
CRAIG
WHITE

The Idea of "CONSPIRACY" in McCarthy-Era Politics

By Richard M. Fried

On Sunday, January 29, 1950, former Vice President Henry A. Wallace made a mysterious telephone call to Joseph E. Davies. Just fourteen months after he had challenged Truman for the White House in 1948, the agitated Wallace insisted he must see the man he had so roundly denounced.

Davies, the one-time ambassador to Moscow, had like Wallace resisted the anti-Soviet hard line early in the Cold War, but unlike the former vice president, he was still friendly with Truman. Initially vague as to his urgency, when Davies "pressed" him, Wallace said "he was concerned over a possible military dictatorship which according to reliable sources was actually being planned by certain parties here in Washington and in New York."[1] Davies met with the President on February 3, though what they discussed went unrecorded.[2]

On its face, Wallace's mysterious military putsch sounds daft—as if he had in mind the plot of the sort of fanciful political novel common a decade later. But perhaps the onrush of a year's accumulating events had simply frightened him—as they frightened many Americans just five years after the end of World War II and the opening of the Atomic Age. For Wallace, the Truman administration's growing Cold War bellicosity distressed him throughout 1949, and escalating anti-communism at home reminded him of "the catastrophe which took place in Germany," namely the rise of repression under Hitler and the Nazis. He cited efforts in Connecticut to have speeches by leftists canceled—including one of his. The violence that greeted Paul Robeson's September concert in Peekskill, New York, outraged him with its "ugly

Joseph McCarthy (at right) on Meet the Press *with Lawrence Spivak, 1950, just two months after his February 9 speech at Wheeling, West Virginia, where he launched his anticommunist campaign.*

marks of the fascist spirit."[3] In December, the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) heard sensational testimony claiming that prominent New Dealers had rushed uranium shipments to Russia under wartime lend-lease, and assigning blame, inaccurately, to Wallace. All this, especially the last episode, and the imminent resignation from the Atomic Energy Commission of Chairman David E. Lilienthal, who had become an embattled symbol of liberalism and civilian control of the atom, led Wallace to detect an effort not only to "smear" the Rooseveltian past but "to place Atomic energy again in the hands of the military."[4] Possibly this was his warning; in transmitting it to Truman, perhaps Davies embellished it as talk of a looming "military dictatorship."

In early 1950, Wallace was not alone in suspecting that hostile influences working stealthily behind the scenes were threatening American freedom. On February 9, just six days after Davies met with Truman, Joseph R. McCarthy gave a speech over the Lincoln Day weekend in Wheeling, West Virginia, that opened his career as a national figure. His exact words remain in doubt, but some of his auditors asserted that he said: "While I cannot take the time to name all of the men in the State Department who have been named as members of the Communist Party and members of a spy ring, I have here in my hand a list of 205. . . ."

McCarthy was neither the sole Republican to garland Lincoln Day with partisan oratory nor the only one to raise the Communist issue, which had already gained prominence in American political discourse. However, his charges were the most melodramatic and specific (though he later waffled on what he had said in Wheeling). They led to a Senate subcommittee investigation of his rapidly shifting accusations and launched five years of political turmoil, during which the junior senator from Wisconsin was seldom out of the headlines. This article treats the circumstances of McCarthy's seizure of the Communist issue, a topic that interested his critics at the time, the journalists who had to follow and explain his oft-mutating charges, and those seeking to understand his tempestuous career. It was these early months of 1950 that launched what came to be known as the McCarthy era.

Henry Wallace (shown with President Truman) demonstrated the popular susceptibility to fears of conspiracy of the early 1950s when he telephoned presidential adviser Joseph E. Davies in January 1950. Wallace was wary of "a possible military dictatorship" in Washington.

In *The Cold War Comes to Main Street*, historian Lisle Rose ventured that Cold War tension did not stretch truly taut across America till late 1950, under the chill of the wintry debacle in Korea. He said that "public temperament at the end of 1949, though far from buoyant, . . . remained cautiously optimistic."[5] On the other hand, historian Eric F. Goldman labeled 1949 a "year of shocks," citing China's fall to the Communists, Soviet detonation of an A-bomb, and the two trials of former State Department official Alger Hiss. Early 1950 would bring a guilty verdict against Hiss; Truman's declaration that the U.S. would develop the H-bomb to regain a nuclear edge; and, on the day Davies saw Truman, news that scientist Klaus Fuchs had betrayed wartime Manhattan Project secrets to the Russians. These events suggest ample tension in early 1950.

