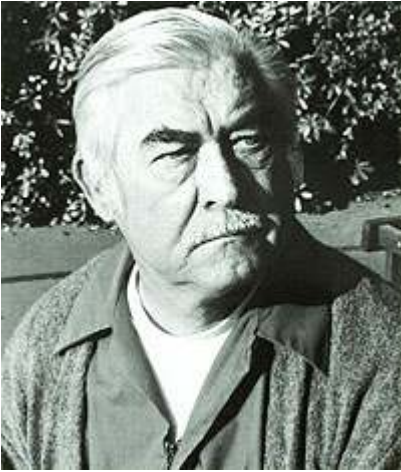


# "A Very Good American"

The undaunted artistry of  
blacklisted screenwriter Michael Wilson

**Written by Joseph McBride**

(From the February 2002 issue of "Written By")



When formerly blacklisted screenwriter Michael Wilson accepted the Writers Guild of America, west's Screen Laurel Award for career achievement in 1976, two years before his death at age 63, he spoke with prescience: "I don't want to dwell on the past, but for a few moments to speak of the future. And I address my remaining remarks primarily to you younger men and women who had perhaps not yet established yourself in this industry at the time of the Great Witch Hunt. I fear that unless you remember this dark epoch and understand it, you may be doomed to replay it--not with the same cast of characters, of course, or on the same issues. But I foresee a day coming in your lifetime, if not in mine, when a new crisis of belief will grip this republic; when diversity of opinion will be labeled disloyalty; when chilling decisions affecting our culture will be made in the board rooms of conglomerates and

networks; when the powers of the programmers and the censors will be expanded; and when extraordinary pressures will be put on writers in the mass media to conform to administration policy on the key issues of the time, whatever they may be.

"If this gloomy scenario should come to pass, I trust that you younger men and women will shelter the mavericks and dissenters in your ranks and protect their right to work. The Guild will have need of rebels and heretics if it is to survive as a union of free writers. The nation will have need of them if it is to survive as an open society."

At the time of his blacklisting in 1951, Michael Wilson was one of the leading Hollywood screenwriters. That year his adaptation (with Harry Brown) of Theodore Dreiser's 1925 novel *An American Tragedy* (as the film *A Place in the Sun*) was brought to the screen by producer-director George Stevens. The classic film about the self-destructive pursuit of wealth and status by an ambitious young man (Montgomery Clift) won Screen Writers Guild (SWG) awards and Academy Awards in 1952 for the writers, as well as an Oscar for the director. But on September 20, 1951, shortly after its premiere, Wilson was called to testify before the House Committee on Un-American Activities and became an "unfriendly" witness.



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Standing on his principles, he refused to cooperate with the Committee by answering their questions about his alleged Communist Party membership or by naming the names of colleagues. Wilson's defiance of the anti-Communist witch-hunt caused him to be blacklisted in Hollywood for the next 14 years. His writing appeared without credit in some of the most noteworthy films of that era, including *Friendly Persuasion* (1956), *The Bridge on the River Kwai* (1957), and *Lawrence of Arabia* (1962).

for payment.



Wilson took his family to live in France for eight of those years. Their passports were revoked by the U.S. government while they were abroad, making it impossible for them to return to the United States until 1964. "We were doing very well for a while until the blacklist, which was catastrophic," Wilson's widow, Zelma, an architect, told me in a 1985 interview. "It was very tough because the kids were very little and Mike was not making very much as a blacklisted writer. We were trying to live on my salary, which wasn't much. We lived very modestly. But there was no way you could keep a man like Mike down. He went right on being successful."

### On the "A" List

Part Native American and part Irish, English, and German, Franklin Michael Wilson Jr. was born in McAlester, Oklahoma. Wilson was described by his widow as "a quiet, reticent sort of a man. He was just a quiet man who was a believer in the peace movement" against the Korean War and the Cold War.

