

EMERGING TRENDS

# Emerging trends: Ethics, intimidation, and the Cold War

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## Abstract

There are well-meaning efforts to address ethics that will likely make the world a better place, but care needs to be taken to avoid repeating mistakes of the past. In particular, ACL has recently introduced a new process where there are special reviews of some papers for ethics. We would be more comfortable with the new ethics process if there were more checks and balances, due process and transparency. Otherwise, there is a risk that the process could intimidate authors in ways that are not that dissimilar from the ways that academics were intimidated during the Cold War on both sides of the Iron Curtain.

**Keywords:** Ethics; Cold War; Blacklisting; Checks and balances; Due process; Transparency; Respect; Empathy

## 1. Introduction

There have been a number of well-meaning efforts to address ethics in our field<sup>a,b,c,d</sup> (Blodgett *et al.* 2020). It is important, though, to avoid repeating mistakes of the past such as blacklisting during the Cold War.

Our argument for due process should not be interpreted as an attempt to defend indefensible behavior. This paper will argue for checks and balances and due process, and understanding and empathy for positions that we do not agree with, though not for bad behavior and total openness to offensive/dangerous opinions and actions.

While addressing ethics, we need to resist the natural temptation to rush to judgment. After the Boston Massacre in 1770, for example, the mob wanted “mob justice.” They would have likely obtained a quick conviction, if Adams had not intervened. These days, history appreciates his courage, but his defense of the British soldiers was not popular at the time.

There are lessons here, we believe, for ACL’s new ethics process. Efforts “to do the right thing” can easily end badly, especially without appropriate checks and balances, due process and transparency.

This paper will use the history of the Cold War to argue for more safeguards in future ethics processes. While much of the paper will discuss the past, the point is more about the future. Going forward, ethics processes will hopefully not repeat intimidation practices that were all too common during the Cold War, both in the East as well as the West.

Many parties suffered during the Cold War. There were many losers, and even the winners of the Cold War did not win much, given the costs.

<sup>a</sup>[https://aclweb.org/aclwiki/Ethics\\_in\\_NLP](https://aclweb.org/aclwiki/Ethics_in_NLP)

<sup>b</sup><https://2021.naacl.org/ethics/faq/>

<sup>c</sup><https://www.acm.org/code-of-ethics>

<sup>d</sup><https://www.ieee.org/content/dam/ieee-org/ieee/web/org/ethics-member-conduct-committee-ops-manual.pdf>

Bad behavior is not new. Controversies mellow with age, unlike cheddar cheese, which becomes sharper with age. We will talk about well-aged controversies to avoid unnecessary distractions; there are plenty of fresh controversies,<sup>e,f,g,h,i,j</sup> of course, but many of them are still too sensitive to discuss objectively.

Many awards have been granted to great scientists that were not always great people. There are a number of Nobel Prize winners, for example, that treated women and minorities badly, even by the standards of the day. Some were on the losing side of various wars, and a few of them were Nazis.<sup>k</sup> Should we take away their Nobel Prizes?

There have been accusations about Chomsky and the holocaust.<sup>l</sup> If these accusations were correct, how should the ACL respond? Although denying the holocaust is illegal in some jurisdictions, and poor form almost everywhere, there are more appropriate forums to prosecute these accusations than the ACL.

The ACL clearly has jurisdiction over certain issues like sexual harassment at ACL meetings. There should be a difference, though, between sexual harassment at ACL meetings and unpopular politics outside of ACL meetings. If, for example, a recipient of an ACL Lifetime Achievement Award should deny global warming, should we take away their award? What if their family also supports Trump and Brexit?<sup>m</sup> If we object to blacklisting of the left in the 1950s, it is hard to justify blacklisting of the right in the 2020s.

We need to find a way to distinguish ethics violations, e.g., sexual harassment at ACL meetings, from unpopular politics, for example, supporting the “wrong” causes in an election. Should the ACL endorse candidates for public office? Should we punish members that vote the “wrong” way? Should a scientific society consider ideological/political/personal views held by friends and family when (dis-)inviting speakers?

