

# Rex Stout: War-Effort Leader, Proponent of Limited World Government, & Dramatist



**THE WOLFE PACK  
BLACK ORCHID ASSEMBLY  
DECEMBER 1, 2012  
NEW YORK, NY**

Bob Gatten

# Acknowledgements



- Rebecca Stout Bradbury
- Susan Adamson
- Amy Asch
- Anne Fadiman
- Carol Novak
- John McAleer, *Rex Stout: A Biography*
- Thomas Howell, *The Writers' War Board: U.S. Domestic Propaganda in World War II*

# Overview



## Part 1

**Rex Stout, the Writers' War Board, and a resulting play**

## Part 2

**Rex Stout, the Writers' Board for World Government, and a resulting play**

## Part 1

# Rex Stout and the Writers' War Board

Dec. 7, 1941



Henry Morgenthau, Jr.

Dec. 9, 1941



Howard Lindsay

# Rex Stout and the Writers' War Board



- Lindsay called Stout<sup>+</sup>
- Board complete by January 1942
- Board of about 20 authors from NYC

# Rex Stout and the Writers' War Board



Stout at the Writers' War Board Office



Chanin Building, 122 E 42 St.

# Board Members



**Clifton Fadiman**



**Oscar Hammerstein II**

# Board Members



Russel Crouse



Margaret Leech



# Board Members



Pearl Buck



Paul Gallico

# Board Members



William L. Shirer



John Marquand

# Purpose



- Initially, stimulate sale of war bonds
- Promote governmental policy for WWII
- Encourage popular support for war effort
- Allow government to avoid being in propaganda business
- Function as “an arm of the government”

Clifton Fadiman to Thomas Howell

# Work



- **Weekly meetings of Board**
- **Recruited services of over 4,000 writers**
- **No government control or censorship**

# Work



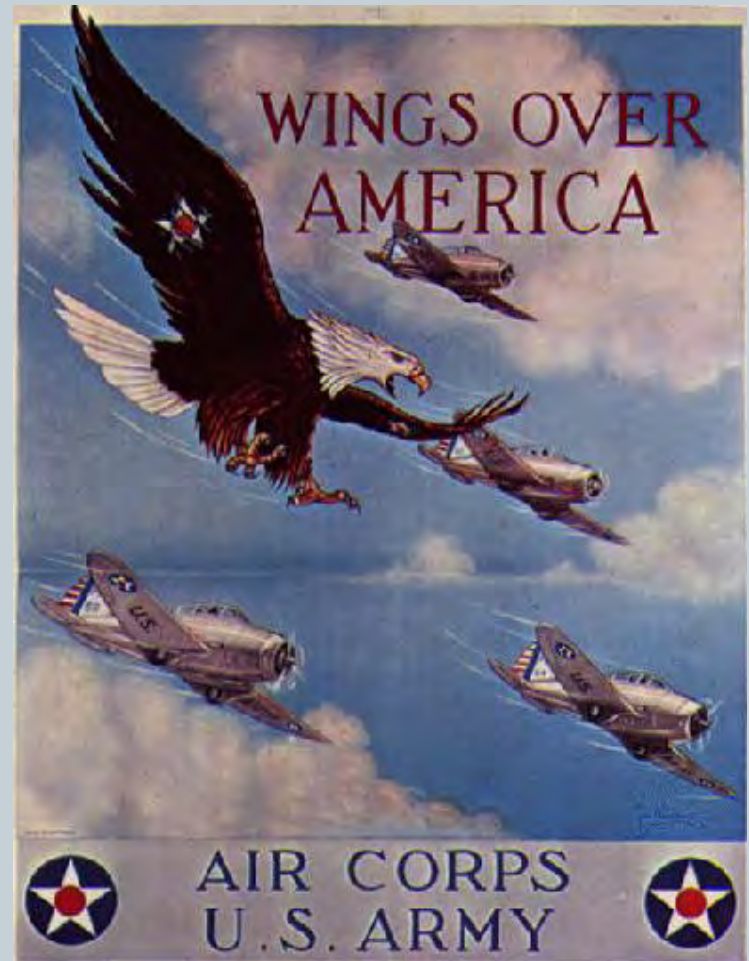
- Received information from government
- Responded to governmental requests for action
- Received government rental and stenographic support (eventually nine employees)
- Followed governmental policies exactly

