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The Rosenbergs were heroes

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70th anniversary of their execution



Ethel Rosenberg and Julius Rosenberg, separated by heavy wire screen as they leave U.S. Court House after being convicted.

In his funeral eulogy for Ethel and Julius Rosenberg, W.E.B. Du Bois declared, "They died because they would not lie." The Rosenbergs were executed by the U.S. government on Juneteenth, 1953.

Du Bois, the legendary Black scholar, also arranged the adoption of the Rosenbergs' two young children, Michael and Robert. The Jewish orphans were adopted by Anne Meeropol and Abel Meeropol. Abel wrote "Strange Fruit," a song about lynching that Billie Holiday made famous.

The Rosenbergs were blamed for the Soviet Union being able to develop an atomic bomb. Their frame-up and execution for espionage during the Korean War was the peak of the anti-communist witch hunt in the United States.

The ruling class was in a frenzy because of the Chinese Revolution. The Soviet Union's ability to defend itself against the Pentagon's nukes made the bankers even more mad.

The FBI and corporate media insisted the Soviets "stole the secret" of the atomic bomb. The real secret was revealed when the U.S. dropped an atomic bomb on Hiroshima, Japan, on Aug. 6, 1945. By incinerating 100,000 people, including 30,000 Korean slave laborers, the Pentagon showed it was possible to develop nuclear weapons.

Showing it was what made it knowable. Some of the scientists involved in the Manhattan Project — the code name for the U.S. atom bomb project — gave the Soviets five years to match the U.S. effort.

The rub wouldn't be in the theoretical work. U.S. scientists knew the Soviet Union had capable physicists.

Among them was Lev Landau, who would win the Nobel Prize in Physics in 1962. Even before the Bolshevik Revolution, the Russian chemist Dmitri Mendeleev had devised the periodic table of the elements.

U.S. scientists thought the Soviets would have difficulty in making extremely pure chemicals and seals to lock in corrosive gases. Because of socialist economic

planning, the Soviet Union was able to concentrate its efforts and explode a nuclear device on Aug. 29, 1949. It took four years, not five, to produce.

Decades of lies

FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover immediately set out to nab the “communist spies” that smuggled secrets. How else could those “stupid people” in the Soviet Union have produced nuclear weapons?

U.S. schoolchildren were taught their country was the land of great inventors like Thomas Edison. Newspapers told their readers that only the U.S. could have built the bomb.

Thirty years later, President Ronald Reagan said there wasn’t a Russian word for freedom. (There is. It’s svoboda.)

So U.S. capitalists were astonished when the Soviet Union sent the first artificial satellite into space on Nov. 7, 1957 — the 40th anniversary of the Bolshevik Revolution.

Claims that the Sputnik satellite was the result of spying fell flat. The Pentagon wasn’t able to launch its own satellite until months later, on Jan. 31, 1958.

It would have been much more difficult to execute the Rosenbergs after Sputnik. It shattered the bigoted conception that 150 different nationalities in the Soviet Union couldn’t do science.

Today another big lie is being told. The People’s Republic of China is being blamed for the COVID-19 pandemic.

With no evidence, the media and even comedians like Jon Stewart are claiming the coronavirus “leaked” from a Wuhan laboratory. This is a blood libel similar to

blaming Jewish people for plagues in medieval Europe or the racist myth that immigrants bring diseases to the U.S.

Building a frame-up

The FBI framed the Rosenbergs and a co-defendant, Morton Sobell, by connecting dots and forging evidence. At the end of World War II, the Communist Party in the United States had around 75,000 members, according to the University of Washington's ["Mapping Social Movements" project](#), including thousands of Black members. They fought racism and built unions.

Over 10,000 party members were members of the U.S. armed forces. Some party members had government jobs, including the electrical engineer Julius Rosenberg, who was employed at Fort Monmouth Army base in New Jersey.

The Manhattan Project had 130,000 employees. U.S. Army counterintelligence agents constantly spied on them.

Even J. Robert Oppenheimer, considered to be the father of the atomic bomb, was a suspect. The army hesitated appointing Oppenheimer to lead the Manhattan Project's Los Alamos laboratory because of his left-wing associations before the war.