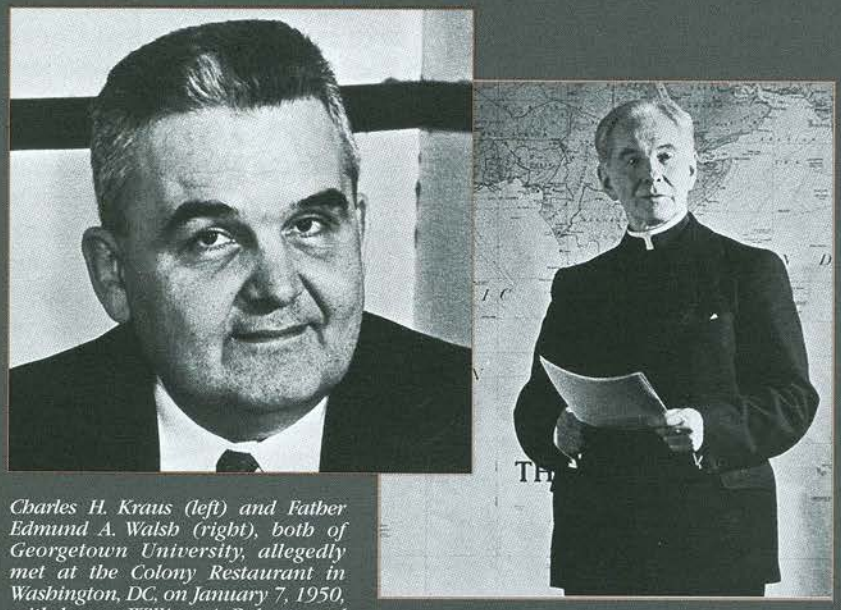
While Senator Joseph R. McCarthy and his supporters have routinely been described as indulging in "conspiracy" thinking, Wallace's worries hint that not just the Right engaged in conspiracy theory. Intriguingly, however, despite the temptation and perhaps even the plausibility of applying conspiracy theory to its conspiracy-hunting foes on the right, liberals and the Truman administration generally avoided such rhetoric. Explanations of the phenomenon of which McCarthy was at the center can be said to fall on an axis; at one end of it lie "historicist" explications and at the other are those that can be labeled "conspiracist." These terms are here used loosely. Historicist interpretations are those suggesting, with some sense of philosophical *sang-froid*, "we've been here before. This is nothing unprecedented." Conspiracist rationales argue, obviously, that certain interests, groups or individuals were, well, conspiring in some fashion.

McCarthyism did encompass a susceptibility to conspiracy theories. A key McCarthyite premise held that the nation's reverses in the Cold War were owing not to circumstances beyond our control but to the workings of a Communist conspiracy and those in the Roosevelt and Truman administrations who, wittingly or not, tolerated it. The query "Who Lost China?" was central to McCarthyite rhetoric. The other 1949 shocks, the Soviet A-bomb and the

Hiss trials, stimulated similar conspiracist queries. The recent VENONA revelations—the code-name for decryptions of Soviet wartime cable traffic by U.S. Army signal intelligence—suggest there was more to the anti-Communist "hysteria" than liberals who bandied that term about would have imagined. Several people named before the House Un-American Activities Committee and once deemed "martyrs" turn out to have circulated in the nether world of Soviet agents and spies.[6]

Since conspiracy theories constituted the political software of many cycles of American politics, it would be no surprise if either side, pro-McCarthy or anti-, had used them. But most conspiracy-theorizing came from the Right. That is both logical and obvious: to the Right the problem *was* conspiracy. Some even embraced this disparaging label. Congressman Charles Kersten (R-Wis.), McCarthy's ally, confessed: "I am one of those . . . who believes that there is considerable merit to the 'conspiratorial theory of history' in regard to the loss of China to the Reds."[7]

Yet if the efforts of McCarthy's *opponents* to search for conspiratorial answers for his rise generally proved inconclusive, it was not because those on the Left were strangers to that mode of argument. In the 1930s they labeled foes of the New Deal part of a plutocratic conspiracy. In that age of probes, the Left applauded Senator Gerald Nye's investigation of World War I "merchants of death," Senator Hugo Black's of lobbying against the regulation of utilities holding companies, and Senator Robert M. La Follette, Jr.'s inquest into the use of labor spies and industrial munitions against workers. Indeed, in the 1950s some members of the establishment viewed current excesses by Red-hunters like McCarthy not with approval—for few endorsed him—but with some equanimity. Recalling earlier inquiries that tormented opponents of the New Deal, such onlookers saw a certain poetic justice. Thus, John J. McCloy, former high commissioner for Germany and then chairman of the Chase National Bank, tweaked Supreme Court Justice Felix Frankfurter by noting that conservatives could remember "how they were harassed and their motives maligned by a lot of zealots in the Roosevelt days. . . . So when McCarthy's bully boys go to work, these people sit back with a certain sense of satisfaction."[8]



Charles H. Kraus (left) and Father Edmund A. Walsh (right), both of Georgetown University, allegedly met at the Colony Restaurant in Washington, DC, on January 7, 1950, with lawyer William A. Roberts and Sen. Joseph McCarthy to discuss the senator's reelection campaign issues. At the meeting, the story goes, McCarthy's Red-baiting campaign was born when international scholar Walsh pointed to anticommunism as the time's most compelling political issue.

These 1930s explorations provided grist for a sort of muckraking journalism that continued after the war. The persevering militancy of critics and dissenters such as left-wing journalists I. F. Stone, George Seldes, and Carey McWilliams warrants attention. Seldes, for example, had espied in the discoveries made by New Deal–era congressional inquests the plottings of would-be fascists led by corporate plutocrats and abetted by a pro-business, pro-fascist kept press. He detailed such views in his journal *In Fact* and such books as *Facts and Fascism*, published in 1943, and *1000 Americans*, in 1947. In a somewhat similar vein, Carey McWilliams in 1948 tried to explain anti-Semitism as "a favorite weapon of proved efficiency in the socioeconomic conflicts of a class-riven society. Whatever else anti-Semitism is or may have been it is today a weapon of reaction." In his 1950 *Witch Hunt*, published just after McCarthy emerged on the national scene, McWilliams argued that the emerging postwar "economic crisis" was "feeding the fears . . . manipulated to undermine the public's belief in freedom."[9] Such left-wing voices as these implied that concrete economic interests might underlie the upsurge of anti-Communist politics.