Wilson was educated during the Depression era at the University of California, Berkeley, where he studied literature and American history, taking a particular interest in military history and the sociology of American minority groups. Intending to become a novelist, he wrote short stories for *Esquire* and other magazines, which brought him to the attention of Hollywood; the two novels he later wrote have not been published. Before enlisting in World War II as a private first class in the U.S. Marine Corps in August 1942, Wilson received his first screenwriting credit for a 1941 movie starring Loretta Young as a ballet dancer, *The Men in Her Life* [screenplay by Frederick Kohner and Paul Trivers, and Wilson, based on the novel *Ballerina* by Lady Eleanor Smith]. Wilson's early credits also include four Hopalong Cassidy Westerns, which, as he wryly told HUAC in 1951, "are now corrupting our children on the television screens of the nation."

Wilson served in the South Pacific as a tactical communications officer (a radio analyst). He was discharged with the rank of first lieutenant in December 1945.

The talent evident in Wilson's short stories, as well as his war record, helped win him a contract writing screenplays for Liberty Films, the postwar partnership of Frank Capra, George Stevens, William Wyler, who all had served as colonels in the U.S. Army, and former studio executive Sam Briskin. For Capra, Wilson did a polish of the screenplay for the 1946 fantasy *It's a Wonderful Life*, based on the short story "The Greatest Gift" by Philip Van Doren Stern. After an arbitration by the SWG, the script was credited to Frances Goodrich, Albert Hackett, and Capra, with "additional scenes" by Jo Swerling; Wilson did not receive screen credit but was acknowledged in the Academy Bulletin as "contributor to screenplay."

"Mike was not a great admirer of Capra," Zelma Wilson recalled. "He thought Capra was a very overestimated director. He felt Capra was a kind of naïve romantic about the common man. Mike wasn't as sure about the purity of the common man as Capra was. I don't think Mike felt that *It's a Wonderful Life* was a great movie; he thought it was pretty good, but he was a disenchanted Catholic, and he was not wild about pictures with angels. I remember him groaning about having to write dialogue with an angel, but he was a professional writer and he did his job."

For Capra in 1946-47, Wilson adapted Jessamyn West's *The Friendly Persuasion*, a collection of short stories about an Indiana Quaker family forced to examine and live up to their pacifist convictions during the Civil War.

Wilson's adaptation dramatized the conflict in a Quaker youth who goes into combat, feeling he has a higher duty to his country, but finds it impossible to kill and decides to become a stretcher bearer instead. In West's story the boy is able to go home without having to test his convictions, but Wilson's script, while emphasizing the pressure American society exerts on pacifist citizens, insisted that an American can remain loyal to his principles.

Although Capra thought Wilson did "a swell job" adapting West's book, he felt "it would be a bad time to produce a picture that might be construed as being antiwar. But we let Wilson work on until he had finished with it." Wilson told HUAC in 1951, "I feel that this committee might take the credit, or part of it at least, for the fact that *The Friendly Persuasion* was not produced, in view of the fact that it dealt warmly, in my opinion, with a peace-loving people."

Capra attempted to disassociate himself further from Wilson in his self-justifying document written in December 1951 for the Army-Navy-Air Force Personnel Security Board, which had revoked his security clearance for a Defense Department think tank at the California Institute of Technology. Capra panicked when accusations were made against his loyalty, including a charge that he had worked with writers suspected of being Communists or Communist sympathizers. As a result, he named seven colleagues to the security board as suspected Communists, including Wilson and screenwriters Sidney Buchman, Ian McLellan Hunter, Hugo Butler, and writer-director Herbert Biberman.

"It was a great shock to me to hear Michael Wilson refuse to answer the \$64 question before the Congressional committee," Capra wrote the board, recalling watching Wilson testify on live television from a Los Angeles hearing room. "... I was bowled over by Michael Wilson's connection with the party. He wouldn't have lasted two minutes with Liberty Films had I the slightest inkling he was a Red." However, six months before Wilson's testimony, the director had settled his contract with Paramount, and in the uncut manuscript of his 1971 autobiography, *The Name Above the Title*, Capra wrote that he had cancelled both *The Friendly Persuasion* and *Roman Holiday* at Paramount when he discovered that their screenwriters, Wilson and Hunter, were alleged to be Communists (both films were later made by Wyler).

