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**From Communist to Catholic Anti-Communist:  
Bella Visono Dodd's American Journey**

**Submitted by Karen Campbell in Partial Completion  
of the Master of Arts Degree at Sarah  
Lawrence College, May, 2000**

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## ABSTRACT

### From Communist to Catholic Anti-Communist: Bella Visono Dodd's American Journey

Priscilla Murolo-Thesis Director

This thesis makes more intelligible the enigma of Bella Visono Dodd, a minor player in the American social and political movements during the tumultuous times of the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s. Bella Dodd was an Italian-American lawyer who in the 1930s and 1940s rose to power as a union leader for the Teachers Union, ran for elective office under the American Labor Party banner, courted politicians, and publicly announced her Communist Party membership. In the 1950s Dodd, an ex-Communist, became a Catholic and a virulent anti-Communist who testified against her former Communist Party associates before the assorted congressional committees. Dodd traveled the country expounding on the evils of communism, ran for elective office on the Conservative Party ticket, edited a right-wing newsletter and turned into a "superhawk" in the 1960s. This thesis explicates her personal and political motivations for turning from left to right and posits that Dodd did not change, instead her political definition of an American mutated through the years. Critically examining her autobiography, *School of Darkness* (1954) this thesis contends that Dodd's life, her years both as a leftist and as a rightist, was a continuum of a zealous quest for acceptance as a loyal American. This thesis argues against Dodd's interpretation of events in the *School of Darkness* and highlights the consistency of Dodd's views--despite the seeming reversal in her political sympathies, and takes into account psychological, ideological and social factors. The work demonstrates how Dodd's political actions and beliefs at once reflected a genuine commitment to principle while serving Dodd's personal needs and interests.

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## INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this thesis is to make more intelligible the enigma of Bella Visono Dodd, a minor player in the American social and political movements during the tumultuous times of the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s. Bella Dodd was an Italian-American lawyer who in the 1930s and 1940s rose to power as a union leader for the Teachers Union, ran for elective office under the American Labor Party banner, courted politicians, called the mayor of New York City, Fiorello LaGuardia, a friend, worked on Vito Marcantonio's U. S. Congressional reelection campaign and publicly announced her Communist Party membership.<sup>1</sup> In the 1950s Dodd, an ex-Communist, became a Catholic and a virulent anti-Communist who testified against her former Communist Party associates before the assorted congressional committees. Dodd traveled the country expounding on the evils of communism to Catholic and secular civic groups, ran for elective office on the Conservative Party ticket, edited a right-wing newsletter and turned into a “superhawk” in the 1960s. This thesis explicates her personal and political motivations for turning from left to right.

In her autobiography, *School of Darkness*, Dodd depicted her metamorphosis from a Communist Party member to a reborn Catholic anti-Communist. This thesis posits that Dodd did not change, instead her political definition of an American mutated through the years. Throughout her life as a student, a teacher, a Communist and an ex-Communist Dodd saw herself as a loyal patriotic American, interested in social justice and working for the greater good of America. Examining her book critically, this thesis contends that Dodd's life, her

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<sup>1</sup> Fiorella LaGuardia (1882-1947) was a Democratic Party reformer and mayor of New York City from 1933-1945. Vito Marcantonio (1902-1954) a leftist, served as a United States House of Representatives from 1934-1936 and 1938-1950 from Harlem. Marc was known for his support of the working classes in his district. For more information on Marcantonio see Gerald Meyer, *Vito Marcantonio: Radical Politician, 1902-1954* (Albany: State University Press, 1989).

years both as a leftist and as a rightist, was a continuum of a zealous quest for acceptance as a loyal American.

### **Bella Dodd's Autobiography-School of Darkness**

*School of Darkness* remains the only account of the life of Bella Dodd. Dodd testified that she lost her personal papers when she sold her home on Lexington Avenue.<sup>2</sup> She may have deliberately destroyed her personal papers if they contradicted anything she wrote in *School of Darkness* (1954). Dodd wanted her book to stand as the sole depiction of her life. She wrote *School of Darkness*, a typical conversion tale, to illustrate from a Catholic anticommunist viewpoint the evils of communism experienced by one disillusioned ex-Communist. Dodd's cautionary tale is plagued by selective overstatements and understatements framed within the standard formula of a confessional and new vision of morality. A critical examination of Dodd's book can provide a new analysis of her actions. This thesis argues against Dodd's interpretation of events in the *School of Darkness*.

Dodd's autobiography was written to portray the darkness of an education that led her to embrace Communist ideology, an education that lacked any enlightened Christian training. Her book, published by a Catholic press, coincided with the McCarthy witch hunts. Her book was a kind of repentance. One of many ex-Communist confessionals popular at the time, *School of Darkness* allowed Dodd to absolve herself of her past involvement with the disfavored Communist Party and, according to Dodd, warn others about this dark ideology

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<sup>2</sup> Dodd said in published government testimony that with the sale of her house personal material was destroyed. Bella Dodd testimony, Congress, Senate, Committee on Foreign Relations, Subcommittee Appointed Under Senate Resolution 231, *State Department Employee Loyalty Investigation*, 81st Cong., 2nd sess., 25 April 1950, 636.

that had fooled even her, an educated, loyal American.<sup>3</sup>

In her autobiography Dodd claimed that she disregarded the Party leaders' intentions of building a Soviet America. Dodd wrote that when she finally realized her mistake it was too late to extricate herself without professional and personal ruin. She further explained in her book that her participation in the Communist Party was in support of the Party's advocacy of the working classes. Looking back through a Catholic anticommunist lens, Dodd recalled that she believed the Party offered a solution to social injustice.<sup>4</sup> Dodd portrayed herself as naive, when in reality she was quite savvy about the mechanizations of the Party and was also an integral part of the Party's labor movement strategy. Dodd wanted readers to believe she was unfamiliar with Party philosophy, but as an active member she was familiar with Party activities. Dodd designed *School of Darkness* to substantiate her contention that she participated in the Party out of blind devotion. She did this to exculpate herself from leftism and to portray herself as indoctrinated and unwittingly following orders.

According to her autobiography Dodd's personal experience with communism gave her the ability to teach others. In her text Dodd transforms her suffering into a show of strength without consideration of her past. She fails to provide convincing explanation of her attraction to communism, which she later condemns. Though Dodd attempts an explanation, she rationalizes it with abstract reasons such as "did not realize the Party's objectives, . . .

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<sup>3</sup> Other conversion texts include: Benjamin Gitlow, *I Confess, The Truth About American Communism* (1940); Louis Budenz, *This is My Story* (1947); *Men Without Faces: The Communist Conspiracy in the USA* (1950); Richard Wright, *American Hunger* (1977); Elizabeth Bentley, *Out of Bondage, The Story of Elizabeth Bentley* (1951); Hede Massing, *This Deception* (1951); Whittaker Chambers, *Witness* (1952); Granville Hicks, *Where We Came Out* (1954) and *Part of the Truth* (1965) and the essays that appeared in Richard Crossman, ed., *The God That Failed* (1949).

<sup>4</sup>Bella V. Dodd, *School of Darkness* (New York: Kennedy and Sons, 1954), 73.

thought one could disregard the dictatorship of the proletariat and accept the communist ideology.”<sup>5</sup> Dodd blames her “materialistic conditioning,” learned from her progressive education, for her adherence to an ideology that, in retrospect, seemed so empty. With this context there arises a difficulty in Dodd’s recall. The Party is presented as an unyielding monolith. The conversion texts pose these problems because authors like Dodd never reveal how belonging to, or involvement in, the Party affected the day-to-day lives of members.

Dodd portrayed herself as a poor but studious child and a popular student with a strong desire to assimilate into American culture through education. Later in life, as a lawyer, Dodd embodied the popular image of a grateful, selfless immigrant who fought social injustice and took *pro bono* clients. According to Dodd her newfound anticommunist and Catholic perspective brought light into her life, while continuing her focus on social justice.

Dodd’s memoirs add little substance to the literature of ex-Communists prevalent during the late 1940s and 1950s. A perceptible sadness at the waste and ruination of a life runs through the histories of Dodd and others as they attempt to justify their disaffection and disillusion with a politics to which they were once committed. Such rationalizations are evident in many revisionist histories to describe a personal, moral, or political conversion. In Dodd’s case her condemnation and vilification of her past were a critique she viewed as virtuous, thereby entitling her to some absolution.<sup>6</sup>

Given the circumstances during Dodd’s authorship, times fraught with fear of accusations and harassment, *School of Darkness* took some artistic license. In the

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<sup>5</sup> Michael E. Brown, “The History of the History of U. S. Communism,” introduction to *New Studies in the Politics and Culture of U. S. Communism*. eds. Michael E. Brown, Randy Martin, Frank Rosengarten, and George Snedeker (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1993), 31-33.

<sup>6</sup> Brown, “The History of the History of U. S. Communism,” 31-32.

manuscript, Dodd changed the names of her family and friends to shield them from publicity and never mentioned any of her siblings by name except Katie, her deceased sister. The actual location of Dodd's neighborhood, and the church where she played, was a mile away from what Dodd detailed.<sup>7</sup> Throughout Dodd's book there appears a lack of clarity concerning certain details and an overuse of jargon especially her condemnation of her former "materialistic" ideology, a term used extensively by Catholic anti-Communists as a coded word for communist ideology.

The few secondary sources that concern Dodd locate her on opposite ends of the spectrum. One source views Dodd sympathetically, as a victim of circumstances, caught in a personal and professional collapse, who informed on only a few ex-comrades.<sup>8</sup> In another, Dodd is viewed as a smart labor organizer for the New York City Teachers Union who also named names in the next decade, prodded by the Catholic church.<sup>9</sup> Dodd is condemned in yet another source; she is considered a professional informer, who ruined people's lives with her testimony. This source also implicates the Catholic Church for orchestrating her actions.<sup>10</sup>

Dodd's life and accomplishments require a greater examination. A more critical, yet sympathetic, analysis of Dodd's actions and motivations, in a historical context, will provide

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<sup>7</sup> George Marsilio, (Dodd's nephew) said Dodd changed her half-brothers' family name to protect them from harassment. Dodd used the name Marscia. George Marsilio in a telephone interview with the author October 30, 1999.

<sup>8</sup> Ellen W. Schrecker, *No Ivory Tower: McCarthyism and the Universities* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986; Oxford University Press, 1986), 168-170.

<sup>9</sup> Marjorie Murphy, *Blackboard Unions: The AFT and the NEA, 1900-1980* (Ithaca: Cornell, 1990), 26, 164, 173, 186.

<sup>10</sup> David Caute, *The Great Fear: The Anti-Communist Purge Under Truman and Eisenhower* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1978), 131, 437-38.

a better understanding and recognition of Dodd's particular circumstances. This new analysis is essential because Dodd's history requires a closer view.<sup>11</sup> Dodd needs a different history, one that depicts her as more than a disillusioned ex-Communist who named names before the congressional investigations, and then dropped out of sight. Her time with the Communist Party is more than just an inadmissible past, confessed with a sense of righteousness, and a deep commitment to anticommunism. Though Dodd's *School of Darkness* repeats that moral pathos of blind commitment and subsequent betrayal so typical of the ex-Communist stories of the time, the text deserves a more focused reading.

*School of Darkness*, though a formulaic book, can yield valuable insight into Dodd's life if we read it against the grain, looking beneath the genre's conventional form. The narrative of a new enlightened self that tells cautionary tales about an old benighted self can be used to explore what this thesis contends are the continuities and similarities between Bella Dodd's left and right history. The central question this thesis asks is what were the forces and influences that enabled Dodd to adjust to shifting ideologies and revise her political beliefs from a communism to a Catholic anticommunism?

Dodd considered herself a patriotic American in the 1930s when she joined the Communists to solve the problems of poverty, unemployment, assaults on workers' rights and fascism emerging from the Depression. At the height of the Second World War America allied with Russia, and Dodd formally joined the Communist Party. In the 1950s Dodd again regarded herself as a loyal American when she became an FBI informer and named names in

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<sup>11</sup> Brown, *New Studies*, 34; Maurice Isserman, "Three Generations: Historians View American Communism," *Labor History* vol. 26 no. 4 (1985): 525.

the congressional investigations into communism.<sup>12</sup> According to Dodd's autobiography she committed a great reversal of political ideology from Communist to Catholic anti-Communist. Or did she? Dodd, influenced by changing ideologies, continued being a "good American" though the definition mutated. This thesis contends that Dodd did not revise her ideology so much as the interpretation of a good American that was never rigidly defined and had changed through the years. To be a radical in the 1930s was to be an American; to be anticommunist in the 1950s continued this identity. A good American in the 1930s could become an "un-American" in the 1950s. The climate of 1930s America fostered radical solutions for the economic and social justice problems of many Americans. The 1950s milieu shifted and championed anticommunism as a weapon against the presumed threat of communism. A good American took loyalty oaths, informed on presumed Communists and espoused the anticommunist rhetoric emanating from conservatives, liberals, and the Catholic Church. The desire to be a good American greatly influenced Dodd throughout her life. The malleable definition of a loyal, patriotic American aided Dodd's political revision from left to right. Dodd's memoirs attempted to show a complete break from her revolutionary past. However, in reality the transition from one camp group to another was more complex and not so clearly delineated. From communist to Catholic anti-Communist, it would be a circuitous journey for Dodd.

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<sup>12</sup> Dodd, 245. There is some question about monetary payments to Dodd from the FBI. In 1951-52 the FBI offered Dodd a sum of money, but files show Dodd refused the stipend stating that she wanted to get out of her financial trouble on her own, without government help. She wanted to freely give information to her country to atone for her Communist Party activity. No record exists in her file that indicates that she took payments. But a later memo describes Dodd as a paid informer. SAC, NY memorandum to Director, Feb. 7, 1952, Bella Dodd #100-6951-132, Part 2 of 4; SAC, NY memorandum to Director, June 6, 1954, Bella Dodd #100-6951-166, Part 2 of 4.

## Chapter I

### The Education of an American

#### **“A Leader in the Class”**

Dodd’s early life exemplifies the struggles and successes in the education of an immigrant American during the first three decades of the twentieth-century. Education was paramount to Dodd. Free public education allowed her the freedom to improve herself and rise to be a leader in the community, whatever community she found herself in.

In *School of Darkness* Bella V. Dodd called herself “an American born on Italian soil as the result of a series of accidents.”<sup>13</sup> That opening comment in her autobiography revealed how Dodd saw herself and wanted others to see her in the middle 1950s, as a patriotic American. Her early life of trauma shaped Dodd and her political ideology.

Dodd’s birth and early life proved pivotal to her ideological development. Born Maria Assunta Isabella Visono, in Picerno, Italy, on October 8, 1904, Bella Visono Dodd was the only child from the marriage of Teresa Marsilio and Rocco Visono. According to Dodd, Rocco Visono, a Swiss-Italian from Lugano, Switzerland had proposed marriage and suggested that they emigrate to America. As Dodd recollected, her mother Teresa, a young widow and mother of several children, did not want to leave Italy or the farm she owned that had been in her family for generations. However, eventually Teresa acquiesced and agreed to marry Rocco after they had settled in America.<sup>14</sup> Teresa’s decision to postpone her marriage

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<sup>13</sup> Dodd, 1. Dodd’s mother was barely in America three months before she traveled to her homeland where she bore Dodd. According to Immigration and Naturalization Service records Dodd became a naturalized citizen in 1928 when she was twenty-four-years old. SAC, NY, letter to Director, April 25, 1947, Bella Dodd #100-6951, 65x1.

<sup>14</sup> Dodd, 1, 2, 3.

may have been a way to maintain her autonomy; that is to say, in case she disliked America she could return to Italy. Leaving a fiancé would be easier than to divorce a husband.

Rocco and the boys from Teresa's previous marriage emigrated to America first, followed by Teresa and her daughter, Caterina. In January 1904, according to Dodd, Teresa and Rocco were married in East Harlem. Other records indicate that Teresa and Rocco married in Italy. Dodd located her parents' union in America to help Americanize herself. Possibly, to Dodd, parents who married in America produced American children, wherever the birth occurred. The family resided in a five-room tenement on 108th Street in New York City's East Harlem. Within a few months trouble with farm management called Teresa back to Italy.<sup>15</sup>

During the voyage to Italy Teresa realized she was pregnant and, in Dodd's words, "was dismayed [that] the baby might be born there," which indeed the baby was.<sup>16</sup> Teresa left the infant in Italy with a foster mother and returned alone to America. In her autobiography, Dodd explained that her mother always hoped to return to Italy and thought that leaving the baby there might hasten the homecoming. Teresa planned to come back within the year for the baby, but the years spread to five because, according to Dodd, the family could not afford the cost of passage for two people.<sup>17</sup>

So for her early years Dodd lived with a peasant couple in the rural countryside of

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<sup>15</sup> Dodd, 1-4. U. S. Dept. of Justice, NY, [name deleted] office memorandum to J. P. Coyne, Oct. 24, 1947 Bella Dodd #100-6951 Part 1 of 4; U. S. Dept. of Justice, NY, letter to the Director, April 25, 1947, Bella Dodd # 100-695165x1, Part 1 of 4. FBI files Bella Dodd state that Immigration and Naturalization Service records state that both of Teresa's marriages took place in Italy; U. S. Dept. of Justice, NY, letter to the Director, April 25, 1947, 100NY-6951-80; 100-69511-65x1, Part 1 of 4.