But by the 1950s, most mainstream liberals tended to forsake harsher sorts of anti-business rhetoric. With the end of New Deal programs, the experience of waging World War II, and the new postwar political landscape, liberalism redefined itself. An emphasis on economic growth—often shared with those who held more conservative political and economic views—tended to damp the combative political style that accompanied the New Deal.[10] It is surprising, perhaps, given Truman's peppery, populist campaign against "selfish" Republican interests in 1948, that few Democrats talked much about economic interests in connection with McCarthy and what he represented. They willingly envisioned him as corrupt, but if they saw him as a lackey of certain groups, these were more often defined in terms of their intellectual menace than their economic might. Loosely Marxist or even populist invective was out;

among liberal intellectuals a more Freudian or sociological turn was in.

Some McCarthy foes did expose his economic ties and sources of support. Liberal journalists, both in his home state and nationally, uncovered intriguing details such as his aversion to paying income taxes. Some sleuths even hoped to uncover ties with the Al Capone gang.[11] In the Senate, his efforts to repeal wartime sugar controls won him the nickname of the Pepsi Cola Kid, and his activities respecting housing policy were thought to involve pecuniary corruption. These financial peccadilloes duly impressed McCarthy's liberal opponents but had little traction among the public at large.[12]

Another anticlimactic set of charges with conspiracist nuances were efforts to link the senator with hardcore isolationist or pro-Nazi constituents—or even real Nazis. When he cried foul against the American prosecutors of German soldiers charged with the Malmedy Massacre, no other explanation made sense to critics. (In the December 1944 Battle of the Bulge, at this Belgian crossroads, German SS troops had cold-bloodedly machine-gunned more than eighty American soldiers captured during their counteroffensive. This atrocity subsequently became the focus of a war-crimes trial, and after that there were charges that American captors had brutalized some German prisoners to gain confessions.)[13] McCarthy was commonly tarred as an isolationist, though his voting record was nothing of the sort.[14] Charges of "isolationism," a staple of partisan warfare since the late 1930s,[15] continued to punctuate mid-century political rhetoric. In McCarthy's first weeks of notoriety, the administration invoked the sacred phrase "bipartisan foreign policy." Truman derided McCarthy and two other GOP critics as the Kremlin's "greatest assets." He lamented to Michigan Senator Arthur H. Vandenberg, the *beau ideal* of bipartisanship, that the demise of that policy "would mean but one thing—victory for Russia in Europe." Other critics also branded McCarthy a stalking horse for isolationism.[16]

Perhaps the most aromatic whiff of conspiracy issuing from McCarthy's crusade pertained to its origins. The "plot," however, was religious, not economic. The great foundation myth of the McCarthy Era was the "Dinner at the Colony" narrative. This story held that by early 1950 McCarthy, touched by scandal and politically adrift, desperately needed an issue as his 1952 reelection campaign neared. William A. Roberts, a liberal Catholic attorney who had befriended McCarthy, and a Georgetown University political scientist, Charles Kraus, who worked part-time in Joe's office, tried to steer the brash, unstable rookie to a more statesmanlike demeanor. They introduced him to Father Edmund A. Walsh, founder and rector of Georgetown's School of Law and Diplomacy. Walsh was an expert on the global Communist threat and a scholar of a geopolitical bent. While aiding Central European famine victims after World War I, he had seen the Red Menace close up.

The fullest version of the meeting at the Colony Restaurant in Washington, D.C., on January 7, 1950, is by Eric F. Goldman in *The Crucial Decade*, first published in 1956. As Goldman told it, at dinner the senator avowed his need for an issue. Roberts recommended the St. Lawrence Seaway. Not enough sex, McCarthy replied, proposing instead a generous old-age pension program recalling the Townsend Plan, a popular panacea of the 1930s. Fiscally unsound, the others contended. Father Walsh reportedly raised the issue of the Red Menace, and McCarthy waxed enthusiastic. A month later came his Wheeling speech, which commenced the era that bears his name.[17]

What makes this *conspiracy*? All four diners were Catholic, two were from Georgetown University, and Father Walsh, it was tempting to presume, spoke for the Church on communism. Observers would soon remark and foes lament that Joe had heavy Catholic support. Catholics were more pro-McCarthy than any other religious group but not dramatically so, and some, but not all, leaders of the American church cheered him.[18] This—plus the waning of Democratic Party allegiances among once-faithful Catholic voters now heeding Republican charges that FDR had sold Eastern Europe "down the river" to Stalin—frightened Democratic loyalists. In addition, some liberals shared ancient fears that Catholics,