Nor had the charges against Wilson been a secret in Hollywood before his HUAC appearance. He received his pink subpoena from HUAC on June 13, 1951, and was fired from Twentieth Century-Fox three days later by production chief Darryl F. Zanuck. Wilson wrote a friend on



**Refugees:**  
Screenwriter Michael Wilson in 1957 with his wife, Zelma, mother Neil, daughters Rosanna and Rebecca. He protected his family from the government's witch-hunts by living in France.

September 5, "I have been 'laid off,' which is the studios' temporary euphemism for blacklisting me. There was a time when studios waited until a man was in contempt of Congress before blacklisting him; but today the mere announcement that I have a subpoena and that I oppose this committee's aims costs me my job... [F]reedom of speech is costly these days."

What happened to Wilson's pacifist script after Capra dropped it reflected the political climate of the Cold War. When William Wyler directed the film for Allied Artists in 1956 as *Friendly Persuasion*, he had the story changed to make the Quaker youth (played by Anthony Perkins) become a killer. The Quakers in Wyler's version, as Pauline Kael observed, "are there only to violate their convictions." But some of the strength of Wilson's conception remains, as in a scene of a crippled Union Army officer respectfully challenging the steadfast Quakers about pacifism in their meeting house.



**The Prophet: Wilson was blacklisted and living in Europe after writing a statement denouncing HUAC's hearings: "I do not think any honest pictures will be written by frightened writers, and I know they will not be written by informers."**

The Screen Writers Guild in 1953 amended its rules permitting production companies to deny screenplay credit to blacklisted writers. Wyler initially recommended that his brother Robert and West, who had revised Wilson's work, be given screenplay credit on *Friendly Persuasion*, with no credit to Wilson. Wilson requested an arbitration by the Writers Guild of America (as the SWG was renamed in 1954) and was awarded the sole screenplay credit. A public controversy erupted when Wyler and Allied Artists then decided to release *Friendly Persuasion* without any screenwriter credit. Wilson nevertheless received a WGA award for the script, which also received an Oscar nomination; the Academy subsequently disqualified his nomination. In October 1956, Wilson sued Wyler, West, Robert Wyler, Allied Artists, Paramount, and the vestigial Liberty Films (by then part of Paramount) over the denial of credit. The case was settled out of court.

After Wilson's death in 1978, William Wyler claimed that the denial of credit was "a decision I regretted but had no control over" and that the controversy "should in no way minimize or detract from my high esteem of Michael Wilson, both as writer and citizen." But a memorandum written by Wyler for his files on April 8, 1954, contradicts this, indicating that he had talked to Paramount executive Y. Frank Freeman about buying the script and had received assurance from Freeman that he could deny credit to Wilson. "Mike just blamed Wyler," Zelma Wilson said. "He was very angry. Wyler could have given him credit."

## **The Big Lie**

In his 1975 interviews for an UCLA oral history, *I Am the Sum of My Actions*, Wilson told Joel Gardner that he had joined the Communist Party in 1938 while at Berkeley and remained a member until the mid-1950s. Five days before his 1951 HUAC testimony, Wilson wrote an impassioned letter to his mother and father, who had expressed dismay over his stand against cooperating with the Committee: "Have Americans been sold on the Big Lie--that the principles on which our country was founded sound 'un-American'?... To save my 'career,' I am indeed given only one other alternative: If I were to repudiate all my past beliefs and associations, if I were to perjure myself by smearing patriotic Americans as conspirators and traitors, if I were to jump on the bandwagon of these venal politicians and beat the drum for a third World War--then



like the scum Dmytryk [Edward Dmytryk, a member of the Hollywood Ten who had turned informer to resume his directing career], I could continue to work in the motion picture industry.

