He was a cabaret performer, earning recognition from the New York Theater Hall of Fame.

SAY WHAT?
KEY TERMINOLOGY

BLACKLIST
A practice of preventing people from getting work because they were suspected of having Communist connections or associations

CAPITALISM
A system in which people and businesses can privately own property, businesses, and other resources

COMMUNISM
A system in which the government controls major industries and resources

COMMUNIST
A person who supports or believes in communism

DOCUDRAMA
A type of theater that tells a story based on real people, events, or historical moments

HOUSE UN-AMERICAN ACTIVITIES COMMITTEE (HUAC)
A U.S. House of Representatives committee that investigated people suspected of having ties to Communism or other activities considered "un-American"

INFORMER
A person who secretly gives information about someone to the authorities or another group

McCARTHYISM
The practice of accusing people of being a Communist or disloyal, often without enough evidence

THE RED SCARES
Two periods in U.S. history when fear of Communism led to investigations, accusations, and concerns about Communist influence in the United States

DID YOU KNOW?
Transcript to Theatrical Script

Are You Now or Have You Ever Been? is a **docudrama**. Instead of making up dialogue, Bentley used actual words from the original HUAC hearing transcripts to create the play's script.

How does knowing these are real words change the way you think about what you're hearing?

MEET THE CREATIVES

MEET THE DIRECTOR: ANNA D. SHAPIRO

Anna D. Shapiro is a Tony Award-winning theater director and educator known for her work on Broadway and with Chicago's Steppenwolf Theatre Company.

She directed the stage musical adaptation of *The Devil Wears Prada*, with music by Elton John.

"I always say that I direct plays really for one reason, and that is to make the audience's world bigger."



ANNA D. SHAPIRO

She won a Tony Award for Best Direction of a Play in 2008 for *August: Osage County*.

THE SEVENTEEN WITNESSES

MEET THE CHARACTERS

These aren't fictional characters. They are real people who walked into HUAC hearings with careers, reputations, beliefs, friendships, and fears of their own. As you read about them, notice how different their lives were, and what happened when they were all placed under the same spotlight.

In this production, some actors will play multiple roles.

ACTORS



Larry Parks
Known for playing Al Jolson in *The Jolson Story*



Sterling Hayden
Actor known for *The Asphalt Jungle* and *The Killing*



José Ferrer
Multi-award winning actor and film director, known for *Cyrano de Bergerac*; the first Hispanic actor to win an Academy Award

Elliott Sullivan
Worked in Broadway and Hollywood productions

Martin Berkeley
Actor and screenwriter, known for his work in Hollywood films and television

Tony Kraber
Actor, director, and a founding member of the Group Theatre, a New York theater company known for realistic acting



Marc Lawrence
Known for playing gangsters and other tough characters in Hollywood films



Lionel Stander
Known for his distinctive voice and outspoken personality



Paul Robeson
Singer, actor, athlete, and activist, known for his powerful voice and advocacy for racial equality and workers' rights; recipient of the Grammy Lifetime Achievement Award after-death

DIRECTORS & CHOREOGRAPHERS



Sam G. Wood
Film director, known for directing *A Night at the Opera* and *Goodbye, Mr. Chips*



Edward Dmytryk
Film director, one of the Hollywood Ten



Elia Kazan
Award-winning Greek American theater and film director, known for *A Streetcar Named Desire* and *On the Waterfront*



Jerome Robbins
Award-winning choreographer and director, known for *West Side Story*

WRITERS



Ring Lardner, Jr.
Award-winning screenwriter, one of the Hollywood Ten



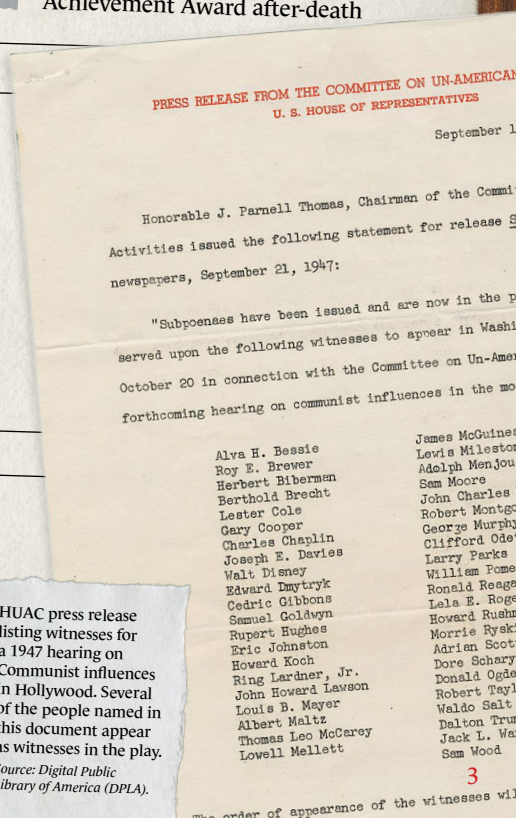
Abe Burrows
Writer, comedian, and director, known for award-winning musicals *Guys and Dolls* and *How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying*