It is inevitable that speakers with popular views will receive more invitations than speakers with unpopular views. That said, it is dangerous to conflate politics and ethics, like we did in the 1950s. There was a time when you might lose your job if you voted for Henry Wallace (Vice President of the US from 1941 to 1945), or if unpopular views were held by “close and continuing” associations, for example, parents, children, significant others. Both sides of the Cold War weaponized guilt by association and intimidation. During exceptional times, such as national emergencies, it may be necessary to impose exceptional restrictions. But exceptions should not become the rule. During the Cold War, the “emergency” persisted for decades.

Punishments do not scale. Society can punish a few bad people for a few bad crimes, but the Cold War attempted to punish too many people for too much. Just as Lincoln supposedly<sup>n</sup> said about fooling some of the people some of the time, so too, we should not attempt to intimidate all of the people all of the time. The Cold War ended because the system of intimidation was unstable and unsustainable. Let’s not repeat the mistake of intimidating too many people for too much. The definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over and expecting different results, another cliché that is often (mis)-attributed to a famous historical figure, who may have never said it.<sup>o</sup> In any case, when we address ethics, let’s do so in a way that makes sure the future is better than the past.

<sup>e</sup><https://www.wired.com/story/prominent-ai-ethics-researcher-says-google-fired-her/> (Bender et al. 2021)

<sup>f</sup><https://www.nytimes.com/2021/02/24/us/smith-college-race.html>

<sup>g</sup><https://www.newyorker.com/culture/annals-of-inquiry/seeking-the-true-story-of-the-comfort-women-j-mark-ramseyer>

<sup>h</sup><https://www.washingtonpost.com/podcasts/post-reports/the-violence-rattling-asian-americans/>

<sup>i</sup><https://github.com/firestephenhsu/firestephenhsu.github.io>

<sup>j</sup>[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/A\\_Letter\\_on\\_Justice\\_and\\_Open\\_Debate](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/A_Letter_on_Justice_and_Open_Debate)

<sup>k</sup><https://www.nydailynews.com/life-style/nazis-heil-history-nobel-prize-winners-article-1.2762671>

<sup>l</sup>[https://chomsky.info/1989\\_\\_\\_\\_/](https://chomsky.info/1989____/)

<sup>m</sup><https://www.cbc.ca/news2/interactives/sh/wex94ODaUs/trump-robert-mercier-billionaire/>

<sup>n</sup><https://abrahamlincolnassociation.org/you-can-fool-all-of-the-people-lincoln-never-said-that/>

<sup>o</sup><https://professorbuzzkill.com/einstein-insanity-qnq/>

## 2. Blacklisting in America

### 2.1 Blacklisting in the entertainment industry

There have been many retrospectives concerning blacklisting in America. Many of these were created by the movie industry.<sup>p,q,r,s,t,u</sup> These retrospectives tend to focus on blacklisting in Hollywood. As for Broadway, Arthur Miller's "The Crucible" was obviously not about the Salem Witch Trials:<sup>v</sup>

*It is only a slight exaggeration. . . 'The Crucible' starts getting produced wherever. . . From Argentina to Chile to Greece . . . and a dozen other places, the play seems to present the same primeval structure of human sacrifice to the furies of fanaticism and paranoia that goes on repeating itself forever. . . the Salem interrogations turn out to be eerily exact models of those yet to come in Stalin's Russia . . . and other regimes.*

### 2.2 Blacklisting in academia

Treatments of blacklisting in academia are less well-known. "The Oppenheimer Case" (Stern 1969) describes an event in 1954, but was written more than a decade later during the Vietnam War, which has considerable influence on that treatment, as we will see. More recent discussions are more contrite, and less confrontational and less willing to take on "the man" as we used to say:<sup>w</sup>

*Though many professors did criticize Senator Joseph McCarthy and his methods, the academic community did not seriously challenge. . . dismissals. . . Such a discovery is demoralizing . . . for the nation's colleges . . . have traditionally encouraged higher expectations. . . Here, if anywhere, dissent should have found a sanctuary. . . Ms. Schrecker's survey is a valuable reminder that our colleges were not immune to the politics of McCarthyism and of its awful human toll. Above all, it is the victims we remember, and the trail of broken careers.*

We are not old enough to have firsthand knowledge of what happened during the 1950s, but we have colleagues such as Chapman that do.

We will return to America after a few words about other countries.