Yet with thousands of U.S. Army and FBI agents prowling around, nobody claimed to have found any spy rings until after the Soviets exploded their bomb.

Julius Rosenberg was fired from his civilian job with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in January 1945 as a suspected communist. (He actually resigned his membership in 1942.) But Julius wasn't arrested until July 1950.

At the time, there were still around 40,000 Communist Party members. Hundreds of thousands of people had worked with the CP or the Young Communist League.

That was a big talent pool for Hoover and his FBI agents to construct a frame-up by matching people with left-wing backgrounds. They found out that Julius Rosenberg's brother-in-law David Greenglass, an ex-YCL member, had worked as a machinist at Los Alamos.

Presto! The "Rosenberg spy ring" was invented.

Under threat of the death penalty, David Greenglass told prosecutors whatever they wanted. [His lying testimony](#) sent his sister Ethel Rosenberg to the electric chair. It took five jolts of electricity to kill her.

Show trial

The Rosenbergs and Morton Sobell were convicted in a show trial. Although, at the time, a quarter of New York City's population was Jewish, not a single Jewish juror was chosen.

One of the federal prosecutors was Roy Cohn, who had illegal "ex parte" conversations with presiding Judge Irving Kaufman in which Cohn urged the death penalty. After serving as Senator Joe McCarthy's sidekick, Cohn became a lawyer and mentor for Donald Trump.

The evidence was flimsy. David Greenglass produced three crude sketches. One looked like a pie chart. A baby carriage couldn't have been made from them, much less an atomic bomb.

Greenglass said his spy contact was Harry Gold, [a chemist and pathological liar](#) who admitted that he "lied for a period of 16 years." Gold also claimed to be a courier for Klaus Fuchs, a scientist at Los Alamos.

Fuchs confessed he was a spy to a Scotland Yard detective and was jailed in Britain. Fuchs identified Gold as his contact from a picture.

Fuchs' statement and identification of Gold is questionable. Fuchs never confronted Gold in a U.S. court and thus couldn't be cross-examined. It's striking that the convictions of Greenglass, Gold and Fuchs would have been impossible without their confessions.

The FBI even suspected future Nobel Prize winner Richard Feynman, who had been Fuchs' roommate at Los Alamos. FBI agents changed their mind only because Feynman was completely non-political.

Morton Sobell was indicted because he was a schoolmate of Julius Rosenberg at New York's City College and a former YCL member. The only witness against Sobell was Max Elitcher, who claimed vaguely to have seen Sobell visit Julius Rosenberg while carrying a container that could have had film in it.

He then said he had no idea what was in the container, yet Sobell was sentenced to 30 years in prison. He served 17, including five years at Alcatraz.

The prosecution stressed that Sobell and his family went to Mexico after David Greenglass was arrested. If Sobell was such a master spy, wouldn't the Soviets have tried to help him escape?

Instead, Mexican secret police kidnapped Sobell and turned him over to FBI agents at the border.

A key piece of evidence was forged. A hotel card from the Albuquerque Hilton was introduced to prove Harry Gold was in town to meet David Greenglass on June 3, 1945.

Miriam and Walter Schneir were authors of "Invitation to an Inquest," a detailed exposé of the Rosenberg-Sobell case. They looked at copies of the card. It had different date stamps on the front and back despite Gold having checked in and out on the same day.

When the Schneirs sought to examine the original card, the FBI told them that the evidence was destroyed, even though J. Edgar Hoover called the Rosenberg case “the crime of the century.”

Smearing the dead

Millions of people around the world rallied around the Rosenbergs. They saw parallels between their frame-up and the anti-Jewish persecution of French army officer Alfred Dreyfus decades before.

The American Jewish Committee, which represents the small section of the Jewish Community that’s capitalist, didn’t think so. Writing in the AJC’s Commentary magazine, historian [Lucy Dawidowicz endorsed](#) the Rosenbergs’ execution.

Today when Jewish youth join marches supporting Palestinian liberation, Commentary magazine supports bombing and starving Gaza.

The publication of “Invitation to an Inquest” in 1965 sparked new interest in the Rosenberg and Sobell cases. The U.S. deep state counterattacked, particularly after the overthrow of the Soviet Union.