"Surely, whatever your own beliefs, you cannot see this as an alternative for a decent human being--to turn Judas, to sell my birthright and worship the Almighty Dollar for the sake of expediency for the sake of my career, or for the sake of your shame as to what people will think. It is not my *career* that is really at stake at all--it is my survival as a free writer... If I have any worth as a writer, it is because I have been a worthy citizen."

In a prepared statement HUAC would not let him read, Wilson wrote, "We have seen fascism on television this week. But it has not yet been transferred from the television screen to every American home and street and workshop. The men and women watching these weird proceedings may not know that *they* are on trial, but many Americans who have been watching these proceedings must see through the idiocies of the 'red scare' to the simple issue--the right of everyone to follow his own conscience, to think and speak and communicate without police supervision...

"I am not surprised to be hauled before a Committee that is trying to make *peace* a dirty subversive word.... Had I remained silent before this onslaught on reason, I would not have been summoned here today. But my life has no purpose without the prospect of peace. This Committee has no purpose without the prospect of war.

“  
It is not my career  
that is really at  
stake at all--it is my  
survival as a free  
writer. If I have any  
worth as a writer, it  
is because I have  
been a worthy  
citizen.  
”

Michael Wilson

"Therefore I have no choice but to take my stand against this Committee and its designs... These hearings have made my industry, the motion picture industry, a virtual captive of the war party. The consequence of these hearings will be appalling pictures, more pictures glorifying racism, war and brutality, perversion and violence. I do not think any honest pictures will be written by frightened writers; and I know they will not be written by informers."

When asked by HUAC, "What knowledge have you of the activities of the Communist Party in the moving picture industry?," Wilson took the Fifth Amendment: "And in so doing I wish also to protect the rights of every American citizen to the privacy of belief and association... I think subversion is being committed against the Bill of Rights here today."

"My husband was a very good American," said Zelma Wilson.

## Let Them Eat Salt

The lawsuit *Michael Wilson, et al. vs. Loew's Incorporated, et al* was filed in July 1953 by Wilson and 22 fellow blacklistees, alleging that the film studios had "conspired together and agreed with each other to blacklist and to refuse employment to and exclude from employment in the motion picture industry" anyone refusing to cooperate with HUAC. Although Wilson and his fellow plaintiffs lost the suit, which ultimately was dismissed by the U.S. Supreme Court in 1958, they helped lay the legal and moral foundation for the eventual dismantling of the blacklist.

A more successful challenge to the political and economic system that had blacklisted them was devised by Wilson and two colleagues, his brother-in-law and fellow screenwriter Paul Jarrico

and Herbert Biberman, a member of the Hollywood Ten. Working against great odds, they made what Jarrico wryly described as "a crime to fit the punishment," the radical independent feature *Salt of the Earth* (1954).

Jarrico served as the producer and Biberman as director of the controversial film, based on the Empire Zinc Company strike of 1950-52 by Local 890 of the International Union of Mine, Mill, and Smelter Workers in Bayard, New Mexico, a largely Latino organization. The main title card is gratifying to the heart of any screenwriter: it reads simply salt of the earth by michael wilson.

Wilson wrote *Salt* democratically, inviting extensive input from the miners and their wives. The result allows them to speak in their own voices, although Wilson somewhat oversimplifies and idealizes the events of the strike while fictionalizing the story for powerful dramatic effect. Juan Chacón, the president of Local 890, was cast as strike leader Ramón Quintero, giving a strong and complex performance. Many other union members and their wives were cast in smaller roles. The most original and far-reaching aspect of *Salt of the Earth* is its feminism. Mexican actress Rosaura Revueltas plays the central role of Esperanza, Ramón's wife, who gradually finds her own militant voice. She and the other miners' wives assert their rights against their male-chauvinist husbands and take over the picket lines when the men are forbidden by a court order.

