

### #3 Jack Blum: Bard

**Jack Blum:** I wound up at Bard because I rebelled. I simply said, no, no science, no more. I'm out of that business and, you know, it's either I get to go to a college where I can find my way or I don't go.

**Naomi Fowler:** This is Jack Blum: The Corruption Diaries from the Tax Justice Network. I'm Naomi Fowler.

**Jack Blum:** Bard was a very interesting kind of place then. It was fascinating because it had a faculty that was made up of, in part, people who had been refugees from Germany in World War II. But it also was a place where people who were the best writers of a generation came and were actually teaching and the faculty student ratio was nine students for every faculty member, which was an obvious financial catastrophe for the college. On the other hand, it was unbelievable for the student body. So, for example, I had a seminar on European literature with Ralph Ellison in a group of four and we would convene at the saloon down the road over a pitcher of beer to talk about whatever the reading had been. And when you're surrounded by stuff like that, it really makes a difference in what you learn. But far and away, the most influential teacher in my life was a man named Heinrich Blücher. Blücher, had been an activist in Germany. He was born in 1899. He had been in World War I, came out of World War I and he had been radicalized and went through a period of being a street organizer in Berlin, involved to some degree with, as I came to understand much later, Rosa Luxemburg and the radicals of Berlin. But then did a variety of other things, got involved with art and literature and he was completely self taught. He had no formal degrees from any institution. But he became, I think, one of the world's great philosophers. And he was called that by Carl Jaspers, who was in awe of the way the guy thought. And what Blücher was able to do was to open up the whole world of creative processes, art and literature and music and a whole variety of things to talk about philosophical underpinnings, to talk about developing criteria, how to tell good from bad, decent from indecent, and so on. I mean, the guy was absolutely magnetic.

He would teach using the Socratic method which at the time for teachers was pretty unusual. What he would do would be assign a reading, and he might push you. So one of the ways he absolutely killed students in the first course would be, okay, Sam, tell me who you are. And he'd keep pushing it. This guy would give his name. - Not enough. Who are you, really?! You know, and, and keep going. And then, at the end of that, say, you might want to look at this, you might want to read that, and we'll come back and talk about it next week.

His wife was Hannah Arendt, and it was, only after I graduated from Bard and went on to law school, I went to law school at Columbia - they lived on Morningside Heights - and I would go to the, their apartment, and, whenever I was feeling like I needed to have an infusion of good thinking would see him and met her in the

course of that process. When he died, which would have been 1967 or thereabouts, she asked me to deliver a eulogy at his funeral, which I did, and we became good friends thereafter, got to know each other much better, and in the course of that, I got to meet some pretty remarkable people. I remember having dinner with her and WH Auden, around, you know, the dining room table in their house. And she, she pointed me later when I travelled to Europe and I began to meet a lot of people, she gave me introductions to different people who were able to explain things to me, explain how they worked. She introduced me to a woman named Anna Weill, who had been the chief of staff for Schuman, who was the guy who put together the original Coal and Steel community and the origins of what became the European Union. And to hear from someone who was literally present at the creation about how things came together and what their thinking was, it, it was a pretty important part of my understanding how the world worked.

I can say that the McCarthy period is something that affected me as a kid because there was an investigation by the House UnAmerican Activities Committee of the Newark Teachers Union, and my mother was a school teacher in Newark, and of course, the teachers were all terrified by this committee which would, you know, put a label on someone and make them unemployable and it was terrifying. I later understood that there was a real issue with McCarthyism and how, how serious that all was.

**Naomi Fowler:** McCarthyism is named after the Senator Joseph McCarthy, and relates to political repression and persecution of people perceived to be spreading communism within US institutions. This was the late 1940s and 1950s, a time of high tensions with the Soviet Union.

**Jack Blum:** Now, Hannah was on the board of and instrumental in putting together something called the National Committee for an Effective Congress, which was dedicated to fighting McCarthy, and the kind of threat he represented to democratic institutions. And these were people who formed the National Committee for an Effective Congress as a bipartisan, fundraising group for members of Congress of both parties who opposed the kind of activity and rhetoric that McCarthy represented. And all of them were people who had exposed themselves and were willing to take the risk of publicly opposing McCarthy. And that was not inconsiderable. And these people included a former ambassador, certainly an awful lot of the people who were public intellectuals who got out there and said, no, this, this guy's gotta go. We gotta do something about him.

As a consequence of that I got to meet a number of people who were involved in that fight. And that became incredibly important to me as I then went through law school and went to work for the Senate.

And what's so remarkable is that the terror that McCarthy put forward and had everybody so involved with is so very much like what we've been through recently,

there were things that went on that have so fallen from the memory of the American people that today it's really quite shocking to go back and say, oh my God, you mean we were there before, we did all that before, we lived through all that before? And the answer is yes. And if you've lived through it and you can recall some of it, you really are quite the outlier. It's like, oh God, you know, you belong in a museum of natural history here!

To give you an example of how screwy this history is, and how you almost had to root it out, when I got out of law school and I went to work for the Senate I had to get a full field FBI security clearance. And that meant my furnishing all sorts of references and calling on people, you know, would you mind if..? One of the people I gave as a reference was Heinrich Blücher. I didn't learn until after he died that he had been terrified by the fact that he was going to be interviewed by the FBI. And the reason was that he had been a radical in the 20s in Germany and he was afraid that they would somehow get into that whole period and ask him about it, and that somehow that would undo his American citizenship. He never said a word and of course that never happened and everything was fine, but the overhang of all of this was just overwhelming.

**Naomi Fowler:** The Corruption Dairies is a production of The Tax Justice Network, made by me, Naomi Fowler and Jo Barratt. Interviews with Jack Blum were recorded over several days at Jack's home in Maryland by Zoe Sullivan.