

2010

Judy Holliday's Urban Working Girl Characters in 1950s Hollywood Film

Judith E. Smith

University of Massachusetts Boston, judith.smith@umb.edu

Follow this and additional works at: http://scholarworks.umb.edu/amst_faculty_pubs

 Part of the [American Film Studies Commons](#), [American Popular Culture Commons](#), [Jewish Studies Commons](#), and the [Women's Studies Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Smith, Judith E., "Judy Holliday's Urban Working Girl Characters in 1950s Hollywood Film" (2010). *American Studies Faculty Publication Series*. Paper 6.

http://scholarworks.umb.edu/amst_faculty_pubs/6

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the American Studies at ScholarWorks at UMass Boston. It has been accepted for inclusion in American Studies Faculty Publication Series by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks at UMass Boston. For more information, please contact library.uasc@umb.edu.

Judy Holliday's Urban Working Girl Characters in 1950s Hollywood Film

Judith Smith. American Studies, University of Massachusetts Boston

A Jewish-created urban and cosmopolitan working girl feminism persisted in the 1950s as a cultural alternative to the suburban, domestic consumerism critiqued so eloquently by Betty Friedan in The Feminine Mystique. The film persona of Jewish, Academy Award-winning actress Judy Holliday embodied this working girl feminism. Audiences viewed her portrayals of popular front working girl heroines in three films written by the Jewish writer and director Garson Kanin, sometimes in association with his wife, the actress Ruth Gordon, and directed by the Jewish director George Cukor in the early 1950s: Born Yesterday (1950), The Marrying Kind (1952), and It Should Happen to You (1954). Holliday's working girl feminism conveyed women's wage-earning as ordinary and unexceptional, women workers as competent, spunky, active in their own behalf, and unwilling to back down in the face of authority. Importantly, this working girl feminism assumed the necessity of male allies, and envisioned the possibility of male support and admiration for working women, enabling the requisite, heterosexual, romantic denouement.ⁱ

In the 1930s and 1940s, Jewish cultural producers, among others, enthusiastically participated in the creation of popular theatrical, musical, and film works which offered up images of sassy, sexy, and tough working women and their male counterparts, and of multi-ethnic and sexually sophisticated urban cosmopolitans.ⁱⁱ Images of working-

girl feminism, shaped in the 1930s and 1940s, made their way into 1950s popular culture underneath or interspersed with the more dominant celebration of consumerism, domesticity and compulsory heterosexuality. At the same time, the prevalent anti-communism of the era led many of those who helped to create the images of working girl feminism to camouflage these counter-themes to avoid right-wing-scrutiny and protest .. Anti-communist blacklisting closed off the public space for popular front left-wing feminism, publicly silenced Holliday herself, and made it harder for subsequent audiences to recognize the traces of the independent politically-engaged women at the center of her star power and distinctive persona.

Jewish cultural producers were primarily responsible for making Holliday a star. From the point of view of current conceptions of Jewish identity, their willing merger of Jewish ethnicity into a kind of urban ethnic style and the reframing of Jewish ethnicity as "everyman" urbanity might seem to constitute a form of passing that hid Jewish particularity. However, within the context of the 1930s and 1940s, when American Jews passed from immigrant provincial and parochial associations into new forms of community and collaboration in the labor movement and on the progressive left, and during a time when it seemed urgent to challenge fascism's externally imposed schemes of racial categorization, the presence of Jewishness as part of urban cosmopolitanism seems less like a form of hiding and more like an explicit political choice. ⁱⁱⁱ

Women film critics of the 1970s such as Molly Haskell and Marjorie Rosen, influenced by the enthusiasms of women's liberation, largely failed to recognize the traces of working girl feminism in the 1950s. From their perspective, the films that featured working girl heroines in the late 1940s and 1950s did not look all that feminist, because they did not ordinarily encourage female autonomy and their celebration of the heterosexual couple seemed to reinforce domestic retreat. Although these feminist critics could find compelling women characters in the anarchic screwball comedies and heroic women's films of the 1930s and through the war years, they found themselves disappointed by harsher forms of containment for women's aspirations after the war and by romantic resolutions that compromised women's independence. Brandon French was one of the few feminist critics to find some affinities between the rebellious female characters lionized by the women's liberation movement and women heroines in films of the 1950s. She identified Judy Holliday's characterization of Florence Keefer in the Marrying Kind as one of her examples of a transitional woman "on the verge of revolt," as she titled her study.^{iv} However, French's text-based reading of the film paid no attention to the popular front backgrounds of the writers and director responsible for creating the rebellious film character Holliday would enact. Many of those who gravitated to the left in the 1930s and 1940s were interested in some version of the "woman question" as a central dimension of the sexual modernity to which they aspired.

The emergence of gay liberation in the 1970s and the resulting polarization of the categories of homosexual and heterosexual may have also had the effect of making it harder to see working girl feminism's subtler challenges to male dominance. But in the face of the overwhelming public celebration of heterosexual domesticity, some of the qualities associated with working girl characters, such as sexual cosmopolitanism, assertive female sexuality, and publicly acknowledged female desire and pleasure in sexuality, presented challenges to normative heterosexuality. "The working girl films which playfully highlighted the performance of heterosexual courtship and those which, somewhat less playfully, disclosed the potential disappointments of courtship and marriage, provided popular cultural alternatives to more circumscribed notions of women's aspirations.