## 3. Behind the Iron Curtain

### 3.1 Two short visits by the first author in late 1980s

The Cold War had consequences in many parts of the world. Academics in many countries had to "go along to get along" or else. We presented a paper in Estonia when it was still part of the Soviet Union (Church 1987). There were severe limitations on what academics could read and write. Newspapers from the West were prohibited. We were encouraged to bring gifts of reprints of academic papers. These gifts were much appreciated. Copy machines were protected by armed guards. Blank paper was expensive.

The Cold War also had consequences in Hungary. Coling 1988 was held in Budapest. Hungary in 1988 was completely different from Estonia in 1987. Obviously, different countries are different, but more importantly, much had changed between 1987 and 1988, as a result of Gorbachev's perestroika (restructuring) and glasnost (openness), among other things.

<sup>p</sup><https://guides.library.ucla.edu/blacklist>

<sup>q</sup><https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mmeTKECKm2U>

<sup>r</sup><https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tUxdwFwUTI>

<sup>s</sup><https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=taancRcLQ8o>

<sup>t</sup><https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z1XnOxfE5lg>

<sup>u</sup><https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e8SVglR8gTc>

<sup>v</sup><https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/1996/10/21/why-i-wrote-the-crucible>

<sup>w</sup><https://www.nytimes.com/1986/09/28/books/cold-war-on-campus.html>

The mayor of Budapest gave an opening speech at Coling 1988. Normally, such speeches are short. This one was not. Foreigners (including the first author) found the mayor's lengthy speech somewhat boring, but the locals were on the edge of their seats. When it was safe, we asked them what we missed.

What was exciting was not so much what was said, but what was *not* said. The mayor described thousands of years of Hungarian history. The locals knew all that. No surprises there. The surprise was a glaring gap in the mayor's version of this well-known history: despite the obvious length of the mayor's speech, there was not a single mention of the Soviet Union. The locals recognized this for what it was, a clear signal that great changes were about to happen. The wall was already falling down, though it would take foreigners like us more than a year to appreciate what was happening.

### 3.2 *Some perspectives from East Germany (GDR)*

East Germans knew that great changes were about to happen well before the rest of us. When the wall actually fell down in 1989, it came as a complete surprise to many of us in America (including the first author). It is possible that Reagan knew more than most of us when he asked Gorbachev to "tear down this wall,"<sup>x</sup> 2 years before it happened. In fact, his speech was not considered important until the wall actually fell down in 1989; in 1987, in both America and the Soviet Union, his speech was considered "openly provocative" and "war-mongering."<sup>y</sup>

These events were less surprising to university professors in East Germany (GDR), because they had more visibility across the wall than most us. In the GDR, like many other places, academics publish research results in international journals. Over time, these publications were followed up with correspondences though the mail. A few privileged professors ("Reisekaders") were allowed to travel, and spend considerable periods of time in West Germany, America and elsewhere, often producing quite successful results. Of course, many professors, particularly newer ones, were less privileged, and were not able to travel, or even correspond through the mail.

Despite constraints on travel and correspondences, toward the end of the GDR, there was a widely held sense among researchers in the GDR that they were falling behind, especially in computer technology. Of course, researchers in the GDR had access to computers, but most of these were Robotron computers. Robotron was a "Volkseigener Betrieb" (a state-owned company). Robotron was able to keep up remarkably well, at least for a while, by modifying software from the West. The trouble began when publishers started to expect submissions in electronic formats on floppy disks, exposing gaps in technology and more. Submissions were expected to use text processing standards and tools that were unavailable in the GDR, exposing gaps in technology. Even more insidious gaps were exposed by the floppy disk requirement. In the GDR, floppy disks had to be double-checked by the Office for International Affairs, which became known among researchers as the "Office for Preventing International Affairs."

Another gap involved housing. In most of the world, academics move from one city to another as their careers progress from student to professor, but academics were less willing to move within the GDR because of a severe shortage of housing. It was unusual to buy an apartment. Apartments were rented from the state. Rents were low, but it could take years to find an apartment. Once people finally found an apartment, they were reluctant to give it up and move to a new city, and start the search process all over again from the beginning. Researchers with families were particularly reluctant to move, since they would be separated from their family until they found a new apartment.

Politics interfered in employment decisions. The Party was everywhere. Many important researchers felt pressure to join the Party. Those that resisted this pressure became second-class citizens. On the bright side, the Party did not interfere as much in what second-class citizens were teaching.