Filmed on the actual New Mexico locations with stark precision and eloquence, *Salt* is a powerful human drama. Generally avoiding didacticism, the neorealistic film exemplifies the philosophy of politically conscious, mass-audience filmmaking that Wilson articulated in a 1978 interview: "I tend to feel that [the] didactic or agitprop approach to the whole art form is an incorrect one for progressives... If the aim is primarily to change people, the film artist or creator is better off simply depicting honestly the way things are rather than beating people over the head with his own point of view in a propagandistic way."

*Salt* was made under conditions of harassment by government authorities and film industry unions spearheaded by Roy Brewer, the militantly anti-Communist Hollywood leader of the International Association of Theatrical Stage Employees and Moving Picture Operators (IATSE) and president of the Motion Picture Alliance for the Preservation of American Ideals, which helped run the Hollywood blacklist. According to a 1953 FBI document, the bureau obtained copies of Wilson's screenplay that March, while the film was still shooting. The bureau described the script as "definitely a Communist propaganda portrayal... The script was studded throughout with the Communist line including such items as racial hatred, white supremacy, graft and corruption of public officials, police brutality, and 'Red baiting.'" Another 1953 FBI document reported that Brewer, a bureau informant, "felt that every legitimate obstacle should be thrown in the way of those endeavoring to produce a film [that] was alleged to be anti-American and pro-Communist."

Airplanes buzzed the location to interfere with sound recording. Revueltas was arrested and deported by the Justice Department's Immigration and Naturalization Service before the filming was completed; she was subsequently blacklisted both in the United States and Mexico. Zelma Wilson was fired from her job with an architectural firm when *Salt* went into production. People involved with the film and the union were physically attacked. An attempt was made to torch the



**Oscar's Shame: In 1957, after writing the script with Carl Foreman of *The Bridge on the River Kwai*, Michael Wilson was denied credit and the Academy Award.**

local union hall, and both the union hall in Carlsbad and the home of a union official were destroyed by fire. State police had to protect the filmmakers during the final days of shooting.

Pressure was applied by Brewer to prevent IATSE editors from working on the film. When Brewer seemingly relented and allowed editor Barton "Bud" Hayes to be hired by the production company, Hayes turned out to be a spy for IATSE and the FBI. The FBI investigation evidently also included wiretapping or bugging: A 1954 FBI document states that "a technical surveillance maintained at the Hollywood Arts, Sciences, and Professions Council revealed that this film was consistently losing money at the box office." *Salt* received only a limited theatrical distribution in 1954 because of interference by Brewer and IATSE, which ordered its projectionists not to show it.

## A Bullish Black Market

After *Salt*, Zelma Wilson said, her husband "did black market work for about two years. Producers hired him under the table, Mike and [Dalton] Trumbo and some of his other friends. They didn't even know what happened to the films half the time." The blacklisted writers would take their script pages in a brown paper bag to an intermediary and exchange them for payment.

Wilson had frustrating experiences working on the two films produced by Sam Spiegel and directed by David Lean that won Academy Awards as the best pictures of 1957 and 1962, *The Bridge on the River Kwai* and *Lawrence of Arabia*. Because of their blacklisting, Wilson, who wrote the final shooting script for *Kwai*, and Foreman were denied credit on that classic World War II film about British soldiers in a Japanese prison camp. The screenplay was credited instead to Pierre Boulle, the author of the 1952 French novel on which the film is based, *Le pont de la rivière Kwai*. Boulle was awarded an Oscar even though he did not speak or write English. Eventually, Foreman and Wilson had their credits restored by the WGA. They received posthumous Academy Awards in 1985. Their belated awards were not given a spot on the Oscar telecast but were presented to the writers' widows at a separate ceremony.

