FOREWORD

BY JOHN HENRY FAULK

It was a dreadful time in the land. Some called it Scoundrel Time. Others called it the Time of the Toad. Historians call it the McCarthy Era. It was a time when intimidation and repression overwhelmed orderly political processes, a time when denigrating epithets and vicious labels were substituted for rational political dialogue, a time when mindless fear and hysteria swept away common sense and resulted in a terror whose repercussions were felt in all branches of our government and in the minds and conduct of the people of the United States. Above all, it was a time when vigilantism took over our national life.

A vigilante, by definition, is one who believes (or claims to believe) that the laws of the land and the institutions that enact, administer, and enforce those laws are not capable of protecting society from some real or imagined danger that the vigilante perceives to be imminent. The vigilante joins with like-minded neighbors, and the group appoints itself the judge, the jury, the prosecuting attorney, and the executioner of those believed to constitute the danger. The danger takes on the attributes of the Antichrist; thus anyone who does not publicly condemn it becomes suspected of supporting it.

Vigilantism creates and orchestrates an atmosphere of suspicion and fear, the *sine qua non* for the exercising of vigilante "justice." Such "justice" is the very antithesis of our traditional Anglo-American system of justice. In fact, established legal processes are often viewed with deep distrust. Vigilante justice upends the judicial maxim that an accused person is presumed innocent until proven guilty by due process of law. In the world of the vigilante, the accused is presumed guilty until proven innocent to the satisfaction of the vigilante. Usually this is achieved by the accused's embracing the opinions of the vigilante. Don Carleton's masterful dissection of the Houston Red Scare of three decades ago is what makes his brilliant study such an important work. He has delineated every wrinkle and seamy furrow in the grim visage of vigilantism.

Of course, Houston is not the only community in which such Red Scares flourished. Dozens of communities had fully orchestrated variations on the Houston Red Scare theme going on at that time. For instance, the Red Scare that was sweeping through the entertainment world from Hollywood to New York left a trail of destroyed reputations, blasted careers, and destitute victims in its wake.

I managed to get a ringside seat for that Red Scare. I got caught up in one of its insidious manifestations—blacklisting. I can't think of anything that educates a person on vigilantism as effectively as the experience of being one of its victims does. I considered myself qualified for a Ph.D. on the subject before I was finished with it.

There are several important conclusions that Carleton reaches about the Red Scare. They correspond with the conclusions I reached on the subject. These conclusions are rather startling when one first confronts them. Then they become so obvious that one wonders why they were not understood from the very first.

These are some of the most important:

1. In spite of the great hue and cry about traitors and a Communist conspiracy raised by Senator McCarthy and his imitators during the Red Scares, they never produced a single Communist spy whose guilt was proved in court. Nor was a single person ever indicted for treason, let alone tried for the crime. In other words, the whole Red Scare business, from beginning to end, stands condemned by history as a colossal fraud on the American public. Even today, thirty years later, few people admit this truth.

2. In Houston, and in other communities where Red Scares flourished, some of the most affluent and respected citizens often actively engaged in vigilantism or gave their approval. They did so, shamefully enough, not because they believed that the community was threatened by subversion but because they saw an opportunity to strengthen their political advantages.

3. That "bulwark of liberty," our free press, behaved most slavishly in the midst of Red Scares. The media not only aided and abetted the vigilantism but also often instigated and orchestrated the witch-hunt, hiring experts on subversion to write the inflammatory pieces on the peril threatening the community.

4. The tactics and attitudes of the vigilantes took on the character and qualities of the totalitarians that the vigilantes claimed to oppose and despise.

5. The main victims of the vigilantism of that period were the ideals and principles upon which this republic is founded. Perhaps one of the greatest tributes to the founding fathers' vision and wisdom is that the republic they founded survived that terrible period.