The world of wartime and postwar Popular Front left shaped Judy Holliday as a performer. This is the same world that historian Daniel Horowitz has shown to be formative for Betty Friedan, whose work in the 1963 The Feminine Mystique initiated a popular critique of suburban domesticity. Judy Holliday was born in 1921 to a family with ties to the Jewish immigrant left. Her grandmother Rachel Gollumb was a devoted socialist, and her mother Helen grew up in the overlapping New York worlds of the socialist labor movement and Yiddish literary and theatrical circles. Her uncle Joseph Gollumb joined the Communist Party for a period of time and wrote for the Daily Worker. Her father Abe Tuvim, at one time a labor union activist, traveled in the same Jewish leftist community. Holliday's parents met each other at the Rand School of Social

Science, a gathering place for Greenwich Village socialists, and socialized at the Café Royale, where the stars of Yiddish theater and the Yiddish intelligentsia congregated.^{vi}

Holliday emerged as an entertainer during the Popular Front period of the late 1930s, through WWII and into the late 1940s. Michael Denning has argued that in these years, the interactions between the new social movements associated with labor and the CIO, civil rights, and anti-fascism, and the emergence of the new culture industries of radio and film, provided unprecedented opportunities for left-wingers to be involved in American cultural production attracting a popular audience. Popular Front spaces nurtured Holliday's own performing career. After graduating first in her class from Julia Richmond high school, Holliday secured her first job in the theater as a switchboard operator for Orson Welles' Mercury Theater Company in 1938. At the same time, she began to write original material to perform with friends and aspiring entertainers Adolph Green and Betty Comden as part of a troupe, eventually to call themselves the Revuers. Their original humor and songs, parodying Hollywood and Broadway, radio and advertising, also played off news headlines. They critiqued European Fascism and opponents of the New Deal and the left, such as newspaper publisher W.R. Hearst and Congressman Martin Dies. They drew on the format of the European cabaret and the topical musical revue style popular in the Yiddish Catskill resorts, the labor movement summer camps, and the ILGWU-sponsored hit Pins and Needles which played on Broadway from November 1937 to 1940. When Holliday first proposed that her troupe perform at Max Gordon's Village Vanguard, then a meeting

place for bohemian poets, he recognized her promise of “skits and songs of satire and social significance” as part of what he had just enjoyed seeing on stage in Pins and Needles .^{vii}

Word of mouth and enthusiastic press built up a loyal audience for the Revuers’ song parodies and skits, in New York and beyond. In addition to appearing at the Village Vanguard in 1939 and in 1941, they performed at many venues in Manhattan, including the upscale Rainbow Room at Rockefeller Center in the fall of 1939, the 1939 and 1940 World’s Fair , on their own show on NBC radio from March to November 1940, on an experimental television broadcast in 1940 and 1941, at Radio City Music Hall in 1941, and at Barney Josephson’s left-wing Café Society uptown and downtown in 1942 and 1943. In the summer of 1943 they toured nightclubs outside New York as far away as in the Midwest and Canada, and they played at various Popular Front benefits. In these years Holliday’s social world included people associated with the Popular Front left, such as Leonard Bernstein, John Houseman and Nicholas Ray. She had an important relationship with a left-wing Jewish woman, Yetta Cohen, with whom she lived in the Village in the early 1940s, and to whom she remained close for the rest of her life. The Revuers moved to Hollywood in September 1943 on the promise of a film with Twentieth Century Fox and a long-term contract for Judy, now officially renamed Holliday rather than Tuvim by the studio, but their performance scene ended up on the cutting room floor. When the Revuers split up, Comden and Green collaborated with their friend Leonard Bernstein and together they wrote the hit 1944

musical On the Town, in which Comden and Green also performed. Holliday had small parts in two unimportant films, and when the studio let her option lapse, she returned to New York in December 1944. ^{viii}

After a small but prize-winning supporting part in her Broadway debut in 1945, Holliday's big breakthrough came in 1946 in Born Yesterday, a first play written and directed by Garson Kanin, also from a left-wing Jewish family, and also a part of the Popular Front left. Born Yesterday's political satire proved a surprise hit for Kanin, who had began his career on the NY stage as an actor and director and worked steadily in Hollywood in the late 1930s with left-wing writers and directors Dalton Trumbo, Paul Jarrico, and Herbert Biberman. After serving in an Army film unit during the war, he would lend his support to the Civil Rights Congress and the Wallace campaign. Kanin wrote the part of Billie Dawn, the streetwise and brazen "dumb blonde" mistress of a crooked junk dealer, for Jean Arthur, based, he commented retrospectively, "on a stripper he once knew who read Karl Marx between shows." ^{ix}

Holliday took over the part at the last minute and developed the "dumb blonde" characterization of Billie Dawn's chorus girl into a smart and spirited working-girl citizen. She invented a distinctive talk and walk for Billie Dawn that audiences adored, and identified with Holliday for the rest of her life. According to Kanin's retrospective account, the play's producer resisted casting Holliday, that "fat Jewish girl from the Revuers," citing Richard Rodgers' pronouncement at an audition that "this show is by

Jews and for Jews but it can't be with Jews." Reportedly, Kanin defended Holliday by calling her "not so fat" and "not so Jewish. But she's funny and a hell of a good actress." Kanin's expose of Washington DC's postwar return to "politics as usual" centered around Holliday's character, which represented the hopeful promise of the postwar social contract. The play, set in 1945, inscribed Billie Dawn's political awakening with various Popular Front references: she allies herself with the woman hotel cleaner who measures the price of a hotel room against her weekly earnings, and she learns to invoke Tom Paine and the Bill of Rights from the young New Republic writer who has become her teacher. The play refers to New Deal standard-bearer Henry Wallace and jabs at the rhetoric of "free enterprise" used by conservatives to oppose the social safety net protections of the New Deal. ^x

When Born Yesterday opened in February, 1946, audiences loved the play's humor and warmly responded to its political sensibilities. They especially delighted in Holliday's stunning performance, which New York Times theatre critic Brooks Atkinson would later describe as "the spectacle of her character in development out of cold brassiness into human enthusiasm and revolt." A critic at the Philadelphia opening depicted the audience euphoria: "After the final curtain came hand-clapping (mere clapping couldn't raise that din), whistles, and even cheers...the crowd didn't want to leave. Utter strangers nodded beamingly to each other. They had to put out the lights to get them into the streets." As the crowds kept coming, reviewers widely credited Holliday as key the play's success., Atkinson wrote that the central point of the

comedy, Billie Dawn's transformation "into a human being aroused by a new interest in the life of other people," was "conveyed by Holliday's acting as vividly as by the script Mr. Kanin has written." Holliday performed the part of Billie Dawn for the next three and a half years, dazzling the sold-out crowds who flocked to see her perform nightly from February 1946 through May 1949. When she left the play in 1949, audiences dwindled. In January, 1948, she married a musician, David Oppenheim, whom she met through Leonard Bernstein. In the years of her Born Yesterday celebrity, Holliday campaigned for Henry Wallace, protested the blacklist in radio and film, supported the Hollywood Ten, and lent her name as a sponsor of World Peace Conference held in NYC in the spring of 1949. Later that fall, she would publicly protest the attack on Paul Robeson's Peekskill performance in August 1949.^{xi}