<sup>16</sup> Dodd, 3.

<sup>17</sup> Dodd, 11.

Avialano, Italy. Too poor for leather shoes, Dodd wore cloth ones. Dodd's memories of poverty were woven with memories of the "protecting love" she received from her foster parents and her close attachment to her foster father, Taddeo, a shepherd.<sup>18</sup> Teresa sent money regularly with her letters, and Dodd knew the couple were her foster parents. When Dodd was five years old, Teresa appeared to reclaim her. In telling the story Dodd did not express any feelings of abandonment by her mother. No doubt these deep-seated feelings would have been repressed. Mother and daughter sailed from Naples and arrived in New York City on March 8, 1909.<sup>19</sup> Dodd later wrote in her autobiography, "I left everything I knew and was going into the unknown."<sup>20</sup> In her memoirs, Dodd barely touched upon her experience as a little girl leaving one life to begin anew with a strange new family. Dodd's maternal abandonment doubtless helps to explain her deep desire for a sense of belonging in the United States.<sup>21</sup>

As with many other immigrants, education became the greatest Americanizer for Dodd, though there were other influences. For example, Dodd's seventeen-year-old half-sister, Caterina, Americanized her own name to Katie and she changed Maria Assunta Isabella's to Bella. Katie enrolled Dodd in Primary School One (P. S. 1) in the fall of 1909. Katie wrote Dodd's birth date as 1902 (instead of 1904) so Dodd could start in the second

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<sup>18</sup> Dodd, 4.

<sup>19</sup> U. S. Dept. of Justice, NY, letter to the Director, April 25, 1947, Bella Dodd #100-695165x1, Part 1 of 4.

<sup>20</sup> Dodd, 11.

<sup>21</sup> Dodd, 3, 10, 5. Though it was common in Italy to leave children with a wet nurse, and in 1904 travel abroad held dangers for a newborn, given all the extenuating circumstances I maintain that this maternal abandonment and reclamimation, estrangement from foster parents, coupled with living with strange people in a strange place affected Dodd psychologically. In her book Dodd's repeated use of the term "Forgotten Man" symbolized herself feeling "Forgotten" by her birth parents. See page 31 footnote 110.

grade.<sup>22</sup> Thus, Dodd joined the burgeoning wave of immigrants educated in the public schools of the City of New York. Only ten years earlier in 1895 the city centralized its system with the new immigrants in mind. In 1909, when Dodd entered the system, the infrastructure could not keep pace with the influx of New York City immigrants. Building construction and educational standards varied among schools.<sup>23</sup> Dodd's first primary school was, as Dodd described it, "one of the last of the so-called soup schools," old style charity schools that were slowly giving way to the centralized system.<sup>24</sup> Two elderly women ran the school and "opened class each morning with prayer and singing" the song "Columbia, Gem of the Ocean."<sup>25</sup> At school Dodd remembered experiencing some anti-Italian harassment "pursued by cries of wop, wop."<sup>26</sup> Dodd ignored the barbs, unaware that the word disparaged Italian-Americans, and soon she considered herself "a leader in the class."<sup>27</sup> Dodd recalled that her mother had already taught her enough English to feel comfortable at school. Those cries of "wop" probably originated from second-generation Italian-Americans since Dodd attended school in the heart of Italian Harlem, and most likely Dodd looked and

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<sup>22</sup> Dodd, 12.

<sup>23</sup> Marjorie Murphy, *Blackboard Unions: The AFT and The NEA, 1900-1980* (Ithaca: Cornell, 1990), 26; Kenneth T. Jackson, ed., *Encyclopedia of the City of New York* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 956-58; Diane Ravitch, *The Great School Wars: New York City, 1805-1973: A History of the Public Schools as Battlefield of Social Change*. (New York: Basic Books, 1974), 185. The public high schools were instituted in 1897. Schools were established in NYC as early as the sixteenth century but were church and privately run institutions. For more information concerning the NYC Schools see Ravitch's book.

<sup>24</sup> Dodd, 13. Before free public schools students were obliged to pay for their education. Charity schools were schools funded by the city but operated by private individuals and groups. "Soup school" may share a similar meaning to soup kitchen-- an establishment that dispenses minimum dietary (educational) essentials (soup and bread) to the needy.

<sup>25</sup> Dodd, 14.

<sup>26</sup> Dodd, 13. Wop was a derogatory slang term for Italian Americans. The word derived from the fact that many Italian immigrants lacked proper papers such as birth certificates and thus their immigration documents were stamped W. O. P. meaning without official papers.

<sup>27</sup> Dodd, 12.

sounded like an immigrant with her old-country clothes and foreign accent. It was probably not nativist harassment.<sup>28</sup>

When Dodd completed the second grade, the Visonos moved from East Harlem and after a few other moves settled in the Castle Hill section of the Bronx in 1912. Dodd's second school, P. S. 12 was an improvement but it lacked indoor bathrooms.<sup>29</sup> Dodd remembered the school's daily Bible readings and the principal, Dr. Condon, who was prone to interrupt class for marching practice. While Dodd was at P.S. 12, World War One broke out in Europe; she remembered the anti-German newspaper coverage of the war and was moved by the stories of suffering. During this time anti-German sentiment was rampant and resulted in a ban on the teaching of the German language in schools and demands for loyalty oaths from all teachers. Fears of German and other ethnic disloyalty peaked. Americanization classes in the schools, both day and evening, pushed to unify the hyphenated Americans and make them become less alien and more Anglo-Saxon in manner and language.<sup>30</sup> The Americanization movement was a program of education in schools, voluntary associations and public programs that taught subjects required for naturalization, such as English, American history, civics and government structure. Later, the associations added other essentials of culture such as hygiene and child care. A loyalty poem entitled,

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<sup>28</sup> Dodd, 12, 13, 22.

<sup>29</sup> Dodd, 16. Andrew J. Ingenito, "I Remember," *The Bronx in the Innocent Years, 1890-1925* (New York: Harper and Row, 1985), 136; *Encyclopedia of the City of New York*, 583, 957.

<sup>30</sup> John Higham, *Strangers in the Land: Pattern of American Nativism, 1860-1925* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1955), 204-207, 215.. Citizenship classes remained a required curriculum in every state until 1927. Private associations such as the Daughters of the American Revolution and the American Legion first conceived and pushed the curriculum. Americanization was an ideology that demanded universal conformity and obedience mixed with the spirit of nationalism and promoted the elimination of ethnic cultures, especially the German culture after World War One. For more information see Higham.

“Americans’ Creed” became a daily classroom observance. Public pronouncements about the grandiose benefits of citizenship and opulent patriotic holiday celebrations reinforced the Americanization lessons learned in schools.<sup>31</sup>

**“Mom took over a large house with tillable acreage.”<sup>32</sup>**

The rural, almost pastoral, setting of Pilgrims Rest in the Bronx that Dodd describes as the family home in her book, offset the idea that she was an immigrant from the urban slums. In reality, the Visono family lived in the back of her father Rocco’s grocery store at 2315 Westchester Avenue. According to Dodd’s autobiography, Teresa worked as a care giver and housekeeper for two elderly sisters, Mattie and Sadie Munn who owned an old house and farm on sixty-four acres called Pilgrims Rest. “It was when they died that we went to live in the house,” explained Dodd; yet she did not clarify whether her family owned the Bronx farm, merely stating, “Mom took over a large house with tillable acreage.”<sup>33</sup> Dodd noted that the farm produced surplus food sold in the family store, though the family “had little cash.”<sup>34</sup> The huge house, filled with children and grandchildren, was hardly luxurious, with a leaky roof, kerosene lighting, and no indoor plumbing.

Dodd may have had retained fond memories of Pilgrims Rest, though questions concerning the book’s authenticity remain that suggest at best embellishments to suit her purpose. For instance, Dodd said her father was a stonemason in Italy, yet it seems illogical that he would come to America and operate a grocery store since stonemasons in the New

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<sup>31</sup> Dodd, 14, 16, 18. The United States entered World War I in April 1917. Higham, *Strangers in the Land*, 204-207.

<sup>32</sup> Dodd, 14.

<sup>33</sup> Dodd, 14.

<sup>34</sup> Dodd, 15.

York building trades were among the highest paid, and business was good even during the Depression. In *School of Darkness* Dodd wrote that her family consisted of nine children from Teresa's first marriage who had all emigrated to America. However, other sources indicate otherwise. Dodd in actuality had two half-brothers and one half-sister. Fabrication of a large family may have been Dodd's need to identify with the large families the Catholic Church encouraged.<sup>35</sup> The fabrications of certain facts support the idea that Dodd constructed her Americanism. Wherever the Visonos lived, and however many there were, the family was known and respected in the Bronx neighborhood.<sup>36</sup>

Dodd's childhood environs encompassed the Northeast Bronx area on Westchester Ave between Castle Hill and East Tremont Avenues. One neighborhood location, St. Peter's Episcopal Church, near Westchester Square, left significant impressions on Dodd. The church grounds and graveyard, reminiscent of an idyllic English churchyard, became the countryside for Dodd who "in summer . . . picked blackberries there and in spring . . . hunted violets."<sup>37</sup> In the graveyard Dodd practiced her American history and her Americanization lessons, imagining that the headstones were graves of "Pilgrims and Puritans or heroes of the Civil War." She frequently placed bouquets of flowers "as tokens of respect for the men and women of the American past," and because she "wanted passionately to be part of

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<sup>35</sup> Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) FBI files on Dodd state that Immigration and Naturalization Service records list only three older children Phillip Marsilio of Williamsbridge Road, Kate (deceased in the Influenza Epidemic) and brother Jerry "whereabouts unknown." Dodd's book describes her father as a stonemason passing through town, while FOIA/FBI documents portrayed Rocco as an employee on Teresa's farm; U. S. Dept. Of Justice NY, letter to the director, April 25, 1947, Bella Dodd #100-6951-65x1, Part 1 of 4. 100NY-6951-80, NY62-9124. The Catholic Church forbids birth control and encourages large families and thus more parishioners.

<sup>36</sup> Dodd, 14, 15.

<sup>37</sup> Dodd, 16.

America.”<sup>38</sup> Dodd also recalled her participation in after school activities at St. Peter’s, organized by the pastor’s daughter Gabrielle Glendenning, whose mother, Dodd added, was the “daughter of Horace Greely,” a famous American.<sup>39</sup> To Dodd the entire Glendenning family became “a wholesome influence on our neighborhood [that] . . . set the pattern for what . . . [Dodd] believed to be the American character.”<sup>40</sup>

Dodd’s diverse neighborhood afforded her views of America and Americans that helped propel her assimilation and provided a role model of a teacher in Gabrielle Glendenning. The Visonos had settled in a mixed-ethnic area, which helped transform Dodd into an American faster than the immigrants who lived in ethnic ghettos. According to Dodd, “people respected each other despite differences of race or religion.”<sup>41</sup> In 1912 to 1915 the Castle Hill section of the Northeast Bronx contained mainly one-family homes scattered among truck farms. The ethnic population of the area consisted mostly of Irish- and German-Americans with some older Anglo-American inhabitants. Few Italian-American families populated the area. The neighborhood began to change in the early 1920s when the city extended the subway to the area and housing lots sprang up on the farmlands. Dodd noted that Pilgrims Rest was demolished and the land sold into lots in 1928. The farms gradually diminished in number before disappearing in the 1940s.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Dodd, 16.

<sup>39</sup> Dodd, 17. Horace Greely (1811-1872) American newspaper editor and founder of the *NY Tribune* ran the paper for thirty years. Greely, an American hero, advocated black and woman suffrage, and labor organization and opposed monopoly grants to railroads. Though a great humanitarian most know Greely for coining the term, “Go west young man.”

<sup>40</sup> Dodd, 17.

<sup>41</sup> Dodd, 17.

<sup>42</sup> Dodd, 14, 15, 17, 46. NYC info Jackson, ed.. *Encyclopedia of the City of New York*, 583-585. To this day Castle Hill, The Bronx never maintained an Italian-American church.

In the summer of 1916 a significant event occurred. Dodd had an accident that disabled her permanently. Dodd graduated from grammar school in 1916 and planned to attend Evander Childs High School in September. That summer, as she stepped off a streetcar the car wheels severed her toes and middle section of her left foot. Dodd's recovery was slow; she was hospitalized for six months and recuperated at home for another half year. According to a childhood friend, interviewed in the 1940s, this injury resulted in "a permanent disability and a noticeable limp." In *School of Darkness* Dodd stated that one year after the accident she entered high school on crutches and received a prosthetic that winter. Though the prosthetic proved difficult to use, Dodd recalled she joined the school hiking group, encouraged by her mother and determined to overcome her disability. Dodd's childhood friend concluded later that the accident changed Dodd who "became more serious and soon surpassed her relatives intellectually."<sup>43</sup>

As a disabled person, Dodd became further sensitized to injustice and inequality through her feelings of difference. The accident greatly disadvantaged the young woman who desired acceptance and wanted to assimilate with other Americans. Dodd was not only an immigrant, but, in her own words, she also became "an invalid."<sup>44</sup> Dodd's disabling injury exacerbated her "otherness," by making her difference more noticeable and permanent, first with crutches that impeded her mobility, and later with a limp that made her different from most people. It seems likely that she compensated for her feelings of worthlessness by

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<sup>43</sup> The FBI interviewed people from Dodd's old neighborhood to determine the extent of her communist loyalty and gain further information. SAC, NY letter to Director April 25, 1947. Bella Dodd #100-6951 65x1 Part 2 of 4. Unfortunately Dodd's friend is not named in the file though the file states that she and Dodd walked home from P. S. 12 every day. Dodd, 20, 21.

<sup>44</sup> Dodd, 20.

overachieving in intellectual pursuits, and masked her injured emotions with concern for other disadvantaged people.<sup>45</sup>

**“The Call was a Socialist publication.”<sup>46</sup>**

High school introduced Dodd to left-wing politics, literature and scholarship. In 1917 she entered Evander Childs High School in the Bronx. By Dodd’s account the student population at the school in 1917 numbered more than one thousand girls and boys “mostly the children of Americans of Scottish, Irish, and German extraction but there were also some children of Italian, Russian and other European peoples.”<sup>47</sup> Dodd joined the other students from diverse ethnicities who coalesced into a group that imbibed the notion that “we were all alike . . . children of parents in modest circumstances, neither rich nor poor.”<sup>48</sup>

Dodd blossomed intellectually and developed her political passion in high school. She eagerly learned Latin because to her it was “a symbol of a real education,” excelled in history and science, and won a college scholarship.<sup>49</sup> She was proudest of the fact that she “had been chosen the most popular girl” of the senior class.<sup>50</sup> But it was her political awakening that had the greatest impact on her later life. At Evander Childs, Dodd became

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<sup>45</sup> Dodd, 19-20. SAC, NY letter to Director, April 25, 1947, Bella Dodd #100-6951-65x1 Part 2 of 4. Dodd, 18-20. During this time Dodd suffered another great loss. Katie’s second-born child died in the Great Influenza Epidemic and soon Katie succumbed, too.

<sup>46</sup> Dodd, 22.

<sup>47</sup> Dodd, 22.

<sup>48</sup> Margaret Goreth Hunt, “My Days at Evander Childs,” *The Bronx in the Innocent Years, 1890-1925* (New York: Harper and Row, 1985), 100; Dodd, 22; *Encyclopedia of the City of New York*, 583, 957. Higham, 215. It is interesting how Dodd divided the ethnic groups, into northern European and southern and eastern European, similar to the way the nativists classed the Europeans as either Nordics or Italians, Jews and Slovaks. Dodd, 22.

<sup>49</sup> Dodd, 19.

<sup>50</sup> Dodd, 20, 24.

attracted to social reform and often participated in political discussions with other students. Some of her fellow students opened Dodd's eyes to leftist politics and literature. A girl from the East Bronx introduced her to the socialist periodical, *The Call*. Dodd noted that "*The Call* was a Socialist publication."<sup>51</sup> Dodd found a deep interest in the journal's concern with poverty and oppression. "I felt my heart beat with excitement as I read articles on social justice. For the first time I felt a call, a vocation. Unconsciously I enlisted, even if only emotionally, in the army of those who said they would fight social injustice."<sup>52</sup> This social justice theme would often recur in Dodd's life after her first exposure to left literature. With a firm foundation in political consciousness Dodd would go on to college and encounter other political students and fortify her left political ideology.<sup>53</sup>

Dodd was an Italian-American woman less than typical in regard to education and employment. Dodd's educational expectations and ambitions were ahead of other Italian-American females. During the inter-war years statistics for Italian-American women show that they exhibited little interest in higher education and the teaching profession, perhaps because they were working in factories. Between 1900 and 1920, 45% of Italian-American women in the New York City area worked for wages. This percentage was greater than in any other white ethnic group, except the Bohemians. Factory work and factory homework contributed to the statistic that in 1920 only 20% of second-generation Italian-American women had completed at least one year of high school. Parents viewed secondary education for young Italian-American women as worthless when instead the daughter could be earning

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<sup>51</sup> Dodd, 22.

<sup>52</sup> Dodd, 22.

