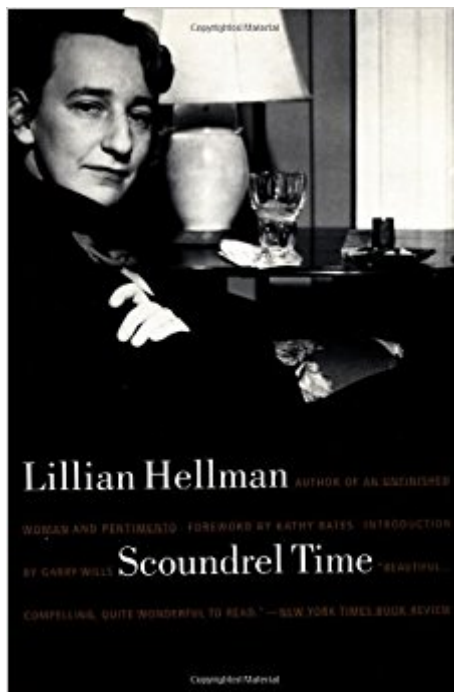


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# Scoundrel Time



## Synopsis

In 1952, Hellman joined the ranks of intellectuals and artists called before Congress to testify about political subversion. Terrified yet defiant, Hellman refused to incriminate herself or others, and managed to avoid trial. Nonetheless the experience brought devastating controversy and loss. First published in 1972, her retelling of the time features a remarkable cast of characters, including her lover, novelist Dashiell Hammett, a slew of famous friends and colleagues, and a pack of "scoundrels" -- ruthless, ambitious politicians and the people who complied with their demands.

## Book Information

Paperback: 155 pages

Publisher: Back Bay Books; 1st Back Bay paperback ed edition (July 1, 2000)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0316352942

ISBN-13: 978-0316352949

Product Dimensions: 5.5 x 0.4 x 8.5 inches

Shipping Weight: 8 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.3 out of 5 stars 15 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #106,667 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #27 in Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Arts & Literature > Theatre #626 in Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Arts & Literature > Authors #936 in Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Arts & Literature > Actors & Entertainers

## Customer Reviews

I always been intrigued with this controversy but have concluded that it is difficult to understand the issue without having lived at that time as so many questioned capitalism after the depression. So receiving a first hand account by someone blacklisted, and particularly such a renown writer as Lillian Hellman, provides a very interesting perspective. This had a lasting effect on her and it is highlighted in the discussion of the farm that she would be required to sell as their income (her companion Dash Hammett who did serve time for his testimony) would dry up. Yes, this rambles as she discusses the effect of her testimony on the remainder of her life. But along with the Ring Lardner book I consider this the definitive first hand account of the HUAC committee and this terrible time in American political intimidation. I encourage you to read this book if you have interest in American politics, in the 40s and 50s and the paranoia of communism in America.

Scoundrel Time is a very interesting book. It takes you through the events that happened in Lillian Hellman's life during a very troubled time in American history. I found it interesting to hear her opinion on the issue. I recommend this book to anyone who is interested in the Cold War or McCarthyism. I bought this book for a Cold War upperdivision class in college and am glad that I did.

Goof book Great Service

very well written

Extraordinary book.

fine

Those who cannot learn from the past are condemned to repeat it. - George Santayana  
Keeping that thought firmly in mind, I would love to make "Scoundrel Time" required reading for every High School Civics student. This memoir tells of Lillian Hellman's appearance before the much-feared House UnAmerican Activities Committee in the fearful 50's, when any taint of association with Communist or Russians could result in loss of your job, your relationships, your future. At a time when celebrities and movie moguls were falling over each other to prove their "Americanism" by pointing fingers at others who were suspected of being less pure, Hellman reminded the committee of the "simple rules of human decency": "to tell the truth, not to bear false witness, not to harm my neighbor, to be loyal to my country." Despite being much admired for her moral courage, she suffered : years of little or no income, being forced to sell her home, threats of losing of her passport. A few years later our society seemed to right itself, to regain its moral compass, to realize the injustice and irrationality behind the crusade for "Americanism". But the undercurrents righteous ideology are still strong. In Garry Wills' introduction to my copy, he reminds us "An element in America's sense of mission has always been a belief that close foreign ties might sully the purity of republican doctrine. It was not enough to be American in citizenship or residence - one must be American in one's thoughts.... Lack of right thinking could make an American citizen un-American." It was this kind of thinking that drove Japanese-American citizens into internment camps during World War II. It justified the Watergate break-in in the minds of Nixon's adherents (Nixon, of course, was deeply involved with HUAC). It pushed us into Viet Nam through our fear of a monolithic World

Communism which did not exist. It still taints our politics with ideas of "American Exceptionalism" as if, just because we are America, we can do no wrong on the world stage. But Lillian Hellman is proof that it is possible to resist the ideological current, to stand for freedom as our Founding Fathers described it: freedom of speech, freedom of belief, freedom from unjust confiscation of property or punishment or imprisonment. If we are really American, we must remember these freedoms for everyone, not just the people who agree with us. Lillian Hellman reminds us. Maybe she's the one who belongs on the \$20 bill.

"I cannot and will not cut my conscience to fit this year's fashions..." The greatest female American playwright of the twentieth century, Lillian Hellman, said it on May 19, 1952, as she was called before the United State House of Representatives. The House Un-American Activities Committee, with its witch hunting hearings intent on driving so-called Communists and fellow travelers from entertainment, and any other influential positions in American life. Creating various abominable blacklists that prevented its victims' employment, and hounded them into suicide and self-imposed exile. Hellman's words resounded around America and the world back then, and still do. They are contained in her well-known and greatly admired memoir of the time, *SCOUNDREL TIME*. The New Orleans-born Hellman did, indeed, testify before the committee, as she was required to do on May 21, 1952. She was accused of having attended Communist Party meetings in 1937. In her letter of the 19th, she explained that she was willing to testify only about herself, but was unwilling to claim her rights under the Fifth Amendment unless forced to, and would not 'name names' of other supposed communists and fellow travelers, which is what the committee wanted its victims to do. In her testimony, she denied that she ever had belonged to the Communist party, but was eventually forced to take the Fifth; she named no names. After her testimony, she released to the press her stirring letter of the 19th, which was immediately heard round the world. Her career was severely damaged by HUAC - she had to work as a saleswoman at Macys for some time -- but she never was imprisoned. Her longtime lover Dashiell Hammett, the American author credited with developing the hard-boiled noir detective story, was. Hellman authored two additional volumes of memoirs, *An Unfinished Woman*, and *Pentimento*. "The Little Foxes," "Toys in the Attic," and "The Watch on the Rhine" are among her best-known plays; she also authored many screenplays. Her last years were marred by a feud with American author Mary McCarthy, who had accused Hellman, on the televised Dick Cavett show, of lying with every word, "including 'and' and 'the'." Hellman chose to sue McCarthy for libel; the suit was closed with her death. Many years ago, well before the McCarthy business, I interviewed Hellman for an American newspaper. It was a strong

interview, with a couple of reverberant lines in it, and was picked up at the time by several major newspapers. Quotes of it, to my knowledge, have since been picked up by at least six books. The New York Public Library, Lincoln Center branch, has been given a copy of the original taped interview and its transcript; I believe they are available on the Internet. SCOUNDREL TIME is a quick and dramatic read, as befits its author, and still an important one.

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