Lillian Hellman
Playwright, known for *The Little Foxes* and *Watch on the Rhine*



Arthur Miller
Well-known award-winning playwright, known for *Death of a Salesman* and *The Crucible*


PRESS RELEASE FROM THE COMMITTEE ON UN-AMERICAN
U. S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

September 1

Honorable J. Parnell Thomas, Chairman of the Commi
Activities issued the following statement for release S
newspapers, September 21, 1947:

"Subpoenaes have been issued and are now in the p
served upon the following witnesses to appear in Washi
October 20 in connection with the Committee on Un-Ame
forthcoming hearing on communist influences in the mo

Alva H. Bessie
Roy E. Brewer
Herbert Biberman
Berthold Brecht
Lester Cole
Gary Cooper
Charles Chaplin
Joseph E. Davies
Walt Disney
Edward Dmytryk
Cedric Gibbons
Samuel Goldwyn
Rupert Hughes
Eric Johnston
Howard Koch
Ring Lardner, Jr.
John Howard Lawson
Louis B. Mayer
Albert Maltz
Thomas Leo McCarey
Lowell Mellett

James McGuines
Lewis Mileston
Adolph Menjou
Sam Moore
John Charles
Robert Montgo
George Murphy
Clifford Ode
Larry Parks
William Pome
Ronald Reage
Lela E. Roge
Howard Rushm
Morrie Rysk
Adrian Scot
Dore Schary
Donald Ogde
Robert Tayl
Waldo Salt
Dalton Trum
Jack L. Wa
Sam Wood

3

The order of appearance of the witnesses wi

HUAC press release listing witnesses for a 1947 hearing on Communist influences in Hollywood. Several of the people named in this document appear as witnesses in the play.
Source: Digital Public Library of America (DPLA).

THE WORLD OF THE PLAY

The play takes place during the **Second Red Scare**, a time when fear of Communism grew across the United States. To understand what happens to the people in this play, it helps to know how that fear grew and eventually made its way to Hollywood.

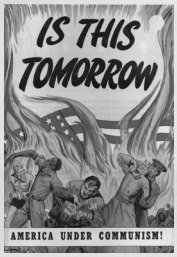
The First Red Scare

The **First Red Scare** began after the **Russian Revolution of 1917**, when the Bolshevik (BOHL-shuh-vick) Party took control of Russia and created a Communist government.

Many Americans feared that Communists might try to take over the U.S. government. These fears grew during a time of labor strikes, protests, and political violence.

The Red Scare

The Fear of Communism Grows



The Red Scares were two periods in U.S. history when fear of Communism led to investigations, accusations, and concerns about Communist influence in the United States.

The Second Red Scare: The Fear Gets Bigger

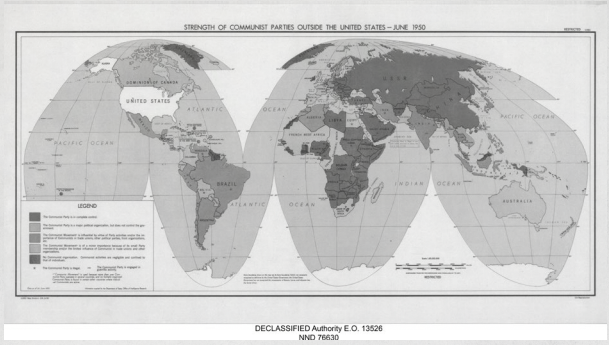
After World War II, tensions between the United States and the Soviet Union increased because of political differences. China became a Communist country in 1949. These events increased fears of Communism in the United States and helped fuel the **Second Red Scare**.

Why was it called the "Red Scare"?



"**Red**" comes from the red flag, a symbol used by Communist movements. After the 1917 Russian Revolution, the red flag became closely associated with the Bolsheviks and Communism.

"**Scare**" refers to the fear that Communism could spread or take over.



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Communism vs. Capitalism

Communism is a system in which the government controls major industries and resources. The United States is a capitalist country, where people and businesses can privately own property, businesses, and other resources.

The HUAC & Hollywood

The Investigation Reaches the Movies

The House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) was a committee in the U.S. House of Representatives that investigated people and groups suspected of having ties to Communism and other activities the government considered "un-American."

The HUAC called people to testify before Congress. People were questioned about their political beliefs and activities, as well as their relationships with others who were thought to be communists.

In 1947, HUAC turned its attention to Hollywood. Why Hollywood? Movies reached millions of people, and some government officials feared that Communists could use movies and entertainment to spread their ideas.

Actors, writers, directors, and other people in the entertainment industry were questioned about if they attended Communist meetings, supported Communism, or knew people who were tied to Communism. Some people answered the questions or named other people. Others refused, believing they had the right to keep their political beliefs and associations private.

These investigations are at the center of the play.



