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**McCARTHY RECONSIDERED:
A Look at How the Historiography of Joseph McCarthy and
McCarthyism has Changed in Light of New Information**

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McCARTHY RECONSIDERED:

**A LOOK AT HOW THE HISTORIOGRAPHY OF JOSEPH McCARTHY
AND McCARTHYISM HAS CHANGED IN LIGHT OF NEW INFORMATION**

by

R. Bruce Bonham

**Thesis submitted to
the School of Graduate Studies and Research
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
M.A. degree in History.**

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ABSTRACT

McCARTHY RECONSIDERED:

A LOOK AT HOW THE HISTORIOGRAPHY OF JOSEPH McCARTHY AND McCARTHYISM HAS CHANGED IN LIGHT OF NEW INFORMATION.

**R. Bruce Bonham,
University of Ottawa, 2001**

**Supervisor
Professor Brian Loring Villa**

The immediate origins of this thesis may be traced to the release by the United States Government in 1995 and 1996 of the Venona files, some 2,900 Soviet intelligence messages intercepted and decoded during the Cold War period by the National Security Agency and its U.S. Army predecessor, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the Central Intelligence Agency and the British and allied services. These deciphered messages confirm that at least 350 Soviet espionage agents in the United States, including many in the U.S. government, had covert ties to Soviet intelligence agencies by the 1940s, much as Senator Joseph McCarthy had charged. This, of course, reawakened my interest in McCarthy and McCarthyism.

In the chapters that follow, I first examine some of the historiography on McCarthyism and point out recent revelations about individual espionage cases, which show that many of McCarthy's charges need to be revisited due to new and ever-changing evidence. Following this introduction, the first chapter deals with the Venona project, what it has revealed and areas that require further research. In the second chapter, I step back to recreate what I think were the roots of McCarthyism, starting with the Russian Revolution and moving through time to the McCarthy era, presenting important incidents and legislation along the way that helped to create a situation in

which the Senator could thrive. In the third chapter, I present a re-enactment of what happened after McCarthy arrived on the scene, before discussing important connections the Senator had with J. Edgar Hoover and the FBI, when McCarthy first became a communist hunter and how television may have played a large role in the Senator's demise. The fourth chapter deals with McCarthy's early days and how he has been viewed very differently in different quarters. In the fifth chapter, I discuss the important impact the presidents during the McCarthy era, Harry S Truman and Dwight David Eisenhower, had on the actions of the Senator and how, in fact, they both played major roles in the creation and maintenance of McCarthy and McCarthyism during the period he loomed large in American politics. Finally, I present conclusions about McCarthy and those who impacted on the McCarthy era, discussing why the McCarthy historiography has not changed a great deal to this point despite Venona and other new evidence, how the Senator's reputation may become rehabilitated to some extent and the great importance of the role the FBI played in McCarthyism.

PREFACE

Few academics would ever admit to having any sympathy for Joseph McCarthy, *bête noire* of most liberals at the height of the Cold War. The history of the Wisconsin Senator has been written, therefore, from the viewpoint of barely disguised hostility. How could it be otherwise? The abundance of evidence in support of this viewpoint is so great it does not seem like a bias at all. Still, this unanimity is hardly reassuring in terms of historical balance and still less so from the perspective of historical methodology. For some people, widely shared views are open invitations to challenge. This author is one such person. Therefore, I plan to address the subject of McCarthy and McCarthyism from a different perspective.

I have had a fascination with Wisconsin's most notorious Senator for a long time. From the very first time I read about America's second Red Scare of the late 1940s and early 1950s, I took a rather romantic view of McCarthy's fight. I saw him as a great crusader, a lonely Senator performing a patriotic act in the midst of a very hot Cold War, trying to ferret out (in the red-neck language of the times) hated spies, commies and pinkos in the State Department and upper echelons of United States society.

This was my first impression. However, the more I read about "Tail-Gunner Joe," the more I thought he was not much of a patriot after all, but a political opportunist who had truly earned his reputation as one of the most reviled politicians in the history of the United States. He had happened on his meal ticket, anti-communism, perhaps by chance, and realized it could make him famous. The predominant historical interpretations had thus made their mark on me by the time I was an adult. Of my earlier views, however, two elements remained: the appreciation of his role as a hero for millions of Americans

who were scared of the Red Menace and an appreciation of his ability to dramatize complex issues for the masses.

The news of Venona was of great interest to me. It reawakened the possibility that Joseph McCarthy could have been a patriot after all and not just a second-rate politician who used the Red Scare and the fears of an entire nation to advance his own political career. It was with great enthusiasm I set out to look deeper into the life of this man and the impact the new information might have in changing how he is viewed.

There are a number of people who have helped me to complete this undertaking. First, I would like to thank historian John Haynes for replying to my many queries promptly and efficiently. I would also like to thank Morton Sobell for providing important early information that helped me to formulate many questions about the Venona project and its significance, as well as my thesis advisor Brian Villa for his guidance, understanding, connections and some excellent ideas. I reserve my most sincere thanks for my wife, Anna, who patiently waited out my four years of graduate studies, as I worked full time as a journalist and part time as a researcher. Finally, I would like to thank too many to list at my places of employment during this time period, *The Kingston Whig-Standard* and the *National Post*, for providing encouragement, proofreading and time off when I needed it, as well as University of Ottawa history professors Don Davis and Paul Lachance for providing some useful suggestions to make my paper more coherent.