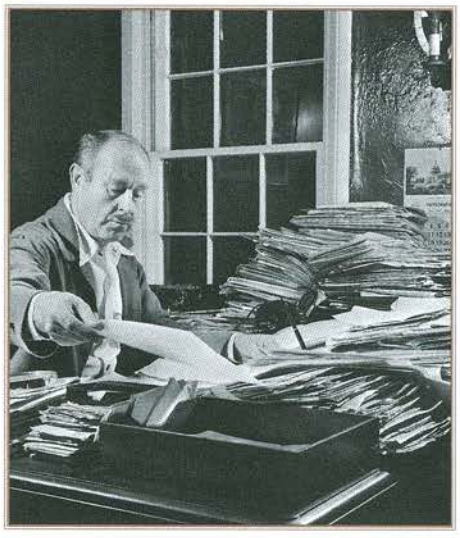
William A. Roberts, shown second from right in a later National Highway Program meeting with President Eisenhower. Roberts was a principal organizer of the 1950 Colony dinner meeting with Joseph McCarthy.

under the influence of the Vatican, were not political free agents.

Scholars have discounted the "Dinner at the Colony" story. In his book on McCarthy in his home-state context, Michael O'Brien pointed out that in November 1949, two months *before* the purported dinner, McCarthy subjected a newspaper publisher who was his leading home-state critic to a telling barrage of red-baiting and continued to ply the Communist issue right up to January 7 and beyond. If the Colony dinner occurred, O'Brien argued, it had little consequence: clearly it did not introduce McCarthy to the Red issue. In a study of McCarthy and the Catholic Church, Father Donald F. Crosby dismissed the story as uncorroborated, part of the "McCarthy legend" first published by Joe's severest press critic, the liberal columnist Drew Pearson. Though conceding that Walsh probably had met McCarthy, Father Crosby emphasized that Walsh angrily denied Pearson's story (though not publicly) and dared Pearson to substantiate it. Recent McCarthy biographer Arthur Herman compared the fable to a claim McCarthy once made of getting a late-night visit from a military intelligence officer who gave him an FBI file detailing Red subversion: the Colony story had "no more basis in hard fact" than McCarthy's tale.[19]

Yet there *is* documentary evidence for the dinner. Eric Goldman interviewed two of the principals, Roberts and Kraus, for his account. Roberts had been Pearson's source, and as his lawyer would soon represent the columnist in a nasty $5.1 million libel-slander suit against McCarthy. Logically Roberts, now McCarthy's foe, would enjoy discrediting him with the Colony Dinner story. In 1954 he even gave a speech about it, speaking as an eyewitness. When Goldman queried him, Roberts stated that Professor Kraus arranged the affair; they met at Roberts's office, went to dinner, and then returned to the office. At that point, when Kraus was not present, the three men continued talking. Walsh, as Roberts remembered it, said that Communist infiltration would "be certain to be an active issue two years later. I do not recall that he specifically recommended that McCarthy should adopt it as a sole or principal issue."[20]

If, as one might argue, Roberts was an interested witness, there was another—Walsh himself. To columnist Marquis Childs, Walsh conceded he had met McCarthy at "a dinner party" and they chatted about "a fixed pension for persons reaching sixty-five years of age." He did not mention discussing communism and termed "the fantastic report that it was I who was his intimate counselor in his campaign against the State Department" the product of an "evil mind." While at times Pearson did insinuate a deeper role for Walsh—and Georgetown—rather than simply mention



Columnist Drew Pearson, McCarthy's harshest press critic, broke the story of the Colony dinner, during which Father Edmund Walsh allegedly counseled McCarthy that communist infiltration would continue to be the top domestic concern in the coming years and thus a good campaign issue.

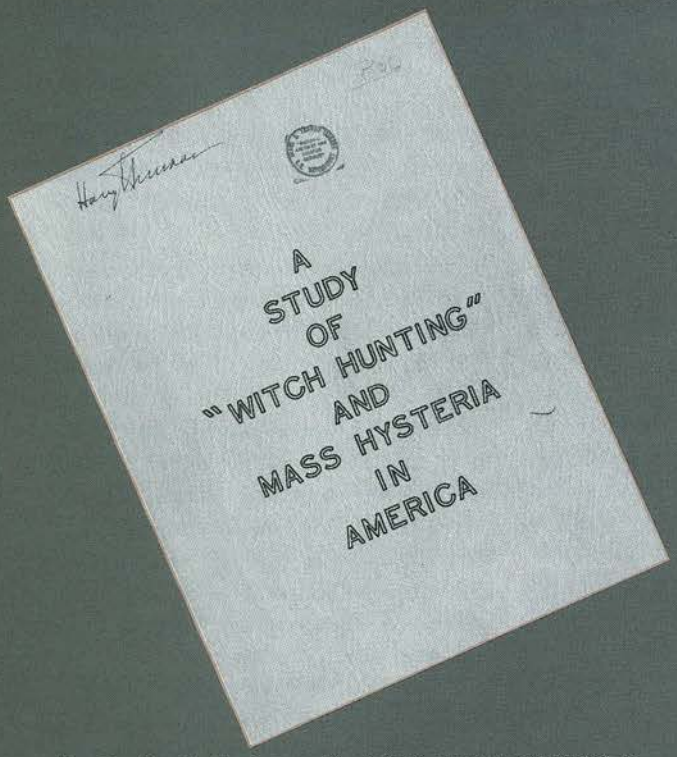
of the Communist issue—Walsh denied too much, namely being Joe's "intimate counselor"; and his recall of McCarthy's pension scheme is striking validation of a detail of the legend.[21]