The Hollywood Ten outside a federal courthouse in Washington, DC, January 9, 1948. Source: Associated Press.

The Hollywood Ten
Some Refuse to Answer

In 1947, ten Hollywood screenwriters and directors refused to answer the HUAC's questions about their political beliefs and associations. They believed the government was violating their rights by questioning them about their beliefs and who they knew.

They became known as the **Hollywood Ten**. They were later convicted for refusing to answer Congress's questions and sentenced to prison. The Hollywood studios responded by creating the **Hollywood blacklist.**

The Blacklist
Canceled from Hollywood

A **blacklist** was a list of people who were prevented from getting work because they were suspected of having Communist connections or had refused to cooperate with anti-Communist investigations.

The blacklist affected actors, writers, directors, producers, and others in Hollywood. Some people lost their careers or struggled to find work for years. Some worked under different names or did not receive credit for their work. Even people who were never proven to be Communists lost their jobs simply because they had been accused or were connected to someone who was.



McCarthyism
Accusations Make National Headlines

In 1950, Wisconsin Senator Joseph McCarthy claimed that Communists were secretly working in the U.S. government. His accusations attracted national attention and helped intensify fears about Communist influence.

McCarthyism describes this period when people were accused of being Communists or traitors, sometimes without enough evidence. Investigations and public pressure were used to target people.

In 1954, McCarthy accused officials in the U.S. Army of allowing Communist influence in the military. The hearings were shown on television, allowing millions of Americans to watch. Many people began to question McCarthy's methods, which were often described as aggressive and bullying.

Hollywood Blacklist
The OG Cancel Culture?

Have you ever seen someone get "canceled" because of something that they said, did, or were connected to? During the Hollywood blacklist, people could also face serious consequences because of their beliefs or who they were connected to, including losing their fans, jobs, and opportunities.

Step Into Their Shoes

What might make someone risk their career rather than answer a question?

What would you be willing to risk to stand up for what you believe?

Why Tell Stories from the Past?

Why do theaters put on plays about events that happened decades or even centuries ago? Historical plays can help us look at the past in a new way. They can help us understand what happened, why it mattered, and how people experienced it.

As you prepare to see the play, consider this question:

What can a story from the past help us understand about the world we live in today?

IN THE CLASSROOM

GOT 20 MINUTES?

BEFORE THE SHOW

Pre-Show Activity: Hot Seat

OBJECTIVE: Students will explore how fear, pressure, and accusations can shape the choices people make.

ACTIVITY FRAMEWORK: Before beginning the activity, have each student secretly choose another student in the classroom. Then, introduce the following scenario:

Graffiti has been found on the front doors of the school. The graffiti supports the school's biggest rival. The school wants to find out who did it. Have the class create a list of questions to help figure out who was involved.

Select five students to sit at the front of the class and be questioned by their classmates. Tell each student that the person they secretly chose was part of the group that created the graffiti—only they know this information. Students should take turns being the interrogator and one of the five being questioned. Throughout the investigation, remind students of the severity of their choices. Examples: if you refuse to answer, you may get in trouble or if the school finds out you lied, you will not be allowed to join after-school clubs.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

- What would make you change your answer?
- Would you name someone else to protect yourself? Why or why not?
- Is staying silent the same as lying?
- How might fear or pressure change your choices?
- How did it feel to be the interrogated? How did it feel to be the interrogator?

GOT 45 MINUTES?

AFTER THE SHOW

Post-Show Activity: Your Words, My Poem

OBJECTIVE: Students will explore how artists can transform real voices and testimony into new works of art.

ACTIVITY FRAMEWORK: The artists behind *Are You Now, or Have You Ever Been?* transformed real historical testimony into theater. Have students pair up and interview each other using the same set of questions. Students should transcribe everything their partner says, then use those words to create an original poem. Encourage students to choose, arrange, and repeat their partner's words to find deeper meaning.

POETRY SLAM: Have students perform their poems for the class.

GOT 5 MINUTES?

QUICK TOUCHPOINTS

- If someone in authority asked you to report something your best friend had done, would you do it? What if you could get in trouble for refusing?
- You have been accused of something you did not do but are suffering the consequences anyway. What would you do? How would you feel?
- Can you think of a person living today who was punished because of what they believed or who they were connected to? What has happened to them?

LEARN MORE. GET EXCITED!

Visit these links for videos and articles about your upcoming show. For more behind-the-scenes glimpses and exclusive content, follow Arena Stage on Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok.

YouTube Playlist:
ARE YOU NOW OR HAVE YOU EVER BEEN?

Instagram Video (2 minutes)
Interviewing the cast of ARE YOU NOW OR HAVE YOU EVER BEEN?

THREE BIG QUESTIONS

1. **What does it mean to be loyal to your country, your community, or yourself?**
2. **Who gets to decide what is American and Un-American behavior?**
3. **How do you stand up for yourself even when you are not sure of the consequences?**

RESOURCES

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