CHRONOLOGY OF IMPORTANT EVENTS IN THE LIFE OF JOSEPH McCARTHY AND IN McCARTHYISM

- ☐ **November 14, 1909** – Joseph Raymond McCarthy is born in Grand Chute, Wis., to Timothy and Bridget McCarthy.
- ☐ **1917** – The Russian Revolution shakes the foundations of the free world.
- ☐ **1919** – The Third International, or Comintern, a worldwide revolutionary alliance, is formed. The Communist Party of America and rival Communist Labor Party in the United States are also formed.
- ☐ **1921** – The Communist Party of the United States of America (CPUSA) is created.
- ☐ **1929** – The Great Depression begins.
- ☐ **June 1930** – Joseph McCarthy graduates from high school.
- ☐ **1933** – President Franklin Roosevelt introduces his New Deal.
- ☐ **1935** – The Comintern calls for a Popular Front against fascism. Joseph McCarthy graduates from Marquette University's law school.
- ☐ **1938** – The Special House Committee on Un-American Activities (HUAC) is formed, chaired by Martin Dies.
- ☐ **August 23, 1939** – The Nazi-Soviet Pact signals the beginning the Second World War.
- ☐ **1939** – The Hatch Act is implemented, making loyalty to America a condition for peacetime employment in the United States.
- ☐ **1940** – *The Daily Worker* is prosecuted under the Voorhis Act, which requires foreign-controlled organizations to register with the government and provide information on their activities. As well, the Alien Registration Act, more popularly known as the Smith Act is implemented, aimed at Communist party leaders.
- ☐ **1941** – Germany invades the Soviet Union and the Japanese attack Pearl Harbor. A Popular Front against fascism is re-established.

- ❑ **February 1943** – The Venona project begins.
- ❑ **1945** – Two famous espionage cases make the news: *Amerasia* and the defection of Igor Gouzenko in Canada.
- ❑ **April 12, 1945** – Harry S Truman becomes president of the United States.
- ❑ **1946** – Joseph McCarthy is elected Senator of Wisconsin.
- ❑ **March 12, 1947** – Truman provides economic and military support for the Greek and Turkish governments against the Soviet Union in what is to become known as the Truman Doctrine.
- ❑ **March 22, 1947** – Passage of Truman's Executive Order No. 9835, the Federal Employee Loyalty Program, results in a "name check" of each employee.
- ❑ **June 1947** – In what is known as the Marshall Plan, Secretary of State George C. Marshall announces massive American economic aid to deal with a severe European economic crisis threatening to bring powerful Communist parties to power in Italy and France.
- ❑ **1948** – The Whittaker Chambers-Elizabeth Bentley espionage hearings reveal countless secrets about espionage in the State Department.
- ❑ **1949** – William Remington is convicted of perjury, Venona discovers a spy network has penetrated the Manhattan Project in Los Alamos, N.M., and China falls to the Communists.
- ❑ **March 6, 1949** – Judith Coplon is arrested for espionage.
- ❑ **September 23, 1949** – The Soviets successfully test the atomic bomb.
- ❑ **1950** – The Korean War breaks out. Alger Hiss is convicted of perjury and given a five-year prison term.
- ❑ **February 9, 1950** – Joseph McCarthy makes his famous speech in Wheeling, W. Va., about Communists in the State Department
- ❑ **September 23, 1950** – The McCarran Act, or Internal Security Act, is implemented, giving government officials vast powers to detain suspected spies and Communists.

- ☐ **1952** – Dwight D. Eisenhower becomes president of the United States.
- ☐ **April 27, 1953** – Eisenhower issues Executive Order No. 10450, which drastically revises the federal government's internal security program by authorizing the heads of all federal departments and agencies to fire employees for reasonable doubt not only about their loyalty but also reliability.
- ☐ **June 19, 1953** – Julius and Ethel Rosenberg are executed.
- ☐ **1954** – The Communist Control Act makes the Communist party illegal.
- ☐ **April 22, 1954** – The Army-McCarthy hearings begin.
- ☐ **August 1954** – Senator Ralph Flanders of Vermont introduces a resolution to censure Joseph McCarthy.
- ☐ **December 2, 1954** – The Senate votes to censure McCarthy on two of 46 charges.
- ☐ **May 2, 1957** – McCarthy dies at the age of 48 from cirrhosis of the liver.

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INTRODUCTION

A historiography of McCarthyism

“Digging out a skunk is a dirty, smelly business. No one wants to be near you when you’re done – but someone’s got to do it.”

– **Senator Joseph McCarthy**

Until very recently, many of the voluminous works about Joseph McCarthy have depicted the Republican Senator as an energetic liar with an almost photographic memory¹ whose communist spies were either a complete fabrication or a figment of his imagination. It is sometimes forgotten that he was, at a certain moment in history, enormously persuasive. In the predominant historiography, even this is presented negatively. The following very small cross-section of views of a handful of the more prominent McCarthy biographers provides some idea of how the Senator and his activities have been portrayed over time.

In one of the first published works about McCarthy, a 1959 book titled *Senator Joe McCarthy* considered a classic by many, journalist Richard Rovere described the Senator as a “con man.”²

He simply persuaded a number of people that he was speaking the essential truth; he sent up such vast and billowing clouds of smoke that many men and women who were not abnormally gullible became convinced that there must be a fire beneath it all.³

In a study by historian Earl Latham published in 1966, the author went so far as to suggest McCarthy and lawyer Roy Cohn, who remained by the controversial Senator’s side throughout the Army-McCarthy hearings, could have both been acting on behalf of the Communist party and cleverly sabotaging the State Department.⁴ In 1971, Fred Cook’s description of McCarthy as “the most effective demagogue ever to practise the art of mass passion on this continent”⁵ was typical of the way the Senator has been portrayed by many historians.