# Work



- Monthly reports (with five projects where publicity was needed) to more than 4,000 professional writers
- Monthly editorials to 1,600 newspapers (published anonymously)
- Monthly articles to newspapers, 2,600 industry newsletters, and 1,100 army bases

# Work



# Work



- Radio scripts to 825 radio stations
- 50 speakers per month and play scripts to military bases
- Articles for national magazines (e.g., *The Saturday Evening Post*, *Reader's Digest*, & *Colliers*)
- Many successful campaigns<sup>+</sup>
- 85% of work done as direct request from government



# Independent Goals and Efforts



- Convince citizens of the malignant nature of Germany (not just Nazis) (e.g., book burnings, slaughter of Czech town of Lidice) and the need for a harsh peace for Germany<sup>+</sup>
- Promote racial tolerance and equality<sup>+</sup>
- Encourage postwar international cooperation<sup>+</sup>

# Closure



- Disbanded following official end of war in September 1945.
- “the best instance in a violent conflict of the organized use of writing abilities to help the fight” Rex Stout to Thomas Howell

# Closure



**“Rex was the nicest angry man that I knew in the Hitler period. . . His anger and brilliance contributed in an extraordinary way . . . to alert the country, as a whole, to existing dangers.”**

Peter Cusick to John McAleer

# Closure



**“Much more than any other of us,  
Rex was the Board.”**

Alan Green to John McAleer



## New-York Historical Society (thru May 27)



Irving Boyer, *Prospect Park*

# Connections



## Alexander Woolcott



- Critic
- Commentator for *New Yorker*
- Member of Algonquin Round Table

# Connections



Radio Broadcast, January 23, 1943

CBS *The People's Platform*

Discussion of *Is Germany Incurable?*

## Panelists:

- Marcia Davenport, novelist
- Harry D. Gideonse, president of Brooklyn College
- George N. Shuster, president of Hunter College
- Rex Stout
- Alexander Woollcott<sup>+</sup>

# Connections



## Woolcott Living On

<i>And Be A Villain</i> (1948)	Death by poisoning of Cyril Orchard during a live radio show
<i>The Silent Speaker</i> (1946)	Death by beating of Cheney Boone just before addressing the National Industrial Association at the Waldorf-Astoria
<i>Fourth of July Picnic</i> (1958)	Death by stabbing of James Korby just before addressing the United Restaurant Workers of America picnic; Wolfe delivers a speech



# Connections



## Wolfe and Archie in Wartime

Written	Novella	Published
August 1942	<i>Not Quite Dead Enough</i> <sup>¶</sup>	1942
August 1943	<i>Booby Trap</i>	1944
June 1944	<i>Help Wanted, Male</i>	1949

