

AT THE CENTER OF THE STORM:

HE RAN ALL THE WAY

AND THE HOLLYWOOD BLACKLIST

by Jake Hinkson
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He was born Jacob Julius Garfinkle, a poor Jewish kid from the Lower East Side of New York City. He spent some time in street gangs and ended up in a Bronx school for troubled youth. After winning a state debating contest, he attended drama school and hit the stage as a member of the Group Theater. It wasn't long before Hollywood came courting and cast him in Michael Curtiz's smash hit *Four Daughters* in 1938. Overnight he became a movie star. The legend of John Garfield was born.

Thirteen years later, it ended with a thud. Accused of being a Communist and hounded by the House Un-American Activities Committee, Garfield died of a heart attack, a frightened, broken man. It was a terrible way to go, but he'd already amassed an impressive body of work that would outlive him. He had made a special mark in the dark underworld of film noir, lusting after Lana Turner in *The Postman Always Rings Twice* (1946), boxing his way to redemption in *Body and Soul* (1947), and losing everything in *Force of Evil* (1948). Cinematically, he came to his bitter end face down in a gutter in *He Ran All the Way* (1951).

In the film, Garfield plays Nick Robey, a simpleminded stickup man who pulls a payroll job that goes horribly wrong. Nick's accomplice ends up captured but not before Nick guns down a cop. Frantic, he hides in a public pool and picks up Peggy Dobbs (Shelley Winters) a sweet neighborhood girl. He teaches her how to swim and she takes him home to meet her parents and her little brother. Boiling with paranoia, sure the cops are hot on his trail, Nick pulls a gun and takes the Dobbs family hostage.

He Ran All the Way has an impressive pedigree. It was directed by John Berry and photographed by James Wong Howe. In addition to Garfield and Winters, it stars Wallace Ford, Selena Royle, Norman Lloyd, and Gladys George. The screenplay, credited to Guy Endore and Hugo Butler, was mostly written by the great Dalton Trumbo. It's an impressive group of people collaborating on a taut, dark crime picture. What makes *He Ran All the Way* particularly fascinating, however, is that it seems to have been at the



John Garfield and Shelley Winters in *He Ran All the Way*

center of the Communist witch-hunts in the fifties. It wasn't just Garfield's problem. The lives and careers of a shocking number of people involved in this film were crushed by the House Un-American Activities Committee's investigation into suspected Communist subversion in Hollywood.

All of the writers on the project found themselves in trouble with red baiters. The script (based on Sam Ross's novel) was originally written by Trumbo, one of the original Hollywood Ten who had refused to testify before HUAC in 1947 and wound up serving a year in prison for contempt of Congress. Because Trumbo was banned from working in Hollywood at the time, he used a front on the project, novelist and screenwriter Guy Endore (*Tomorrow Is Another Day*). This proved ironic since Endore, a member of the

Communist Party, was soon to be blacklisted himself. He sold some occasional scripts under an alias, but Endore's career in American film was essentially ruined. Likewise, the third writer on the project, Hugo Butler (who did a minor rewrite of the script and received screenplay credit with Endore) dodged a HUAC subpoena and was forced to leave his career behind. Both he and Trumbo relocated to Mexico with their wives. Trumbo continued turning out high quality work like Losey's *The Prowler* and Byron Haskin's *The Boss*. Most notably, he wrote *Roman Holiday* which won his friend, Ian McLellan Hunter, an Oscar for best screenplay (Trumbo was given posthumous credit in 1993). Butler, however, was a changed man. He did some work in Mexico and Italy, wrote some scripts for fellow blacklistee Joseph Losey, even directed a film under another name, but he became increasingly embittered and ill. In 1968, he died at age fifty-three.

Director John Berry had started out in the leftist theater world in New York. An early disciple of Orson Welles (he once called Welles "my spiritual father"), he thought theater a progressive medium and far superior to the crass commercialism of film. Soon though, he was tempted out to Hollywood where he was assigned to study Billy Wilder on the set of *Double Indemnity*. In 1949, he turned in a gem with *Tension*, starring femme fatale

Audrey Totter at her sexiest and meanest. It was a suspenseful piece of work, one that should have led to bigger projects, but his next film had a far greater impact on his career—and his life. *The Hollywood Ten* (1950) was a fifteen minute documentary defending Trumbo and the rest of the Hollywood writers and directors who had stood up to the original congressional investigation into Hollywood's politics in 1947. Even while he was making *He Ran All the Way*, Berry knew that things were going to get tough. Then on April 25, 1951 one of the Hollywood Ten, director Edward Dmytryk, flipped and turned informer. One of first names he gave the Committee: John Berry. When the FBI showed up at his door to serve him with a subpoena, Berry climbed out his back window and fled the country. He relocated to

France and started making films, including the impressive *Ca va barder* and *Je suis un sentimental*. He even did an adaptation of *He Ran All The Way* for French television. By his own admission, though, he never recovered his career's momentum.

The list of blacklisted *He Ran All The Way* collaborators goes on:

—Associate producer Paul Trivers saw his career evaporate overnight.