<sup>53</sup> Dodd, 22-24.

money to help the family.<sup>54</sup>

Whether Dodd would have remained in school if she had not been injured is an interesting issue. A “noticeable limp” might impede her ability to find a suitable husband, so perhaps Teresa and Rocco encouraged their daughter’s educational advancement. However, by the time of Dodd’s accident she was twelve years old and had already planned to go to high school. It seems likely that a greater factor in Dodd’s educational trajectory was her association with other, more Americanized ethnic groups, in school and in the neighborhood. A high percentage of Jewish families lived in the Bronx and Jews comprised the largest ethnic group in the city. Dodd patterned herself after the educational example of her Jewish girlfriends whom she followed through Evander Childs, Hunter College and to postgraduate study.<sup>55</sup>

In 1921 Dodd entered Hunter College, the New York City College for Women in Manhattan. Like so many Jewish women of her generation, she went to college in pursuit of a teaching career. The teaching profession became the pinnacle of many immigrant parents’ dreams for their daughters as it brought financial security, a predictable salary, and

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<sup>54</sup> Miriam Cohen, “Italian-American Women in New York City, 1900-1950: Work and School,” in *Class, Sex, and the Woman Worker*, eds. Milton Cantor and Bruce Laurie, Contributions in Labor History, Number 1 (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1977) 122, 128, 183n22. Most Italian-American women worked in the garment or artificial flower industry. Homework in the garment and artificial flower industry consisted of work done at home by all family members, especially children. New York appears to be an exception compared to Italian-American women in other areas where historians have argued that the majority of Italian-American women (mothers) worked in the home and sent their children out to work. See Elizabeth H. Pleck, “A Mother’s Wages: Income Earning Among Married Italian and Black women, 1896-1911,” in *A Heritage of Her Own: Toward a New Social History of American Women*, eds Nancy F. Cott and Elizabeth H. Pleck (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1979) and Virginia Yans-McLaughlin, *Family and Community: Italian Immigrants in Buffalo, 1880-1930* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977).

<sup>55</sup> Cohen, 122, 128, 183n22. Dodd never worked in outside employment during her high school years. Dodd’s Northeast Bronx neighborhood was quite a distance from the garment centers of Manhattan, and the subways did not extend to her area. Dodd probably worked in her family’s grocery store, though she never mentioned it.

professional status and provided upward mobility into the middle class. In the 1920s and 1930s teaching afforded Jewish and other ethnic women, such as Dodd, a career in one of the few professions open to women at the time. The nursing profession, public utilities and insurance industry were so anti-semitic that Jewish women never bothered applying.<sup>56</sup>

Another significant factor in the choice of the teaching profession was the free education available in the New York City public colleges to a young woman with good academic grades. In September 1922 when Dodd entered Hunter College, it was the only city college open to women. The City College of New York was all male, Brooklyn College was not established until 1930 and Queens College came later in 1937. Tuition fees for private women's colleges were vastly out of reach for most immigrants. The majority of the student body at Hunter College came from immigrant families.<sup>57</sup> The curriculum was designed to train them for teaching in the grammar and secondary schools.

Class and ethnic tension simmered between the teachers and students at Hunter. In her memoir Dodd noted that she disliked the attitudes of the conservative teachers and administrators: Anglo-Saxons and German-Americans, who were holdovers from the days when Hunter had been a normal school and who kept a barrier between themselves and the Italian-, Russian- and Polish-American students.<sup>58</sup> The teachers and staff judged that the students, many of them foreign-born or children of foreign-born, exhibited a dearth of

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<sup>56</sup> Ruth Jacknow Markowitz, *My Daughter, The Teacher: Jewish Teachers in the New York City Schools* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1993), 15. Irish-Americans dominated these professions.

<sup>57</sup> Markowitz, 1,5,7, 13, 14, 15, 19. Kristina D. Engstrom, "Radical or Respectable?: Class and Ethnicity in the Early Student Peace Movement at Hunter College, 1932-1935," (Masters Thesis, Sarah Lawrence College, 1995), 3.

<sup>58</sup> In 1915, Hunter College was incorporated into the New York City College system.

appreciation for the free education and never hesitated to remind the students of this. The students, however, believed, as Dodd put it, that they were “getting only that to which we were entitled.”<sup>59</sup> These students had learned their Americanization lessons; they knew the Constitution and the Amendments and were ready to defend them.<sup>60</sup>

Dodd wrote that Dean Annie Hickenbottom attempted to dictate middle-class style to the young women, though the students patronized her more than they heeded her advice, especially her admonishments to always “wear a hat and gloves and to speak only in low and refined voices.”<sup>61</sup> Most of Dodd’s teachers were from the old school--diligent, kind and knowledgeable but, to an eighteen-year-old, behind the times. There were other teachers, but Dodd became especially close to one in particular, Sarah Parks.<sup>62</sup>

Parks who was not tethered to the old regime and was quite radical, “affected [Dodd] most as a person.”<sup>63</sup> Parks taught first-year English and Dodd considered her “more unorthodox than any of the students dared to be.”<sup>64</sup> She rode a bicycle to school, her long blond hair flying in the wind without a hat, which was unthinkable for a Hunter College student, not to mention a teacher. (Parks obviously ignored Dean Hickenbottom’s plea.) Dodd wondered if the Dean knew and approved of Parks’s lessons in “advanced social theories,” taught during English class, since Dodd found her theories “both disturbing and

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<sup>59</sup> Dodd, 25.

<sup>60</sup> *Encyclopedia of the City of New York*, 575-576; Dodd, 25. Engstrom, 3, 5.

<sup>61</sup> Dodd, 25.

<sup>62</sup> Engstrom’s thesis discusses the class issues in depth.

<sup>63</sup> Dodd, 25.

<sup>64</sup> Dodd, 25.

exciting.”<sup>65</sup> According to Dodd, Parks expanded the students’ intellect and loaned them books on communism.<sup>66</sup>

After Dodd completed her first year at Hunter, she took a summer job selling a children’s fact book called *Volume Library* door to door. Dodd recalled it was a “daring choice” as she still had “difficulty in walking any great distance without pain.”<sup>67</sup> Another daring choice was her sales territory, in upstate Westchester, so far from the Bronx that she rented a room in a farmhouse near Mt. Kisco. Perhaps employment was scarce for a teenager in her Bronx neighborhood, though Dodd provided no further information. In *School of Darkness* she does not mention whether this was acceptable with her parents and Dodd leaves the impression that she was a typical rebellious American teenager.<sup>68</sup>

In her sophomore year Dodd considered herself “a different girl” (because of her first year at college and her summer employment).<sup>69</sup> She began to rethink “priorities, hierarchical institutions and intelligentsia” and became acutely aware of the disparity between the rich and poor.<sup>70</sup> She formed friendships and discussion groups with other women students interested in social reform. These loosely-formed groups endorsed no specific political agenda but pledged to “dedicate ourselves to love of our fellow man.”<sup>71</sup>

Dodd continued her friendship with Parks, not as a teacher, but as what Dodd called

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<sup>65</sup> Dodd, 25. For example, the teacher equated the Russian Revolution with the French Revolution because both had emancipating results.

<sup>66</sup> Dodd, 25, 26.

<sup>67</sup> Dodd, 29.

<sup>68</sup> Dodd, 29-30.

<sup>69</sup> Dodd, 29.

<sup>70</sup> Dodd, 30.

<sup>71</sup> Dodd, 27.

an “unofficial dean” whose apartment students visited seeking advice and support.<sup>72</sup>

Looking back, Dodd recalled her love for Parks who “brought fresh air into a sterile, intellectual atmosphere” and filled her life with students seeking guidance.<sup>73</sup> At the time Dodd considered herself one of the *avant garde*.<sup>74</sup> Parks introduced the students to Marxism and socialism. In *School of Darkness* Dodd declared that Parks “diverted some of us into a blind alley” by posing pragmatic solutions to ethical problems.<sup>75</sup> Dodd’s statement weighs heavily with Catholic ideology; Parks’s morality was different from the authorial Dodd’s new Catholic morality. Whatever Dodd thought about Parks in the 1950s, after college in the 1920s she continued her friendship with her former teacher.

Dodd attended college in an era when conservatism and ethnic division were on the rise, yet at Hunter she encountered leftists who networked across ethnic lines. Hunter classmates and friends also exposed Dodd to left politics. She associated with students from various ethnic groups. According to Dodd, “many eastern-European students brought their parents’ socialist and leftist ideology along from the old country.”<sup>76</sup> Two of Dodd’s girlfriends had parents who had been involved in the Russian Revolution of 1905 and the daughters brought its lessons to school. The political climate was ripe for discussions. Socialist groups were active in colleges, though small in number.<sup>77</sup>

Recalling her college years, Dodd detailed a search for her true self and identity,

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<sup>72</sup> Dodd, 30.

<sup>73</sup> Dodd, 30.

<sup>74</sup> Dodd, 31.

<sup>75</sup> Dodd, 30.

<sup>76</sup> Dodd, 27.

<sup>77</sup> Dodd, 27.

joining different groups to help find herself. She wrote of feeling uneasy; “I was received by all but felt part of none.”<sup>78</sup> She “spent many hours in discussions with different groups.”<sup>79</sup> Dodd tried to make friends and “drifted into another circle of friends, girls with strong intellectual drive permeated with a sense of responsibility for social reform.”<sup>80</sup> In the basement of Hunter’s Sixty-eighth Street building students created an “intellectual proletariat” space of their own, a place for meetings and discussions.<sup>81</sup> Dodd recollected in *School of Darkness* that she and the group embraced laissez-faire thinking, agnosticism as religion, pragmatism for philosophy, and were “unguided by any standard of right and wrong.”<sup>82</sup> Her group “talked glibly of science and evolution, skeptical of religious concepts” and associated with a group of students that shunned the consumerism of the pre-Depression age and advanced new notions of political consciousness.<sup>83</sup> Dodd’s anticommunist lens colors her reminiscence because students in the 1930s maintained a strong sense of morality, though perhaps not the same morality as Dodd embraced in the 1950s.<sup>84</sup>

According to Dodd, her best friend was Ruth Goldstein; the Goldstein family adopted Dodd, who always spent the Jewish holidays at their house. She envied the Goldstein family especially their sense of tradition because she felt that her own “family was not bound

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<sup>78</sup> Dodd, 27.

<sup>79</sup> Dodd, 27.

<sup>80</sup> Dodd, 26. Though Dodd failed to specify the make up of this group, it was comprised mainly of political Jewish women

<sup>81</sup> Dodd, 27.

<sup>82</sup> Dodd, 27.

<sup>83</sup> Dodd, 28.

<sup>84</sup> Dodd, 27, 28, 29.

together and now did not seem to belong anywhere.”<sup>85</sup>

In June 1925 Dodd graduated with honors from Hunter College. The next day Dodd and Ruth Goldstein enrolled in Columbia University graduate school for the fall term. That summer she entered the hospital to have surgery to improve her injured foot.<sup>86</sup> Previously, Dodd had completed the teaching examinations for the New York City elementary and secondary schools and was confident, because of a teacher shortage, that she would secure a teaching position. As Dodd expected, she received an appointment as a substitute medieval history teacher in a lower Manhattan high school for the fall of 1925. So with an improved gait Dodd tackled teaching in the public schools of New York while she pursued her master’s in political science at Columbia. Six months later she accepted a position as a teaching assistant at Hunter College’s political science department.<sup>87</sup>

### **Columbia University and The World**

Dodd pursued a master’s degree required to advance professionally in an educational career. Nevertheless, it was Dodd’s hunger for further intellectual study within the political system that led her to choose political science. Graduate school widened her academic and social circle and offered Dodd further entry into the intellectual and political activities of the left. Her professors were respected journalists and authors and renowned intellectuals who later became members of President Franklin Roosevelt’s “brain trust.”<sup>88</sup> Her political science courses included classes on Congressional treaty law, the press’s influence, and the power of

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<sup>85</sup> Dodd, 27.

<sup>86</sup> Dodd, 33. The surgeon cleaned up the initial amputation and Dodd walked better than before. Dr. Edgerton performed the surgery at St. Francis Hospital in the Bronx.

<sup>87</sup> Dodd, 33-35.

<sup>88</sup> Brain trust is a group of official or unofficial advisors concerned especially with planning or strategy.

public opinion. The Columbia professors involved the students in mainstream political activity, exposing corruption in local politics. Likewise, Dodd and the other graduate teachers encouraged their students at Hunter to investigate the inequitable conditions in the “courts, jails, legislatures and institutions.”<sup>89</sup> Dodd broke gender conventions and sent female students out to investigate.<sup>90</sup>

The fall of 1926 saw a large influx of students into Hunter College. Classes were large, and classroom space was scarce, with auditoriums, gymnasiums and cafeterias converted into classrooms. Dodd and Ruth Goldstein became assistants to the political science department head, and they worked together to provide the students with a new curricula and innovative teaching techniques. Dodd passed on to her students the lessons she had learned in graduate school and sent them out into the world.<sup>91</sup>

Looking back Dodd confesses her regrets about the years she spent teaching leftist, socialist and communist ideology to her students and attributes her behavior to a lack of direction. Communism, to Dodd writing in the 1950s, was not a progressive social movement but a step backward in the history of civilization. She blames the political climate of the 1930s for her pedagogic style of intellectual elitism and student autonomy. She laments her condemnation of the work of traditional religious and charitable organizations and saw her criticism of established beliefs as a contagion she passed on to her students. She

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<sup>89</sup> Dodd, 39.

<sup>90</sup> Dodd, 36, 40. Raymond Moley (1886-1975) was a FDR cabinet member and journalist. Lindsey Rogers taught treaty law, Carlton J. H. Hayes used his *The Rise of Nationalism* in his classes, A. A. Berle and Gardiner Means authors of a work concerning the capitalistic corporations of the day. Dodd's professors had experience at the London School of Economics and the Brookings Institute.

<sup>91</sup> Dodd, 38- 39.

recollects that her negativity was an attempt to propel the students to help the working classes. Dodd reports that her innate ability to nurture her students because of her female gender was her only accomplishment.<sup>92</sup>

While at Columbia University Dodd joined the John Dewey Society and the Progressive Education Association.<sup>93</sup> She became a frequent visitor at the International House, where she joined with international students to discuss political issues and the “desire to be a citizen of the world.”<sup>94</sup> Columbia University contacts enabled Dodd to take her political work beyond the realm of education. Dodd research for her master’s thesis, “Is Congress a Mirror of Our Nation?,” piqued her interest in the politicians who had become first teachers, then lawyers.<sup>95</sup> In June 1927 Dodd received her M. A. in Political Science from Columbia University. That fall she enrolled in New York University Law School, interested in “the need to change the *status quo*” and intending not to practice but to teach law.<sup>96</sup> As a law student, she continued to teach at Hunter.<sup>97</sup>

At this juncture it is necessary to examine Dodd’s retrospective regrets about her teaching leftist ideology. In *School of Darkness* Dodd distorted her past to serve her new ideology and could not keep her present Catholic anticommunism out of her recollections. She rationalized her guilt in exposing her students to leftist dogma as her desire to help the

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<sup>92</sup> Dodd, 44.

<sup>93</sup> John Dewey (1859-1952) was an American philosopher, educator and socialist. Dodd, 43.

<sup>94</sup> Dodd, 43.

<sup>95</sup> Dodd, 45. Dodd’s master thesis on file at the Butler Library at Columbia University was missing from the library shelves.

<sup>96</sup> Dodd, 49.

<sup>97</sup> Dodd, 48, 49.

working classes. She translated her past commitment to leftist ideology into the language of anticommunism as her lack of focus. However, Dodd was very focused as a college teacher, as her text illustrated. Dodd continued her justification of her past when she highlighted the stereotypical idea of a woman as mother to vindicate herself by her ability to nurture her students, even as she exposed them to left politics.

Dodd's personal life changed when she entered law school. She left her parents's home, moved to a small apartment in Greenwich Village, and devoted the evenings to socializing and endless political discussion. She met "men and women who were talking ideas and living unorthodox lives." Sarah Parks and Dodd continued their friendship beyond school; both women were part of the same social group. Yet by the fall of 1927 Dodd had withdrawn from their "close friendship" and distanced herself from Parks who had become obsessed with Hunter College politics.<sup>98</sup> Dodd considered Parks inappropriately desperate, "a certain emptiness in her life was catapulting her violently into everything she did."<sup>99</sup> Parks committed suicide in 1928. To Dodd, Parks's death "had a profound effect on those of us whom she had influenced. I was thrown into an emotional tailspin. I felt guilty. . . . I thought I failed her."<sup>100</sup> Dodd thought that the decline of their friendship was partly responsible for Parks' act. In her autobiography, Dodd exhibited ambivalent feelings toward Parks. Parks had the "intellectual courage . . . for the coming collective society," yet she lacked "the

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<sup>98</sup> Dodd, 51. Dodd sought advice from Parks concerning some intellectual issues. Parks was indifferent, more involved in other matters concerning salary and promotion issues at Hunter. Dodd was less concerned with those issues.

<sup>99</sup> Dodd, 51.