Born Yesterday's remarkable box office success led to a lucrative film deal for Kanin. Harry Cohn and Columbia Pictures paid a million dollars for the screen rights, top money in 1947 for a stage play. Kanin wanted Holliday to reprise her star turn as Billie Dawn in the movie version of Born Yesterday, but she did not fit the usual Hollywood categories for women actresses: wholesome girl next door, femme fatale, long legged dancer, or glamour queen. Her speech associated her with New York Jewish ethnicity, but within studio system representational practices, only comics and supporting players could be marked as Jewish. Like the play's producer, Harry Cohn resisted casting Holliday as Billie Dawn, publicly referring to her as "that fat Jewish

broad” and circulating names of Columbia contract players, such as Rita Hayworth or Lucille Ball, instead.

It took two years for Columbia to cast Judy Holliday as the “Brooklyn Galatea” character that she created on Broadway. Hollywood insider accounts credit Holliday’s eventual casting to Garson Kanin and his wife, the actress Ruth Gordon, also part of the theatrical left, who schemed with their friend and fellow progressive Katherine Hepburn to showcase Holliday in their 1949 film Adam’s Rib. Holliday filmed the New York scenes while continuing to play Billie Dawn on stage, and then left Born Yesterday to finish filming Adams Rib in Hollywood at the end of May, 1949. Holliday’s character in the film, Doris Attinger, picked up a gun and shot at her cheating husband and his mistress, motivating the defense of women’s equal rights by her lawyer, Katherine Hepburn’s Amanda Bonner. Holliday’s small but memorable part as the wronged housewife on trial for murder provided her with a kind of public screen test for Columbia. Gordon, Kanin and Hepburn orchestrated a publicity campaign which circulated the claims that Holliday “stole” the picture, and, after Holliday was announced to be a runner up for the New York Film Critics Award for her performance in Adam’s Rib, Columbia cast Holliday to play Billie Dawn on screen.

This Hollywood insider account elides attention to Holliday’s star power bargaining, with which she resisted ceding control over her career to the studio via the usual unfavorable long-term contract with Columbia. The contract Holliday signed in

January, 1950 for Born Yesterday required her only to do one film a year for seven years, enabling her to continue living in New York and working in theater, with the additional unusual contractual concession of complete autonomy to appear on radio and television. Publicity pieces, including those by nationally syndicated Hollywood columnists Louella Parsons and Hedda Hopper revealed Holliday's aspirations to be a star on her own terms without "going Hollywood," emphasizing her preference for living and working in New York, resisting film pressures to constantly diet, to dress as a star, and to aspire to a Hollywood social life. ^{xii}

George Cukor, director of Adam's Rib, also directed the film version of Born Yesterday. Cukor had been working in Hollywood since 1930, and his circle included many people active in the Hollywood left, although he saw himself as less politically engaged than many of his friends. Working with Kanin and Gordon reoriented Cukor's filmmaking away from Hollywood theatricality and artifice toward postwar styles of social realism, including filming on location in "real settings" and experimenting with camera subjectivity. ^{xiii}

Although the film Born Yesterday removed most of the political references that had identified the play, Holliday's performance of a "dumb blonde who gets smart" circulated her distinctive version of a working girl heroine even more widely, to wildly enthusiastic audiences who made the film, like the play, a tremendous hit. A former chorus girl who achieved a speaking part, the daughter of a worker for the gas

company with modest aspirations for honest work and a hot lunch, Holliday's Billie Dawn is savvy and sexually forthright even before she puts on her glasses, studies the dictionary, rejects her mobster former boyfriend as a "fascist" and exposes his corruption scheme as a cartel. As the filming began and Holliday was interviewed in the local Hollywood press, she praised Billie Dawn as "complex...in almost every performance I find new and fascinating facets of the dumb gal who actually is one of the smartest women I've ever known." Many of the reviewers recognized and applauded the message of the film's political satire, "the thought that the "little people" will eventually fight back and topple tyrants, and that education is the leveraging power," and almost all credited Holliday's performance as key to the success of the film. "'Born Yesterday' is all Judy Holliday," wrote the trade newspaper Hollywood Reporter, Life Magazine gushed that "the whole picture is Judy's" while the Los Angeles Examiner exclaimed that "Judy Holliday is Born a Star in this Satirical and Highly Amusing Comedy."^{xiv}

By the time of the film release in December 1950, anticommunist activists had begun to aggressively challenge the wartime's progressive left, although it was not yet clear how much popular clout they could muster and whether they could dislodge the Popular Front's widespread and far-flung cultural presence. The serious consequences of red-baiting became increasingly apparent throughout 1950, beginning with the perjury conviction for New Dealer Alger Hiss, the wide publicity for Senator Joe McCarthy's February 1950 charges about Communists in the State Department, the

government's successful prosecution of the Rosenbergs as atomic spies, the failure of the appeals efforts for the Hollywood Ten's jail sentences for challenging the 1947 HUAC investigation, and especially the outbreak of the Korean War. Judy Holliday, Garson Kanin, and Ruth Gordon were among the 151 writers, directors, and actors listed in Red Channels: The Report of Communist Influence in Radio and Television, a volume released by three former FBI agents which then served as a reference tool for blacklisting within radio and television broadcasting. The anti-communist blacklists fumed at the star power of Popular Front celebrities, their popular appeal, and their potentially unlimited impact to ever larger audiences via appearances on radio and television. With their primary employment in the theater, Kanin and Gordon felt less vulnerable to blacklisting, while Holliday had more to fear over its potential impact for her.