The FBI and CIA say they have proof that the Rosenbergs and Sobell were guilty. They point to the “Venona Project,” which consists of allegedly deciphered messages between Soviet agents in the U.S. and their Moscow headquarters. The documents claim to show that the Rosenbergs, Sobell, and dozens of other people in the U.S. were Soviet agents.

Why should anybody believe U.S. spy agencies? These are the folks that told the world that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction.

Even if the Venona papers are genuine, the rub is matching code names with individuals. One of the alleged code names for Julius Rosenberg was “liberal.” Does

that sound like a name for an accused communist super-spy?

The code name linked to Morton Sobell described him as having a wooden leg, which he didn't have. There was no code name for Ethel Rosenberg.

The Venona Project smeared a series of liberals who couldn't defend themselves since they were dead. That was the case of the economist Harry Dexter White, who worked in the U.S. Treasury Department.

The deep state and the ultra-right used the Venona papers to support Joe McCarthy's phony charge that President Franklin Roosevelt's administration was filled with communists.

The documents have also been used to rehabilitate Elizabeth Bentley's tarnished reputation. The professional liar gave dishonest testimony against the Rosenbergs, defendants in other trials and before a series of congressional witch-hunting committees.

Typical of the so-called "red spy queen" was her claim to have given the secret date of the Normandy landings to the Soviets. Actually, Gen. Dwight Eisenhower informed the Soviets of when D-Day would occur. He did so because he wanted them to launch an offensive and prevent German troops from being withdrawn from the Eastern Front.

Never forget the Rosenbergs

"I consider your crime worse than murder," declared Judge Kaufman when he sentenced the Rosenbergs to the electric chair

Worse than the killers of the 14-year-old Emmett Till? The two racists who tortured the Black youth to death got off scot-free.

Gen. Douglas MacArthur wanted to drop dozens of atom bombs on Korea and China. Judge Kaufman blamed the Rosenbergs for the U.S. not being able to do so.

Former Secretary of State Dean Rusk wrote in his memoirs that the Pentagon's Joint Chiefs wanted President John F. Kennedy to approve a plan to launch nuclear first strikes against the socialist countries.

The whistleblower Daniel Ellsberg revealed that the Pentagon plan would have killed 600 million people.

What if the Rosenbergs and Morton Sobell had helped the Soviets build an atomic bomb? It was only because the Soviet Union — and later the People's Republic of China and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea — were able to develop a deterrent to the Pentagon's arsenal of atomic and hydrogen bombs that a nuclear holocaust was averted.

But the Rosenbergs and Sobell didn't have the ability to penetrate the Manhattan Project. The FBI wanted them to finger dozens of liberals to back up Joe McCarthy's fantastic claim of "20 years of treason" under the Roosevelt and Truman administrations.

The courage of Ethel Rosenberg, Julius Rosenberg, and Morton Sobell prevented this nightmare.

Ethel Rosenberg was electrocuted for supposedly typing reports. She was arrested almost a month after Julius Rosenberg was jailed to put pressure on him to lie.

David Greenglass later admitted he lied about Ethel Rosenberg's typing. Justice demands that Ethel Rosenberg be given a presidential pardon.

When Morton Sobell was 91 years old, he was badgered by New York Times reporter Sam Harris into saying he and Julius Rosenberg offered information to the Soviets. It

was from their jobs as electrical engineers, not from the Manhattan Project.

Twenty-seven million Soviet people died defeating Hitler. Yet during World War II both Britain and the United States refused to share new anti-aircraft weapons and radar with the Soviets.

If Morton Sobell and Julius Rosenberg did indeed help the Soviets, it wasn't espionage to help a gallant ally. It was whistleblowing like Daniel Ellsberg did when he released the Pentagon Papers or the truth-telling by Chelsea Manning about U.S. war crimes in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The best way to honor the Rosenbergs is to fight even harder to free Mumia Abu-Jamal, Leonard Peltier, Ruchell Cinque Magee, Sundiata Acoli, Mutulu Shakur, and dozens of other political prisoners.

One way to do so is to donate to the Rosenberg Fund for Children, which helps the children of political prisoners, at [RFC.org](https://www.rfc.org).

Long live the memory of Ethel Rosenberg, Julius Rosenberg, and Morton Sobell!

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