<sup>100</sup> Dodd, 51.

practical boldness required for becoming a disciplined member of the group.”<sup>101</sup> To Dodd, Parks lived her life as an individualist, which Dodd felt was incompatible with a collective action.<sup>102</sup>

Dodd saw her life and journey similar to Parks’s in many ways: they were college teachers, single women, and they politically influenced their students. In retrospect, Dodd considered both herself and Parks brainwashed by communism. (Dodd never stated that Parks was a Communist Party member, though she was definitely a “fellow traveler.”<sup>103</sup>) According to Dodd she herself escaped communism (rediscovered Catholicism) before it was too late but Parks did not. Dodd explained that her own political and ideological boldness was her brainwashed devotion to the Communist Party. Writing with ominous hindsight, Dodd remembered “I did not know then that I, too, was to follow in her footsteps. I was to take a longer, more deceptive yet parallel road to annihilation.”<sup>104</sup> Parks made a lasting impression on Dodd and her political consciousness which Dodd passed on to her own students. In the 1950s, while writing her memoirs, she began to read Catholic literature and lamented about Parks, blaming her suicide on the communist literature Parks read that left the teacher with “no standards to live by.”<sup>105</sup> Dodd graduated law school in June 1930, took the bar exam, and embarked on a trip to Europe. The trip to Europe introduced Dodd to fascism and her future husband.<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> Dodd, 51.

<sup>102</sup> Dodd, 50, 51.

<sup>103</sup> A “fellow traveler” describes a person who was sympathetic to the goals of the Communist Party.

<sup>104</sup> Dodd, 51.

<sup>105</sup> Dodd, 239.

<sup>106</sup> Dodd, 51.

Dodd's sojourn in Europe in the summer of 1930 appeared to be a panacea for her discontent at home. She wrote that she made the trip for a number of reasons: "looking for answers, tired and restless, wanted to enjoy life." Dodd avoided specifically identifying her malaise. It may have been depression over Parks's death, or family trouble caused by her moving into her own apartment (quite uncommon for a single woman at the time). Perhaps Dodd went to Europe anxious to see this intellectual Mecca for herself since many Americans were visiting the German universities renowned for theoretical scholarship. Dodd's lasting impressions of European cities were not of the great treasures, nor the intellectual stimuli, but communists in the streets, homosexuals in the nightspots, "the pinched faces of the middle class" and the preponderance of fascist soldiers in Germany, Austria and Italy.<sup>107</sup> In *School of Darkness* Dodd later wrote that in Europe she met her future husband, but provided no elaboration.<sup>108</sup>

#### Visono's Marriage—"our love for this country"<sup>109</sup>

On September 10, 1931, Bella Visono married John Ferdinand Dodd in a civil ceremony at New York City Hall. She was twenty-seven years old and had been dating John Dodd after both returned from Europe. She described John Dodd as ten years her senior from an old Southern family in Georgia, neither plantation owner nor sharecropper. Bella Dodd called him a "highly nervous person" because of a military injury with diverse working experience.<sup>110</sup> She shared few commonalities with John Dodd except a deep love for their

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<sup>107</sup> Dodd, 53.

<sup>108</sup> Dodd, 52-54, 59-61.

<sup>109</sup> Dodd, 59.

<sup>110</sup> Dodd, 59. John Dodd was injured in the First World War which may have been the reason for his nervousness and his diversity of experience may have been the result of his inability to hold a job.

country, which she did not explain, and later questioned her impetuous marriage. However, she wrote that she “grew to love John more than I thought I was capable of loving anyone.”<sup>111</sup>

To Bella Dodd, John Dodd was a true American since his family roots stretched back to the American Civil War. Quite possibly a part of Bella Dodd’s attraction to John Dodd was her desire to be a real American. By partnering with John Dodd and his Southern background Bella Dodd fortified her sense of being an American. It was especially telling that, though divorced in the 1940s, Bella Dodd retained her ex-husband’s American name for the rest of her life.<sup>112</sup>

Dodd’s foreign birth propelled her need to Americanize. Her maternal abandonment and early life of foster care probably contributed to a powerful need for acceptance. Early childhood poverty fostered Dodd’s commitment to social justice. Her disabling accident during adolescence allowed for her identification with disadvantaged people. As a disabled immigrant, Dodd shared common experiences with those citizens, often disregarded and disabled by injustice, whom Dodd often called the “Forgotten Man” of New York City.<sup>113</sup> Unquestionably, Dodd’s early childhood and progressive New York City education helped shape her adult personality.

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<sup>111</sup> Dodd, 60.

<sup>112</sup> Dodd, 59- 60. Dodd’s FBI file questioned the validity of her marriage because of a report by a woman (name blacked out) who “came to NY, in September, 1934, to find her husband . . . presumed to be living with Bella V. Dodd.” SAC, NY memorandum to Director, March 21, 1948, Bella Dodd #100-6951-174.

<sup>113</sup> The ‘Forgotten Man’ first coined by social Darwinist and laissez faire critic William Sumner who depicted a middle class father who taught his sires to be selfless, hard working and capitalistic. The image revised with the Depression and FDR who used the icon as a typical American who had fallen on hard times.

## Chapter II

### The Making of an American Communist

#### Dodd's Introduction to the Communist Party

Association and collaboration with groups that worked for teachers' rights introduced Dodd to the Communist Party. In her recollections, Dodd reports being "stunned by . . . the depression," and notes that the lines of unlucky depositors outside the shuttered Bowery Bank for Savings in Manhattan resembled the faces she had seen in Europe a few years earlier.<sup>114</sup> Concerned with the economic problems of the workers at Hunter, Dodd organizes teachers for better wages and conditions and forms the Instructors Association at Hunter College.

In 1932, as a consequence of the Depression, Dodd's father and her new husband experienced financial difficulties. She had previously served a clerkship in a law office which specialized in corporation law.<sup>115</sup> Dodd returned to teach at Hunter because she received a higher salary there than she did as a law clerk. Family financial difficulty was not the only reason Dodd returned to teaching. Teaching and its environment afforded her the satisfaction of intellectual study and discourse in a left-friendly place. Americanization classes had portrayed teaching as a noble profession and the legal field was not as lucrative nor as friendly to women lawyers as today. Besides, Hunter College held a history of Dodd's younger years and explorations of left ideas, a safe and familiar place.<sup>116</sup>

Again at Hunter, Dodd met left wing intellectuals but this time, in 1932,

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<sup>114</sup> Dodd, 61.

<sup>115</sup> Dodd, 61.

<sup>116</sup> Dodd, 52-54, 59-61.

circumstances differed from the 1920s. Between 1922 and 1926 when Dodd attended college the Communist Party appeared nearly nonexistent though she was aware of a group of Communist students: “a leather-jacketed, down-at-the-heels group.”<sup>117</sup> She considered them ineffectual and not interested in outreach. In the 1930s the Communist Party made its greatest inroads at the college level. Working-class students especially were attracted to the solutions the Communist Party offered to solve the problems of the Depression. Left groups such as the American Communist Party and the socialists increased their organization and influence throughout the country. In 1935 the Seventh Congress of the Communist International called for cooperation with the noncommunist left in the struggle against fascism. This prompted the American Communist Party to moderate its position to support New Deal programs and become involved in daily politics.<sup>118</sup>

Hunter students became increasingly politicized. One reason was that the trustees appointed a controversial college president. Dr. Eugene Colligan tried to implement conservative ideas, which fueled dissent from both faculty and students.<sup>119</sup> According to

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<sup>117</sup> Dodd, 28. The American Communist party was in its infancy during this time and focused initially on trade union activities. The Party was established in 1919 originating from the factionalized left, political groups, labor groups, and the left wing of the Socialist Party. Internecine fighting continued for the next few years and different groups emerged. In 1922 the groups joined to form the Workers (Communist) Party. Mari Jo Buhle, Paul Buhle and Dan Georgakas eds., *Encyclopedia of the Left* (Urbana: University of Illinois, 1992), 146-149. William Z. Foster, *The History of the Communist Party of the United States* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1968), 174-178.

<sup>118</sup> *Encyclopedia of The Left*, 591, 594, states that Popular Front policy increased membership to 65,000 at the end of the Popular Front in the late 1930s. Maurice Isserman, *Which Side Were You On? The American Communist Party During the Second World War*, (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1982), 3. Dodd, 65, 66.

<sup>119</sup> Dodd, 63,64. Dr. Eugene Colligan’s assignment was the result of a political appointment. The dissenters believed that the new president, a conservative Roman Catholic and formerly an administrator at a public high school, was incapable of administering and understanding the needs of a college. The previous administrations at Hunter had operated a ‘hands-off’ policy which gave the teachers total autonomy in their classes. Colligan brought his conservative ideas about administrative involvement in the lives of students. Colligan threatened to withhold recommendations for teaching positions from any students found to have participated in antiwar

*School of Darkness*, Fiorella LaGuardia's mayoral election signaled "a new type of city politics" similar to FDR's national New Deal policies, which allowed political protest and organizing. The students rallied behind those ideals.<sup>120</sup>

According to Dodd, "almost overnight" student groups, such as the Young Communist League and the National Student League joined with the socialist Student League for Industrial Democracy, and recruited many students.<sup>121</sup> The united groups emphasized agitation, instigating political organizing drives and college strikes around issues that concerned students such as tuition and antiwar protests. The students participated in cross-class alliances and coalitions with groups in the labor movement. New York City college students journeyed to Harlan, Kentucky, to support a miner's strike in 1932. Students' free speech actions increased as well. The deepening international crisis of German and Italian fascist aggression in the 1930s sharpened the student focus and helped build strong antiwar and antifascist sentiments on campus.<sup>122</sup> Students' protests exploded when the Hunter College president, Eugene Colligan, expelled five students for mere participation in an off-campus antiwar protest.

The students of the 1930s, with their political activity and desire to better humanity,

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activities. He also had the discretionary right to expel any student he felt incompatible with his idea of what constituted a Hunter student. For a specifics of Hunter College activism in the 1930s see Engstrom, Markowitz and Sherry Gorelick, *City College and the Jewish Poor: Education in New York, 1880-1924*, (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1981).

<sup>120</sup> Dodd, 64. LaGuardia was elected mayor under the reform ticket. Nationally, Section 7a of the Wagner Act (1935) made it legal for workers to organize unions, previously labor organization was prohibited in the workplace.

<sup>121</sup> Dodd, 65.

<sup>122</sup> Dodd, 63-66. Students did not want America to become involved in the aggression occurring in Europe at the time.

became one driving force behind the left groundswells.<sup>123</sup> Students, not teachers, recruited more members for the left groups. Dodd noted that, "students had a strong effect on the teachers." These student activists carried many professors, Dodd among them, into contact with left and communist groups.<sup>124</sup>

The Instructors Association at Hunter grew into a coalition of teachers from all of the city's public colleges.<sup>125</sup> When Communist Party member Margaret Schlauch, a New York University professor, and other private college instructors joined with Dodd and the Instructors Association, they formed the American Association of University Teachers. Though short-lived the group survived long enough for Dodd to meet other Communist Party members at gatherings held at Schlauch's home. Dodd's labor and leftist activities and acquaintances increased.

By 1933 Dodd expanded her work for teachers' rights and worked with Party

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<sup>123</sup> Engstrom, 1, 19, 20. Markowitz, 40, 43-45. *Encyclopedia of the Left*, 591-595, 753. In the 1930s campus activists initiated the first mass student protest movement. With involvement of nearly half of the student body (500,000 students) this decade signals a pivotal change in American student politics. However, by the late 1930s the Comintern's (Communist Party International) change in policy fractured the student movement and contributed to its collapse in 1941.

<sup>124</sup> Dodd, 62. The student movement growth was helped along by a number of factors: recognition of the Soviet Union, the New Deal administration and its policies, as well as the growing threat of Nazism and fascism in Europe. *Encyclopedia of the Left*, 591-595. In 1932 at the height of the Depression NYC attempted to implement a tuition charge for the colleges. The students, mostly working-class, would be unable to attend if tuition was instituted. They successfully fought the measure. Tuition was finally instituted in the 1970s. For further reading on the student movements of the Thirties see Hal Draper in Rita Harold, *As We Saw the Thirties: Essays on Social and Political Movements of the Decade* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1967) ; Sherry Gorlick, *City College and the Jewish Poor*, (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1981); Robert Cohen, *When the Old Left Was Young: Student Radicals and America's First Mass Student Movement, 1929-1941*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993). NSL (National Student League) formed in 1931 under the auspices of the Communist Party USA. The League for Industrial Democracy, a socialist group, founded by Upton Sinclair in 1904, was an older, less radical group than NSL. Dodd and Howard Selsam of Brooklyn College were recruited by students. Dodd, 61-65. Ellen W. Schrecker, *No Ivory Tower: McCarthyism and the Universities* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 44; *Encyclopedia of the Left*, 591-95.

<sup>125</sup> Dodd, 61.

members in the Anti-Fascist Literature Committee. The threat of Hitler fueled the antifascist movement. Enlisted by Schlauch's friend and fellow Party member Harriet Silverman, Dodd researched and wrote pamphlets and raised funds for the Committee. As Dodd recalled, when she pressed Silverman about Party distribution of the donations she collected, Silverman offered to introduce her to Earl Browder, the leader of the Party. Dodd thought he resembled "a professor in a small Midwest college."<sup>126</sup> Soon Dodd hosted salons at her home that brought together professional people, Party members, creative artists and the union workers, in Dodd's terms, "the real proletarians."<sup>127</sup> Though Dodd was willing to join the Communist Party, Harriet Silverman told her that open Party members were not "important communists."<sup>128</sup> In *School of Darkness* she recalled that Communist Party leadership decided that she was to "be saved for real tasks and must not at this time be exposed."<sup>129</sup> Although Dodd did not officially join the Party, Harriet Silverman supplied her with Marxist literature, collected the monetary donations she raised, and gave her instructions from the Party.<sup>130</sup> Dodd began working in the Ex-servicemen's League, the Unemployed Councils, labor groups and other organizations intent on social reform while she continued to work with the Instructors Association.<sup>131</sup>

In her anticomunist memoirs Dodd claimed "communist teachers" asked her to participate in meetings of the Classroom Teachers Association, a Party-affiliated group

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<sup>126</sup> Dodd, 69.

<sup>127</sup> Dodd, 69.

<sup>128</sup> Dodd, 73.

<sup>129</sup> Dodd, 75.

<sup>130</sup> Isserman, 11.

<sup>131</sup> Dodd, 67- 69, 73-75.

involved in fighting for control of the New York City Teachers Union. Some members of the Classroom Teachers also held membership in the Teachers Union Local 5 of the American Federation of Teachers. The Classroom Teachers Association illuminated different issues of concern to teachers, such as the Board of Education's low wages for substitute teachers and the plight of unemployed teachers. Dodd wrote that, within the Teachers Union, the Communist members highlighted these inequities, organized the substitute and unemployed teachers into union membership, and agitated for change while the conservatives in the union ignored the issue. With the large number of substitute and unemployed teachers added to the union's membership rolls, the Classroom Teachers group soon gained control over the Teachers Union Local 5.<sup>132</sup>

I did not become a Communist overnight. It came a little at a time. I had been conditioned by my education and association to accept this materialistic philosophy.<sup>133</sup>

Dodd's confessional above occurred after she had solidified her Catholic anticommunism, an ideology that vilified the materialistic philosophy of the Communist Party. However, in the 1930s the American Communist Party attracted Dodd for two major reasons. First, the Party aligned with the struggles for workers' rights, Black rights, and rights for the unemployed and other oppressed groups. Second, Party membership brought association in a dedicated family with guaranteed friends and relations, especially important for people who yearned for acceptance and assimilation as Dodd did.<sup>134</sup>

Dodd saw membership in the Party as patriotic. She answered her own questions of

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<sup>132</sup> Dodd, 72, 73, 75.

<sup>133</sup> Dodd, 73.

<sup>134</sup> Dodd, 61-65.

hesitation and rationalized her Communist Party involvement by citing the commitment of blue-blooded Americans: “I saw Susan [Woodruff] and others of old American families devoted to the principles of service to humanity [and] it helped to allay any doubts I had.” Other Party members like “Mary van Kleek of the Russell Sage Foundation, Josephine Truslow Adams, Annie Pennypacker, and Ferinanda Reed traced their ancestry to the early settlers.”<sup>135</sup> Dodd’s strong need to be recognized as an American hastened her emulation of these Party members. After all, if these true Americans were Party members, it must have been all right for Dodd, a mere immigrant American to imitate.

Social justice issues always concerned Dodd. She “respected the way they [the Party] fought for” oppressed and disadvantaged people and “admired the selfless dedication” of Party members and “their courage.”<sup>136</sup> Dodd saw communism “as a philosophy of life which glorified the little people.”<sup>137</sup> She saw the Party as “the only ones who are doing anything about the rotten conditions of today.”<sup>138</sup> Party leader Harriet Silverman impressed Dodd with her threadbare clothes and “that she was not concerned about her own poverty, and thought only of the working people of the world.”<sup>139</sup> Within the trade unions, especially, the Party lent enormous support. In *School of Darkness* Dodd described her feelings of affiliation with the Party during a May Day parade: “I felt excited as I marched with segments of organized labor.” She viewed her actions as, “my gesture of defiance against greed and corruption . . .

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<sup>135</sup> Dodd, 113-114.

<sup>136</sup> Dodd, 73.

<sup>137</sup> Dodd, 126.

<sup>138</sup> Dodd, 74.

