

Tentative Title of Dissertation:

Cold War Orphans: The Rosenberg Children, the State, and the Culture of the Second Red Scare

Dissertation Abstract:

Cold War Orphans explores a little-studied aspect of the most famous espionage case during the Cold War: the debate over the futures of the children of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg. Just six and two when their parents were arrested, Michael and Robert Rosenberg spent four years without a permanent home before they were adopted by Abel and Anne Meeropol. During the period between their parents' arrests in 1950 and executions in 1953, the Rosenberg children were thrust into both the public and private battle over their parents' legacy and questions of who was best capable of raising the boys to be "proper" American citizens was central to many connected to the case. Michael and Robert Rosenberg became entangled in larger questions of the rising concern over children in post-war America, the effect of the Red Scare on Jewish communal organizations, and the depth of the state's commitment to erasing the influence of communists on American citizens. My research explores how these questions played out for the Rosenberg children, who struggled to find a stable home in the midst of the notoriety and fear surrounding their parents' case. It examines how the Cold War entangled the future of two small children in a complex web of state, communal, and private interests which threatened their personal wellbeing in the name of ideological victory.