Father Walsh's defenders sometimes stressed that his focus lay on geopolitics and international, not domestic, communism, as the title of his book *Total Power* might suggest.[22] However, he did *not* ignore the homegrown threat. From the 1930s on, he lectured at the FBI academy on such nonglobal topics as "Recent Social Changes" and "Social Trends in Police Work" and had a long-term friendly relationship with FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover. He also approvingly observed Congressman Hamilton Fish, Jr.'s investigation of Communist activities in the early 1930s and watched closely the 1949 spy trial of government functionary Judith Coplon and Soviet diplomat Valentin Gubitchev.[23]

The most compelling proof of the story comes from a witness hitherto unheard—Charles H. Kraus. When Goldman queried him, Kraus said: "there was such a dinner" of the four men, at the Colony, but most accounts of it had a "bias one way or the other," painting a picture "either black or white." Kraus suspected that "the real picture is actually gray" and was "not at all sure that this dinner was the real key" to McCarthy's anti-Communist crusade. Kraus remembered that at dinner Walsh "couldn't talk too much because Roberts and Mc[Carthy] did so much talking."[24]

Still, it would be wrong to make too much of the "Dinner at the Colony." Even if Walsh did utter the magic word "communism," it would have been no revelation to McCarthy. The episode was not part of some sort of bargain-basement Popish Plot. Yet Georgetown University feared precisely that sort of perception, and not without grounds. In 1953, for instance, a shrill editorial in a North Carolina paper included the quote: "The secret of McCarthy's strength is the backing of the Roman Catholic hierarchy and the Vatican. He only fires the guns that are made for him by Father Edmund Walsh." In one of his many warnings about how Catholic power threatened American democracy, Paul Blanshard decried McCarthy's "campaign of disgraceful vilification" and Church support for it.[25] Some of McCarthy's foes were nonplused to receive fan mail from bigots. One letter to an early Democratic critic of the Wisconsin senator cautioned: "The Charley McCarthy of the Vatican is as bad if not worse than one that hews the Kremlin line"; another warned that "the Vatican boys hope to run Washington some day."[26] These were minority views, and it is hard to say what impact the "Dinner at the Colony" story had on such fevered souls, but the story had perhaps the longest staying power of any of the legends that attached to McCarthy, and it does qualify, if only mildly, as a conspiracy theory.

In the Truman White House a more historicist explication of the McCarthy eruption emerged. It blamed the public's



PREFACE

The history of the American Republic is replete with instances of attempts to compel unwavering adherence to dogma - the status quo - whether it be economic, political, social or religious. Frequently, this defensive and retrenching approach to the problems of our democracy has been accompanied by widespread mass hysteria. On occasion, public excitation has intensified to the point where historians have identified this social phenomenon as a "witch-hunt."

It is the purpose of this study to investigate and report upon the various manifestations of mass hysteria and "witch-hunting" in American history, with a view to analyzing the deep-seated causes and identifying the symptoms leading to past out-croppings which have endangered our free institutions. In so doing, we may achieve a better understanding of the nature of the present public anxiety.

Periods of national stress have come and gone before. Their departure has been hastened only when the people have been restored to their normal senses. Armed with this perspective, Americans who may be inclined to yield to the easy temptation to follow the mob in dealing with the current "Red Scare" may instead be persuaded to act according to the

The President's Air Force aide Robert Landry responded to Truman's desire for a clearer understanding of outbreaks of conspiracy thinking in America's past by drafting a report on the subject. Here is the cover of Truman's own copy of the report, and the first page of its Preface.

susceptibility to conspiracy theories. Widely read in history, Truman often rummaged through it for lessons. At various times the President rode with McCarthy's punches, singed him with rhetoric, or tried to fight him by indirect means. To help himself and his allies understand their travails, he had his staff compose a paper to explain it. The project actually began before McCarthy rose to prominence, triggered the year before by disturbing anti-subversive measures proposed in Congress. Truman's aide Robert Landry answered the President's wish for a chronicle of America's periodic bouts with intolerance and witch-hunting. His 170-page memorandum began with the Salem witch uproar, forged through the Alien and Sedition Acts, anti-Masonic and Know-Nothing outbreaks, anti-abolitionism, the Ku Klux Klan, the Red Scare and Palmer Raids, and indicated that McCarthyism was but one more recurrence of a germ that lay dormant between bouts of ravaging the body politic.[27] This sprawling tome was unusable. Presidential aide Stephen J. Spingarn pruned it, and then Kenneth Hechler wrote a still-shorter "digest."[28] It suggested that America had eventually recovered from previous fevers and, it implied, would do so once again. To an administration and party that had so little traction against McCarthyism, that theory had a reassuring ring. It said: the matter is out of our hands; the cure lies with time's ministrations; the problem is popular suggestibility. Truman gave out this historical study to visitors and other interested parties, particularly to explain the onrushing drive to enact fierce anti-Communist legislation in the summer of 1950, which culminated in passage, over his veto, of the McCarran Internal Security Act.[29]

