Cold War Compromises:
Albert Barnes, John Dewey, and the Federal Bureau of Investigation

Historians have increasingly uncovered evidence that informants utilized the anti-communist crusade of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) for a variety of motives. Some informants were interested in furthering personal vendettas while others volunteered their services for ideological reasons. The data supplied by informants proved invaluable to the FBI in its unremitting efforts to discredit the political left and ultimately served as the evidential basis for the repression of political nonconformists during the late 1940s and 1950s. With the passage of the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), scholars have been provided with an important tool in uncovering heretofore unavailable information in recent American history. Documents secured under FOIA show that Albert Barnes, collector of modern art, educator, and inventor of Argyrol, a widely-used medicine, used the FBI information-gathering apparatus to attempt to discredit Barrows Dunham’s first book, *Man Against Myth*, and also prompted John Dewey’s attempt to revoke his highly laudatory comments on *Man Against Myth*.¹

*Man Against Myth* was an instant success. It was published in 1947 just as the Cold War consciousness was descending and, in its first hard-cover edition, sold 75,000 copies. The book contained a critical analysis of those slogans which Dunham believed were accepted uncritically and which distorted the human condition. In a graceful and witty style, Dunham, in individual chapters, attacked such widely-held beliefs as the impossibility of changing human nature, the superiority of

the rich over the poor, the superiority of some races over others, and the multidimensional nature of all philosophical questions (i.e. that every question possesses two sides). His concluding chapter was a scathing indictment of twentieth-century linguistic philosophy, assaulting the logical positivists and their notions that all problems are merely verbal. *Man Against Myth* was a radical, socialist critique of contemporary thinking in the capitalist world and helped to make Dunham a leading target for future political attacks.²

In September, 1953, Professor Barrows Dunham, chairman of the Department of Philosophy, was dismissed by the Temple University Board of Trustees for refusing to cooperate with the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC). As a leading Marxist scholar, member of the Communist Party of the United States (CPUSA) from 1938 through 1945,³ and an outspoken critic of capitalism, Dunham was an obvious target for investigation by HUAC. The Dunham-HUAC hearing was the culmination of a decade of clandestine information-gathering by the FBI. To understand the actions of Albert Barnes and John Dewey in the Dunham case, it is first necessary to begin with Bertrand Russell’s dismissal from his newly appointed teaching position at the College of the City of New York in 1940.⁴

Even before Russell could begin teaching, hostile politicians, religious pressure groups, and the newly-formed Rapp-Coudert investigating committee applied sufficient pressures so that Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia removed the funds from the city budget for Russell’s position.⁵ Among those who supported Russell were John Dewey, a friend

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² Barrows Dunham, *Man Against Myth* (Boston, 1947).
³ Professor Dunham left the CPUSA because he disagreed with the policies pursued by Earl Browder. When the Communist Political Association was dissolved and the Communist Party reorganized, Professor Dunham never rejoined because he believed the CPUSA was still following Earl Browder’s policies.
of Albert Barnes, Sidney Hook, and the Committee for Cultural Freedom. Russell quickly became *persona non grata* throughout the United States and found himself without means of economic support. The one man, according to Russell, who took any practical initiative in his case was Dr. Albert Barnes who provided Russell with a five-year appointment to lecture at the Barnes Foundation, an educational institution he had created in Merion, Pennsylvania.⁶

When Barrows Dunham learned of Bertrand Russell's appointment to the Barnes Foundation, he congratulated Barnes on his defense of free speech. As a result, Dunham and his wife, Alice, were invited to join the class to hear Russell's lectures. Of the sixty class members, Dunham was the only trained philosopher and he remembered Russell as "witty, beautiful, and utterly clear." In fact, the lectures that Dunham and the other students heard were the first two-thirds of Russell's *History of Western Philosophy*.⁷ By all accounts, including Barnes's, the lectures represented a fruitful experience.⁸ But like most of Barnes's attempts to create a constructive and personal relationship, the Russell appointment was doomed to failure.