Two other prominent historical works published in the 1970s, however, removed some of the onus from the Senator regarding the Red Scare and discussed McCarthyism in political and sociological terms. In 1970, Robert Griffith concluded members of the

right wing of the Republican party were responsible for making anti-communism the dominant theme in American politics in the late 1940s and early 1950s. According to him, these conservatives, among them McCarthy, loathed the New Deal and were frustrated by the repeated defeats their party had suffered in national elections over a period of two decades.⁶ David Caute suggested in his 1978 book *The Great Fear: The Anti-Communist Purge Under Truman and Eisenhower* that McCarthyism is a recurring theme throughout history. Caute described the phenomenon as “the great fear,” which had occurred in France, Britain, Germany, Italy, Spain and the United States, at different times and through various forms of witch hunting. One of the appeals of McCarthyism, he said, was that it offered every American the chance of being taken for a good American, simply by demonstrating a gut hatred of Communists. McCarthy treated communism as “a perversion to which no man was condemned by birth, only by choice,”⁷ he said.

In his epic *The Life and Times of Joe McCarthy: A Biography*, published in 1982, Thomas C. Reeves maintained that McCarthy was never a grave threat to the Constitution or to the nation, that “he had no ideology or program of any significance” and that “his ambition was limited.”

McCarthy could have been stopped cold at any time by, say, J. Edgar Hoover, Richard Nixon, or Dwight Eisenhower – men with authority, who knew when he was bluffing and lying ... He brought far more pain to the world than any man should. He was above all a reckless adventurer, an improviser, a bluffer.⁸

One of the best McCarthy biographies was published by David Oshinsky in 1983. In *A Conspiracy So Immense: The World of Joe McCarthy*, Oshinsky said the Senator

gained in popularity largely because he provided a simple explanation for America's decline in the world:

He spoke of a massive internal conspiracy, directed by Communists and abetted by government officials who came to include the Republican President of the United States. He provided names, documents and statistics – in short, the appearance of diligent research. And he understood intuitively that force, action and virility were essential prerequisites in the Red-hunting crusade.

Oshinsky concluded, however, that McCarthy, while politically skilled, was not as ambitious as some have indicated, that despite the fact he slandered many people, he was not a would-be dictator.⁹

Of the later works, one of the most important was by historian Richard Fried, who, in 1990, coined the term “neo-isolationism” to account for McCarthyism. He said McCarthyism gave groups such as German- and Irish-Americans the chance to vent their frustrations against a generation of Democratic interventionist (and anti-German and pro-British) foreign policies.¹⁰

Among the standard histories of McCarthyism, Stephen Sniegoski has pointed out the main difference is between what might be called liberal and leftist viewpoints. Liberal accounts do not rule out completely the existence of pro-communist subversives and the need to root them out. Rather, the claim is that the number of these subversives was small and the executive branch of the government was successfully taking care of them. Leftist versions attack the federal government's loyalty-security program, deny the existence of loyalty-security risks and say that even if there were pro-communists in the federal government, they should not have been removed from their positions.¹¹

Conservative views

Of the more favourable accounts of McCarthy and McCarthyism, perhaps the most famous, and certainly one of the more provocative summaries of the conservative viewpoint, was provided by contemporary journalists William F. Buckley Jr. and L. Brent Bozell. During the McCarthy era, they attacked the anti-McCarthy liberal and leftist attitudes. However, they were essentially members of the McCarthy anti-communist team and, as such, their work is usually disregarded by historians as “a contemporary right-wing apologetic.”¹² Buckley and Bozell criticized liberals for calling McCarthyism conformity, pointing out that conformity did not have to be seen as a negative thing. If it promoted good values, such as anti-communism, then conformity could be considered positive.¹³ According to them, the majority of Americans sympathized with the values communism threatened. A democratic society should not take for granted that democracy, solely by virtue of its ideological superiority, would drive communism out of the market of ideas, they said, pointing out laws and executive orders prohibited Communists, or persons whose loyalty or reliability was in doubt, from holding government posts long before McCarthy started making accusations. Yet these laws were frequently evaded and sloppily administered. McCarthy and his allies simply insisted they be enforced.¹⁴

In his somewhat-less-storied account of 1985, Sniegoski became one of a very small minority of academics to publicly side with Buckley and Bozell. The findings of the Tydings Committee, which was assembled in 1950 to investigate McCarthy’s early charges of Communists in the State Department, found his accusations to be “a fraud and a hoax.” However, Buckley and Bozell, who analyzed the backgrounds of the individuals cited by McCarthy, concluded the Senator did name security and loyalty risks. Following

an investigation of his own, Sniegowski found evidence that at least two of those named by McCarthy were, indeed, legitimate security risks. They were Owen Lattimore, the director of the Walter Hines School of International Relations at Johns Hopkins University who had a number of close connections with the State Department and whom McCarthy labelled “the top Russian espionage agent,”¹⁵ and John Stewart Service, a career diplomat stationed in China in the Second World War who had been involved in the *Amerasia* espionage case in the mid-1940s, which has been characterized as “one of the gravest breaches of security in the wartime history of the United States.”¹⁶

Sniegowski claimed Lattimore’s writings showed him to be an ardent apologist for Soviet and Chinese communism. A former Soviet general, Alexander Barmine, once testified that Lattimore was a member of Soviet Military Intelligence. As early as 1950, the Tydings Committee, while clearing Lattimore of all accusations against him, had this to say about the man:

Some of Mr. Lattimore’s friends, associates and contacts have been identified before us as Communists. On the other hand, many of his intimate associates are people of the highest repute. Certainly the former connections, when taken with the latter, are not such as to conclude that he is a Communist on the theory that “birds of a feather flock together,” even were we prepared to accept such a theory under the circumstances. Perhaps in many of his contacts, Mr. Lattimore has not exercised the discretion [that] our knowledge of communism in 1950 indicates would have been wise, but we are impelled to comment that in no instance has Mr. Lattimore on the evidence before us shown to have been knowingly associated with Communists.¹⁷

The final report of the McCarran Committee, which in 1953 set out to investigate the communist infiltration of the Institute of Pacific Relations (IPR), an organization devoted to the study of Asian affairs,¹⁸ concluded Lattimore was a “conscious articulate

instrument of the Soviet conspiracy.”¹⁹ Years later, more proof would emerge that Lattimore had close ties to Communists. In 1988, Chen Han-shen, a former communist secret agent, published a book describing how he was sent to the United States in 1936 at Lattimore’s personal request through Comintern channels to serve as his co-editor at *Pacific Affairs*. The magazine was published by the IPR, a group McCarthy accused of being “riddled with Communists” because some of its members had been connected to the *Amerasia* case. In the 1990s, information came to the fore that a very close, even intimate, friend of Lattimore’s, President Franklin Roosevelt’s chief adviser, Lauchlin Currie, was a Soviet agent, or was at the very least on abnormally friendly terms with the Russians. It was Currie, whom McCarthy accused of being a risk, who sent Lattimore to China as FDR’s representative. Currie also instructed Lattimore to hire the Cambridge spy Michael Greenberg as his assistant at *Pacific Affairs*.²⁰

Sniegowski’s second security risk, John Stewart Service, had consistently portrayed the Chinese Nationalist government as totalitarian, inefficient and corrupt in diplomatic dispatches, while the Communists were depicted as democratic, progressive and honest. Upon returning to the United States in 1945, Service was caught transmitting classified documents to *Amerasia*. Service was cleared by the State Department Loyalty-Security Board in 1951. He was eventually fired by Secretary of State Dean Acheson, but was reinstated after the Supreme Court held that his dismissal violated State Department procedures.²¹ According to Sniegowski, even if the information he passed was harmless, the very transmission of classified documents to a journal with communist ties should have been sufficient to make Service a security risk. Given Service’s background, it seems reasonable for McCarthy to have doubted his reliability, Sniegowski said.

Sniegowski criticized liberal historians for assuming an absolute standard in determining a security risk, one they do not define. He pointed out it was not necessary for McCarthy to prove individuals guilty of any crimes, like treason or espionage. Rather, the purpose of the loyalty-security regulations was to provide the government with reliable personnel, keeping potential spies and subversives out of sensitive positions. Sniegowski posed the question:

If belonging to front groups, following the communist line, being identified as a Communist and illicitly transmitting classified documents to Communists were not enough to label one a security risk, what was?²²

More recent findings

A 1995 account of communism and espionage in the United States by John Earl Haynes, Harvey Klehr, Fridrikh Igorevich Firsov and Timothy Sergay offers no vindication for McCarthy or McCarthyism. However, these historians pointed out:

The widespread popular belief that many American Communists collaborated with Soviet intelligence and placed loyalty to the Soviet Union ahead of loyalty to the United States was well founded.

They added:

Concern about the subversive threat of the CPUSA [Communist Party of America] and worries that Communists employed in sensitive government jobs constituted a security risk were equally well founded.²³

Four years later, following the release of the Venona files, information declassified in 1995 and 1996 by the American Central Intelligence and National Security agencies that will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter One of this paper,

Haynes and Klehr published the book *Venona: Decoding Soviet Espionage in America*. The book outlines in detail a much greater Soviet espionage threat in the United States during the Cold War era than many had previously believed. Haynes and Klehr provide a study of almost 350 cases of “U.S. citizens, noncitizen immigrants and permanent residents of the United States who had a covert relationship with Soviet intelligence that is confirmed in the Venona traffic.”²⁴

It now appears McCarthy was largely correct in his views about the IPR. Historian Arthur Herman, in his controversial 2000 account *Joseph McCarthy: Reexamining the Life and Legacy of America's Most Hated Senator*, points out the IPR had sheltered no fewer than eight active espionage agents: Greenberg, who had been Lattimore's successor as editor of *Pacific Affairs*; Chi Chao-ting, a communist Chinese agent who received IPR money and helped to create *Amerasia* magazine, later working for Lattimore at Johns Hopkins; Han-shen, a former Comintern agent and member of Richard Sorge's Tokyo spy ring,²⁵ who helped Lattimore edit *Pacific Affairs* from 1936 to 1939; Agnes Smedley, another Sorge agent; Herbert Norman, head of the Canadian Liaison Mission from 1946 to 1950, who committed suicide in 1957 in Cairo after being dogged by rumours of being a Communist for much of his career; GRU agents Thomas A. Bisson and Joseph Bernstein; and Guenther Stein, a German journalist with NKVD²⁶ connections. They had been surrounded by a large circle of Communist party members and sympathizers, including the party's first executive secretary, *Amerasia*'s Philip Jaffe, and Frederick Vanderbilt Field, *Amerasia*'s financial backer and a member of the IPR's board.²⁷