<sup>x</sup><https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IguMXrgfrg8>

<sup>y</sup><https://www.nytimes.com/1987/06/13/world/raze-berlin-wall-reagan-urges-soviet.html>

Life was different after the fall of the GDR. Immediately after the wall came down, there were joint celebrations between “Wessis” (West) and “Ossis” (East). It was hoped that reunification would be “swift and peaceful,” but reunification turned out to be surprisingly painful. In retrospect, it was relatively easy to tear down the wall, but it will take decades to tear down the many psychological barriers that still remain.

The East German economy turned out to be far behind the West, and proved difficult to reintegrate. Regional inequalities continue to this day. The former East has more unemployment (9%) than the West (5.6%). The East also has lower salaries and more poverty, with declining populations, and relatively few large employers.<sup>z</sup>

It has not been easy for East Germans to adopt to the new system. There is resentment of superficiality, bright lights, and flashy images. In the past, East Germans could be successful by joining the Party, but under the new system, with more emphasis on the individualism of the new capitalist economy, success depends on other factors such as jobs skills and performance.

Many (20% or more)<sup>aa</sup> East Germans still defend and even glorify the GDR. Under the GDR, people knew what was expected of them, and what to expect from the government. While there may have been less individual free choice, some people view the simplicity and lack of responsibility as a kind of freedom. They may not have enjoyed certain democratic rights such as the right to vote and the right to express opinions in public, but on the other hand, they did not have to worry about access to basic necessities. These people believe the current system overemphasizes the downsides of the former GDR system, and fails to mention its upsides, because communism/socialism is still viewed as a threat to American capitalism. Many of these people are now voting for LINKE and AfD, parties on the left and right, respectively.<sup>ab</sup> A prominent member of LINKE, Gregor Gysi, has denied that he used to assist the Stasi, the East German secret police.<sup>ac</sup>

### 3.3 The editor's experience in Bulgaria in the late 1980s

The previous two subsections described consequences of the Cold War in Estonia, Hungary, and Germany, based on a couple of short visits by the first author, and a few interviews by the second author of more senior academics in Germany. As it turns out, the editor of this journal has considerably more firsthand experience. We asked him to share some of his recollections of Bulgaria in the late 1980s. There are examples below of guilt by association, as well as politics interfering in employment decisions.

The editor made it clear that the Party had the last word on everything including academics. Top positions were reserved for Party members. He was encouraged on several occasions to join the Party, but never did.

There were important differences, however, from country to country. Bulgaria was not as harsh as Romania, nor as liberal as Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Hungary. In Romania, there were limitations on reading and writing; typewriters, for example, had to be registered with the police. Romanians near the Bulgarian border could watch Bulgarian TV. Bulgarian TV would occasionally show films from America and Western Europe. Broadcasts crossed many borders: Estonians could listen to broadcasts from Finland, and East Germans could listen to TV from West Germany.

Travel was difficult. These days, the editor routinely travels around Europe, but his first trip to the West was a big deal. He went to France in 1987, the same year as our first trip to Estonia. His trip required an exit visa, which would have been impossible if his parents had worked for the former Bulgarian Royal Family, an example of guilt by association.

<sup>z</sup><https://www.thelocal.de/20181002/the-east-west-divide-is-diminishing-but-differences-still-remain/>

<sup>aa</sup>See Table 3 of footnote<sup>ab</sup>

<sup>ab</sup><https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/1467-923X.12859>

<sup>ac</sup>[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gregor\\_Gysi](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gregor_Gysi)

Before the trip, he had a conversation with his research institute's Deputy Director for Special Matters. The deputy asked for "assistance." The editor did not oblige.

The editor described a number of international meetings that he organized between 1987 and the fall of communism in 1989. There were unknown "colleagues" that would listen to conversations that he had with guests from all over the world. When these unknown colleagues came too close, the editor would switch among a number of languages including English, French, German, and Spanish. In a clear attempt to intimidate the editor, the Deputy Director for Special Matters summoned the editor soon after this episode and demanded: "What do you think you are doing? Playing with us?"

We shared these recollections with a colleague from Western Europe who confirmed much of the story, and explained how he successfully convinced funding agencies in the West at the time to support students in Bulgaria who were contributing to research as opposed to others who did not seem to be contributing as much, as far as he could tell. He did not appreciate, until seeing these recollections, that the role of the Deputy Director for Special Matters was to intimidate the researchers.