Although Born Yesterday found itself the subject of an attack by conservative Catholic William H. Moorling, , its popular front political satire expressed a still recognizable popular democratic sensibility and the film community rallied around it. Moorling, a film reviewer syndicated in the Catholic diocesan press, singled out Kanin's support of Wallace in 1948 and his active defense of the Hollywood Ten to discredit him, and turned against the Popular Front framework of the play. Moorling called it "the most diabolically clever political satire I have encountered in almost 30 years of steady film reviewing," and identified the writer William Holden's character as "making arguments for all the world as if he'd freshly graduated "summa cum laude"

from the University of Karl Marx.”^{xv} But at this moment, the film community closed ranks in support of Kanin’s highly praised comedy. Louella Parsons asserted in her column for the anti-Communist Hearst-owned Los Angeles Examiner that “if there are any pink ideas infiltrated into Born Yesterday, they are way over my head.” The MPAA, the industry lobby, sent out a wire to all the Catholic papers challenging Moorling’s review, arguing that “the picture gives warmth and positive support to the democratic ideals, principles and institutions of America.” The editorial in Motion Picture Herald, edited by Martin Quigly, the author of the Production Code and arguably the film industry’s most important Catholic, defended the picture’s “important meaning with respect to ...honesty, democratic principles, integrity, and good citizenship,” although it noted that the “low moral tone” and some of the “baldest and bawdiest dialogue sequences” could have benefited from its preferred mode of “moral remonstrances”.^{xvi}

Escalating publicity for Holliday led to increased attacks. Holliday’s acclaim for her performance as a comedienne and romantic lead in this film initially resulted in radio appearances and awards nominations, including an Academy award nomination. In late March, however, HUAC began a new round of hearings on the entertainment industry, and groups of picketers from the Catholic War Veterans set out to discourage people from attending the film at two movie theaters in New York and New Jersey, with signs that attacked Holliday and Kanin as Reds. Still, as Variety noted, “some patrons thought the [picket] line was a publicity stunt and the box office returns were

higher than on previous Saturdays.” Just a few days later, Holliday won 1950’s Best Actress Oscar. Shortly after that, she headlined a list of stars accused by HUAC of having links to “Red Groups.” Columbia stood by their new star, hiring Kenneth Bierly, a former FBI agent and Counterattack researcher, to analyze the evidence against Holliday in an effort to help her clear her name. Holliday attempted to save her ability to work as an actress without compromising her political convictions, producing a statement in June 1951 in which she inserted anti-fascism as well as the requisite anti-Communism.^{xvii}

Holliday hoped to be able to use her new movie celebrity status to challenge Hollywood norms for female stars, and to expand her dramatic range beyond what she conveyed as Billie Dawn. In interviews before she won the Oscar, she defended the “feminine figure” and the sex appeal of actresses with curves and rejected the dieting and bleaching regime required by the studios and television cameras. Although she praised Billie Dawn as “honest and brave and nobody’s fool”, she hoped for a part where “I can use my own hair, my own voice, and maybe even be literate.”^{xviii} Kanin and Gordon wrote her next Columbia-contracted film, The Marrying Kind, with those aspirations in mind., A drama of class-inflected and sex-conflicted modern marriage, The Marrying Kind paid unusual attention to female as well as male subjectivity and challenged the conventions of Hollywood romantic comedy. Kanin wrote to Cukor differentiating the film from his previous style of polished comedy: this film’s “aim is realism, its tone is documentary rather than arty, its medium is photography rather

than caricature...the closest we have ever come to 'holding up the mirror to nature.'"^{xix}

Holliday played its working girl heroine, Florence Keefer, who exhibited no social marks of ethnicity but spoke lines written in syntax suited to her distinctive cadence. Kanin and Holliday used pre-film publicity interviews to try to reorient Billie Dawn's fans. Kanin described it as a comedy in "another key;" Holliday more directly argued that "this picture isn't a comedy. Not at all," but a "quiet love story" about a settled married couple.^{xx}

The Marrying Kind opens in Manhattan's divorce court, and signals its political intentions to explore the social institution of marriage rather than individual problems with the wife's answer to the judge's query about the cause of their incompatibility: "Because we're married." The narrative is constructed by the difference between women and men's experience of their courtship and shared married lives, with voice-over narration by both wife and husband that diverges from what we see on screen. The film is consistently sympathetic to both the wife's unfulfilled longing for intimacy and connection and the husband's relentless feelings of strain to achieve beyond his limited income as a machine fixer in the post office. When an accident puts him temporarily out of work, she returns to the job she held before marriage, suggesting that the wife's competence can flourish only when her husband is down, but also that reliance on two wage earners might reduce the pain of his situation by redistributing the pressure to provide. The narrative incidents eloquently critique the marriage ideal characterized by upward mobility, acquisition, a male breadwinner, and a female homemaker. The

wife's concerns are as poignantly illuminated as the husband's, her dissatisfactions are as fully a challenge to the success of the marriage as are his. A freak accident leading to a child's death leaves a burden not of blame but of painful loss, which falls heavily on both parents, while the film shows the wife claiming the same right to slam out of the door in an argument that he has previously assumed. Their final willingness to try again rejects superficial promises of personal transformation, instead proposing the hope of comfort based on a potential mutuality and an acceptance of the fragility of marriage.