The 1950 elections reinforced Truman's sense of history's cyclicality. McCarthy had stumped for several candidates who gained election to the U.S. Senate. The Communist issue was a noisy presence in many campaigns. It helped Congressman Richard M. Nixon win a Senate seat, thanks to the prestige earned from his pursuit of Alger Hiss during hearings of the House Un-American Activity Committee. Truman found traces in the campaigns of "an earnest effort to bring religious prejudices into this situation" and asserted that "the Republicans have always profited when there has been an anti-Catholic, anti-Jewish and anti-negro hysteria in the country. It is a terrible thing when that happens, although it seems to be necessary that we have periodical waves of that sort of thing in this country."[30] (Although Truman's reading of the election was historicist, it contained an element of conspiracism as well.)

Eric Goldman implied a variant of this people-are-to-blame theme in *The Crucial Decade*, arguing that Americans were prone to anxieties fired by the "shocks" of 1949 and aftershocks of 1950. It may seem out of bounds to cite a theory published in 1956, after all the tumult and furor, but such views did not emerge in a vacuum. As early as March 21, 1950, Richard Strout of the *Christian Science Monitor* had anticipated such a conceptualization, noting a "growing feeling" in Washington that McCarthy profited from the public's "irritation and dismay" triggered by the Soviet A-bomb, China's fall, the Hiss case, and other jolts.[31] This able newsman may have reached these views independently, but his approach dovetailed rather nicely with the interests and perceptions of Dean Acheson's State Department.

Ultimately, the liberal take on McCarthyism turned conspiracy on its ear, making "conspiracy theory" itself a villain. In the

McCarthy era and after, liberals often derided the right wing with such labels as "paranoid style" or "conspiracy theory." McCarthyites were usually not depicted as representing selfish economic interests, though there was mention of Texas oil tycoons and downwardly-mobile old aristocrats. McCarthy supporters were less often characterized as greedy than as hag-ridden by status anxiety, if not more seriously deranged.[32]

The distaste for conspiracy theories had undeniable logic. Their pedigree reached to Hitler, and, for intellectuals, Nazism was the era's governing bad dream. Thus, in the central intellectual *J'accuse* against McCarthy, the collection of essays entitled *The New American Right*, conspiracy-hunting was criticized. The book was published in 1955 and included work by Daniel Bell, Richard Hofstadter, Nathan Glazer, David Riesman, and others. These authors collectively were in flight from "ideology." To them it was ideologies—fascism and communism—that had produced so much recent misery. Critics of these essayists have also pointed out that they were in retreat from "the people," the unwashed and untutored who were persuadable by grand ideologies that offered conspiracy theories and scapegoats.[33]

This liberal stance was only natural: since they were accused of abetting if not belonging to a Red conspiracy, it made sense to dismiss talk of conspiracy theory as pathology. At the same time, most liberals conceded that the Communists, some of them at least, were part of a conspiracy. Certainly that explains the support some liberals lent to harsher elements of official anti-communism—the 1947 loyalty program, the 1950 McCarran Act, and the 1954 Communist Control Act. Justifying his role in framing the latter measure, liberal Senator Hubert H. Humphrey asserted that "every American wants to make it clear once and for all that Communism is a criminal conspiracy." Senator Paul Douglas stressed that after all "we have had some Alger Hisses in government."[34]

Some elements of the argument in *The New American Right* seemed validated in 1954 when Republicans invoked conservative rationales for the need to discipline McCarthy—citing the damage he did to institutions. That was a strategic sense asserted by perhaps his most effective foes, the National Committee for an Effective Congress, and shared with its allies.[35] Whether McCarthy's censure and decline occurred soon enough, and, crucially, whether getting rid of McCarthy truly cured the damage done by the broader phenomenon misnamed "McCarthyism," determines how much intellectual credit we accord to this set of theoretical and tactical ideas.

In the end, one could argue that liberals never found a good point of leverage against McCarthy. Tsvetan Todorov has offered (unwittingly) a useful historical parallel in his suggestion that the Aztecs' leader Montezuma failed to deal effectively with Cortez's conquistadores when they invaded Mexico out of a lack of understanding: no available model or portent accurately fit circumstances, and communication—and with it self-defense—crumbled.[36] Perhaps to argue that McCarthy's opponents' key problem was, similarly, comprehension puts the cognitive cart before the historical horse. Still, according to critical historians, the Truman administration and its allies had maneuvered themselves into a position that offered little defense against a more excessive version of their own beliefs. As Richard Pells tellingly put it, "postwar liberals had functioned as modern Dr. Frankensteins." McCarthyism was an unwanted outgrowth of their own "militant anti-Communism."[37] If the criticism is valid that this, at bottom, was the liberal bind, the question is whether this was a tragedy based on this root error of liberalism or, to use a term popular in the 1950s, one of liberalism's unavoidable ironies. ✦

Communist cavalry riding down Nanking Road after the Communist takeover of Shanghai, September 29, 1949. This consequential development, and others, such as the Alger Hiss case, were part of several political "shocks" in that era that fed popular ideas of Communist conspiracy.