## 4. Perspectives from MIT in 1970s

### 4.1 A 1976 student teach-in

Academics from many parts of the world suffered during the Cold War. Even American academics suffered, though less than many. That said, we know more about what happened in America.

When the first author was an undergraduate at MIT in the mid-1970s, international students were intimidated by unknown "colleagues" from their home countries. Students were worried about guilt by association. That is, their families in their home countries might suffer if they participated in politics in America. Students might also be forced to return home, and face prosecution.

The editor of this journal shared similar experiences when he was a student in East Germany. He knew a female student from Cuba who was scared to be seen with him by "special" colleagues from her home country. He also met a small number of international students from North Korea. They were subject to even stricter monitoring.

As for monitoring of international students at MIT, the university tried to look the other way, but after certain stories appeared in the school newspaper, *The Tech*, the university was forced to acknowledge reality: there were police on campus from many parts of the world.

One story in *The Tech*<sup>ad</sup> described the denial of a passport because of a 1976 student teach-in held in 26–100, a lecture hall on campus, to discuss some of our concerns about deals involving MIT and military technologies such as missile guidance systems and nuclear power.

It turns out that our concerns were even more serious than we realized at the time. A few years later, the Shah of Iran would be overthrown, and a few decades later, Iran's Nuclear program would become a major story in the news.<sup>ae</sup>

The teach-in attracted a large audience including the first author, the MIT campus patrol, some unknown "colleagues" from other countries, and many others from a number of universities in the Boston area. The CIA<sup>af</sup> was probably there as well. They had an office nearby on the third floor of Tech Square.

There were multiple confusions that would have been funny if the situation had not been so deadly serious. Most of the people in the room knew that the unknown colleagues were not communist, and the campus patrol had only limited authority, but the campus patrol were confused about the former and the unknown colleagues were confused about the latter. Language

<sup>ad</sup><http://tech.mit.edu/V96/PDF/V96-N12.pdf>

<sup>ae</sup><https://www.nti.org/learn/countries/iran/nuclear/>

<sup>af</sup><https://www.cia.gov/>



and cultural barriers added to the confusion. Intimidation is often associated with a lack of understanding and empathy for other positions.

## 4.2 Cryptography

Another sensitive topic was cryptography. Our undergraduate advisor, Rivest, is perhaps best known for public key cryptography, called RSA after the authors: Rivest, Shamir and Aldeman (1978). According to NSA,<sup>ag</sup> the result was not only known, but classified.<sup>ah</sup>

*NSA's problem with it was that it had been discovered within the cryptologic community five years earlier and was still regarded as secret. . . NSA hunted diligently for a way to stop cryptography from going public. . . Someone notified the press, and journalist Deborah Shapley published the entire controversy in an issue of Science magazine.*

The perspective of this history from Stanford<sup>ai</sup> (henceforth PHS) is similar, though more sympathetic to academia than to the US government. As an undergraduate, our memory is more sophomoric: we were so outraged that the “spooks” would even think about blocking publication that just before they could act, there was a late night envelope stuffing Party and preprints were mailed to colleagues all over the world, especially colleagues in the Soviet Union.

At the time, computers in the MIT AI Lab had no security, by design. Anyone could watch anyone do anything. This was considered a feature, not a bug. We were proud of the small town atmosphere. Everyone knew everything about everyone.

While the field was small, this small town approach to security was effective for maintaining order, but it did not scale. With success, the field became larger and more like a big city than a small town, with consequences for attitudes toward security, privacy, and punishments for bad behavior (e.g., gossip, public shaming).

While the field was still small, the lack of security had some interesting/ironic consequences for cryptography. A few years after RSA, we crowded around a computer screen, spying on Rivest as he was working on a draft of a subsequent paper, suggesting that NSA had designed key lengths for a proposed standard to be just short enough so they could break the code and no one else could.

Some of the others in the crowd probably knew more about the key length controversy than we did. Normally, these people did not spy on others, but they encouraged us to spy on Rivest at just the right time. They may have been working with Rivest to leak the story with plausible deniability.