Barnes was a curious amalgam of genius and irascibility. The son of a Kensington butcher, he was born in 1872, attended Philadelphia's prestigious Central High School, matriculated at the University of Pennsylvania, and graduated from its medical school at the age of twenty. Early in his career he abandoned the practice of medicine, and by the age of twenty-nine he combined his skills in chemistry and public relations to begin building his financial fortune marketing Argyrol. His interest in business diminished as quickly as his interest in art developed. He purchased his first oil painting in 1905 and developed one of the finest collections of Impressionist and Post-Impressionist paintings in the United States. His first attempt to exhibit his art collection in Philadelphia in 1923 was a fiasco. A man with strong social ambitions, his exhibition was ridiculed by the socially prominent persons who controlled the art museums in Philadelphia. From this hu-

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miliation emerged a long-lasting feud between the parvenu with genius and the Philadelphia upper classes. This hostility carried over into most facets of his relationships and became one of the dominant themes of his personality.\(^9\)

Barnes's hostility soon carried forward to Bertrand Russell's wife, Patricia. His reasons were trivial and had little foundation in reality: the fact that Russell's wife used her title (Lady) when dealing with members of the foundation's staff bothered Barnes immensely. He also became infuriated because Mrs. Russell knitted during her husband's lectures and he argued that her actions disturbed the class. Barnes barred her from entering the grounds of the foundation, but economic reality forced Russell to continue his weekly lecture.\(^10\)

Although an "uneasy truce" was maintained between Russell and Barnes, it was not long before decisive action was taken. On December 28, 1942, Bertrand Russell was notified by letter that his teaching appointment at the foundation would expire on January 1, 1943. Barnes claimed that Russell had broken his contract with the foundation by engaging in outside lectures. This charge was patent nonsense and after a protracted lawsuit, the sixty-nine-year-old Russell eventually won a settlement of $20,000.\(^11\) While the press was enjoying a field day with this Barnsian foolishness, one of Barnes' students, R.D. Bulley, was quoted as stating that Bertrand Russell's "system [of learning] has a definite tendency to discourage the desire to learn."\(^12\)

Bulley's statement infuriated Barrows Dunham who claimed that she was a stooge for Barnes and that the statement was an obvious falsehood. Dunham wrote a letter in defense of Russell and the philosophy profession that was published in *The Philadelphia Inquirer* on February 10, 1943 (see Document No. 1). Shortly after the publication of the letter, professor Claude Bowman, friend of Barnes and Dunham and professor of Sociology at Temple University, told Barrows Dunham that Barnes was in a "fury" about his letter and might try to have Dunham


\(^10\) Feinberg and Kasnls, eds, *Bertrand Russell's America*, 188


\(^12\) *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, 19 January 1943
dismissed from his faculty position at Temple University. As the FBI documents reveal, Barnes did try to create problems for Dunham; he waited until 1947, when Dunham published *Man Against Myth*, then once again appeared on the scene—this time as an informant for the FBI and an ideological watchdog for Professor John Dewey.

The documents that follow demonstrate the FBI's surveillance of Barrows Dunham and all those associated with him in the publication of *Man Against Myth*. The FBI's willingness to use and to accept any type of information represents a very troublesome period in our national history. From the publishing house to the psychiatrist's couch, the FBI gathered bits of information and gossip about Dunham and his associates (see Document No. 2). J. Edgar Hoover's men were not above receiving stolen goods in their protection of the national security and in a comical and typically bureaucratic manner, the FBI agents were advised to conceal their stolen copy of *Man Against Myth* because it was "still a trade secret" (see Document No. 3).

Equally as disturbing was the performance of Professor John Dewey. His early praise of *Man Against Myth* was of the highest order (see Documents No. 4 & 5), and he continued to offer to promote the book until he was prompted to believe he had committed an ideological blunder. Alarmè that he thought his endorsement of Dunham's book was an endorsement of the Progressive Citizens of America (PCA) and those groups forming around Henry Wallace, Dewey asked Dunham to "discourage" use of his endorsement of *Man Against Myth* (see Document No. 6). Dunham acceded to his request and told Dewey that he would "accept no praise from any man who required as the price of it that I agree with his political opinion." Dunham always thought that Sidney Hook, the philosopher, had convinced Dewey to attempt to retract his favorable comments from the dust jacket of *Man Against Myth*. However, as the FBI files show, the persuasion came not from Sidney Hook but from Albert Barnes, Dewey's close personal friend.