After Holliday completed filming The Marrying Kind, public anti-communist accusations against her continued to appear and work opportunities began to disappear. Winning the Oscar resulted not in offers for lucrative radio and television appearances but rather in a subpoena to appear before Pat McCarran's Senate Internal Security Subcommittee, even though a 1950 FBI investigation turned up no evidence that Holliday had ever been a member of the Communist Party. NBC cancelled scheduled and contractual radio appearances and dropped a proposal for a network television show. Anticommunists organized against The Marrying Kind when it arrived in theaters, and the film community was divided and on the defensive in the face of continued Congressional investigation. Catholic War Veterans picketed the New York opening of the film with posters proclaiming, "While Our Boys are Dying in Korea, Judy Holliday is Defaming Congress," and "Judy Holliday is the darling of the Daily Worker." A group calling themselves the Wage Earners Committee picketed the

opening in Los Angeles, their signs proclaiming that “Red Dogs Bark but the Pickets March On.”^{xxi}

At her Senate Subcommittee hearings which had been postponed until after the film opened, accompanied by her Columbia-financed counsel, former judge Simon Rifkind, Holliday fell back on Billie Dawn’s “dumb blonde” style of confused answers that distanced her from the Communist Party without incriminating left-wing friends or associates. She did not give the committee the names they wanted, and she tried as best she could to hold her political ground. “The few things I actually participated in were things I couldn’t possibly have thought were subversive,” Holliday insisted, while managing to refer to the Peekskill attacks as “a civic outrage,” to attack censorship, and to cite General Douglas MacArthur’s signing onto a New York Times ad congratulating the Red Army. Still, she felt demeaned and humiliated by having to cover her chosen progressive affiliations as being a “sucker” for the underdogs, and to describe her sophisticated intellectual self as “irresponsible and slightly—more than slightly—stupid.” As she reported afterwards to her friend, the journalist Heywood Hale Broun, who had helped prepare her the previous night, “Maybe you’re ashamed of me because I played Billie Dawn. Well, I’ll tell you something. You think you’re going to be brave and noble. Then you walk in there and there are the microphones and all of those senators looking at you—Woodie, it scares the shit out of you. But I’m not ashamed of myself because I didn’t name names. That much I preserved.”^{xxii}

Apparently, the picketers did not affect the initial ticket sales for The Marrying Kind, but the film enjoyed only modest success and Holliday hardly mentioned it in later accounts of her career. Columbia's promotional materials suggest how a chilling atmosphere encouraged the studio to try to mask the film's social concerns, instead potentially misleading audiences by promising a repeat of Born Yesterday's comedy or a sweet, wedding bells romance. Representations of intelligent independent working women and the film's implicit working girl feminism constituted a red flag for anticommunists. Studio publicity described the film as "hilarious" and recommended publicity stunts and tie-ins featured weddings, cakes, and rings. But when the ads encouraged audiences to look forward to a reprise of Holliday as a dizzy, wise-cracking blonde or a celebration of marital bliss, ticket buyers were likely to be disappointed and upset by the depths of her character. Although reviewers continued to admire Holliday's talents, a number of them, and presumably audiences as well, found the film's efforts to "dissect married life, with its joys and sorrows" too naturalistic, its drama too contentious.^{xxiii} After the congressional release of her supposedly private testimony in September, 1952, another round of unsettling articles appeared, some portraying her as "'Duped by Reds" while angry anticommunist columnists accused her "dumb blonde" performance of duping the investigators.^{xxiv}

Holliday's efforts to clear herself meant that she could continue to make movies with Columbia according to her contract. She made a few appearances on television, though enhanced enforcement of the blacklist on Philco-Goodyear Playhouse meant

that its producer, Fred Coe, had to negotiate a special deal to cast Holliday in a dizzy blonde part written especially for her in the NBC television drama "The Huntress," broadcast in February, 1954. Still, the anti-communist picketing, hate mail, furious phone calls, and blacklisting scarred her personally and professionally and silenced her public political voice. She had told the Senate subcommittee that she would be careful not to "side on anything:" in her words, "I don't say 'Yes' to anything now except cancer, polio, and cerebral palsy, and things like that." In nationally published interviews after 1952, she spoke as an aspiring working actress, and later, as a divorced woman, but she retold the story of her career to emphasize her lucky timing, her comic roles and her weight problems, without revealing the left politics or the Popular Front feminism that created the supportive context for her spirited working girl persona.^{xxv}

The space created by Popular Front writers for Holliday's specialty of spunky and sexy working girls narrowed, although it did not disappear altogether. Holliday worked with the Born Yesterday team one more time in the 1954 It Should Happen to You, written by Kanin and directed by Cukor. Holliday plays another savvy and sexy working girl, Gladys Glover, who has left her job in a shoe factory upstate and come to New York City to find work and try to make a name for herself. When she gets fired from her job modeling girdles, she rents a billboard in Columbus Circle in one last try at making herself known. Traces of Popular Front humor and working girl feminism are visible here: the film spoofs Madison Avenue promotions, and Holliday's character holds her own against high-powered soap company corporate executives who want

that billboard for their ad campaign. She maintains her ambitions in the face of disapproval from Jack Lemmon's documentary filmmaker, shows remarkable self-possession in a seduction attempt by the wealthy soap company heir played by Peter Lawford, and ultimately stands up to the radio promoter who merchandises her billboard appeal. The film ends with her abandoning her self-generated stardom for marriage to the filmmaker, but the sight of a blank billboard can still catch her attention.^{xxvi} Reviewers praised writer Kanin's satirical take on "advertising indorsement, celebrity-worship, television... panel shows," and welcomed the return of Holliday's character with its familiar combination of "confusion and self-delusion...gumption and native honesty."^{xxvii}

Two of the remaining three films Holliday made for Columbia made no use of her working girl persona, and, perhaps not coincidentally, achieved less success with critics and ticket buyers. Reviewers continued to admire her acting ability as Nina Tracy, a stylish and successful television soap opera writer in the 1954 film divorce/remarriage comedy Phffft, directed by Mark Robson, and as Emily Rocco, a housewife and expectant mother in the 1956 Italian family film Full of Life, directed by Richard Quine. Although her Phffft costumes recalled her Bille Dawn outfits, Holliday's character had none of the popular appeal of "the poor man's Pygmalion" in writer George Axelrod's comic premise, repeated from his first hit in The Seven Year Itch, of "the confusion and embarrassment of two people who think they want to be devils but don't." John Fante's script, based on his novel exploring ethnic cross-

generational acceptance, broke Hollywood taboos with its explicit and earthy depiction of pregnancy and of Catholic practice. But Holliday's part as the perpetually hungry and anxious mother-to be, which called for her to develop a newfound passion for cleanliness, to fall through the kitchen floor, and to go through with a Catholic wedding to please her Italian father-in-law, used her provocative talents to support mainstream conforming values, in what one trade reviewer identified as "an ardent tribute to both Motherhood and (as its communicants term it) the Mother Church."^{xxviii}