—Actor Norman Lloyd, who plays Garfield's accomplice in the payroll heist, was out of work for years after being blacklisted until Alfred Hitchcock threw him a lifeline in the late fifties and hired him to help produce *Alfred Hitchcock Presents*.

—Selena Royle, who plays Winters's mother, had worked steadily for years as an admired supporting actress, but when her name appeared in a list of "Red Fascists" in the right-wing publication *Red Channels*, she was ordered to testify before HUAC. When she refused, her career was finished. She moved to Mexico, like many blacklist refugees, where she would live out the rest of her life writing travel guides and assembling cookbooks with titles like *Pheasants For Peasants* and *A Gringa's Guide To Mexican Cooking*.

—While cinematographer James Wong Howe wasn't blacklisted, HUAC considered him suspicious, and that whiff of controversy alone complicated the early fifties for the legendary DP.

—Shelley Winters also avoided a direct confrontation with the Committee, but during the hearings she quit Hollywood in disgust. As she told the San Francisco Film Festival years later, "It was all because of the Communist scare...I couldn't stand what was happening."

Berry later told interviewer Patrick McGilligan that the cast and crew were under a great deal of strain at the time the movie was made. "[The movie is] about doom," he said. "That's not coincidental."

These people were all small fish, though. What the Committee really wanted was someone big. That meant a bona fide movie star, and almost from the beginning they had their eye on John Garfield. He was dragged before the Committee where he denied knowing anything about Communism. He denied having ever met a single Communist. These were blatant lies (his wife Robbie had been a party member), but Garfield had never been a party member, and he had no desire to put the finger on any of his friends just to save his career. The Committee asked him about John Berry and Hugo Butler, both of whom had fled the country. Garfield said nothing. They asked him who wrote *He Ran All The Way*, and he didn't mention Trumbo. Still, the Committee hounded him, kept after him about an issue of *The Daily Worker* that he admitted to once having read, pressed him on the difference between being a liberal and being a pink-o. Mostly, though, they wanted names. It was all the Committee ever seemed to want: just give us the names of some of your friends, and we'll let you go.

When Garfield refused to turn rat, HUAC gave his testimony to the FBI and asked them to build a perjury case. The studios stopped hiring him. One of the biggest movie stars of the 1940s—a man with two Oscar nominations and millions of fans—was done in



Hollywood. The FBI started tailing him, eventually compiling a thousand-page file on the comings and goings of an out-of-work actor.

Panicked, Garfield wrote an article for *Look* magazine called "I Was A Sucker For A Left Hook" in which he denounced Communism and said he'd been duped into supporting various leftist causes. It read like a pathetic plea for absolution, and the magazine refused to publish it. "I'll act anywhere," he told a columnist in late 1951. But his career was over. In May of 1952, he died suddenly of a heart attack.

Asked about Garfield's death, John Berry mused later, "The tension was enormous. The temptation to play ball must have crossed his mind. This may sound romantic, but I think what happened was, faced with this option, Julius Garfinkle of the Bronx said to John Garfield of Hollywood, 'You can't do this to me.' And John Garfield packed his bags and died. The

only way to clear himself was to rat, and he couldn't do that."

Yet John Garfield continues to live on, one of the great doomed men of film noir, and one of his best performances appears in *He Ran All The Way*, which was to be his final film. Berry later told interviewer Patrick McGilligan that the cast and crew were under a great deal of strain at the time the movie was made. "[The movie is] about doom," he said. "That's not coincidental."

The film shows the director at his best. Because of Howe's exquisite deep focus photography, Berry is able to utilize the front of the image to great, jarring effect—often foregrounding an actor's face in a tight close-up while allowing another plane of action to unfold behind him. And while the script has lapses (neither Shelley Winters nor her parents seem to notice that she's brought home an anxious, stuttering mess of a man until he pulls out a gun), it still crackles with great lines: when Garfield's booze-swilling mother tells him, "If you were a man, you'd be out lookin' for a job," he snaps back, "And if you were a man, I'd kick your teeth in." The cast is uniformly good. Winters played needy, self-deluded women better than anyone, and Gladys George, sucking down Pabst Blue Ribbon for breakfast, steals every scene she's in.

Ultimately, however, the film belongs to its doomed star. Though Garfield looks pale and punchy, he's still absolutely riveting. A natural earthiness emanates from those stock shoulders, that big sweaty forehead, and that unmistakable New York voice. His eyes—dark and soulful—always appear to be shadowboxing with his thoughts. Garfield's face had always seemed to project worry, and in the way he combined everyguy authenticity with a bubbling neurosis, he presaged the Method actors like Brando and Dean who would follow him. In a way, he had outgrown this kind of role. Films like Polonsky's *Force of Evil* and Curtiz's *The Breaking Point* had showed that he could play a smart guy with moral complications as well as dumb palookas and lusty dimwits. Still, what he does here, in his last film, he did as well as anybody. The film's final image, of Garfield face down in a gutter, is a remarkable noir visual, a fitting end to a tragic career. ■