Another version of this controversy can be found in PHS:

*In a public speech in 1979 aimed to quell some of the controversy, Inman [NSA leadership] asserted: “NSA has been accused of intervening in the development of the DES [a proposed standard] and of tampering with the standard so as to weaken it cryptographically. This allegation is totally false.”*

While no one knows whether Rivest actually took advantage of the lack of security to leak the story, there is no doubt that others have used the lack of security in creative ways. For example, Minsky knew that a friend of his, the head of the MIT AI lab, was the only one in the lab that did not read email sent to the head of the lab. Minsky used this feature to send a flame to his friend, knowing that his friend would not see the flame, but others would (and did).

As will be discussed shortly, intimidation is an effective weapon against academic freedom. NSA threatened academics with legal action if they presented sensitive work in public meetings.

<sup>ag</sup><https://www.nsa.gov/>

<sup>ah</sup>[https://www.nsa.gov/Portals/70/documents/news-features/declassified-documents/cryptologic-histories/cold\\_war\\_iii.pdf](https://www.nsa.gov/Portals/70/documents/news-features/declassified-documents/cryptologic-histories/cold_war_iii.pdf), p. 234.

<sup>ai</sup><https://stanfordmag.medium.com/keeping-secrets-84a7697bf89f>

Since lawyers are expensive, and universities were more willing to defend professors than students, some student work was presented by professors to protect students from NSA's threats, as discussed in PHS.

PHS ends on a more positive note, observing that both sides eventually managed to find common ground and work together in more constructive ways:

*Hellman<sup>aj</sup> and Inman<sup>ak</sup> forged an unlikely friendship in the wake of the conflict in the late 1970s.*

## 5. The 1950s

### 5.1 Chapman and Oppenheimer

The 1970s and 1980s were more liberal than the 1950s. There was more guilt by association in the 1950s than in the 1970s and 1980s.

A colleague of ours, Chapman, did not talk much about his blacklisting. His name would have appeared on the Funk and Wagnalls dictionary, if he had not been blacklisted. Chapman made it clear to the first author that he was deeply hurt by this omission. As we recall the conversation, he was never that interested in politics, but long before the dictionary, he was interested in a woman, and she was interested in politics.

*"I got 'disappeared,' "* Chapman said, *using a term heard in the 1950s when many writers and artists were blacklisted for their political affiliations. (A few decades later, Chapman was the one who added "McCarthyism" to Roget's, classifying it under the heading "Misuse.")*<sup>al</sup>

Chapman's story reminds us of Oppenheimer, who famously lost his security clearance in 1954, perhaps because of questions about his loyalty, or perhaps because of a conflict with Teller. (Teller wanted to build the H-bomb, whereas Oppenheimer thought that the A-bomb was powerful enough.) Much has been written about this story, which also involves an association with a woman who cared more than Oppenheimer did about topics that became taboo many years later. Who knows what really happened, but it did not end well.<sup>am</sup>

*The results of the hearing provoked outrage within the scientific community. Oppenheimer was seen as a martyr to McCarthyism. Wernher von Braun said before a Congressional hearing, "In England, Oppenheimer would have been knighted." Einstein quipped that "AEC" should stand for "Atomic Extermination Conspiracy." David Lilienthal, a former Chairman of the AEC, wrote in his diary, "It is sad beyond words. They are so wrong, so terribly wrong, not only about Robert, but in their concept of what is required of wise public servants." Edward Teller was shunned by a great part of the scientific community. Nobel Prize-winning physicist Isidor I. Rabi once suggested that "It would have been a better world without Teller."*

Many parties suffered under McCarthyism including Oppenheimer, Teller, science, the country and even McCarthy himself. McCarthy lived a short and troubled life. Obviously, he caused much harm, but there was also much pain. McCarthy died at the age of 48, likely from alcoholism.

### 5.2 Intimidation

The point of blacklisting and guilt by association is intimidation (Stern 1969) p. 476:

<sup>aj</sup><https://ee.stanford.edu/~hellman/>

<sup>ak</sup><https://www.nsa.gov/About-Us/Current-Leadership/Article-View/Article/1620368/adm-bobby-r-inman-usn/>

<sup>al</sup><https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-2002-feb-24-me-chapman24-story.html>

<sup>am</sup><https://www.atomicheritage.org/history/oppenheimer-security-hearing>



*The general belief that scientists are barred for political reasons has intimidating effects. One member of an NIMH [National Institute of Mental Health] consultant panel told Science, “Knowing what happened to Steve Chorover, I wondered whether I should endanger my career by marching in a Vietnam protest a couple of weeks ago.”*

Steve Chorover was a professor at MIT, whose funding may have suffered because of anti-war activities at a time when the war had become so unpopular that President Johnson decided not to run for reelection.