### On His Laurel

*Michael Wilson accepted his 1976 WGA lifetime achievement award with a cautionary look toward to the future.*

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Exactly 20 years ago Allied Artists was preparing for release a film called *Friendly Persuasion*. I had written a screenplay of *Friendly Persuasion* nine years earlier, in 1947. But by the time the picture was produced in 1956, I had already

been blacklisted for five years. Unhappily, the Board of our Guild had earlier capitulated to one aspect of the blacklist by agreeing to an unprecedented clause in the Minimum Basic Agreement. In effect this clause stipulated that if any screenwriter who had been a hostile witness before the House Committee on Un-American Activities should by some fluke receive credit on a picture yet to be released, the producing company had the right to remove his name from the credits.

William Wyler, the producer-director of *Friendly Persuasion*, chose to list as coauthors of the screenplay his brother Robert and Jessamyn West, the author of the short stories on which my screenplay had been based. I appealed to the Guild for an arbitration and was later informed that a panel of my peers had ruled unanimously that I was the sole author of the shooting script. When Allied Artists was also so informed, a company spokesman reminded the Guild that I did not have to be given credit because I had been a naughty boy. Very well, said the Guild spokesman, but you can't give credit to another writer. And so for the first and perhaps only time a Hollywood picture was released that wasn't written by anyone.

In this instance, the blacklist had a serendipitous effect because *Friendly Persuasion* went on to win the Writers Guild Award the following spring and the Palme d'Or at the Cannes Film Festival, so my noncredit on the film gained me more recognition than I would have received had my name been on it.

I do not tell you this anecdote to pick



Wilson hoped that Spiegel and Lean would credit him on *Lawrence of Arabia*, but he was denied again. The credit and the Oscar nomination went to playwright Robert Bolt, who had rewritten Wilson's script. "Mike had a great deal of heartache over what happened with *Lawrence*," Zelma Wilson recalled. "He worked 15 months on research and structure and a script. He built it the way I build a building."

Wilson said in a 1964 interview, "The film was at the point of being shot when I found myself again in conflict with David Lean over questions of the film's themes and the nature of the character. We had arrived at an impasse and I withdrew... My version of Lawrence's character was more social and political than that of Robert Bolt, who preferred the psychoanalytical side--the sadistic, masochistic, homosexual aspects of his character."

After receiving a copy of Bolt's screenplay just over a month before the film's premiere, Wilson wrote Spiegel on November 7, 1962: "It is clear at once that little of my dialog [sic] remains in this screenplay, certainly less than 10 percent. I assume that the dialog was written by Robert Bolt, and through you I must congratulate him on a job well done. He is a gifted man. If screen credit were determined on the basis of dialog alone, I could not claim recognition for this picture.

"However, more goes into the writing of a motion picture than the spoken word. Structure, selection, continuity, plot, invention, and characterization--all these factors form and define the final product we see and hear... Why, then, is the screenplay attributed to Mr. Bolt so much like mine, to a degree that it virtually coincides with mine in terms of continuity? The story that Robert Bolt tells is the story that I told. He has chosen different words with which to tell it."

Wilson wrote Bolt on November 29, 1962: "For the past 11 years I have been one of the blacklisted American writers. I have just begun to emerge from that shadowy realm, not through any abandonment of principle on my part, but because at long last I have found an American producer who has the courage to give credit to a writer he engaged, and the witch-hunters be damned. The men in control of *Lawrence of Arabia* lack that courage. If I were 'clean,' my name would already be alongside yours as co-author of this picture. I implore you to believe this is not a paranoid assertion. I am not a man for all

at old wounds or to rehash ancient wrongs. The truth is that I was one of the fortunate few who managed to continue practicing our craft through much of this period, and tonight I think of other blacklisted writers who might be here in my place had they had my luck.

No, I don't want to dwell on the past, but for a few moments to speak of the future, and I address my remaining remarks primarily to you younger men and women who had perhaps not yet established yourselves in this industry at the time of the Great Witch Hunt. I fear that unless you remember this dark epoch and understand it, you may be doomed to replay it, not with the same cast of characters, of course, or on the same issues. But I foresee a day coming in your lifetime, if not in mine, when a new crisis of belief will grip this republic; when diversity of opinion will be labeled disloyalty; when chilling decisions affecting our culture will be made in the board rooms of conglomerates and networks; when the powers of the programmers and the censors will be expanded; and when extraordinary pressures will be put on writers in the mass media to conform to administration policy on the key issues of the time, whatever they may be.