Herman points to the Annie Lee Moss case as an example of how the “myth of Joe McCarthy” has been perpetuated. The case of the middle-aged black woman who was allegedly wrongly accused of being a Communist party member may have been the

straw that broke the camel's back for McCarthy and his sidekick, Cohn. Under televised examination in March 1954, Moss, who lived at 72 R Street, SW, Washington, DC, made McCarthy and Cohn look like fools when she confessed she had no idea who Karl Marx was.²⁸ Her defenders accused McCarthy of confusing Moss with another woman with the same name in the same neighbourhood when the Senator pointed out copies of the Communist party's *Daily Worker* had been appearing on her doorstep. Edward R. Murrow made the woman a heroine on his famous television program *See It Now* and the anti-McCarthy press had a field day.²⁹ She became an instant martyr to the anti-McCarthy cause. The information about Moss being a Communist, which had been provided by J. Edgar Hoover, Director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), was found to be true in September 1958, when the Subversive Activities Control Board reported copies of the Communist party's own records showed "one Annie Lee Moss, 72 R Street, SW, Washington, DC, was a party member in the mid-1940s." Moss got her Pentagon job back in 1954 and was still working for the Army in December 1958,³⁰ more than a year after McCarthy had died. Indeed, Herman says, Moss was a Communist party member in the mid-1940s and McCarthy and Cohn had simply botched their investigation.³¹

Martha Dodd is another example of a spy who was long suspected by the FBI and was considered a security risk by McCarthy-era House and Senate investigators. She was the daughter of William Dodd, the U.S. Ambassador to Germany. From a Soviet intelligence file in Moscow, historians Allen Weinstein and Alexander Vassiliev have revealed some of the story of Dodd and the betrayal of her homeland in their recently released *The Haunted Wood: Soviet Espionage in America – The Stalin Era*. She said in a statement from the 1930s uncovered by Weinstein and Vassiliev:

It goes without saying that my services of any kind and at any time are proposed to the [Communist] party for use at its discretion. Currently, I have access mainly to the personal, confidential correspondence of my father with the U.S. State Department and the U.S. President. My source of information on military and naval issues, as well as on aviation, is exclusively personal contact with our embassy's.

William Dodd also co-operated with Soviet intelligence. He provided information obtained from conversations with leading Washington Congressmen, Senators and government officials. Among William Dodd's contacts was a Justice Department employee named Helen Fuller, who conveyed to him in 1937 allegations about Hoover, a man who had a large impact on the career of one Joseph McCarthy, that turned out to be true:

Hoover is keeping files on almost all major political figures. Congressmen, Senators and businessmen. He gathers compromising material on everybody and uses it for blackmail. In the course of the latest hearings on financing the FBI, Hoover blackmailed those Congressmen who tried to stand [full funding] ... He used against some of them even cases of casual sex ... We settled with [William] that he would try to get closer to [Helen Fuller] in order to get regular information from her.³²

In his recent historical re-examination of the life of the Senator, Herman says "in retrospect, the cause McCarthy made his own – anti-communism – has proved to be more valid and durable than the basic assumptions of his *anti*-anti-communist critics."³³

Herman's work challenges much of the prevailing historiography. He bases his conclusions largely on evidence that has come to light following the opening of historical archives in the former Soviet Union and the release of other top secret documents, including the Venona files. This new evidence, Herman says, shows McCarthy's claims of a large network of communist spies and security risks were essentially correct. It should be added that this latest evidence, while supporting his claims of spies in the

government, will not go so far as to vindicate the Senator's actions in the eyes of many American historians.³⁴

Despite recently published books by Haynes and Klehr, as well as Weinstein and Vassiliev,³⁵ fully documenting a large network of spies and security risks at all levels of American society just prior to the McCarthy era, most academics, including these authors, remain unwilling to admit the Senator was right in his assertions regarding espionage in the State Department. McCarthy's aggressive, often bullying, tactics and unsubstantiated accusations, which led to the term McCarthyism, will probably always remain a dark period in the history of American politics, these historians say.

As well, while it is true the latest evidence suggests espionage was common around the time of McCarthy, many historians say there is still very little to suggest even a small percentage of the people whom McCarthy accused of espionage and other traitorous acts were guilty of those offences. And, in fact, Weinstein and Vassiliev suggest that, by the time McCarthy started making his public accusations, the communist threat had all but disappeared in the United States.³⁶ Historian David Kahn, an American historian of cryptography and author of *The Codebreakers*, sums up the feelings of many academics with regard to the revival of McCarthy's reputation. "I don't want to go overboard," he said.³⁷

Introductory conclusions

In summing up the accumulated works on Joseph McCarthy, McCarthyism and espionage in the United States in the Cold War period, it appears there are some guideposts suggesting changing views. However, it is important to note there has been no

truly logical linear evolution of the views on McCarthyism, rather the topic has been studied from a hodgepodge of different perspectives and in a myriad of different ways. Studies in this area have always been very politically charged and the research has tended to reflect this to a certain extent. Having said this, there are some very general patterns that emerge. Early on, much of the research centred largely on McCarthy, the man, and how through demagoguery he held sway over a large audience. This would include the works of Rovere, Latham and Cook, among others. However, the research soon evolved beyond McCarthy to consider political and sociological aspects that led to McCarthyism. I have mentioned some of the more important authors in this section. These would include Griffith, Cate and Richard Fried. The idea that a huge espionage problem may have existed in the United States and the impact this problem had on McCarthyism has not been considered seriously until very recently. It has been mainly in the past half-dozen years that a drastically different historical perspective has started to emerge in books by Haynes and Klehr, Herman, and Weinstein and Vassiliev. This is largely because, with the end of the Cold War and the fall of communism, much more information has been made available to researchers in the past decade in the form of FBI documents, Russian archival material and the Venona files.