As unpopular as the war was, some of us who participated in anti-war activities were warned by our parents that doing so could endanger our careers decades later, if attitudes toward the war should evolve over time. Such was the experience of our parents’ generation. People suffered because behavior that was considered acceptable during the roaring 20s and the great depression of the 1930s evolved into a liability during the Cold War.

Our generation largely ignored our parents, and everyone over 30,<sup>an</sup> because we were young and idealistic (and naive and arrogant).

### 5.3 Inappropriate questions

We now have more appreciation for our parents’ intimidation after reading (Stern 1969) pp. 472–473, where it is reported that representatives of the Federal Government asked questions such as these in loyalty-security inquiries:

- What do you think of female chastity?
- Is it proper to mix white [sic] and Negro blood plasma?
- There is a suspicion in the record that you are in sympathy with the underprivileged. Is that true?
- In your newspaper reading, what headlines attract your attention? Do you follow the United Nations’ activities?
- How many times did you vote for Norman Thomas? How about Henry Wallace?
- What were your feelings at the time concerning race equality?
- Have you ever made statements about the “downtrodden masses” and “underprivileged people”?

Recall that Henry Wallace was vice president of the United States from 1941 to 1945. He came close to becoming president but was replaced by Truman shortly before Roosevelt’s death. Wallace ran for president in 1948 as a progressive. Norman Thomas ran for a number of political offices in the 1920s and 1930s as a socialist.

On the same page, (Stern 1969) p. 472, there is a list of charges filed against Federal employees in the 1950s:

- Belonging to a “radical group” that had been “extremely critical of the American Legion and of other laws and institutions.”
- Having “close and continued association with your parents”—who had belonged to some “radical” organizations.
- Being an editor of a newspaper that “has carried several editorials and articles expressing radical viewpoints.”
- Having purchased books from a certain bookstore. . .

<sup>an</sup><https://www.berkeleydailyplanet.com/issue/2000-04-06/article/759?headline=Don-t-trust-anyone-over-30-unless-it-s-Jack-Weinberg-Daily-Planet-Staff>

### 5.4 Counterproductive rudeness

It would be easy to dismiss much of the above as ancient history, but the expression “close and continuing” can still be found on surprisingly recent web pages.<sup>ao</sup> It is poor form, and perhaps illegal, in employment interviews to ask questions about certain sensitive topics such as dating history, but many Federal employees have to answer such questions.<sup>ap</sup> There can also be questions about drugs that have been legalized in many states in the US.<sup>aq,ar</sup>

Academics from many countries find it intimidating to visit the US. When visitors arrive at US airports, they are required to answer a number of inappropriate questions on topics such as terrorism, bombs, and communism. These questions have evolved slightly over time. Communism was a priority during McCarthyism and terrorism became a priority after 9/11.

Despite slight variations over time, first impressions have been consistently bad for a long time, at least since the Cold War. Recently, under Trump, first impressions have become even worse. One colleague (personal communication) compared American airports unfavorably to airports around the world including airports in the Soviet Union and Cuba. First impressions matter; rudeness is bad for business.

Rudeness is sometimes defended as a necessary evil, especially during national emergencies. Perhaps, there may have been a plausible justification once upon a time, but it is hard to defend rudeness over decades. Without appropriate checks and balances, given enough time, in the limit, rudeness inevitably becomes indefensible, like the myth of the frog in hot water (though the truth is always more complicated than the myth).<sup>as</sup>

## 6. Conclusions: Looking forward

As is so often the case, what is said is less significant than what is left unsaid. Just as the *Crucible* is not about the Salem Witch Trials and the mayor’s opening speech at Coling 1988 was not about Hungarian history, so too, our discussion of the Cold War is more about the future than the past.

The dystopia of Cold War intimidation could never happen again, or could it? As mentioned in the introduction, we are concerned about a number of well-meaning efforts to address ethics, such as ACL’s new process for reviewing papers on ethics. Such efforts may brush up against sensitive questions mentioned above. Society evolves over time. Answers that worked in the 1950s could be a liability today, and vice versa. We would be more comfortable with efforts to address ethics if there were clear checks and balances to avoid the dystopia of the 1950s with too many inappropriate questions, too much blacklisting and too little due process.