If this gloomy scenario should come to pass, I trust that you younger men and women will shelter the mavericks and dissenters in your ranks and protect their right to work. The Guild will have need of rebels and heretics if it is to survive as a union of free writers. The nation will have need of them if it is to survive as an open society.

seasons [an allusion to Bolt's play about the martyred dissenter Sir Thomas More]; but while martyrdom ill suits me, there are aspects of the blacklist that do fill me with mirth. If I could tell you (and if you're interested someday I shall) the enormous pressures the top brass of this production put on me to 'clear myself,' you would see that this is the heart of the matter."

Wilson took his case to the Writers Guild of Great Britain, which ruled in December 1963 that he was entitled to equal credit with Bolt, although it could not enforce the edict. The guild gave Wilson its award for the best British dramatic screenplay of 1962, as it earlier had to Bolt, who also received an Oscar nomination. But even in the 1989 restored version released theatrically by Columbia, Wilson was still not accorded screen credit due to continued opposition from Lean. The WGA finally restored Wilson's credit in 1995, and his name now appears after Bolt's on DVD and theatrical prints.

### **No Politics, Please**

It was sadly ironic that in the supposedly freer artistic and political climate of the late 1960s and the 1970s, Wilson had less success speaking his mind on screen than he did in the blacklist era. His most cherished projects dealing with political and historical issues went unfilmed.

Wilson received his first post-blacklist screen credit on the Elizabeth Taylor-Richard Burton vehicle *The Sandpiper* (1965), a silly, overly glossy movie about bohemian artists in northern California. Wilson wrote the treatment from a story by producer Martin Ransohoff and received screenplay credit with Dalton Trumbo, who rewrote a script by Irene Kamp and Louis Kamp, credited with the adaptation. Wilson's most successful post-blacklist film was the original 1968 version of *Planet of the Apes*, based on another Pierre Boulle novel, *La Planète des singes* (1963). Wilson rewrote a screenplay by Rod Serling, who shares credit for the film directed by Franklin J. Schaffner and starring Charlton Heston as Taylor, an astronaut marooned among bellicose apes in the distant future. Wilson's thoughtful adaptation enhanced the story's quality as a political allegory. One particularly sharp satirical thrust evokes the HUAC hearings--a tribunal of orangutans trying Taylor silence him and his chimpanzee defenders, who are sentenced for contempt and heresy. The famous ending with Taylor finding the destroyed Statue of Liberty on a beach ("You maniacs! You blew it up! Oh, damn you! God damn you all to hell!") offers some of the most potent political symbolism in American film.

The last screen credit Wilson received in his lifetime was on *Che!*, the 1969 Hollywood biopic of Cuban revolutionary Ernesto "Che" Guevara, then a hero of the American youth movement. Wilson shares screenplay credit with producer Sy Bartlett, who wrote the story with David Karp. The casting of Omar Sharif as Che and Jack Palance as Fidel Castro is embarrassing, and Wilson disowned the film because he felt that changes in his screenplay made Che look foolish. Other intriguing later projects dealing with political issues went unfilmed, including *The Wobblies*, about the International Workers of the World; a script for director Robert Wise about John Brown, *The Raid on Harper's Ferry*; *Outer Darkness*, about the CIA's infiltration of the black radical movement; and *House Divided*, a project about the Revolutionary War that Henry, Jane, and Peter Fonda were planning to make together.

Herbert Biberman said in 1970 that the moral of the story of the filming of *Salt of the Earth* was, "Be careful whom you blacklist--he may be extolled as a hero in the next, if not his own, generation."

"When you become a blacklisted writer, you become an institution," Zelma Wilson reflected. "[But] Mike didn't want to be a martyr, he didn't want to be a hero, he wanted to be a writer."

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