<sup>¶</sup>Cramer's son became a bombardier

# Extension



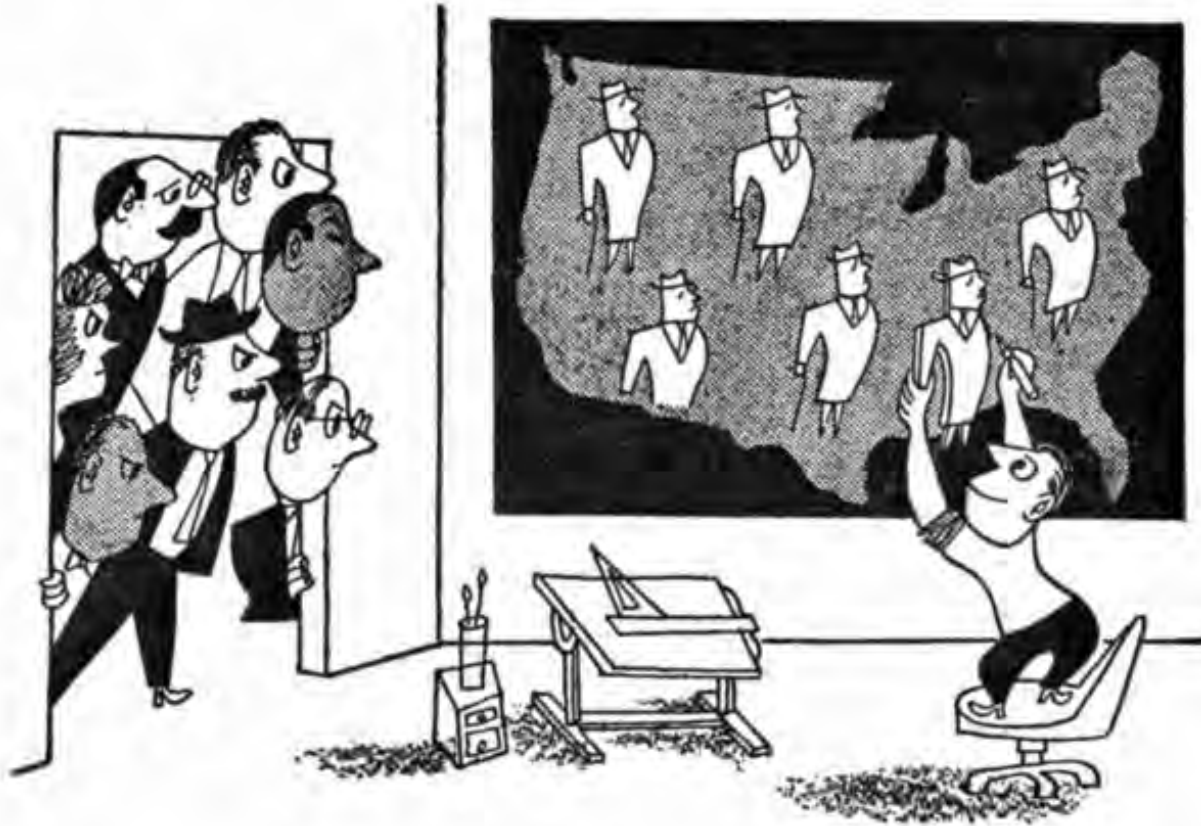
- In 1944, the WWB commissioned the Columbia University Bureau of Applied Social Research to analyze the treatment of minorities in American fiction.
- The results, showing widespread racial disparagement, led the WWB to create a play to convince writers to avoid racial stereotyping (e.g., radio shows such as *Amos 'n' Andy*).

# Extension



- Title: *The Myth that Threatens America*
- The myth: America is mostly Anglo-Saxon, white, native-born, and Protestant

# *The Myth that Threatens America*



Howard Sparber, illustration from *The Myth That Threatens America* (1945)

# *The Myth that Threatens America*



- **Single performance at Barbizon Plaza Hotel in New York on Jan. 11, 1945 for 600 radio & movie scriptwriters, artists, editors, theatrical producers, writers, & publishers**

106 Central Park South  
(Now Trump Parc Apts.)



# *The Myth that Threatens America*



- Opening of show by Rex Stout
- Skit called *Education, Please*, a parody based on Clifton Fadiman's radio show (*Information, Please*)
  - Panelists Moss Hart, Carl Van Doren, Bennett Cerf, & Gypsy Rose Lee on the need to respect minority groups
- Five speeches from famous personalities
  - Including Margaret Mead & the President of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce

# *The Myth that Threatens America*



## *Ol' Man Author<sup>+</sup>*

(based on *Ol' Man River*, by Oscar Hammerstein II and Jerome Kern)

- Hammerstein rewrote his lyrics to address four longstanding stereotypes:
  - “Drunken, pugnacious Irishman
  - Lazy, ignorant, crap-shooting Negro
  - Gangster Italian
  - Avaricious Jew”