Broadway's relative freedom to resist the political pressures of the blacklist shaped the two parts through which Holliday's working girl feminist persona persisted into the second half of the 1950s. She portrayed the anti-corruption crusader Laura Partridge in The Solid Gold Cadillac, a 1953 satire on big business written by George S. Kaufman and Howard Teichman, and rewritten as a 1956 film for Holliday by 1940s left-winger and comic writer Abe Burrows. Holliday also played the telephone answering service operator Ella Peterson in Bells are Ringing, a 1956 hit musical written for Holliday by her old friends and fellow Revuers, Betty Comden and Adolph Green. Holliday appeared on Broadway in Bells for nearly a thousand performances from 1956 to 1959, and the film version premiered in 1960.

The film Solid Gold Cadillac, directed by Richard Quine, reunited Holliday with her Broadway Born Yesterday co-star Paul Douglas in a plot which teamed them as opponents of corporate scandals and as romantic partners. Reviewers delighted in the

reincarnation of Born Yesterday's key ingredients: the "little people," represented by Holliday's character, standing up against the "vested interests," and the topical satire: "references to Washington, Senatorial investigations, and big-business chicanery have been missing from the movies for so long that even the modest raillery that goes on here seems brash and daring." They cheered Holliday's performance, recognizing Laura Partridge to be a "sister under the skin to Judy's Billie Dawn."^{xxix}

In Bells Are Ringing, Holliday played a romantic telephone operator who gets involved in solving the problems of the people whose phones she answers, as one reviewer noted, taking "her switchboard and humanity seriously." The New York Times theater critic Brooks Atkinson noted happily that "nothing had happened to the shrill little moll whom the town loved when Miss Holliday played in 'Born Yesterday,'" and he hailed her Bells song and dance routines making fun of advertising and show business pretensions and celebrating ordinary New Yorkers as carrying on in the tradition of the Revuers. The film reviewers gave Vincent Minelli's screen adaptation mixed praise, but they unanimously applauded the delights of Holliday's performance, crediting her with carrying the show via what one critic called her signature "mix of innocence and savvy mixed in dry martini proportions."^{xxx}

For those who knew how to read them, Holliday's working girl characters represented what Holliday herself, silenced by the anti-communist blacklist, could no longer directly articulate. The title role in Laurette, a biographical play about the

legendary actress Laurette Taylor, represented her final effort to perform a mature, independent and powerful woman. However she left the show, which closed shortly after, for the hospital in the fall of 1960 when a doctor diagnosed the breast cancer from which she would die a few years later. If New Yorkers read Holliday's obituary in the Herald Tribune in 1965, they would be reminded of the Popular Front left affiliation that proved so generative for Holliday and her creative circle. The obituary included a pre-blacklist quote that urged artists towards political engagement: "We actors, like most highly specialized professionals, tend to live in a world of our own...Do you become less of an artist because you refuse to accept inflation, war, and lynching? I don't think so. We can't turn to the theater page first."^{xxxi} But even if the blacklist diminished Holliday's public political voice during the 1950s, her working girl depictions on stage and screen maintained a public cultural presence of urban, worldly, sexy, and rebellious female characters to counter the more publicized images of middle-class, suburban domesticity.

ⁱ On Popular Front feminism, see Michael Denning , The Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century (London: Verso, 1996), pp. 136-151; Horowitz Betty Friedan and the Making of the Feminine Mystique: the American Left, The Cold War, and Modern Feminism (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1998); Kate Weigand, Red Feminism: American Communism and the Making of Women's Liberation (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001); Dorothy Sue Cobble I, The Other Women's Movement: Workplace Justice and Social Rights in Modern America (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004).

ⁱⁱ Denning, The Cultural Front, , pp. 152-159; Paul Buhle and Dave Wagner, Radical Hollywood (NY: New Press, 2002); Buhle, From the Lower East Side to Hollywood: Jews in American Popular Culture (London: Verso, 2004); Buhle, ed., Jews and American Popular Culture (Westport, Ct: Praeger, 2007); Frank Krutnik, Steve Neale, Brian Neve, and Peter Stanfield, ed., Un-American" Hollywood: Politics and Film in the Blacklist Era, ed. (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2007).

ⁱⁱⁱ Smith, Visions of Belonging: Family Stories, Popular Culture, and Postwar Democracy, 1940-1960 (NY: Columbia Univ. Press, 2004), pp. 140-165.

^{iv} Molly Haskell, From Reverence to Rape: The Treatment of Women in the Movies (NY: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1974); Marjorie Rosen (NY: Coward, McCann, and Geoghegan, 1973); Brandon French, On the Verge of Revolt: Women in American Film of the Fifties (NY: Frederick Ungar, 1978).

^v Smith, Visions of Belonging, pp. 242-280. Kate: the Woman Who Was Hepburn (NY: Henry Holt, 2006), Mann, Behind the Screen: How Gays And Lesbians Shaped Hollywood, 1910-1969 (NY: Viking, 2001), pp. 162-170.

^{vi} On Holliday's family background, see Will Holtzman, Judy Holliday (New York: G.P.Putnam, 1982), pp. 25-9; Max Gordon, Live at the Village Vanguard (New York: St Martin's Press, 1980), p. 34.

^{vii} Gordon, Live at the Village Vanguard, p.33-4; Whitney Balliett, "Profiles: Night Clubs [Max Gordon and Barney Josephson]," New Yorker, 9 October 1971, p. 60; Lee Israel, "Judy Holliday and the Red-Baiters: An Untold Story," Ms Magazine, December 1976. See also Holtzman, Judy Holliday, and Gary Carey, Judy Holliday: An Intimate Life Story (New York: Seaview Books, 1982).