<sup>139</sup> Dodd, 67.

an affirmation of my belief that a better world could be created.”<sup>140</sup> In *School of Darkness*, Dodd also wrote that around 1940 her “deepest loyalty to the Communist Party” came because of “their support of the teachers.”<sup>141</sup>

Party membership that sustained family values also drew Dodd. According to her autobiography, Party members welcomed Dodd “into their fraternal circle.”<sup>142</sup> She discovered that Communists “were warmhearted people” similar to herself.<sup>143</sup> The Communist family provided parental figures and offered guidelines and employment. Dodd recollects, “in the world there was immorality and decadence and injustice . . . no real standard to live by. But among Communists there was moral behavior . . . well-defined standards . . . order and certitude.”<sup>144</sup> Dodd worked with Party members and socialized with them at her home and in New York City nightclubs like the Village Vanguard. The Communist Party became Dodd’s family. She stayed in the Party because she found acceptance and friendship.<sup>145</sup>

Professionally, the Communist Party gave Dodd a position uncommon at the time for an ethnic woman. It allowed Dodd, as Legislative Representative of the Teachers Union and later, New York State Legislative Representative of the Communist Party, access to powerful positions and influential individuals. “I cultivated assemblymen and senators. I made many

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<sup>140</sup> Dodd, 85.

<sup>141</sup> Dodd, 126.

<sup>142</sup> Dodd, 73.

<sup>143</sup> Dodd, 74.

<sup>144</sup> Dodd, 126.

<sup>145</sup> Dodd, 73, 126. The Village Vanguard was a Greenwich Village club featuring live jazz or blues musicians.

friends among the legislators.”<sup>146</sup> Dodd even considered Mayor LaGuardia a friend (until she picketed City Hall). Dodd saw other women in leadership positions, such as Harriet Silverman and Elizabeth Gurley Flynn.<sup>147</sup>

After Dodd turned away from Party ideology, she explained that others, too, “believed in Stachel and Foster, Browder and Stalin . . . and the great Party of the Soviet Union. We felt they were incorruptible.”<sup>148</sup> As far as any acknowledgment or cognizance of the Party’s revolutionary stance was concerned, Dodd rationalized that she “was not the only American who thought one could go along with the good things the Communists did and reject their objectives. It was a naive idea.”<sup>149</sup> Dodd claimed that only later did she realize their objectives of revolution against the government. However, in her memoirs Dodd also admitted that she “was not interested in any long-range Party objectives. So I did not argue with them about the ‘dictatorship of the proletariat’ which they talked about, or about its implications.”<sup>150</sup> In essence Dodd wrote that she believed in some of the Communist Party agenda and disregarded the disagreeable ideology.<sup>151</sup>

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<sup>146</sup> Dodd, 84.

<sup>147</sup> Dodd, 84, 118, 119. Dodd organized a picket line around City Hall to exert pressure on the city to pay attention to teachers’ problems. Dodd’s friendship with Mayor LaGuardia ended when the negative publicity from the action angered him. Dodd smugly added that the action spurred the Board of Education to examine the substitute teacher situation.

<sup>148</sup> Dodd, 139.

<sup>149</sup> Dodd, 74.

<sup>150</sup> Dodd, 73,

<sup>151</sup> Dodd, 73, 74. Jack Stachel, William Foster and Earl Browder were American Communist Party leaders, Joseph Stalin was leader of the USSR from 1924 until his death in 1953. Dictatorship of the Proletariat occurs when the workers seize power in a government overthrow in order to transform the working class to the ruling class while also replacing that standing state army with an army from the working class. During this time a period of transition between capitalist and communist and the state becomes the Dictatorship of the Proletariat. Ernst Fischer, *How to Read Karl Marx* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1996), 132-135.

Dodd also ignored other questionable actions of the Communist Party. In 1939 the Hitler-Stalin Pact resulted in a loss of confidence and membership in the American Communist Party. Since the 1930s the Communist Party had opposed fascism, and with their support of the loyalists in the 1936 Spanish Civil War, they had gained the support of many Americans. When Moscow joined with Nazi Germany in a nonaggression pact, many Jewish and non-Jewish members left the Party deeming it unacceptable to align with the Nazis. In *School of Darkness* Dodd wrote that she “was too busy” with teacher business to “give much attention to this outrage” though it disturbed her.<sup>152</sup> Dodd justified her continued Party association by stating that she “deeply loved the Teachers Union” and the Party supported the teachers’ issues.<sup>153</sup> After years of Communist Party-influenced antifascism the Hitler-Stalin Pact negated much of the work of antifascists in America and proved to be detrimental to the American Communist Party.<sup>154</sup>

Dodd enlisted in a social movement that promoted slogans such as “Communism Is Twentieth Century Americanism” and “Jobs, Security, Democracy, Peace.” These slogans followed the new strategy of Americanizing Communism that brought the Communist Party into mainstream American politics for a brief time. Fascism in Italy and Germany was viewed as an international threat, and the Party’s antifascist front groups brought many Americans into contact with the group. Internal education focused on learning about New Deal politics and trade union functions instead of Marxism-Leninism. The Party revised its

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<sup>152</sup> Dodd, 118.

<sup>153</sup> Dodd, 138.

<sup>154</sup> The pact was also known as the Molotov-Von Ribbentrop Treaty, or the Russo-German nonaggression pact. Denning noted that the end of the Popular Front occurred with the Hitler-Stalin Pact. Michael Denning, *The Cultural Front: the Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Verso, 1998), xxi.

strategy from an emphasis on the shop floor and streets to a stress on the electoral arena and promoted the young people of the Party into leadership positions, including Dodd.<sup>155</sup>

The Communist Party grasped the significance of patriotism and a flourishing interest with the American past emerged. Communist publications highlighted American history; biographical articles and pamphlets appeared with subjects such as Thomas Jefferson, Abraham Lincoln and abolitionist John Brown. Dodd, like other immigrants and second-generation ethnic Americans, remembered her Americanization classes and was drawn to the rhetoric by the similarity of the historical content. The Party paralleled Communists' their revolutionary proclivity to America's history of the overthrow of British rule. The New York City local decorated headquarter walls with portraits of Presidents Jefferson and Lincoln next to Lenin and Marx and on the outside facade hung red, white and blue banners. To climax the Party's interest in American history, Earl Browder's Virginia ancestor and Revolutionary War soldier, Littleberry Browder, was discovered and extolled.<sup>156</sup>

### **Teachers Union Activity**

In 1934 Dodd and an old neighborhood friend, Chris McGrath, the Surrogate of Bronx County and chairperson of the Education Committee of the General Assembly drafted a bill that gave tenure to public college teachers which McGrath introduced to the General

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<sup>155</sup> *Encyclopedia of the Left*, 592-94 This slogan was a sign on the exterior of NYC Party Headquarters in the 1930s. Photo in Isserman. Isserman, 15-16. Coalition with some Catholics occurred in the early 1930s with the Catholic Workers. However by 1938 the American Catholic Trade Union (ACTU) was established by ex-Catholic Workers disgruntled by the Catholic Workers' softness on communism. For more information concerning ACTU see Douglas P. Seaton, *Catholics and Radicals: The Association of Catholic Trade Unionists and the American Labor Movement from Depression to Cold War*, (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1981).

<sup>156</sup> Richard H. Pells, *Radical Visions and American Dreams: Culture and Social Thought in the Depression Years* new and rev. ed. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1998), 314, 315, 317, 389 N52; Denning, 16, 129; "Thomas Jefferson," *New Masses* XIX (April 21, 1936), 8; and Samuel Sillen, "History and Fiction." *New Masses* XXVII (June 14, 1938), 22, 23. *Encyclopedia of the Left*, 592-594.. Denning, 131.

Assembly. The passage of the tenure bill brought attention and accolades to Dodd who was soon considered a legislative expert. Consequently, the Teachers Union appointed Dodd its legislature representative and Dodd divided her time between New York City and Albany with some trips to Washington, D.C.. She proved to be a bright, articulate, young new leader in the New York City Teachers Union Local 5.<sup>157</sup>

In the spring of 1936, to concentrate on her new position of Legislative Representative in the Teachers Union, Dodd took a six-month leave of absence from Hunter College. That fall Dodd returned to Hunter for one semester but obtained another leave of absence the following spring. The Teachers Union now included substitute, unemployed and WPA (Works Progress Administration) teachers, all sympathetic to the Communist Party that was instrumental in their inclusion as members. Dodd and the Teachers Union formed coalitions with Communist PTA's and student groups which resulted in a large political bloc. She organized the Union members by assembly districts so the members could pressure their local elected representatives and assembly people within their own elective districts.<sup>158</sup>

According to Dodd the Communist Party instigated the extension of her labor involvement to other union groups. As a delegate to the AFL's (American Federation of Labor) Central Trades Labor Council, Dodd, designated by the Communist Party, presented a petition that supported a "wildcat" strike by seamen who intended to reorganize the ISU (International Seaman's Union). Though the petition lacked any merit for the Teachers Union, Dodd wrote that her legislative position in the Teachers Union depended upon

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<sup>157</sup> Dodd, 73, 75.

<sup>158</sup> Dodd, 77.

Communist Party approval and thus on her execution of the Party's instructions.<sup>159</sup>

Dodd's anticommunist bias is apparent in her recollections as she interjected often that the Party dictated her actions that involved coalition with other unions. However, Teachers Union files show the union was involved in defending other trade unions rights, and cooperation and interrelations were quite common. For example, teachers supported workers in the Painters Union and the right of non-instructional workers of colleges to form their unions, too. Teachers also participated in activities to support the antifascists in the Spanish Civil War. Not every union member was a communist, and though some officials in the Teachers Union were sympathetic to the Communist Party, others were Socialist Party members.<sup>160</sup>

Dodd immersed herself in union business as the Teachers Union membership grew; with separate locals established, membership numbered nearly nine thousand. The AFL knew some leaders of the Teachers Union were associated with the Communist Party as either acknowledged or secret members. The AFL distanced itself from the NYC Teachers Union and eventually revoked the union's charter. As legislative representative in Albany, Dodd encountered prejudice because of her Communist Party affiliation. She persisted, studying the legislators' strengths and weaknesses, and made friends with them.<sup>161</sup>

Dodd resigned from Hunter in 1938 to take a full-time position with the Teachers Union for a salary less than a teacher's pay. Dodd recalled that she astonished her friends

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<sup>159</sup> Dodd, 79, 80.

<sup>160</sup> Assembly Delegate Minutes of the NYC Teachers Union, 1 April 1938; 13 May 1938, Box 1, (New York: UFT Archives, Box 1 Tamiment Library). Layle Lane was Recording Secretary, and a Teachers Union official for many years. She was a member of the Socialist Party.

<sup>161</sup> Dodd, 83, 84, 85.

when she gave up her teacher's tenure and pension: "my friends were amazed that I should be willing to leave the college, my tenure, and my pension."<sup>162</sup> In her new position Dodd helped introduce a bill before the New York State Assembly to give substitute teachers benefits. Though the measure went down to defeat, it brought the plight of the substitute teachers to the forefront of the educational arena.<sup>163</sup>

### **The Rapp-Coudert Hearings**

Dodd's well organized legal defense of Teachers Union members accused of communist activity by the Rapp-Coudert Committee became her most indelible accomplishment and would follow Dodd into the 1950s.<sup>164</sup> In the fall of 1939 the Rapp-Coudert hearings began as an investigation by the New York State Legislature into school finance and administration.<sup>165</sup> Upstate Republican assembly member Herbert Rapp and New York City Republican assembly member Frederick Coudert headed the committee. The investigation was transformed when an uproar over a controversial appointment at the City College of New York reached Albany and the committee decided to investigate the degree of

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<sup>162</sup> Dodd, 107.

<sup>163</sup> Dodd, 108. According to Annette Rubinstein, substitute teachers at the time were paid only \$5.00 a day with no benefits, even if they worked full time. The Board of Education would deliberately use substitute teachers and freeze hiring of regular full time teachers to save money. Interview with Annette Rubinstein, New York, March 13, 1998.

<sup>164</sup> Murphy, 173, 186. Often Murphy credits Dodd's legal skill and maintains that it was a great loss when the union no longer had Dodd.

<sup>165</sup> Left historian Stephen Leberstein disputed that the committee's inception was towards finances and instead argued that the counsel hired by the committee was a high priced political lawyer, inappropriate for a finance hearing. Stephen Leberstein, "Purging The Prof: The Rapp Coudert Committee in New York, 1940-1942," in *New Studies in The Politics and Culture of U. S. Communism*, Michael E. Brown, Randy Martin, Frank Rosengarten and George Snedeker, eds, (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1993), 97.

communist activity in the city colleges.<sup>166</sup> Dodd called Assemblyman Rapp an “up-starter” interested only in school finance, not pivotal in the investigation. Senator Coudert held a higher stake because he belonged to an international law firm with an office in Paris that worked for White Russian clients. The Rapp-Coudert committee intended to expose Communist Party professors in the city colleges. The committee created techniques that subsequent red-baiting investigations of would incorporate. These techniques included the use of ex-Communist Party members as informers and a strategy of initial, private interrogations followed with public testimony before the committee.<sup>167</sup>

Dodd organized the defense of the left-wing teachers and devised a two-part strategy. First, she contested every facet of the committee methods and proceedings; second, she impugned the committee for sabotaging public schooling.<sup>168</sup> According to Dodd she organized the Friends of the Free Public Schools, which raised \$150,000 the first year<sup>169</sup> They sent booklets that explained the teachers’ side to trade unions, women’s clubs, and teacher organizations. The Friends even set up a booth at the New York State Fair and developed programs for radio. Dodd also organized Save Our Schools community clubs

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<sup>166</sup> Bertrand Russell’s appointment to CCNY was eventually withdrawn but the firestorm, concerning the appointment of what many conservatives considered a subversive individual, could not be extinguished. Russell was a British mathematician, philosopher and social reformer whose controversial views included pacifism, a radical position on marriage, homosexuality, sex and adultery which hindered his academic career. He and his wife also founded the highly experimental Beacon Hill School.

<sup>167</sup> Dodd, 119. Schrecker, *No Ivory Tower*, 76.

<sup>168</sup> Dodd, not practicing law at the time, sat in the audience and vocally objected and literally interrupted the proceedings once. Though threatened with expulsion from court Dodd continued for a few more lines. *Education Defense Bulletin*, “Committee for the Defense of Public Education,” No. 3 December 5, 1940 Teachers Union files (New York: United Federation of Teachers Archives, Tamiment Library). (Hereafter TU/UFT.)

<sup>169</sup> Dodd’s group was really called The Committee for the Defense of Public Education another inconsistency between her memoir and reality.

which consisted of diverse members who worked on a grass-roots level.<sup>170</sup>

In addition, once the Rapp-Coudert committee subpoenaed the Teachers Union records, membership lists and financial records the Teachers Union viewed the hearings as an attack on the trade union movement. The Teachers Union appealed the subpoena and buying time with the process. The Committee for the Defense of Public Education hired lawyers, enlisted other trade unions for support, distributed literature and sent out speakers. The defense had decided not to relinquish the union membership lists to the Rapp-Coudert committee. Dodd, "burned the lists of college Union teachers" she held.<sup>171</sup>

Rapp-Coudert would prove to have complex and wide ranging ramifications. Though the state legislature ran the investigation, the New York City Board of Higher Education was charged with implementing the Rapp-Coudert recommendations. The Board required two witnesses to corroborate a teacher's Party membership before she or he faced termination. (The lack of a second witness spared the Brooklyn College professors.) However, the Rapp-Coudert defendants faced an unusual dilemma. A teacher's refusal to testify violated Section 903 of the New York City Charter, and this was punishable by termination. While the hearings were in session, the Board of Higher Education passed a resolution that no teacher was to be a member of any communist, fascist or Nazi group. The courts later ruled this resolution illegal but, unfortunately, not before one defendant, Morris Schappes, denied his Communist Party affiliation. Party strategy, dictated from the top, called for this denial of

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<sup>170</sup> Dodd, 116.

<sup>171</sup> Schrecker, *No Ivory Tower*, 78. Dodd, 121. Dodd explained that the membership cards "would trace a pattern of membership, since our cards showed who sponsored each individual." Dodd, 122. The secretary in the Teachers Union office surrendered the membership lists for primary and secondary school teachers when the committee came to collect them. Dodd later learned the secretary was a Communist Party plant so it remains a mystery as to why the membership lists were relinquished so readily.

Party membership. The strategy later proved foolish, especially for Schappes. Unknown to him and his defense, the prosecution gained the corroboration from a second witness. Consequently, Schappes's continued denial of Party membership eliminated the possibility of endorsement from the liberal establishment. Concerning this questionable decision, Dodd recollected that a "top level committee" devised it without her participation.<sup>172</sup>

Because Schappes lied about his Party membership to the Rapp-Coudert investigators while under oath, the court convicted him of perjury in 1942 and sentenced him to one-and-a-half to three years in prison. Dodd headed the Committee to Free Morris Schappes that raised money for his legal defense. Schappes served thirteen and one-half months in state prison. The Board of Higher Education fired him from the City College of New York and dismissed twenty-two other teachers; eleven teachers resigned. The Teachers Union assisted the dismissed teachers and established a lecture series that paid speaking fees to the terminated teachers. Dodd and others organized the School for Democracy, an adult school that employed many of the unemployed teachers.<sup>173</sup>

Brooklyn College president Harry Gideonse wanted the accused teachers, now publicly identified, removed from their teaching positions. However, because of tenure, which Dodd had fought for, the Board of Higher Education could not fire the teachers without proper cause. The Brooklyn College professors, though spared from termination for the time being, faced a bleak academic future devoid of promotions and pay raises.

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<sup>172</sup> Dodd, 129. Schrecker questioned the merits of letting the Party decide one's fate. Schrecker, *No Ivory Tower*, 79, 80. Leberstein, 116-117. The provision is no longer in the city charter.