As the ACL rolls out its new ethics process, in addition to the issues mentioned above about due process, intimidation, transparency, etc., it is also important to show respect for unpopular positions that we do not agree with. The Beatles “Revolution” preached tolerance with:<sup>at</sup>

*But when you talk about destruction  
Don't you know that you can count me out  
Don't you know it's gonna be alright  
Alright, alright*

Tom Lehrer’s “National Brotherhood Week” is even more (in)-direct. One of his many introductions to this song about (in)-tolerance ends with the punch line:<sup>au</sup>

<sup>ao</sup><https://news.clearancejobs.com/2018/04/28/reporting-foreign-contacts-counts-close-continuing/>

<sup>ap</sup><https://www.militarytimes.com/2013/04/05/dating-history-could-block-security-clearance/>

<sup>aq</sup><https://news.clearancejobs.com/2020/09/01/drug-involvement-and-security-clearances/>

<sup>ar</sup><https://www.nytimes.com/2021/03/22/us/politics/white-house-marijuana-biden.html>

<sup>as</sup><https://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2006/09/the-boiled-frog-myth-stop-the-lying-now/7446/>

<sup>at</sup><https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6MbqzDm1uCo>

<sup>au</sup><https://youtu.be/bH1e8uZzTaY?t=43>

*I'm sure we all agree that we ought to love one another,  
and I know there are people in the world  
who do not love their fellow human beings,  
and I hate people like that!*

Intimidation is often associated with a lack of understanding and empathy for “the other.” When reaching out to people that appear to us to have gone down the rabbit hole of crazy conspiracy theories, it has been suggested that we start with unconditional love, and resist the temptation to discuss sensitive topics (and facts) in counterproductive ways:<sup>av</sup>

*Resist the temptation to argue against their beliefs or explain that they have been duped. This approach is more likely to further entrench someone in their beliefs. Be compassionate, understanding that this person might be feeling confused, scared, betrayed or angry. Be non-judgmental.*

This may also be good advice more generally. If we want to improve ethics within the ACL community and beyond, it might be more effective to start with understanding, empathy, respect and love.

Children expect unconditional love and constructive feedback in terms that make sense to them. Adults may not expect such “parenting,” but we all like to be treated with respect. Failure to address such desires can lead to frustration and childish behavior, even in adults.

As scientists, we may have more faith in the scientific method and facts than in the power of love, but lawyers know there are many ways to win an argument:

*If the facts are against you, argue the law.  
If the law is against you, argue the facts.  
If the law and the facts are against you,  
pound the table and yell like hell.*

Actually, empathy and understanding are more effective than yelling. The late Justice Ginsberg successfully argued for gender equality by defending a man who was denied a small (\$600) tax deduction based on his gender.<sup>aw</sup> This argument was persuasive with the men on the Supreme Court, even though it was obvious that the precedent would extend well beyond rights for men.

Arguments like this are effective because we are social animals, with both rational and irrational needs and desires. It has been suggested recently that “attention is all you need” (Vaswani et al. 2017), but actually “all you need is love.”<sup>ax</sup> Attention is merely a good place to start; ultimately, “love conquers all.”<sup>ay</sup>

People like McCarthy are like wounded animals. If you see a bear in the woods, you do not have to worry too much, because most bears will probably leave you alone. But wounded bears are less predictable, and more likely to strike out in irrational and dangerous ways. Much has been written about the damage caused by McCarthyism, but less has been said about his pain, alcohol use, and premature death. Following the advice in “Getting to Yes” (Fisher, Ury, and Patton 1981), if we can find a way to reach out to people that we do not agree with, and establish diplomatic channels with empathy and unconditional love, then we will be in a more advantageous position to negotiate more sensitive topics, including topics that appear to us to be self-evident and hardly worth debating such as facts and ethics.

<sup>av</sup><https://www.cnn.com/2021/02/04/perspectives/qanon-cult-truth/index.html>

<sup>aw</sup><https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/true-story-case-center-basis-sex-180971110/>

<sup>ax</sup>[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_7xMflp-irg](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_7xMflp-irg)

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