Endnotes:

(In general, I have found hard copies of all my sources, but in some cases they were conveniently available on the Internet and I have left the Internet citations in along with the hard copy cites for the convenience of subsequent researchers)

¹Thomas C. Reeves, *The Life and Times of Joe McCarthy: A Biography* (New York: Stein and Day, 1982), p. 8.

²Richard Rovere, "McCarthy: As a National Demagogue," in *The Meaning of McCarthyism, Second Edition*, ed. Earl Latham (Lexington: D.C. Heath and Company, 1973), pp. 17, 100.

³Richard H. Rovere, *Senator Joe McCarthy* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1959), p. 21.

⁴Earl Latham, *The Communist Controversy in Washington: From the New Deal to McCarthy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1966), p. 1.

⁵Fred Cook, *The Nightmare Decade: The Life and Times of Senator Joe McCarthy* (New York: Random House, 1971), p. 4.

⁶Robert Griffith, *The Politics of Fear: Joseph R. McCarthy and the Senate* (Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 1970), p. ix.

⁷David Cate, *The Great Fear: The Anti-Communist Purge Under Truman and Eisenhower* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1978), p. 18.

⁸Reeves, *The Life and Times of Joe McCarthy: A Biography*, p. 675.

⁹David M. Oshinsky, *A Conspiracy So Immense: The World of Joe McCarthy* (London: Collier Macmillan Publishers, 1983), p. 507.

¹⁰Richard M. Fried, *Nightmare in Red: The McCarthy Era in Perspective* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), p. 8.

¹¹Stephen J. Sniegowski, "Joseph R. McCarthy and the Historians," *Modern Age: A Quarterly Review* 29, no.2 (Spring 1985), pp. 133-135.

¹²*Ibid.*, p. 133.

¹³William F. Buckley Jr., and L. Brent Bozell, *McCarthy and His Enemies: The Record and its Meaning* (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1954), pp. 308-315.

¹⁴William F. Buckley Jr., and L. Brent Bozell, "The Question of Conformity," in *The Meaning of McCarthyism, Second Edition*, ed. Earl Latham, pp. 44, 53 and 59.

¹⁵Rovere, *Senator Joe McCarthy*, p. 151.

¹⁶Latham, *The Communist Controversy in Washington: From the New Deal to McCarthy*, p. 203.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, p. 281, from *Tydings Committee Report*, p. 73.

¹⁸Oshinsky, *A Conspiracy So Immense: The World of Joe McCarthy*, p. 118.

¹⁹Latham, *The Communist Controversy in Washington: From the New Deal to McCarthy*, p. 280.

²⁰Arthur Herman, *Joseph McCarthy: Reexamining the Life and Legacy of America's Most Hated Senator* (New York: The Free Press, 2000), pp. 121-127.

²¹Latham, *The Communist Controversy in Washington: From the New Deal to McCarthy*, p. 204.

²²Sniegoski, "Joseph R. McCarthy and the Historians," pp. 137-139.

²³Harvey Klehr, John Earl Haynes and Fridrikh Igorevich Firsov, with Russian documents translated by Timothy D. Sergay, *The Secret World of American Communism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), p. 16.

²⁴John Earl Haynes and Harvey Klehr, *Venona: Decoding Soviet Espionage in America* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1999), p. 339.

²⁵Richard Sorge was a German press correspondent who headed a Soviet espionage ring in Tokyo during the Second World War. On May 12, 1941, Sorge reported to the Russians that 170 German divisions would attack along the Soviet frontier on June 20, proceeding in the direction of Moscow. The attack came a couple of days later. In August 1941, Sorge reported the Japanese Army was planning to advance southward against Pacific targets rather than northward against the USSR. This information freed Soviet troops along the Manchurian border for service in the west. On October 18, 1941, Sorge was arrested by the Japanese, and he and Ozaki Hotsumi, another agent of Russia, were executed. In 1964, Sorge was declared a Hero of the Soviet Union. From *Encyclopedia Britannica* [<http://www.britannica.com/seo/r/richard-sorge/>].

²⁶The NKVD, Moscow's secret police and quasi-civilian intelligence service, was later to become the more famous KGB. In *Venona: Soviet Espionage and the American Response 1939-1957*, ed. Robert Louis Benson and Michael Warner (Washington: National Security Agency, 1996), p.ix.

²⁷Herman, *Joseph McCarthy: Reexamining the Life and Legacy of America's Most Hated Senator*, p. 126.

²⁸*Ibid.*, pp. 333-337.

²⁹James J. Drummey,

[http://www.thenewamerica.com/tna/1996/vol2no18/vol2no18_mccarthy.htm].

"The Real McCarthy Record: A Longtime Smear Campaign Has Clouded the Truth," *The New American: That Freedom Shall Not Perish*, 11 May 1987.

³⁰*Ibid.*, also Herman, *Joseph McCarthy: Reexamining the Life and Legacy of America's Most Hated Senator*, pp. 333-337.

³¹Herman, *Joseph McCarthy: Reexamining the Life and Legacy of America's Most Hated Senator*, pp. 333-337; see *Reports of the Subversive Activities Control Board, Vol. 1* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1966), pp. 93-94.

³²Allen Weinstein and Alexander Vassiliev, *The Haunted Wood: Soviet Espionage in America -- The Stalin Era* (New York: Random House, 1999), pp. 51, 55 and 66-67.

³³Herman, *Joseph McCarthy: Reexamining the Life and Legacy of America's Most Hated Senator*, p. 6.