^{viii} Holliday's testimony to the US Senate Internal Security Subcommittee on March 26, 1952, in Subversive Infiltration of Radio, Television and the Entertainment Industry, Part 2: Published Hearings. Subcommittee on Internal Security of the Committee on the Judiciary, (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1952); activities of other Revuers on pp. 145, 155, 184. On Yetta Cohen and her importance to Holliday, see Israel, "Judy Holliday and the Red Baiters" and the biographies by Holzman and Carey.

^{ix} "Garson Kanin" in Current Biography (1941), pp. 453-454 and (1952), pp. 294-6; Jerry Tallmer, "Garson and Kate and Spencer," New York Post, 13 November 1971; Richard Stayton "There's Nothing Retiring About Kanin," Los Angeles Herald-Examiner June 25, 1988

^x Garson Kanin, Hollywood (1967: rpt. New York: Limelight, 1984), p. 373; Kanin, Born Yesterday: A Comedy (New York: Viking, 1946).

^{xi} Brooks Atkinson, "Acting the Jokes: Essence of Theatre is in 'Born Yesterday,'" New York Times, 18 May, 1947, p. X1. The Philadelphia opening night critic was quoted in a profile of Holliday, "It's a Living," Colliers, 15 June 1946, p. 84. In the New York Times, see Lewis

Nichols, "Play in Review," 5 February 1946, p. 30; Lewis Nichols, "Broadway Comedy," 10 February 1946, p. 45. See "list of supposedly subversive organizations, March 30, 1951," in the Judy Holliday clippings file, Margaret Herrick Library of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences; the file on Holliday as part of the Counterattack papers at the Tamiment; Holliday's testimony in front of the SISS, March 26, 1952; and Ronald D. Cohen, Rainbow Quest: The Folk Music Revival and American Society, 1940-1970 (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2002), pp. 50, 68.

^{xii} Edwin Schallert, "Smart Girl Role Sought by Judy Holliday," Los Angeles Times, 3 July 1949 and Hedda Hopper, "Judy Holliday Had to Be 'Born' 1200 Times to Land Film Role," Los Angeles Times, 3 July 1950; see also Kanin, Hollywood, pp. 375-6; Irving Drutman, "Came the 'Dawn' for Judy Holliday," New York Times, 22 January 1950, and Louella Parsons, "Louella Paarsons in Hollywood," Los Angeles Examiner, March 5, 1950. Radio and (early) television were important venues for the Revuers in the early 1940s, and Holliday performed in radio dramas in 1945 and 1948, and in a live television drama in 1949: "Judy Holliday's Chronology, 1921-1951, prepared by Glenn McMahon, at www.wtv-zone.com/lumina/judy/chrono1.html, accessed 11 June 2008.

^{xiii} Patrick McGilligan, George Cukor: A Double Life (NY: St Martin's, 1990), p. 194; Ezerá Goodman's column, Los Angeles Daily News, July 16, 1951.

^{xiv} Lowell E. Redelings, "Hollywood Scene: One Minute Interview," Hollywood Citizen News, 6 June 1950. The quoted review was from Cue 30 December 1950; other raise of Born Yesterday's "attempt to inject social significance" include Time, 25 December 1950 ("Ordinary citizens cannot be pushed around"); (Los Angeles) Daily News, 26 December 1950 ("When the people are educated to the meaning of Democracy they will turn on corruption in government and destroy it"). Reviews of Born Yesterday that single out Holliday's performance include:

Hollywood Reporter, 17 November 1950; Independent Film Journal 18 November 1950; Life Magazine 25 December 1950; Los Angeles Examiner; (Los Angeles) Daily News, 26 December 1950; Los Angeles Times, 26 December 1950; Look, 16 January 1951.

^{xv} William L. Moorling, “Clever Film Satire Strictly from Marx,” The Tidings, 1 December 1950.

^{xvi} Louella Parsons’s comment was quoted in “Catholic Lay Opinions Pile Up in Opposition to Moorling,” Variety (weekly) 6 December 1950; and in Thomas Brady, “Hollywood Checks: ‘Born Yesterday’ Controversy Sheds Light on Another Delicate Censorship Issue,” New York Times 10 December 1950; “Mis-Directed Zeal” (editorial), Motion Picture Herald, 9 December 1950.

^{xvii} The other nominees as best Actress included Bette Davis, Anne Baxter (All About Eve) and Gloria Swanson (Sunset Boulevard). “Veterans to Picket ‘Born Yesterday,’” Hollywood Reporter, 26 March 1951; “‘Catholic War Vets Picket ‘Born’ on B’Wat; Patrons Deem it Ballyhoo; Biz Up,” Variety (daily), 26 March 1951; “Two Catholic Vet groups Picket ‘Yesterday’ in Rap at Holliday-Kanin,” Variety (weekly), 28 March 1951. For HUAC headlines see Thomas J. Foley, “Oscar Winners Judy Holliday and Jose Ferrar Linked to Red Groups: House Probers Name Stars, 47 Others,” New York Times 5 April 1951, pp. 1, 4. In October, 1951, the American Legion directed its local organizations to publicize entertainment Reds; an article naming Holliday as a “Communist sympathizer” appeared in American Legion Magazine, December, 1951.

^{xviii} “Judy Holliday: She Wasn’t Born Yesterday,” Quick, 19 February 1951; Judy Holliday, “Women Men Like, Hollywood Album, 1951; Helen Markel Herrmann, “Hey-Hey-Day of a ‘Dumb’ Blonde,” New York Times Magazine, 4 March 1951, pp. 16, 44; Winthrop Sargeant,

“Judy Holliday: ‘Born Yesterday’s’ Not So Dumb Blonde Prefers Slacks to Mink, Likes Proust, Hates Hollywood, Hopes Someday to Play Ophelia,” Life, April 2, 1951, pp. 107-8, 111-118

^{xix} Garson Kanin to George Cukor, 12 July 1951 and 9 September 1951; see also Cukor to Kanin and Gordon, 27 July 1951, in The Marrying Kind folder, Correspondence with Kanin, George Cukor Collection, Margaret Herrick Library, AMPAS.