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Notes

[1] Joseph E. Davies to Matthew Connelly, Jan. 31, 1950; Davies memo, "Strictly Confidential and Personal," n.d. [ca. Jan. 31, 1950], both in box 26, Joseph E. Davies MSS, Library of Congress (LC), Washington, DC. On Davies and Truman (and a reference to the Wallace episode), see Elizabeth Kimball MacLean, *Joseph E. Davies: Envoy to the Soviets* (1982), pp. 173, 176–177. Davies did not share Wallace's urgency. Wallace called on January 29; Davies sent his note two days later and called for an appointment on February 2, four days after talking with Wallace.

[2] Phone card [Feb. 2, 1950], President's Personal File 869, White House Central Files, Harry S. Truman Library (HSTL), Independence, MO; Presidential Appointments File: Daily Presidential Appointments (Feb. 3, 1950), Matthew J. Connelly Files, Harry S. Truman Papers, ibid.

[3] Henry A. Wallace to Truman, Apr. 8, 1949; Wallace to Benjamin Ginzburg, Apr. 11, 1949; Wallace to Gov. Thomas E. Dewey, Sept. 8, 1949, all box 46, Wallace MSS, University of Iowa, Iowa City.

[4] Eleanor Roosevelt to Wallace, Dec. 21, 1949; Francis E. Walter to Wallace, Dec. 23, 1949; Wallace to Eleanor Roosevelt, Jan. 15, 1950; Wallace to Albert Einstein, Jan. 30, 1950, all ibid.

[5] Lisle Rose, *The Cold War Comes to Main Street: America in 1950* (1999), p. 5; cf. pp. 291, 309, and passim.

[6] John Earl Haynes and Harvey Klehr, *VENONA: Decoding Soviet Espionage in America* (1999); Allen Weinstein and Alexander Vassiliev, *The Haunted Wood: Soviet Espionage in America—The Stalin Era* (1999).

[7] Charles J. Kersten to John B. Oakes, Aug. 7, 1953, Reel 2, Oakes MSS, State Historical Society of Wisconsin (SHSW), Madison, WI.

[8] John J. McCloy to Felix Frankfurter, Mar. 8, 1954, box 25, Frankfurter MSS, LC.

[9] Carey McWilliams, *A Mask for Privilege: Anti-Semitism in America* (1948), pp. 87–88; idem., *Witch Hunt: The Revival of Heresy* (1950), p. 13 (cf. p. 7).

[10] For the postwar alterations of liberalism, see Alan Brinkley, *The End of Reform: New Deal Liberalism in Recession and War* (1995), pp. 265–271; Richard H. Pells, *The Liberal Mind in a Conservative Age* (1985), p. 55 and passim.

[11] Unsigned "Preliminary Report," n.d. [1951], box G 221 (1st of 3), Drew Pearson Papers, Lyndon B. Johnson Library, Austin, TX; Robert Fleming, memorandum, "McCarthy from Pearson's Attorney," Aug. 8, 1951, box 3, Fleming MSS, SHSW.

[12] See the early, muckraking biography by two liberal journalists: Jack Anderson and Ronald W. May, *McCarthy—The Man, the Senator, the "Ism"* (1952). For a cooperative journalistic effort to unearth McCarthy's finances, see Robert Fleming to "Murrey" [Marder], July 6, 1950, box 1, Fleming MSS. Such charges may have had an indirect role in McCarthy's downfall: one of the grounds for his censure was his contumacy toward members of a subcommittee assigned to investigate charges lodged by Senator William E. Benton—some of which dealt with McCarthy's financial exploits.

[13] On Malmedy, see Thomas C. Reeves, *The Life and Times of Joe McCarthy: A Biography* (1982), chap. 9; but cf. Justus D. Doenecke, *Not to the Swift: The Old Isolationists in the Cold War Era* (1979), pp. 143–144.

[14] Two fine biographies chronicle McCarthy's financial and other foibles, but with a sobriety lacking in some accounts of Joe's journalistic contemporaries. Reeves, cited above; and David M. Oshinsky, *A Conspiracy So Immense: The World of Joe McCarthy* (1983).

[15] Richard M. Fried, *Nightmare in Red: The McCarthy Era in Perspective* (1990), pp. 57–58; Leo P. Ribuffo, *The Old Christian Right: The Protestant Far Right from the Great Depression to the Cold War* (1983); Geoffrey S. Smith, *To Save a Nation: American Counter-subversives, the New Deal, and the Coming of World War II* (1973).

[16] Truman to Arthur Vandenberg, Mar. 27, 1950, Vandenberg MSS, William L. Clements Library, Ann Arbor, MI. Some liberals also linked McCarthy with the so-called China Lobby, an informal grouping of mostly but not exclusively Republicans who assailed the Truman administration for insufficient support for the Nationalist regime led by Jiang Ji-shek and softness toward the Chinese Communists under Mao Zedong. See Reeves, *Life and Times of Joe McCarthy*, pp. 219–221; Ross Y. Koen, *The China Lobby in American Politics* (1974).

[17] Eric F. Goldman, *The Crucial Decade—And After: America, 1945–1960* (1961), pp. 139–141. Some of Goldman's rendition of the dialogue at the meeting closely parallels that found in Jack Anderson and Ronald W. May's *McCarthy: The Man, the Senator, the "Ism"* p. 172. Anderson worked as a legman for Drew Pearson.