³⁴At a conference in Washington, DC, to mark the 50th anniversary of McCarthy's famous speech to a Republican Women's Organization in Wheeling, W. Va., claiming

that the Truman administration was a bastion for pro-Soviet infiltrators, a panel of some 20 historians presented papers discussing various aspects of McCarthyism. Not one of these historians came out in support of McCarthy. For more on this, please see the conclusion to this paper.

³⁵ Weinstein's and Vassiliev's *The Haunted Wood: Soviet Espionage in America – the Stalin Era* and Haynes' and Klehr's *Venona: Decoding Soviet Espionage in America* were both published in 1999 and produced fresh data outlining a vast Soviet spy network in the United States during the Cold War period.

³⁶Weinstein and Vassiliev, *The Haunted Wood: Soviet Espionage in America – The Stalin Era*, p. 340.

³⁷Lance Gay, "Cables Hint Red-Baiters Not Too Far Off Target," *Scripps Howard News Service*, 6 March 1996.

CHAPTER ONE

What is new: McCarthy in light of Venona

“America’s steady retreat from victory must be the product of a great conspiracy, a conspiracy on a scale so immense as to dwarf any previous such venture in the history of man. A conspiracy of infamy so black that, when it is finally exposed, its principals shall be forever deserving of the maledictions of all honest men.”

- Senator Joseph McCarthy, as part of a 60,000-word speech he delivered on the Senate floor on June 14, 1951, in which he attacked George C. Marshall for actions and policies he felt had helped the Communists in the USSR, Europe, China and Korea**

Before studying the McCarthy phenomenon itself, it is perhaps useful to try to understand the renewed interest in the Senator. Much of this newfound interest has been sparked by the Venona documents, which were released in the mid-1990s and are just beginning to lay the groundwork for reinterpretations of the Cold War era and, more specifically, McCarthy's accusations of spies in the State Department. The Venona files suggest there were, indeed, a large number of spies holding important government positions at the very least until the mid-1940s. Venona consists of more than 2,900 Soviet intelligence messages intercepted mostly in the 1940s and deciphered over a four-decade period through a joint American and Allied program.¹ According to Haynes and Klehr, Venona reveals that, for certain, almost 350 Americans had covert ties to Soviet intelligence agencies and, in all likelihood, the number was higher,² perhaps much higher, given that only a very small percentage of Soviet spy traffic has been decrypted. These covert relationships continued throughout, and probably in many situations long after, the war years.³ Regardless of the fact some aspects of the Venona findings remain controversial, including the methods used to connect cover names with the actual spies⁴ and to some extent why it took so long to make the findings of the project public, one thing appears undeniable: There were spies inhabiting positions of authority in the United States, and their numbers were not insignificant.

Since so much of the renewed interest in McCarthy is derived from the Venona documents, the roots of the project need to be examined, even if only briefly, to verify its significance. But before we move on with this story of Venona, it is important to provide a tiny glimpse of how the perception of an espionage threat grew in the United States. Historian George Carpozi Jr. points out that Americans crept on to the espionage stage in rather slow and deliberate fashion. According to Carpozi, on the eve of the Second World

War, the United States was still an innocent nation not given to suspicion of an enemy, showing little concern over the rise of Nazi Germany and imperialistic Japan “until the threat of those nations became imminent.” To a great extent, Carpozi says, Americans were oblivious about espionage until the Japanese sneak attack on Pearl Harbor and the Philippines on December 7, 1941.

Then we awakened and realized in our profound shock how vulnerable we really were. We were told that Japan’s devastating air raids were the product of effective espionage, which had enabled Nippon’s intelligence operatives to gather accurate information on our fleet and air force concentration at Pearl Harbor and Manila. We were also told that those attacks pointed out our own great weakness and inadequacy for intelligence responsibilities. Until that time, our own intelligence activities had been limited to a narrow parameter – and whatever those activities were, they were totally inept.

Carpozi says that it was only after American entry into the Second World War that the country’s eyes were “opened wide to intelligence as a craft of formidable importance.”⁵

The thinking behind the Venona project was that code breaking assisted military operations, saved lives and served the national interest efficiently and economically. These conclusions came out of the enormously successful attacks on Japanese and German military and diplomatic ciphers. As the Second World War progressed and some began to fear a postwar clash with Moscow, the prohibition against reading the codes of allies seemed less and less valid. Thousands of intercepts had been kept undeciphered and untranslated in the vacuum-cleaner approach of all intelligence services. As Moscow’s demands for postwar concessions in advance grew, some in the defence establishment thought it was high time to read the Soviet traffic. There was, however, a large obstacle: The Soviets used the “one-time pad,” a supposedly unbreakable encoding

process. This problem naturally drew the attention of the U.S. Army's Signal Intelligence Service.⁶

Gene Grabeel, a Virginia schoolteacher, helped kickstart the Venona project in February 1943 when she began the effort to read Soviet diplomatic messages.⁷ Grabeel was a member of this Signal Intelligence Service, a forerunner of the National Security Agency (NSA),⁸ usually referred to as Arlington Hall after the name of the headquarters in which it was housed, the campus of a private girls' preparatory school in northern Virginia, across the Potomac River from Washington, DC.⁹ Grabeel and others assigned to the project in 1943 spent months sorting stored and incoming telegrams.¹⁰

Venona started out with a number of encrypted Soviet telegrams, which had been collected since 1939.¹¹ The project to decipher these Soviet espionage messages was initially given the cover name Bride. This was later changed to Jade and eventually Venona.¹² The term Venona, which seemingly has no significant meaning, was stamped on documents to limit their access to people involved in the code-breaking project.¹³