<sup>173</sup> Leberstein, 117. Dodd, 130, 149. The School for Democracy a Communist-backed liberal adult school with Howard Selsman as director and David Goldway as secretary was located at 13 Astor Place and shared facilities with the Teachers Union. In the late 1940s the School for Democracy merged with The Workers School to form the Jefferson School of Democracy, or as Dodd called it the Jefferson School of Social Research.

Termination for these veterans of Rapp-Coudert became inevitable whenever a second witness materialized. A decade later the second witness appeared and, indeed, she had been within their midst.

Rapp-Coudert had other extensive implications. As a result of the investigations the Party was condemned, not for its revolutionary intent but for its covert nature. Individual teachers recognized their lack of political rights and discovered that their defense was only as strong as the union. Many in the Teachers Union saw Rapp-Coudert as an attack by reactionaries against unions to silence protest and reduce educational allocations.<sup>174</sup>

Bella Dodd and the Teachers Union expressed ideals of Americanism in their support of equality and civil liberties. The union fought for equal representation for substitute and unemployed teachers, and for academic freedom using the rhetoric of democracy. Union conferences entitled “Education for Democracy” included panels with subjects such as: American Ideals--the Teaching of the Democratic Way of Life, Culture in Democracy, Education for Veterans, Teachers as Citizens in School and Community.<sup>175</sup> Teachers Union bulletins, periodicals and press releases used discourse that highlighted the objectives of liberty, democracy and academic freedom.<sup>176</sup> The union’s meeting minutes depicted a group that encouraged member involvement in important educational issues, such as child labor, maternity leave and first amendment rights. The union urged members to exercise their

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<sup>174</sup> Celia Lewis Zitron, *The New York City Teachers Union, 1916-1964: A Story of Educational and Social Commitment* (New York: Humanities Press, 1968), 192-193. Leberstein, 114. Schrecker, *No Ivory Tower*, 100. Murphy considered Dodd a great asset to the Teachers Union during Rapp-Coudert. Without Dodd’s expertise in the 1950s, Murphy argued that the union faltered with ineffective attempts of Sam Wallach, Teachers Union president, and Rose Russell, legislative representative to defend the teachers. Murphy, 173, 186.

<sup>175</sup> Teachers Union Publications, “Education for Democracy” 1939. Box 1 TU/UFT.

<sup>176</sup> Teachers Union Program, 1936-1937, Box 1, TU/UFT.

citizenship and constitutional rights to lobby legislators with petitions and letters, and vote out of office uncooperative politicians.<sup>177</sup>

The images and rhetoric of Americanism and democracy were most prevalent during the Rapp-Coudert committee investigations. The union advocated grass-roots organizing, initiated rallies and demonstrations and created media blitzes that supported academic freedom and workers' rights under the banner of American democracy. Union support of the imprisoned instructor Morris Schappes depicted him in their literature and pamphlets as an American hero, a defender of liberty, an early antifascist fighter and a teacher who "kept democracy alive."<sup>178</sup> Dodd's monthly column in *The New York Teachers News* kept union members aware of events in the New York State Assembly and Senate, especially bills of importance to teachers.

Dodd's first taste of campaigning for elective office occurred with the Teachers Union during the 1938 elections, when she ran on the American Labor Party (ALP) ticket for Assembly in the Tenth Assembly District, her Greenwich Village neighborhood. Members of the Teachers Union organized her campaign. One of the campaign slogans was, "Tweedledum and Tweedledee, you'd better vote ALP," to highlight that Dodd's Democratic and Republican opponents both belonged to the same law firm.<sup>179</sup> The third party never expected victory but welcomed the publicity the election provided.

Losing the election, Dodd also experienced significant personal losses from 1939

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<sup>177</sup> Teachers Union Program, 1935-1938, Delegate Assembly Minutes, Box 1, TU/UFT.

<sup>178</sup> Pamphlet, "Swing Wide the Gates: Let Morris Schappes Be Free," TU Publications, Box 1, TU/UFT.

<sup>179</sup> Dodd, 81, 112, 113. The ALP was formed to support FDR without having to support the corrupt NYC Democrats of Tammany Hall.

through 1941. In April 1939 her father, Rocco Visono died in Poughkeepsie where the family lived.<sup>180</sup> In 1940 John Dodd abandoned his wife. John and Bella Dodd appeared to live together until 1940 but Bella Dodd admitted without elaborating that by 1938 John was “often away on business.” According to her text, John Dodd upset with her increased involvement with the Communists, left Bella to obtain a divorce in Florida. However, Bella Dodd admitted that “there were other and personal reasons why [the] marriage had not been successful.” She last mentioned John Dodd to say he obtained a divorce from her to remarry down South in 1943.<sup>181</sup>

Dodd sold the house in Poughkeepsie and she and her mother returned to Greenwich Village, Manhattan to live where after a brief illness Teresa Visono died at seventy-six years of age. Dodd wrote that she missed her mother deeply, could not bear to stay in the same apartment, and moved to a small room on the top floor of a house on Horatio Street in the same Village neighborhood.<sup>182</sup> Within two years Dodd lost both her parents to death and her spouse to divorce. With little biological family left, Dodd even more firmly solidified her family bonds to the Communist Party.

In 1943 members of the Communist International accelerated a push to revise the Communist Party into a homegrown American Party. Gil Green, the Party’s New York State Chairperson, approached Dodd to invite her to join the Party officially. According to *School*

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<sup>180</sup> Dodd, 114, 115, 116.

<sup>181</sup> Dodd, 114, 126, 161. Dodd, known to be dramatic, possibly exaggerated the issue since Dodd became legislative representative of the Teachers Union in 1935, and the marriage appeared to be over by 1938. Dodd officially joined the Communist Party in 1944 and John Dodd left her in 1940. FBI files indicate John Dodd settled in Louisiana. L. V. Boardman letter to Director, Bella Dodd # 100-6951-187, Part 2 of 4.

<sup>182</sup> Dodd, 130, 131, 132.

*of Darkness*, he wanted her to replace the existing Communist Party legislative representative, Si Gerson, who was bound for military service.<sup>183</sup> Dodd agreed and later wrote “in everything except in name I was a Communist” as a way to rationalize her decision.<sup>184</sup> According to Dodd, her “Marxist conditioning” influenced her decision to join the Communist Party officially.<sup>185</sup> During this time the Communist Party enjoyed some acceptance since Russia and America were allies in World War Two.

In March of 1943 Dodd decided to join the Party, but she did not become an open member until the following year. She began to plan her departure from the Teachers Union and selected Rose Russell as her successor for Teachers Union legislative representative. On June 23, 1944, the Teachers Union gave Dodd a farewell dinner entitled, “A Tribute to Dear Bella.” Dodd officially announced her Communist Party membership at the Communist Party National Convention in July 1944, and was appointed the New York State Communist Party legislative representative. Also, at the Party’s direction, she established a law office with two other lawyers, Philip Jones and Allen Goodwin, at 25 East 42nd Street, New York City. As Dodd recalled, she spent most of the time conducting party business with labor groups and had a few legal clients referred to her by the Party.<sup>186</sup>

As the Communist Party legislative representative she became responsible for organization of the different groups within the Party. Looking back through her anticommunist lens, Dodd contended that her disenchantment grew when she worked at Party

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<sup>183</sup> Dodd, 155.

<sup>184</sup> Dodd, 157.

<sup>185</sup> Dodd, 155, 157.

<sup>186</sup> Dodd, 159, 160, 164.

headquarters and was shocked at the paucity of file materials that concerned social questions such as housing, welfare and other social programs. Nearly a decade later in her book, she claimed the lack of files as evidence of the Party's "long-range strategy for revolution."<sup>187</sup> Dodd wrote in *School of Darkness* that she began to question the motives of the Party leadership, and now saw the rank and file as pawns. During this time Dodd bought a house on Lexington Avenue in East Harlem and became associated with the Party local called the Garibaldi Club. Dodd also moved her law office to 100 West 42nd Street.<sup>188</sup>

Her statements regarding the files may have been exaggerated. Party members' work on social issues occurred within their work with non-communist groups. It was logical that Party files did not reflect these issues. In addition, incurring the expense of purchasing a home and moving a law office were not the actions of a Communist discontent with the Party.

### **Changes in Dodd and the Communist Party**

The end of Earl Browder's leadership of the Communist Party deeply affected Dodd and signaled the discontinuation of her intense involvement. Dodd had joined during Browder's tenure, when he moved the Party away from sectarianism and toward coalitions with non-communist groups and an integration into the American political system. Under his leadership Party recruited people like Dodd, working-class members from the center of society, by utilizing the slogan "Communism is Twentieth Century Americanism."<sup>189</sup> Browder retired the older leaders and opened the leadership positions to the young people

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<sup>187</sup> Dodd, 163.

<sup>188</sup> Dodd, 164.

<sup>189</sup> Isserman, *Which Side*, 14. Previously the Party had recruited people from the edges of society.

like Dodd, and gave them much latitude running the daily affairs of the Party.<sup>190</sup> In 1944 Browder dissolved the American Communist Party and established the Communist Political Association in its place. Dodd became a member of the National Committee and officially announced her membership.

Within a year however, Browder fell into disfavor. Calling him a “utopian opportunist,” the older Communist disliked him and considered him too ambitious.<sup>191</sup> Criticisms of Browder included charges he made deals with capitalists, disregarded racial rights and shifted from a revolutionary Program to coalition with New Deal officials. To his critics Browder accepted capitalist control of society and abandoned the struggle of the working classes. The last straw was the dissolution of the Party.<sup>192</sup>

In 1945 the Communist International (Moscow) rejected Earl Browder's ideas. A letter from French Communist leader Jacques Duclos criticized Browder's policies and recommended, in Dodd's words, that the American Communist Party “clean house” and “get back to . . . revolution.” Duclos called Browder a revisionist and demanded his resignation. According to Dodd writing many years later, it “was clear Browder's approach was in disfavor” and that, “the [Duclos] letter was to change the whole course of the American Communist movement.”<sup>193</sup> It would change her future, too. In 1945 an emergency Communist Party convention convened; it removed Browder as General Secretary of the Party, dissolved the Communist Political Association, reestablished the Communist Party,

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<sup>190</sup> Isserman, *Which Side*, 9.

<sup>191</sup> Foster in William Z. Foster, *The History of the Communist Party of the United States* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1968), 422; Isserman, 8.

<sup>192</sup> Foster, 422-426.

<sup>193</sup> Dodd, 181.

and according to Dodd, rededicated “itself to the task of establishing a Soviet America.”<sup>194</sup>

The Party expelled Browder in February 1946. Dodd, vocal about the policy change, defended Browder, came to verbal blows with the leadership, and fell into disfavor.<sup>195</sup> Party members who did not adhere to the new line were accused of “Browderism” which advocated an amicable coexistence of capitalism and socialism.<sup>196</sup> The Communist Party National Board shipped Gil Green to Chicago and appointed Robert Thompson New York district leader. Dodd “opposed his election” because of his inexperience.<sup>197</sup> Thompson was her boss and she clashed with him repeatedly.

Dodd described what followed at Party headquarters as a “palace revolution” headed by William Foster.<sup>198</sup> Dodd, struck by the behavior of those who feared reproach for their “revisionism,” witnessed displays of “self-flagellation” as she watched the Communist Party leadership atone for their support of Browder.<sup>199</sup> The repudiation of Browder by his former associates such as Mother Bloor and Elizabeth Gurley Flynn shocked Dodd. Dodd contended that Ben Davis accused her of white chauvinism when she defended Browder. Gil Green and Israel Amter wanted Dodd to prepare a written statement that renounced Browder and admitted her mistakes. In *School of Darkness* she recalled that her “pen would not write the words,” and she made up some excuse.<sup>200</sup> Other meetings occurred; Dodd called them the

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<sup>194</sup> Dodd, 192.

<sup>195</sup> Isserman, 240.

<sup>196</sup> Foster, 428.

<sup>197</sup> Dodd, 192.

<sup>198</sup> Dodd, 182. A palace revolution is an overthrow that involved the intimacies of a chief executive.

<sup>199</sup> Dodd, 183.

<sup>200</sup> Dodd, 187. Mother Bloor and Elizabeth Gurley Flynn were well-known Party leaders and activists.

“nearest thing to purge trials.” Members once close to Browder were expected to “beg forgiveness” for their Browderism.<sup>201</sup>

Why Dodd remained in a Party that had changed so drastically requires some analysis. Already forty years old, she had spent most of her adult career involved with the Party either indirectly with the Teachers Union or directly as an open Party member. She had many contacts with labor and political groups and could have secured other employment. However, she was a vocal Communist, and at that time highly critical of the new Party line. Her status may have disadvantaged her as any group on friendly terms with the Party, such as labor unions, may have been hesitant to employ her and risk retribution from the Party. While leaving the Party would possibly have limited her employment opportunities, it was the potential damage to her pride which kept her in the Party. She was not yet ready to acknowledge her discontent with the group to which she had once been so dedicated. And so she remained in the Party. Moreover, she was not yet ready to rescind her communist ideology since there was no place to go.

Dodd later wrote in *School of Darkness* that those clashes with Thompson continued and she became more disillusioned with the Party. She was not alone. Between the years of 1945 through 1947 the Communist Party expelled several thousand who were found “guilty of leftism or rightism,” or white chauvinism.<sup>202</sup> As a way to clean up its image, the Party expelled many homosexuals and others deemed unsavory. This forced exodus, coupled with those members who left the Party on their own, caused a depletion in the ranks and resulted

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<sup>201</sup> Dodd, 187. Ben Davis was one of the African-Americans leaders of the Party.

<sup>202</sup> Dodd, 195.

in a more covert, nearly underground organization.<sup>203</sup>

Dodd described the “a reign of terror” that occurred. The “little people,” petrified that their least criticism about the Party might provide justification for expulsion, public exposure and loss of their jobs, sought advice from Dodd at her office.<sup>204</sup> Dodd considered herself in similar circumstances. However, Dodd had officially announced her Communist Party membership, so she was unconcerned with exposure and according to *School of Darkness* avoided Party condemnation because she thought that her popularity with the rank and file protected her. Dodd, concerned with corruption, considered the leadership of Robert Thompson and Eugene Dennis inept.<sup>205</sup> When she approached William Foster to complain, she received no satisfaction.<sup>206</sup>

According to Annette Rubinstein, Foster had never liked Dodd and this was compounded by Dodd’s very vocal criticism of the changed Party. The Party did not want Dodd with her negative attitude in Albany so they removed her as Communist Party State legislative representative. The Party was willing to pay her a salary but Dodd had her pride, and refused to accept a salary if she did not work for it. This loss of income was the beginning of Dodd’s financial trouble. She started to concentrate on her law practice, which did not sit well with the Party leadership. Another factor that contributed to Party

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<sup>203</sup> Edith Chevat, “In For the Long Haul: Edith Chevat in Conversation with Annette and Friends,” in *Bridges: A Journal for Jewish Feminists and Our Friends*, Vol 6 No. 1 (Summer 5756/1996) : 16.

<sup>204</sup> Dodd, 195. According to FBI files Dodd’s office was where those disgruntled with the Party went to complain. U. S. Dept. of Justice, NY, letter to Director, 18 July 1946, Bella Dodd #100-6951-20.

<sup>205</sup> According to FBI files wiretaps on Dodd, she was angry about the squandering of \$350,000 dollars by new leaders Thompson and Foster; D. M. Ladd memorandum to Director, April 2, 1947, Bella Dodd #100-6951-146.

<sup>206</sup> Foster, called the “old man” was the actual leader of the American Communist Party.

disapproval of her was that Dodd had a lover who was a Trotskyite and part of a small but militant minority in the Seamen's Union which criticized the Party. The leadership of the Party wanted Dodd to sever her relationship with him, which she refused to do, adding to her very shaky position.<sup>207</sup>

Subsequently, according to *School of Darkness*, Dodd became the target of Communist Party harassment and she wrote, "the campaign had begun," which involved visits by "investigators," plants within her own office, interrogation of her friends and associates by the Party, and the spreading of rumor and innuendo concerning her personal life.<sup>208</sup> Dodd twice incurred charges of white chauvinism but disproved them. She asked to resign from the Party and Bill Norman reportedly told her that "no one gets out . . . you die or you are thrown out."<sup>209</sup> Dodd, no longer Party legislative representative, worked on Vito Marcantonio's Congressional reelection. By late 1947 according to Dodd, she was "ill in mind and often body." The Party made "every effort . . . to destroy" her and she "did not have the will to fight back."<sup>210</sup> Throughout 1947, according to *School of Darkness*, she encountered financial trouble, battled with the leadership and waited for the inevitable consequences.

By the spring of 1949 Dodd withdrew from most Party activity except for a brief appearance at a Party convention. Shortly, the Party leadership summoned Dodd to the ninth floor of Communist Party headquarters for a disciplinary hearing. Dodd refused to atone and

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<sup>207</sup> Annette Rubinstein interview with author, March 13, 1998.

<sup>208</sup> Dodd, 196.

<sup>209</sup> Dodd, 197.