These documents show the FBI as a secret police relying upon informants to compile dossiers on members of the political left during the Cold War. It is important to note that liberals who supported the Cold War, such as John Dewey, Albert Barnes, and Sidney Hook, were willing to defend Bertrand Russell, an anti-communist, against attacks

13 Interview with Barrows Dunham, 124-126.
from the reactionary political right, but were unwilling to defend the left-wing views expressed by Barrows Dunham in *Man Against Myth*. This phenomenon of liberal political attacks upon the political left was, in part, responsible for the development of the anti-communist crusade which has been one of the dominant forces in political life in the United States for the past forty years.

Fred Zimring

[Document No. 1]

Mr. Russell’s Lectures

To the Editor of The Inquirer:

In view of the letter from one R.D. Bulley to Dr. A.C. Barnes, from which quotations have appeared in the Philadelphia newspapers, I desire to make the following unsolicited observations:

For nearly twenty years I have been a student and a teacher of philosophy. During that time I have heard lectures by many very distinguished men. In my judgment, Mr. Russell’s lectures at the Barnes Foundation deserve the highest praise. They were wonderfully clear expositions of a difficult subject, they were full of wit, and they were set forth with that literary grace which has characterized all his writings.

Many people have found Mr. Russell to be “dangerous,” but R.D. Bulley is certainly the first to find him dull.

Barrows Dunham

Philadelphia, Feb. 3.
[Document No. 2]

FEDERAL BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION

Form No. 1
This Case Originated at File No. 100-18715
PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA

Report Made At Date When Made Period For Report Made By
Which Made
BOSTON, MASS. 3/18/47 3/11/47

Title Character of Case
BARROWS DUNHAM SECURITY
MATTER—C

Synopsis of Facts:

DUNHAM is the author of "Man Against Myth" to be released by the Little, Brown Company on April 8, 1947. [Deleted] notes that the subject credits publicly known Communists such as ELLA WINTER STEWART, with having assisted him. [Deleted] advises DUNHAM attended PCA founding convention at NYC on 12/31/46 and was there closely associated with D. ANGUS CAMERON, ELLA WINTER STEWART and HAROLD YOUNG. Subject's plans for subsequent books disclosed here-in. . . .

It will be noted here that at the direction of either ELLA WINTER STEWART or D. ANGUS CAMERON advance copies of the book were furnished Professors HAROLD UREY and HARLOW SHAPLEY, DONALD OGDEN STEWART, DOROTHY PARKER, ALBERT EINSTEIN, BERTRAND RUSSELL, LARRY ADLER and HAROLD YOUNG, who will be referred to below.
On February 23, 1947, ELLA WINTER STEWART advised the publishers that she had endeavored to perfect arrangements so that the book would be reviewed in the New York Times by F.O. MATTHIESEN of Harvard University. . . . STEWART added that she thought that she had perfected arrangements whereby the book would be reviewed in the New York Herald Tribune by DOROTHY PARKER, who you will note has already written an "advertising blurb" which is printed on the jacket of the book. STEWART concluded her advice on this date by stating that FREDERICK WERTHAM, her own psychiatrist and an author of pro-communist sympathies, according to [deleted], had written a review which would be placed in any publication the Little, Brown Company desired.

STEWART also assisted in having the book accepted by the Book-Find Club, a Communist book-of-the-month club, and [deleted] advises that it has assured the publishers that it can dispose of 60,000 copies.15

[Document No. 3]

UNDEVELOPED LEADS

The Philadelphia Field Division

At Philadelphia

Will review the enclosed copy of "Man Against Myth." It is noted that while copies of this book have been furnished certain reviewers in Philadelphia, and should now be en route to the book stalls, the book is still a trade secret. Therefore, the Philadelphia Field Division is requested not to carry this book on the streets without an additional cover lest its appearance outside trade channels excite suspicion and [deleted].16

16 Ibid., 49.
Comment Written For The Dust Jacket of
*Man Against Myth* by John Dewey.

Dr. Dunham has written a remarkable book. . .for me, it is most
decidedly the book of the year—and in the interest of good sense and
intelligent clearheaded action one can hope for many years to come.\(^{17}\)

3/24/47

Temporary Winter Address
504 South St.
Key West, Florida

Dear Mr. Dunham:

Thanks for your generous letter. I don’t think I need tell you that if
[anything] I can say or have said promotes the proper circulation of
your book I shall be more than repaid.