# *The Myth that Threatens America*



*Ol' Man Author*

Partial Rendition by

- Amy Asch
- The Wolfe Pack's Wolferines:
  - Maggie Goodman
  - Bonnie Hiller
  - Emily Mikulewicz



# *The Myth that Threatens America*



- “Diverse intellectuals use showmanship to break down race prejudice.” A “sock performance” (*Variety*, Jan. 17, 1945)
- One of the Board’s “best examples of the group’s ability to enlist talented people from all fields.” Alan Green to Thomas Howell
- The Board’s “absolute high point of massed impact upon opinion makers.” Robert Landry to Thomas Howell

# Relevance



## Work Remains

*New York Times Aug. 6, 2012*

### Stuck on Stereotypes

Hispanic Viewers Are Still Waiting for Networks to Get It Right



Ed O'Neill and Sofia Vergara in ABC's highly rated "Modern Family." Ms. Vergara plays Gloria Delgado-Pritchett, a sexy Latina trophy wife.

By TANZINA VEGA  
and BILL CARTER

Sofia Vergara is probably the most recognizable Hispanic actress working in English-language television. She is one of the stars of "Modern Family," the highest-rated scripted show on network television, and she has parlayed her celebrity into commercials for brands like Pepsi and Cover Girl.

Despite her popularity, "Modern Family" is not a hit with Hispanic viewers. Out of its overall viewership of 12.5 million, "Modern Family" drew an average of only about 795,000 Hispanic viewers in the season. That audience accounts for only about 6 percent of the show's viewers — less than half of what you might expect given the 48 million Hispanic television viewers that Nielsen measures.

The same pattern can be seen on other top network shows: "Two and a Half Men" on CBS averaged 611,000 Hispanic viewers out of an average total of 14.6 million viewers. "Grey's Anatomy" on ABC averaged 583,000 out of 10.9 million. "Glee" on Fox averaged 518,000 out of 8.7 million. And "NCIS" on CBS averaged 509,000 out of 19.1 million.

The numbers encapsulate the problem facing English-language television executives and advertisers: they desperately want to appeal to the more than 50 million Latinos in the United States, especially those who are young, bilingual and bicultural, but those viewers seem to want very little to do with American English-language television.

They do, however, continue to watch Spanish-language networks in huge numbers. In May, on

the final night of the most recent season of "Modern Family," far more Hispanic viewers were watching the top Spanish language show that week, the telenovela "La Que No Podia Amar," on Univision, which attracted 5.2 million viewers.

"We're part of the fastest-growing demographic in the country," said Randy Falco, the president and chief executive of Univision. The company recently entered into a partnership with ABC News, which is owned by the Walt Disney Company, to create a 24-hour news channel to serve Hispanic viewers.

At this spring's upfronts, the meetings hosted by network executives to sell advertising airtime, there were nine presentations to advertisers by

*Continued on Page 8*



**Pause for Questions**

## Part 2

### *Rex Stout & the Writers' Board for World Government*

- Board created on July 3, 1949<sup>+</sup>
- Stout as chair; 20 members; over half were members of or worked closely with Writers' War Board
- Goal: transform the U.N. into a limited world government to ensure world peace and avoid WW III

# Work



- Stout proposed creating a play to increase public acceptance of a limited world government
- Title: *The Myth that Threatens the World*
- The myth: Nations can stay sovereign and stay at peace

# *The Myth that Threatens the World*



**Script by**

- **Oscar Hammerstein II**
- **Russel Crouse**
- **Carl Van Doren**
- **Clifton Fadiman**
- **Phyllis Merrill**

**Direction by Oscar Hammerstein II**

# *The Myth that Threatens the World*

Opening Night<sup>+</sup>  
December 4, 1949  
Coronet Theatre  
W 49 St.  
New York



“one of the most distinguished first nights in the history of the New York Stage” John McAleer