<sup>210</sup> Dodd, 207.

walked out. In early June 1949 the Party summoned her to trial at her local party headquarters in East Harlem. As Dodd left the hearing, she recalled that the futility of life "overcame her."<sup>211</sup> Dodd received word of her official expulsion from a reporter's phone call on June 19, 1949. Abandonment by friends and clients followed, and Dodd realized that rejection by one person was incomparable to rejection by an entire group. People Dodd had helped now ignored her. This Dodd called "annihilating." There were some supporters: Layle Lane, Teachers Union recording secretary sent Dodd a letter of condolences; Communist friends like Annette Rubinstein and Doxey Wilkinson also gave emotional and financial support to Dodd.<sup>212</sup>

According to *School of Darkness* Dodd's expulsion charge concerned one of her law clients, a woman janitor who bought a building with prior housing complaints. But in reality Dodd was defending a group of tenants who had been overcharged by a landlord that had no assets in her name, including the building itself. Thus, if the court settled the matter the landlord would be jailed, and the tenants would not receive any refund of the overcharged money. Dodd arranged an out-of-court settlement between the landlord and the tenants whereby the tenants received the money they had been overcharged.<sup>213</sup> The Party framed Dodd and called her an "attorney for landlords" and charged her with being anti-Negro, anti-

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<sup>211</sup> Dodd, 220.

<sup>212</sup> Dodd, 222. The Tamiment Labor Library file on Bella Dodd contained a reply from Dodd to Layle Lane thanking her for sending a supportive message concerning Dodd's expulsion. Interview with Annette Rubinstein with author. Doxey Wilkinson was an African American educator, Party member and Howard University professor.

<sup>213</sup> Annette Rubinstein interview. Rubinstein, so upset about Dodd's defaming, researched the case herself and provided the true story.

Semitic, and anti-working class.<sup>214</sup> Many people considered the charges fabricated, designed to silence her critical voice in a changed Party.<sup>215</sup> Ultimately, Dodd felt betrayed by the Party.

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<sup>214</sup> Dodd, 201. *The Daily Worker*, June 24, 1949, 5:2.

<sup>215</sup> Historians who feel Dodd was treated unfairly include: Schrecker, Murphy, Isserman. George Charney, a former Party member, also regretted he never raised a hand to help Dodd nor protest her inappropriate treatment by the Party. George Charney, *A Long Journey* (New York: Quadrangle, 1968), 152-153.

## Chapter III

### Anticommunism for God and Country

Dodd's expulsion from the Party led to the forfeiture of her Communist friends and law clients, and continuing financial trouble. Forty-five years old, she found herself in disheartening circumstances, expelled from a life and work of nearly two decades, financially crippled, with no family and few friends, isolated and depressed.<sup>216</sup> Furthermore, she suffered a difficult miscarriage and her lover was a Catholic who could not obtain a divorce. FBI files of the time depicted a troubled Dodd, drinking heavily and frequenting midtown Manhattan bars, sometimes with her lover. Moreover, because of her lover's problems he was undependable and not supportive to Dodd during her time of need.<sup>216</sup> Dodd borrowed money from her few remaining friends.<sup>217</sup> Eventually, as Dodd retold it, she lost her home on Lexington Avenue.<sup>218</sup> She moved to a furnished room, and continued to practice law from

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<sup>216</sup> Dodd, 201, 230. According to Dodd's nephew, George Marsilio, Dodd only saw her family (brothers family) once a year because of Dodd's communist activity. Dodd detailed a visit with her brother's family that left her more depressed. Obviously there was some estrangement with her family, because of her political activity.

<sup>216</sup> Dodd's lover suffered from alcoholism, to the extent that he required hospitalization, and once while drunk he lost money he owed Dodd which was destined to pay her mortgage. Information concerning Dodd's lover and his alcoholism comes from FBI files, though his identity was blacked out, his profession and confirmation of his alcoholism came from a phone conversation with Sophie Louise Ullman-Vidal, maker of a film that concerned the expelled teachers, ones that Dodd named. From those files I surmised Dodd's lover was Ralph Mosher because Dodd sometimes used the name Mrs. Mosher and initially the FBI thought Dodd was married to him. FBI files described numerous meetings Dodd had with her paramour in various bars in the area. Annette Rubinstein interview also revealed that her lover was a seamen. Dodd's miscarriage was such that she had to carry the dead fetus to term. Schrecker, *No Ivory Tower*, 169. D. M. Ladd memorandum to E. A. Tamm Oct. ^, 1947, Bella Dodd #100-6951-81, Part 2 of 4: U. S. NY letter to Director, dec. 23, 1946, Bella Dodd #100-6951-38. SAC, NY summary to Director, Aug. 21, 1945, Bella Dodd #100-6951-124, Part 1 of 2.

<sup>217</sup> Dodd was in such poor financial shape that she borrowed two dresses from Annette Rubinstein's mother. Annette Rubinstein interview with the author. This provided further evidence of Dodd's dire financial situation which may have been the impetus to her cooperation with the government as a paid informer and her public embrace of Catholicism and anticommunism work, which provided paid speaking engagements.

<sup>218</sup> According to Annette Rubinstein Dodd and her lover had purchased the house on Lexington Avenue. Dodd's lover disappeared for months at a time so it is possible that without his financial contributions the mortgage payments may have fallen behind and thus the bank would seize the property. Annette Rubinstein

her office at 100 West 42nd Street. Dodd nearly lost her law license when she received a censure by the New York State Bar Association for overdrawn checks. She made restitution, thereby avoiding disbarment. Dodd told an FBI informer that she had such debts she was "on the brink of the sheriff coming" to arrest her.<sup>219</sup> In 1951 Dodd was hospitalized for a blood disorder, and with no health insurance was admitted to the charity ward. She later wrote, "it was a strange and painful year."<sup>220</sup> Dodd also attempted to adopt twin boys who were Italian war orphans, but her application was rejected because of her unmarried status.<sup>221</sup>

In her memoirs, Dodd described her conflicted feelings about naming names; she hesitated to accuse former friends and feared the Communist reprisals: "I dreaded hurting individuals who were perhaps as blind as I. I dreaded the campaign of personal abuse . . . against me."<sup>222</sup> Dodd may be best known as a namer of names and a player in a fearful and confused time in America. The Cold War escalated and a plethora of investigative committees peaked in the 1950s and crowded the halls of Congress attempting to determine the influence and activity of Communist Party members within the government and other segments of society, such as education and the labor movement. The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) was responsible for gathering information on particular people through wiretaps and informers. The FBI's interest in Dodd first arose when it considered her a potential informer while she was still in the Party. In 1946 the FBI started surveillance on

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interview with author.

<sup>219</sup> SAC, NY teletype to Director, Aug. 28, 1951, Bella Dodd #100-6951-125, Part 2 of 4.

<sup>220</sup> Dodd, 224.

<sup>221</sup> Schrecker, *No Ivory Tower*, 169. Dodd, 224, 245. Dept. of Justice, NY letter to director, August 28, 1951, Bella Dodd, #100-6951-105,122, 245; Part 2 of 4.

<sup>222</sup> Dodd, 220, 245.

Dodd to determine her potential for becoming an informer, aware of her discontent with the Party, and her financial trouble. The FBI followed Dodd, wiretapped her office phone, interviewed her former childhood friends and neighbors, and installed an informer in Dodd's office who stole Dodd's appointment book. The FBI planned to offer Dodd five thousand dollars a year for her services as an informer. However, the Bureau concluded that Dodd remained a loyal, though discontented, Communist Party member and an unlikely informant. A memo dated 1948 stated that Dodd's file was now considered inactive. In 1949, the FBI activated Dodd's file immediately after the Party expelled her.<sup>223</sup>

In the spring of 1950, the Tydings Committee, headed by Senator Millard Tydings, a subcommittee of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, was charged with investigating Senator Joseph McCarthy's allegations concerning the infiltration of the State Department by Communist Party members. Louis Budenz, an ex-Communist, accused Owen Lattimore, a State Department East Asia expert, of Communist Party membership. Lattimore's attorney subpoenaed Dodd, knowing that Dodd had never heard of Lattimore.<sup>224</sup> Dodd testified as a reluctant witness and disputed government witness Budenz's accusations that Lattimore passed state secrets to the Russians and was also responsible for the communist overthrow of the U.S.-backed Chinese government. Dodd testified that she never met Lattimore in all her years as a Party leader and criticized her future anticommunist associates. Dodd called

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<sup>223</sup> SAC, NY memo to Director, Bella Dodd #100-6951-72, 73, 75, Part 1 of 4. Dodd's privacy was invaded to the extent that the FBI knew she was being treated for a venereal disease, contracted through her present lover.

<sup>224</sup> The only crime Lattimore committed was being vocally forthright and progressive. From 1941 to 1955 FBI surveillance and harassment of Lattimore resulted in a huge file, empty of any evidence of communist influence or membership. Though Lattimore was found innocent, the charges destroyed his career. Abe Fortas was Lattimore's attorney he would go on to become a Supreme Court Justice and be impeached from office in 1969. Schrecker, *Many Are the Crimes*, 247-253, 365. The Peoples Republic of China was established in 1946.

Budenz “an ineffective man” as a Communist Party member and a “finger man” for a group intent upon elimination of those who disagreed with their escalation of a cold war against Russia.<sup>225</sup> Dodd testified in 1950 that she “never heard his [Lattimore’s] name mentioned by Party leaders . . . as a member or as a fellow traveler.”<sup>226</sup> Dodd also condemned McCarthy’s tactics and the witness informers who “make a practice and profession of informing on their past associates.”<sup>227</sup> Ironically, Dodd would do the same a few years later. To Dodd the Lattimore trial was important because she “had at last spoken openly and critically of the Communist Party.”<sup>228</sup> Her deposition was mild compared with her future testimony.

By 1952 the circumstances in Dodd’s life had changed dramatically. Dodd became a government informer, a communism expert and a namer of names. She rediscovered her lapsed Catholicism and became the main witness for the McCarran Committee of the SISS (Senate Internal Security Subcommittee) in its investigations into Communist activity in the New York City public colleges.<sup>229</sup> Robert Morris, former Rapp-Coudert prosecutor, persuaded Senator McCarran to call an investigatory hearing when Morris learned that Dodd, the former defense organizer for the union during the 1940 Rapp-Coudert investigation, had agreed to testify before the McCarran committee that communism was rampant in education

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<sup>225</sup> *New York Times*, April 22, 1950, 1:7.

<sup>226</sup> *New York Times*, April 26, 1950, 2:2.

<sup>227</sup> *New York Times*, April 26, 1950, 2:2. Congress, Senate, committee on Foreign Relations, *State Department Loyalty Investigation*, 81<sup>st</sup> Cong. , 2<sup>nd</sup> Sess., March 8, 1950, 634-636.

<sup>228</sup> Dodd, 225-227. Congress, Senate, committee on Foreign Relations, *State Department Loyalty Investigation*, 81<sup>st</sup> Cong. , 2<sup>nd</sup> Sess., March 8, 1950, 634-636.

<sup>229</sup> Ellen W. Schrecker, *No Ivory Tower*, 168. SISS was an investigating committee formed in 1951 to investigate allegations of communist agents within the government. Schrecker, *No Ivory Tower* 161.

with many teachers Communist Party members.<sup>230</sup> As noted, the Rapp-Coudert investigations had produced only one witness to testify that the teachers from Brooklyn College belonged to the Communist Party, and the Board of Higher Education required two witnesses for termination of a teacher. The McCarran hearings finished what Rapp-Coudert had started. More than a decade after defending the Brooklyn teachers, Dodd herself was scheduled to testify against them. Frederick Ewen, a Brooklyn College professor and a veteran of Rapp-Coudert, remarked, "When I heard Bella Dodd had turned I knew the ax would fall."<sup>231</sup> Ewen realized that with Dodd as the second witness, his Party membership would be corroborated. However, the accused teachers' termination was not a direct result of Dodd's testimony but a result of Section 903 of the New York City charter that fired any employee who "took the Fifth" and declined to testify before a committee. Nevertheless, the government knew that the accused teachers feared Dodd's testimony, and some teachers resigned rather than be called and exposed before the very public committee.<sup>232</sup>

Dodd's appearance and testimony at the McCarran hearings turned into a public confession of her disenchantment with the Party. Dodd, the once renowned Communist, denounced her past, proclaimed her affiliation with Catholic anticommunism, and reaffirmed her patriotism by warning others of the dangers of the Soviet communism. Dodd went on to

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<sup>230</sup> Schrecker, *No Ivory Tower*, 167-168. Schrecker wrote that Morris learned of Dodd's situation. However I believe it was more than that. Though I can not substantiate my claim because the FBI files black out most every other name but Dodd's, I surmise that Morris, or those associated with him, was one of the agents or informers that regularly reported on Dodd. Dodd had spoken to FBI by this time and had agreed to become an informer. Fulton Sheen encouraged Dodd, as he had others such as Louis Budenz, and Elizabeth Bentley to testify against their former comrades and embrace Catholicism and anticommunism.

<sup>231</sup> Frederick Ewen quoted in Schrecker, *No Ivory Tower*, 168.

<sup>232</sup> Schrecker, *No Ivory Tower*, 167-170. Accused teachers claimed the Fifth Amendment right to not testify against themselves.

testify before many SISS and HUAC investigations.<sup>233</sup>

Dodd's testimony before the congressional investigative committees accomplished two goals for herself. First, she set herself up as an expert on communism in the schools and in the labor movement. Second, she highlighted her Americanism by describing communism as a deadly subversive threat to the national security. To present herself as a communism expert Dodd used her fifteen-year association with the Communist Party, both as a Party official and an official of a union under Communist Party control. She portrayed communism as an exterior Soviet threat and depicted it as un-American. Dodd's testimony severely scolded the Party officeholders and described its operations and functions. Dodd interjected, within her testimony, the need for the government to solve social justice issues to "take away from the Communists the issues the Communists utilize" such as racial discrimination.<sup>234</sup> In *School of Darkness* Dodd depicted her government testimony as patriotic, a way to inform Americans who were unaware of the Communist threat; she stated, "my country needed information I had to give."<sup>235</sup> However, she did more than lecture and warn; she also named specific people she said were party members.<sup>236</sup>

Dodd's career of naming names of communists elicited contending opinions. People either loved or hated her depending on her naming, or not naming individuals as communists. She identified people as Party members but hardly everyone she knew. Dodd did not name

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<sup>233</sup> Schrecker, *No Ivory Tower*, 168.

<sup>234</sup> Bella Dodd, testimony, Congress, Senate, Senate Internal Security Subcommittee *Subversive Influence in the Educational Process*, Sept. 8-10, 1952, 82nd Cong., 2nd sess, 38.

<sup>235</sup> Dodd, 246.

<sup>236</sup> Schrecker, *No Ivory Tower*, 169. Bella Dodd, testimony, Congress, Senate, Senate Committee on Judiciary, *Subversive Influence in the Educational Process*, 82<sup>nd</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> Sess., Sept. 9, 1952, 27-39.

her friends in her appearances before the investigative committees.<sup>237</sup> One friend, Annette Rubinstein, in a published interview stated that “when she [Dodd] was testifying [before HUAC] they asked if she knew me and she said no.”<sup>238</sup> Many of Dodd’s old associates from the Teachers Union and the Party acknowledged the difficult circumstances Dodd encountered and remembered her with kindness and regard.<sup>239</sup> However, there are other remembrances laced with words like “traitor,” “stool pigeon” and “paid informer.”<sup>240</sup> Dodd identified over fourteen-hundred teachers associated with the Communist Party.<sup>241</sup> Where she refrained from specific names, she named entire groups of Communists, such as the teachers indicted by McCarran. In her testimony Dodd said she knew “of no one who has appeared and claimed the fifth . . . who was not a member of the Communist Party.”<sup>242</sup> So with one broad sweep Dodd indicted all of those accused.<sup>243</sup>

Dodd’s motivations for testifying and the degree of her willingness, publicly and

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<sup>237</sup> Schrecker, *No Ivory Tower*, 168-169.

<sup>238</sup> Annette Rubinstein in a published interview, Edith Chevat “In For the Long Haul: Edith Chevat in Conversation with Annette and Friends,” in *Bridges: A Journal for Jewish Feminists and Our Friends*, Vol.6 No. 1 (Summer 5756/1996 ): 18. HUAC is an abbreviation for U.S. Congress House of Representatives House UnAmerican Activities Committee.

<sup>239</sup> Annette Rubinstein, Morris Schappes and Bernard Reiss remember Dodd positively. Schrecker, 168-169.

<sup>240</sup> Those who were named by Dodd or remained in the Party strongly disliked her, such as the teachers dismissed because of her testimony. Author’s conversation with Sophie Vidal-Ullman, maker of film that concerned the dismissed teachers, and people at the Marxist Research Center. Women still involved with the Party exhibit strong feelings having borne the brunt of blacklisting, likely a result of Dodd’s naming them and described her as a traitor.

<sup>241</sup> Murphy, 191.

<sup>242</sup> Murphy, 191; Congress, House, House UnAmerican Activities Committee, *Investigation of Communist Activities in the Columbus, Ohio Area*, 83<sup>rd</sup> Cong. Sess. 1, June 17, 1953, 1750.