I get discouraged when I see the amount of what seems to me slush
that gets ballyhooed nowadays. A voice of clarified & informed com-
mon sense & uncorrupted judgment like your book gives me renewed
courage & I’m personally grateful to you for that.

Sincerely yours,

John Dewey\(^{18}\)

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\(^{17}\) See Dust Jacket of Barrows Dunham, *Man Against Myth*.

\(^{18}\) John Dewey to Barrows Dunham, 27 March 1947, Private Papers of Barrows Dunham
Dear Dr. Dunham:

When we returned, shortly ago, from Fla [sic] where we had spent five mos, I found yours of April 13th thanking me for mine of March 27th. I do not always keep carbons of my letters, and I am rather puzzled [sic] because I am unable to recall writing such a letter. Accordingly I should be grateful to you if you would be [good enough to] send me a copy of the letter.

I shouldn't trouble you this way if it were not that I have been disturbed by the reports that my endorsement of your book carried with it an endorsement of that part of your economic—[views] which agree with those of the PCA, Wallace and other Pro-Soviet partisans. When I wrote to Little Brown I had no idea that you held these views. As you will doubtless learn from them the use that is being made in some quarters of my approval of the book has compelled me to write them not to use any longer that endorsement. My own attitude can be gathered from the enclosed brief reprint. I don't send it in the hope of changing your view but to indicate why I am disturbed. Appeasement of the Soviet brand of totalitarianism if kept up especially by this country is as sure, in my judgment, to lead to war as did the earlier appeasement of the German brand. May I count upon you to discourage such use of my approval of your book?

Sincerely yours,

John Dewey

[Document No. 6]

1158 5th Ave.
NY 29
May 3, 1947

19 John Dewey to Barrows Dunham, 3 May 1947, Private Papers of Barrows Dunham.
[Document No. 7]

Standard Form No. 64

OFFICE MEMORANDUM
UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT

TO: Director, FBI

DATE: May 10, 1947

FROM: SAC, Boston

SUBJECT: BARROWS DUNHAM
SECURITY MATTER—C

[Deleted] has advised that under date May 1, 1947, JOHN DEWEY, Columbia philosopher, whose address is 1158 Fifth Avenue, New York 29, New York, addressed a letter to the Little Brown Publishing Company, concerning DUNHAM'S current book, entitled, "Man Against Myth." DEWEY requested the publishing company to withdraw the statement now appearing on the jacket of the book by him endorsing the book. DEWEY asserted that he had "evidence" that the book is being used to aid the Progressive Citizens of America, and to the "fellow traveler organizations." He stated further that he had "evidence" that the author of the book, BARROWS DUNHAM, was pro-Russian and anti-American, and that for that reason he did not wish his own name associated with either the book or the author.

The publishing company is disturbed not so much by DEWEY'S allegations, as by the fact that the May 11, 1947 issue of the New York Times Book Review section has been printed with a full page advertisement paid for by the Book Find Club, in which DUNHAM's book and DEWEY's statement are featured. The publishing company is now endeavoring to kill that page, but is not too certain that its efforts will be successful. It is fearful lest DEWEY produces his "evidence" to the embarrassment of not only the author but also the publishing company.

The foregoing has been provided the Bureau, New York, and Philadelphia by letter because of the potential publicity which can be afforded this subject. No further inquiries are being made in Boston and none are requested in the other two field divisions.20

BSG/jas

100-18715

cc: New York

cc: Philadelphia

20 Federal Bureau of Investigation File, 10 May 1947, 50
OFFICE MEMORANDUM
UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT

TO: Director FBI
FROM: SAC, Philadelphia
SUBJECT: BARROWS DUNHAM
SECURITY MATTER—C
(Bureau File No. 100-228221)

Reference is made to Boston letter dated May 10, 1947.