# Opening Night Cast



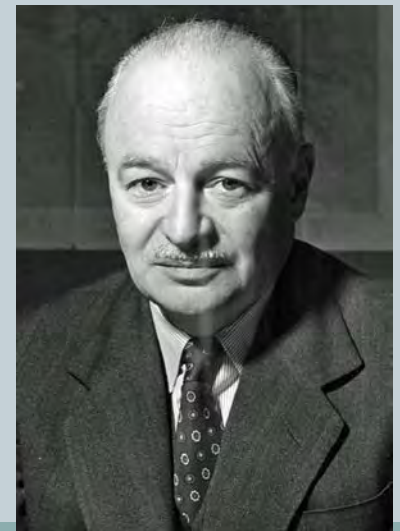
**Rex Stout**



**Eddie Albert**



**Marian Anderson**



**Brock Chisholm**



# Opening Night Cast



Russel Crouse



Alfred E. Driscoll



Clifton Fadiman



Henry Fonda

# Opening Night Cast



Oscar Hammerstein II



Annalee Jacoby  
(in WW II)



Cord Meyer, Jr.



George Olmsted

# Opening Night Cast



Robert E. Sherwood



Cast members from  
*South Pacific*

# *The Myth that Threatens the World*



- Stout gave prologue, expanding on the meaning of *The Myth*
- Fadiman served as M.C. and explained the need for a limited world government
- Microphone fails, Fadiman calls on skeptical electrician (Albert), and a series of dialogues with rest of cast follows

# *The Myth that Threatens the World*



- Warmly received, with much subsequent television, radio, and magazine coverage of topic
- Second performance on March 19, 1950 for 1,200 at the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel



# Other performances through 1953



**Baltimore**

**Boston**

**Chicago**

**Detroit**

**Hagerstown**

**Milwaukee**

**Minneapolis**

**New York**

**Philadelphia**

**Pittsburgh**

**San Francisco**

**Washington**



# Prominent local citizens and *South Pacific* cast members in each performance

## 'Pacific' Cast Takes a Global Role for Night

By Emmett Dedmon

The actors and actresses from Chicago's hit musical, "South Pacific," played an extra performance Sunday night at the Stevens Hotel—but they were not in their usual roles.

They were appearing in "The Myth That Threatens the World," a series of sketches arranged and directed by Oscar Hammerstein II for the Writers Board for World Government.

Their audience was a group of 1,000 Chicagoans, among them a good representation of the city's leaders of industry and society. All



Richard Eastham (right), star of the musicals, chats with Edison Dick and Mrs. Carroll Sutton in the balcony—during the performance of "The Myth That Threatens the World." (SUN-TIMES Photo)

in the balcony—that world gov-

Richard Eastham



Ray Walston



Myron McCormick

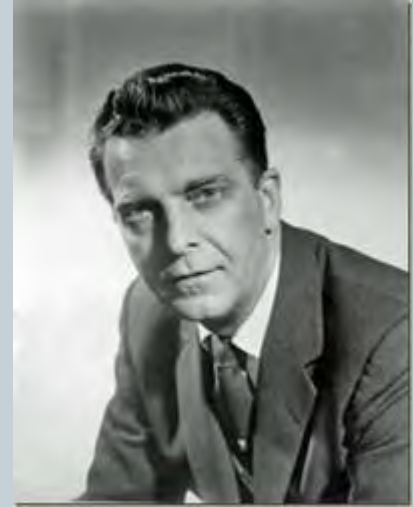
# Actors, journalists, and politicians in cast



**Ralph Bellamy**



**Walter  
Cronkite**



**Chet Huntley**



**Cornelia Otis  
Skinner**



**Adlai  
Stevenson**



# *The Myth that Threatens the World*



- Many attacks on Board and writers



- Many converts to cause, and money raised

# Rex Stout



A fearless, skilled, and  
fierce proponent for

- U.S. victory in WW II
- Ending racial prejudice
- Limited world government  
and world peace