<sup>243</sup> Murphy, 191; Congress, House. House UnAmerican Activities Committee, *Investigation of Communist Activities in the Columbus, Ohio Area*, 83<sup>rd</sup> Cong. , 1<sup>st</sup> Sess. , June 17, 1953, 1750. Some of the groups Dodd named as communist included: American Peace Mobilization, New York Emergency Committee on Inalienable Rights, Joint Committee for Trade Unions, National Federation for Constitutional Liberties, School for Democracy and Physicians Forum.

privately, to name people as communists was complex. FBI files showed that Dodd declined FBI offers of payment and explained that her information was restitution for her regrettable past Communist Party activity.<sup>244</sup> Embarrassed by her very public devotion to a group that expelled her, Dodd found relief by unleashing her anger on those she believed had betrayed her. Her public appearances allowed her to atone en masse for her sins of communism and remake herself into a loyal Christian American.<sup>245</sup>

The extent to which Dodd wished to cooperate with the FBI is murky. Dodd and the FBI shared a relationship best described as complex and, in the end, contentious. Often the FBI files disclosed Dodd explicitly stating that she did not wish to be identified as the accuser. Dodd hesitated to testify publicly because, according to the files, she feared the Party would release information on her promiscuous sex life to the media. It was a plausible concern. Though this may have been a stratagem to put off the FBI, she stated numerous times that the Party harassed her by breaking her windows and spreading rumor and innuendo to the press.<sup>246</sup>

The government investigators initially conducted private interviews with Dodd. Later, during the public hearings, Dodd publicly named carefully preselected names, only a few of those that she named privately on previous occasions. According to FBI files she provided names on a secretive and continual basis to the Bureau. By the late 1950s, however,

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<sup>244</sup> SAC, NY Letter to Director Aug. 14, 1951, Bella Dodd #100-6951-154, Part 2 of 4.

<sup>245</sup> From reading the FBI files available at the time this author saw no memo or teletype that stated Dodd accepted payment or was being paid. Many of Dodd's files are considerably censored and no definitive answer can be ascertained.

<sup>246</sup> Dodd, 121. FBI files state journalist Murray Kempton received anonymous phone calls said to be Dodd's neighbors on 116th St. complaining of her wild parties. Edward Scheidt letter to Director, Aug. 28, 1951, Bella Dodd #100-6951-123.

the FBI viewed Dodd as increasingly uncooperative and prone to selective memory lapses when identifying Party members who may have been friends. As early as 1954 FBI files chronicled Dodd's growing annoyance at the many re-interviews in which she had to rehash old information with new and different agents. She started to skip her appointments with agents. Reports on subsequent FBI interviews describe how Dodd exploded in anger, then apologized. Files noted her "hot Latin temper and foul mouth."<sup>247</sup> By 1956 the FBI considered Dodd a "control problem" and recommended no further information be taken from Dodd unless she was the only source available.<sup>248</sup> When Dodd was contacted in 1956 concerning testimony she had given in 1954 regarding a Teachers Union member, she denied ever providing the information. By then Dodd wished to play down her informant status because of the negative publicity she received from articles written about her and other informers.<sup>249</sup> At best, Dodd had grown ambivalent about her informer's status.

Dodd's decision to testify coincided with her reconversion to Catholicism. At the Lattimore hearings, she was hesitant, reluctant, fresh from expulsion, exhibiting none of the bluster she would at later hearings. She even criticized McCarthy and his tactics.<sup>250</sup> After Dodd found religion, the tone of her testimony dramatically shifted from a hesitancy to a vehement condemnation of the Communist Party. From her pulpit at the sundry investigative

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<sup>247</sup> Dept. of Justice, NY, letter to Director, 18 July 1946, Bella Dodd #100-6951-20, Part 1 of 4.

<sup>248</sup> Dept. of Justice, NY summary to Director [date deleted], Bella Dodd 100-6951-62, 65, 70, Part 3 of 4. The FBI also considered Dodd too public because of her book, *School of Darkness*.

<sup>249</sup> Rovere's article named Dodd as a paid informer. She threatened to sue Harpers magazine but dropped the lawsuit. Richard Rovere, "The Kept Witness," *Harpers* (May 1955): 25-34.

<sup>250</sup> Bella Dodd testimony, Congress, Senate, Committee on Foreign Relations, Subcommittee Appointed under Senate Resolution 321, *State Department Employee Loyalty Investigation*, 82nd Cong., 1st sess., 5 March 1950, 635. (Hereafter *Employee Loyalty Investigation*).

committees that sprouted in the McCarthy era, Dodd deemed progressive schooling responsible for her acceptance of communism. Reclaiming her Catholic faith allowed Dodd reentry into another sectarian world, satisfied her desires for Americanization, and provided a livelihood within the anticommunist network.<sup>251</sup>

Dodd traveled easily from the sequestered world of the Communist Party to the insular world of Catholic anticommunism because of the similarities between these settings. Both camps were known for their sectarianism and for the condemnation of their opponents.<sup>252</sup> Like the family of the Communists, the family of the Catholic anti-Communists welcomed and, quite possibly, recruited Dodd.<sup>253</sup> Once Dodd had lectured on the merits of Communist ideology; now she expounded against the evils of Communism. The anticommunist network gave Dodd a podium to forewarn about the dangers of communism and Communists, proselytize the Catholic faith, and gather speaker's fees along the way. Just as the Communist Party had supplied her subsistence, the Church now nourished Dodd. Through the influence of Cardinal Spellman, Dodd taught at a Catholic college in the Midwest and later taught labor and legislative law at St. John's University Law School from 1953 to 1961. She spoke before Catholic and anti-communist groups throughout the country. According to her autobiography, she established another law practice specializing in disadvantaged cases with two young Catholic lawyers, James Cardiello and Joseph Blair. By writing articles, speaking to groups and teaching, Dodd

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<sup>251</sup> Caute, *The Great Fear*, 131, 437-38.

<sup>252</sup> Paul Blanshard, *Communism, Democracy, and Catholic Power* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1951) 161.

<sup>253</sup> Often in *School of Darkness* Dodd describes Irish Catholic lawyers asking her if she'd like to meet either Reverend Fulton Sheen, or author Reverend James Keller.

earned a living championing the anticommunist agenda. Around 1964 Dodd encountered more health problems that resulted in financial hardship; *The Tablet*, a Catholic weekly in Brooklyn, helped organize a fund for Dodd and raised more than three thousand dollars to pay her medical bills. Dodd's FBI file contains a letter to FBI Chief J. Edgar Hoover from a private citizen who inquired whether Dodd could receive a government pension for her anticommunist congressional testimony. Clearly Dodd's actions were heroic to some citizens.<sup>254</sup>

Dodd did not discover Catholic anticommunism on her own; she had help from Reverend Fulton J. Sheen and his highly organized Catholic conversion network. Sheen operated a network of Catholic lawyers and other anti-Communists who acted as missionaries to ex-Communists, or those wavering, and offered the protection of the Catholic church. In turn Sheen funneled the converts into Catholic anticommunist activity and government informing. In the 1950s the Catholic Church orchestrated its own style of Americanization through its staunch support of anticommunism, not only in eastern Europe but also in America. The ex-Communist informers who converted to Catholicism with the guidance of Sheen included Louis Budenz and Elizabeth Bentley, who both authored books on the subject. The Catholic Church called communism a peril to democracy and insisted that faith and patriotism worked congruously with Catholicism and Americanism.<sup>255</sup>

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<sup>254</sup> Schrecker, *No Ivory Tower*, 168, 169. Caute, 131. Dodd, 230. D. M. Ladd memorandum to E. A. Tamm Aug. 4, 1952, Bella Dodd #100-6951-72, Part 3 of 4. Dodd encountered health problems in the 1950s when she was hospitalized for a blood disorder. Since she lacked any health insurance (having let it lapse) she was admitted into a charity ward. Dodd as a lawyer handled immigration cases.

<sup>255</sup> Kathleen Riley-Fields, "Bishop Fulton J. Sheen: An American Catholic Response to the Twentieth Century" (Ph. D. Diss., University of Notre Dame, 1988), 84. Louis Budenz authored a book entitled *This is My Story*, (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1947) and was employed by Fulton Sheen as a communism expert. According to Schrecker when Budenz's health problems kept him from working the Boston archbishop gave him a \$600

Dodd continued her quest for Americanization through the Catholic anticommunist movement. The Church had vigorously advanced the government investigations and the anticommunist agenda for two reasons. First, the Church's anticommunist crusade aimed to increase attendance at parochial schools by defiling the reputation of the public schools and the teachers, many of them of the Jewish faith.<sup>256</sup> Dodd became the Church's expert on communism in the education system. Second, the Church's embrace of anticommunism became a way for the Catholic church, the target of nativists and antipapists, to Americanize. The threat of Communism became an obsession of the American Catholic hierarchy in their zealousness to show allegiance to a country that viewed Catholics as part of an alien and clandestine society. Anticommunism became the conduit that the Church and Dodd used to bolster their claims of Americanism.<sup>257</sup>

In 1966 Dodd edited a right wing newsletter called *The New York Independent*. Many of the columnists were former government SISS agents and prosecutors, such as Robert Morris, and other Irish-Catholics. The editorials, written by Dodd, repeatedly spoke out against racial integration and once honored Georgia's racist governor, Lester Maddox. The newsletter exposed alleged communists in a weekly column and warned of an inevitable Soviet overthrow of the U.S. government unless the country found religion. One article criticized "rock and roll," warning it would turn teens into African cannibals.<sup>258</sup>

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monthly stipend. Ellen Schrecker, *Many Are The Crimes: McCarthyism in America* (New York: Little, Brown and Co., 1998), 75. Bentley authored a book entitled *Out of Bondage*, (New York: Ballantine, 1948) and after her conversion taught at a Catholic college in Louisiana.

<sup>256</sup> Jewish teachers were concentrated in the cities of the northeast and Los Angeles.

<sup>257</sup> Patrick Allitt, *Catholic Intellectuals and Conservative Politics in American 1950-1985* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), 16-19; Schrecker, *Many Are the Crimes*, 74.

<sup>258</sup> *New York Independent*, 3 June 1966. Newsletter found in Dodd's FBI files, Part 4 of 4.

Dodd ran for elective office three times (in 1964, 1966 and 1968) on the Conservative Party ticket. In 1964 and 1966 she ran for a New York State Supreme Court Judgeship. Both attempts proved unsuccessful. In 1968 she was defeated in her bid for U. S. House of Representatives for the 19th District. Dodd became a “superhawk” during the Vietnam conflict and was quoted in the New York Times as saying, “Let the generals win the war as they say they can in six to eight weeks.” This was quite a change from her antiwar days in the early 1930s.<sup>259</sup>

Dodd died on April 29, 1969. Her nephew George Marsilio believed trouble with her injured foot may have caused her death. Dodd’s medical problems included diabetes, thrombosis and heart trouble. He also thought that Dodd was ill for some time yet did not contact her family.<sup>260</sup>

Bella Dodd penned her autobiography to announce that the light of Catholicism led her out from the darkness of Communism. She used *School of Darkness* to vindicate herself from her years of Communist activity and portray herself as a misled but patriotic American. According to Dodd, she wrote the book to warn others about the danger of the dark ideology of communism into which she was lured. She utilized the book to condemn the progressive, nonreligious, public school education she received, which made it easier for her to accept what she called “the materialist philosophy” of the communists. The tone of Dodd’s book was similar to the style of most anticommunist writings that predicted doom and hellfire if communist ideology was not driven off the face of the earth. In *School of Darkness* she

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<sup>259</sup> *New York Times*, October 30, 1968, 1:3.

<sup>260</sup> *State Department Employee Loyalty Investigation*, 664.

constructed herself as a hero who bravely came to the aid of her country to fight the communist menace, and who withstood the persecution visited upon her for speaking out against her former associates and ideology. The book illustrated the eternal forgiveness obtainable by a return to the Catholic faith, and how her struggle to extricate herself from the Party could only be resolved by her embrace of Catholicism. Dodd needed to show that in her past she was deceived by the Communist Party into thinking that she was helping the poor and oppressed people of America. Whether Dodd believed what she authored cannot be definitively confirmed. Dodd required that her credibility be established as a loyal anti-Communist American if she wished to become a lecturer and authority on this right-wing philosophy.

“We wanted to be Americans,” Dodd wrote of her childhood dreams.<sup>261</sup> Americanism figured prominently in *School of Darkness*. She wrote the book at a time when American loyalty was being narrowly defined. Dodd carefully blended her childhood memories of Americanization and assimilation with her 1950s sense of American loyalty and Catholic anticommunism. In the book she defined herself as an American in her actions and deeds. Dodd painted herself as a loyal American, ready to volunteer to help America in a time of need, whether it was unemployment, workers’ rights or exposing the Communist threat. To Dodd, in *School of Darkness*, an American was someone who fought for democracy and justice.

Dodd’s early experiences fortified her construction of Americanism, from honoring war heroes to teaching in after-school programs. Dodd chose to depict Americans as

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<sup>261</sup> Dodd, 15.

unselfish, respectful, religious people whether they instructed others in American ways, or dedicated themselves to the working classes or the downtrodden.

To Dodd, her involvement in the antifascism movement was a way to promote American ideals of democracy on the international level. She depicted her involvement in left politics as a way to instill democracy and gain equality for workers, unemployed and poor students. The Teachers Union's picket lines and demonstrations, and her defense of teachers' academic freedom illustrated Dodd's desire to fight for the American ideals, freedom and justice.

In *School of Darkness* Dodd saw her most loyal and patriotic act as an FBI informer. She noted that the word "inform means to educate honest citizens uninformed about Marxism."<sup>262</sup> Dodd believed she held valuable information, necessary to the security of America. She saw herself as saving her country from communism, and her testimony against former associates as a way to keep Americans in the "little towns" safe from the danger of communism.<sup>263</sup> In her autobiography Dodd showed that Americans can be mistaken and follow false ideologies, yet forgiveness was possible, almost a constitutional right, if the wayward repented and embraced Christian morality.

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<sup>262</sup> Dodd, 245

<sup>263</sup> Dodd, 227.

## Conclusion

Bella Dodd was a complex individual, uniquely shaped by the circumstances of her life and the transformations of her era. The intricacies of her life circumscribed Dodd, one of many women born before her time. A foreign birth molded her passions for American assimilation and cemented her desires for an American identity. She was psychologically bruised by her maternal abandonment at birth and by her disabling accident that resulted in a search for acceptance and fervor for social causes. Dodd traveled through different American social movements from the 1920s through the 1950s, shifting her definition of an American to correspond to the times.

In *School of Darkness* Dodd constructed her identity using embellished or understated events to highlight her American loyalty. Her search for her identity, for acknowledgment and acceptance, consumed her life. Dodd shaped her identity to meld with the different environments and families she chose, whether it was the Goldsteins, the Communist Party, or Catholic anticommunism. In her autobiography she constructed her character to conform with her support of anticommunism. Her craving for acceptance had led her into the left and communist world in the 1930s, and upon her banishment from that world, into devotion to another ideology and a reconstruction of her identity tailored for the right-wing world. As strongly as Dodd had condemned capitalism, and had spoken of the dangers of fascism and poverty, she later condemned the Communist Party and exploited public anxiety about communism with exaggerated predictions of doom.

During Dodd's lifetime forces and influences arose that contributed to her revision in ideology. Dodd's childhood occurred at a time of a large influx of immigrants that led to the

development of governmental programs of Americanization that taught patriotism, conformity and nationalism, intended to combine the hyphenated new Americans into a compliant group of American workers and students. Dodd's young adult years in the 1920s fell within a time of a flourishing of culture and politics that fueled the idealism of the young. In the 1930s and 1940s, when Dodd was an adult worker, the Depression, the New Deal and fears of fascism provided an environment that, while never making communism or leftism the national language, made Marxist ideologies easier to embrace. Dodd became involved in the Communist Party because the group promoted the young leaders of the movement and provided her with a position of responsibility and esteem that gave the immigrant woman the attention, respect and career unavailable from the government or the private sector. After her expulsion from the Party she adopted the anticommunist movement and here, too, she found acceptance. Dodd, neither astute theorist nor professional writer, saw an opportunity to become a professional anti-Communist.

Dodd became an anti-Communist when she had exhausted all her options. The Communist Party had discarded her, and she had rarely practiced law in the Party, which made it very difficult, later, to build a client base, especially as a woman in a profession then dominated by men. Catholic anticommunism offered an attractive alternative. It fulfilled her needs in much the same way the Party had. The Church offered a family, friends, a career and a return to respectability, tarnished by her years with the Party.

I contend that Dodd molded her ideology and identity to configure a professional recognition and a livelihood as an authority on communism. After her ruination in Communist Party circles, Catholic anticommunism offered Dodd employment as a college

professor at Catholic universities and as a traveling lecturer. The Catholic Church showcased Dodd when the Church wanted to criticize public education, incite the public to push for religious morals in government administration and American life, or receive donations for the Catholic missionaries fighting communism in eastern Europe and Asia.

Life's circumstances can fashion a person's contributions to history. Dodd's ambition, devotion to workers' rights and concern for social justice resulted in public school teachers gaining tenure and other rights. Her belief in a democratic America helped build a strong New York City Teachers Union , and she successfully defended teachers when forces against educational and academic freedoms attempted to curtail and restrict their civil liberties. Personality clashes, changes in Party ideology and leadership, expedited Dodd's expulsion from a life and work of two decades. This expulsion pushed Dodd to espouse a new ideology, though contrary in some ways, was similar in its zealousness, unbending commitment and condemnation of opponents. She still believed that she was helping America and oppressed Americans.

Dodd's life teaches us that definitions of loyalty, democracy and American patriotism are malleable ideas with no rigid definitions or boundaries. Dodd wrapped herself in the flag of Americanism through the left years of the 1930s and continued the draping in the 1950s when right wing ideology became defined as American patriotism.

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