JOHN DEWEY’s action in withdrawing support from BARROWS DUNHAM’s book “MAN AGAINST MYTH” was prompted by his close personal friend, ALBERT C. BARNES, of Merion, Pa. BARNES is the man who discovered argyrol, became a multi-millionaire and established the Barnes Foundation, which is chartered as an educational institution by the State of Pennsylvania. The Foundation consists of a gallery and other buildings located at Merion, Pa., which contain a collection of more than 1,000 paintings by modern artists. The Foundation’s educational program follows the teachings of JOHN DEWEY.

BARNES was incensed that much of the critical reception given “MAN AGAINST MYTH” was favorable when he felt the book to be “earnest, full of zeal, superficial, one-sided and often extremely silly—very sophomoric.” He was particularly disturbed by the endorsement given the book by JOHN DEWEY, whose name had been identified with the Barnes Foundation for many years; and it annoyed him that the PROGRESSIVE CITIZENS OF AMERICA (of which DUNHAM’s wife, ALICE, is local secretary) was publicizing the book.

BARNES furnished this office with a copy of a letter he sent DEWEY on April 22, 1947. The letter was addressed “Dear Jack,” and read in part:

“Your stopNotice to LITTLE, BROWN AND COMPANY locks the door after the horse has gone. It did not stop the horse from
continuing to perform on every approved track known to advertising experts; e.g., last week, DUNHAM, on the radio, sandwiched your endorsement of his book between plugs for an inferior brand of ice cream. . .

“As soon as I heard of DUNHAM’s book, I offered to bet you that it would be a phony: The New York Times—Prescott on April 8th, and Edman on April 13th—told the world that the book is a phony and, by implication, put it in the class of communistic tracts. On this latter score, I can supply data—which would stand up under judicial investigation—to show that it fits smoothly into the party line. We have been over DUNHAM’s book with a finetooth comb and can find nothing original, ample corroboration of Prescott’s and Edman’s statements of the author’s mental confusion, and statements strongly indicative that it is a full meal of fellow-traveler nourishment. . .

“Last night I had a long talk with BOWMAN, a member of the faculty at Temple University, whom you met at my house. He knows what’s what in the DUNHAM situation and he said your endorsement was ‘extravagant’. He, like many others who have talked to me about it, wonders how in the hell you ever boosted DUNHAM’s book with a statement so laudatory that it could hardly apply to anything much short of the best chapters of the Old Testament or the finest plays of Shakespeare. . . .

“Your endorsement of the book purports to be ‘the sound judgment’ of a philosopher recognized as the most distinguished in America. If that judgment is sound, you repudiate the ideas which for twenty-five years we have drilled constantly into students from the day they enter our place until they leave. . . .

“It’s a hell of a mess, and I am going to do my damnedest to get us, and you, out of it, and help the Federal Government show up these fellow-travelers so they cannot interfere with the foreign policy of the Government.”

In a letter to this office, BARNES said:

“My interest in counteracting these subversive elements, besides a wish to support the Government’s program, is a desire to rid honest,
scientific educational methods of the obstructions carried on in underground movements in various institutions. I am particularly incensed at DUNHAM because he duped DEWEY into endorsement of his book by the smooth, slick methods of cheap journalism. As I told you, I informed DEWEY of the local situation, he wrote the publisher to withdraw his name from the advertisements of DUNHAM's book, and, he informed me, he has written DUNHAM protesting against the use of his name in connection with the promotion of the objectives of the PROGRESSIVE CITIZENS OF AMERICA."

If additional information on BARNES is desired, reference is made to "The Terrible Tempered Dr. BARNES", a series of articles by CARL McCARDLE which appeared in the "Saturday Evening Post" beginning March 21, 1942.

This case is being closed pursuant to SAC Letter No. 44, Series 1947. 21

JWD:img
100-16499

cc: Boston (100-18715)
    New York