^{xx} “Marrying Blonde,” New York Times, 22 April, 1951; Howard Thompson, “The Local Scene,” New York Times, 25 September 1951. New York-based reviewers identified the Keelers as “second generation of various stocks,” and Holliday as a “Brooklyn- Bronx -Manhattan type” and as a “Bronx yenta.” See Gilbert Seldes, “SR Goes to the Movies,” Saturday Review of Literature, March 22, 1952, p. 31; Bosley Crowther, “More on Miss Holliday and ‘The Marrying Kind’,” New York Times, March 23, 1952; Manny Farber in The Nation, April 26, 1952, p. 410.

^{xxi} Holliday’s FBI file, “Judy Holliday’s Chronology, 1921-1951, at www.wtv-zone.com/lumina/judy/chrono1.html, accessed 11 June 2008. The FBI opened its investigation in June, 1950, after she had signed her Columbia contract and shortly before Red Channels was published, and concluded by September 1950. “Catholic War Vets Picket ‘Kind’ in NY,” Variety (daily), 17 March 1952; “Wage Earners Committee Pickets ‘Marrying Kind,’” Variety (daily), 14 April 1952. Both articles note that neither Holliday or Kanin were called before HUAC or named as Communists by anyone who testified before HUAC.

^{xxii} Holliday testimony to SISS, March 26, 1952, pp. 181,151,165,175; Holzman, Judy Holliday, pp. 9-24, 158-168. The conversation with Broun was quoted on p. 24; initially quoted by Lee Israel, “Judy Holliday and the Red-Baiters.”

^{xxiii} Pressbook for The Marrying Kind, University of California Cinema Television Library; Kay Proctor, “‘Marrying’ At Three Theaters,” Los Angeles Examiner, 12 April 1952; John L. Scott,

“New Film Blends Comedy and Drama,” Los Angeles Times, 12 April 1952; “New Films,” Newsweek, 24 March 1952, pp. 109-110.

^{xxiv} For an example of the first, see “Judy Holliday not Red, Just ‘More than Slightly Stupid’,” Los Angeles Daily News, September 23, 1952; for the later, see Victor Riesel’s column in Los Angeles Daily News, October 1, 1953.

^{xxv} Judy Holliday, “The Role I Liked Best...” Saturday Evening Post, 26 July 1952; Bob Thomas, “Oscar Winner’s Life No Cinch, Says Judy,” Mirror 13 June 1953; Judy Holliday, “Unless I Watch Out, I’m a Fat Girl,” Los Angeles Examiner: American Weekly 27 February 1955; Betty Randolph, “An Intimate talk with Judy Holliday,” TV and Movie Screen, 1955; Virginia Bird, “Hollywood’s Blonde Surprise,” Saturday Evening Post 31 December 1955, William Peters, “Judy Holliday,” Redbook, 1957; in the Judy Holliday clipping file at the Margaret Herrick Library of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, Los Angeles. On the difficulties in casting Holliday on Philco-Goodyear, see; Delbert Mann interview in Gorham Kindner, The Live Television Generation of Hollywood Film Directors: Interviews With Screen Directors (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland, 1994), pp. 150-153.

^{xxvi} Kanin’s preferred original ending imagined more collaboration, and less disciplining of Gladys: “Pete and Gladys play a little scene about stopping at a motel overnight and him bringing her breakfast in bed, and so on, with the climax of him pointing off at the sign which read, Mr. and Mrs. Pete Shepperd; sign blown off, under it, the end,” in Garson Kanin to George Cukor, June 30, 1953, in George Cukor Collection, Folder 1, Ruth Gordon and Garson Kanin, at MHL, AMPAS.

^{xxvii} Otis Guernsey, Jr, “Screen: ‘It Should Happen to You’,” New York Herald Tribune, January 16, 1954; Bosley Crowther, “The Screen in Review,” New York Times, January 16, 1954; “The New Pictures,” Time, January 25, 1954. Other reviews which saw the part as a repeat of Billie

Dawn included Lynn Bowers, "New Comedy Delightful," Los Angeles Examiner, April 1, 1954, "Movies," Fortnight, March 3, 1954, and "SR Goes to the Movies: The Not So Weaker Sex," Saturday Review, February 6, 1954, p. 28, which used the term "sisters under the skin."

^{xxviii} "Phffft," Time, November 15, 1954; Bosley Crowther, "The Screen in Review," New York Times, November 11, 1954; "Phffft," Variety (daily), October 19, 1954;"New Films," Newsweek, November 8, 1954. Review quoted is James Powers, "Kohlmar, Quine Pic Warm and Amusing," Hollywood Reporter, December 19, 1956; see also "Full of Life," Variety (daily), December 19., 1956; "Holliday Hit in Repartee," Los Angeles Times, December 26, 1956; "Full of Life," Cue, February 16, 1957; Bosley Crowther, "Screen: Father-in-Law," New York Times, February 13, 1957, p. 38.

^{xxix} "Solid Gold Cadillac," in Variety (daily), August 15, 1956 and in Hollywood Reporter, August 15, 1956; "Solid Gold Judy," Saturday Review of Literature, September 29, 1956.

^{xxx} Brooks Atkinson, "'Bells are Ringing' For Judy Holliday," New York Times, November 30, 1956, p. 18; Archer Winston, "Bells are Ringing," New York Post, June 24, 1960. See also reviews in Variety, Hollywood Reporter, and Motion Picture Daily, June 8, 1960; New York World Telegram and Sun, New York Mirror, and New York Herald Tribune, June 24, 1960; and Los Angeles Mirror-News, June 30, 1960.

^{xxx} M.C. Blackman, "Judy Holliday Dead of Cancer at 41:That Wonderful Dumb Blonde with the 172 IQ," New York Herald Tribune, June 8, 1965.