[18] Donald F. Crosby, SJ, *God, Church, and Flag: Senator Joseph R. McCarthy and the Catholic Church, 1950–1957* (1978).

[19] Michael O'Brien, *McCarthy and McCarthyism in Wisconsin* (1980), pp. 91–97; Crosby, *God, Church, and Flag*, pp. 47–52; Arthur Herman, *Joseph McCarthy* (2000), pp. 96–97. Drew Pearson first published the Colony story in the March 14, 1950, *Washington Post*.

[20] Goldman, *Crucial Decade—And After*, p. 348; clipping, *Washington Post*, Feb. 16, 1954, folder 766, Walsh MSS, Georgetown University; speech, "McCarthyism: a New Cycle," n.d. [1954], box 5, William A. Roberts MSS, SHSW; Roberts to Goldman, Sept. 9, 1955, box 70, Goldman MSS, LC. At this point, Goldman was relying on a version of the dinner reported in Jack Anderson and Ronald W. May's *McCarthy: The Man, the Senator, the "Ism"*, pp. 172–173, a critical biography published for use in the 1952 campaign.

[21] Hunter Guthrie, SJ, to Julia J. McCormick, Apr. 24, 1950, folder 112, Walsh MSS, Georgetown University; and Edmund A. Walsh, SJ, to Marquis Childs, Apr. 25, 1951, box 9, Childs MSS, SHSW.

[22] For a sampling of his work, see Anna Watkins, ed., *Footnotes to History: Selected Speeches and Writings of Edmund A. Walsh, S.J.* (1990).

[23] J. Edgar Hoover to Walsh, May 3, 1947; Walsh to Hoover, July 7, 1937, both in folder 18, Walsh MSS, SHSW; Edward B. Bunn, SJ, to Hoover, Nov 8, 1956, folder 114, ibid.; Walsh to Hamilton Fish, Oct. 18, 1932, folder 55; Walsh to Hugh Clegg, July 5, 1949, folder 103, ibid.

[24] Charles H. Kraus to Eric F. Goldman, Sept. 22, 1955, box 70, Goldman MSS, LC. If Roberts was right that the substantive discussion of communism occurred after Kraus had left, then Kraus's doubts carry somewhat less weight.

[25] Clipping, *Winston-Salem Journal & Sentinel*, July 12, 1953, folder 768, Walsh MSS; Paul Blanshard, *Communism, Democracy, and Catholic Power* (1951), p. 299.

[26] Letters to William E. Benton, Aug 7, 1951, box 1, William E. Benton MSS, SHSW.

[27] Robert B. Landry, "A Study of 'Witch-Hunting' and Mass Hysteria in America," Oct. 31, 1949 (esp. p. iv), "Hysteria" folder, box 123, PSF General File, HSTL; memorandum, R. B. Landry for the President, Oct. 31, 1949, Robert B. Landry folder (box 126), PSF General File, HSTL.

[28] Memorandum, Truman to George Elsey, Feb 2, 1950, George Elsey folder, PSF General File, HSTL; Elsey, Memorandum for the President, Aug. 18, 1950, Robert B. Landry folder, ibid.; Ken Hechler, *Working with Truman: A Personal Memoir of the White House Years* (1996), pp. 185–186.

[29] Notes on Cabinet Meeting, Aug. 22, 1950, box 2, Matthew J. Connelly Papers, HSTL; Charles G. Ross to Norman Thomas, Aug. 28, 1950, box 61, Norman Thomas MSS, New York Public Library.

[30] Truman to Max Lowenthal, Dec. 15, 1950, Max Lowenthal folder (box 127), PSF, General File, HSTL.

[31] *Christian Science Monitor*, Mar. 21, 1950. See also Lawrence N. Strout, *Covering McCarthyism: How the* Christian Science Monitor *Handled Joseph R. McCarthy, 1950–1954* (1999). Richard Strout for many years also wrote the *New Republic*'s "TRB" column.

[32] The most concise treatment of the intellectual origins and context of the socio-psychological critique of McCarthy and his following is in Ribuffo, *The Old Christian Right*, pp. 237ff.

[33] Michael Paul Rogin, *The Intellectuals and McCarthy: The Radical Specter* (1967).

[34] Hubert H. Humphrey to Anabel Bancroft, Aug. 18, 1954, box 104, Humphrey MSS, Minnesota Historical Society, St. Paul, MN; Paul Douglas to author, Apr. 23, 1971.

[35] NCEC insiders took as a valuable theoretical model Hannah Arendt's 1951 book *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. Some of them found a useful historical parallel in the insouciance of German conservatives facing the challenge of Hitler. Author's interview with Maurice Rosenblatt, June 27, 1967; Robert Griffith, *The Politics of Fear: Joseph R. McCarthy and the Senate* (1970), p. 225.

[36] Tzvetan Todorov, *The Conquest of America: the Question of the Other*, translated by Richard Howard (1983), pp. 71–79 and passim.

[37] Richard H. Pells, *The Liberal Mind in a Conservative Age: American Intellectuals in the 1940s and 1950s* (1985), p. 339.