In October 1943, Lieutenant Richard Hallock, a Signal Corps reserve officer, discovered weaknesses in the cryptographic system of Soviet trade traffic.¹⁴ He demonstrated the Soviets were making extensive use of duplicate key pages assembled in separate one-time pad books. Hallock's discovery yielded methods for finding duplicate pages. Then, in 1944, cryptanalyst Cecil Phillips made observations that led to a fundamental break in the cipher system used by the KGB. He noticed a change in Soviet message formatting and after a few months identified the first five-digit cipher group as the key-page indicator. Consequently, when any two messages were found to have the same initial five-digit cipher group, the two were identified as having been super-enciphered using duplicated one-time pages. Phillips' insight enabled American

code-breakers to examine their collection of intercepted Soviet cables and rapidly find duplication of key pages between KGB messages and Trade messages, a fundamental step in breaking in to the KGB traffic.¹⁵

However, it was reportedly not until 1946 that Meredith Gardner, an Arlington Hall “book-breaker,” began to actually read parts of these messages.¹⁶ Gardner was eventually able to reconstruct the code book used by the KGB from November 1943 into early 1946.¹⁷ By 1949, Gardner’s discoveries had not only revealed the fact that a spy network had penetrated the top secret Manhattan Project in Los Alamos, N.M., where the United States was building the atomic bomb, but enabled the FBI to identify Klaus Fuchs, a British physicist working on this project, as a likely source of Soviet intelligence information.¹⁸ Reportedly, using simply brain power, with no computers, the cryptographers slowly and diligently cracked what was thought to be an unbreakable code. They painstakingly turned a jigsaw puzzle of seemingly incomprehensible information into strong evidence of a Soviet spy ring whose ranks included Julius and Ethel Rosenberg, executed in 1953 at New York’s Sing Sing Prison after being convicted of providing vital information to the Soviet Union about the production of the atomic bomb.¹⁹

A historical monograph of Venona perhaps provides a clearer understanding of how American code-breakers were able to decipher Soviet messages:

The cryptographic systems used by the KGB’s first chief directorate involved a codebook in which words and phrases were represented by numbers. These numbers were then further enciphered by the addition of random number groups, additive, taken from a so-called one-time pad. A one-time pad comprised pages of random numbers, copies of which were used by the sender and receiver of a message to add and remove an extra layer of encipherment. One-time pads used properly only once are

unbreakable. However, the KGB's cryptographic material manufacturing centre in the Soviet Union apparently reused some of the pages from one-time pads. This provided Arlington Hall with an opening. In order to break into the system successfully, analysts had first to identify and strip off the layer of additive in order to attack the underlying code.²⁰

Most of the KGB messages between Moscow and New York and Moscow and Washington in 1944 and 1945 that could be broken at all were broken between 1947 and 1952.²¹ This may be of some importance to note because it was in 1950, right in the middle of the successful code-breaking time frame, that McCarthy stepped out of the shadows and into the spotlight. By 1946, the cryptanalysts had discovered the cables were from several Soviet entities: Amtorg (the Soviet trade organization in America) and the Soviet Government Purchasing Commission, and diplomatic messages from the Foreign Ministry, the KGB, the GRU (Soviet Army General Staff Intelligence) and Soviet Naval Intelligence.²² In 1953, after many important messages had already been deciphered, code-breaker Samuel Chew was able to solve a set of code clerk "key-saving" cases that Phillips had identified earlier. Working on Trade traffic, he discovered some highly predictable patterns in the shipping messages. Chew's work had a dramatic impact on the efforts of those who were recovering cipher keys. They were now able to solve or remove the one-time pad cipher for stretches of Trade code text and thereby to reveal significant strings of KGB code. This breakthrough resulted in great progress on earlier messages.

It has been suggested that around this time it was discovered a copy of a burned code book the United States had in its possession contained some of the code used in earlier KGB messages. One version is that the book had been found at a German signal intelligence archive in Saxony, Germany. This version says that although badly damaged, the book assisted Gardner in reconstructing part of the KGB code book for years prior to 1943,²³ and further helped along the process of deciphering message traffic.²⁴ However,

there has been a great deal of controversy surrounding this suggestion and various accounts of what the burned code book actually meant in the overall decoding scheme.²⁵

What Venona reveals

The Venona files, while providing a great deal of useful information about espionage activities, leave a lot to the imagination. According to Michael Warner and Robert Louis Benson, editors of *Venona: Soviet Espionage and the American Response 1939-1957*, which was published by the NSA and CIA and outlines a brief history of the Venona project, “Venona suggests who was emptying American safes but usually says little about what was in those safes.”²⁶ A large majority of the decrypts are actually only fragments or partial decrypts. That is, some (and sometimes it is only a few) words have been deciphered. And many of these words are also a type of code. People being discussed in the messages normally have code names. For instance, Harry Gold, a chemist and Communist party member who was a key KGB agent, is referred to as “Gus” or “Goose”;²⁷ Julius Rosenberg is called “Liberal”²⁸ or “Antenna”;²⁹ David Greenglass, Ethel Rosenberg’s brother who worked in a Los Alamos machine shop that was part of the atomic bomb project, is “Kalibr” or “Calibre”; and Ruth Greenglass, David’s wife, is “Osa” or “Wasp.”³⁰ As well, places and things are often referred to in code. For example, the United States is called “Strana” or “Country” and Great Britain is “Ostrov” or “Island,” and the United States Atomic Energy Project, or Manhattan Project, comes up frequently as “Enormous” or “Enormoz.”³¹ Washington was “Carthage,” New York was “Tyre” and San Francisco was “Babylon,” all cities of fallen empires.³²

A typical message described an activity, such as a procedure involved in the making of the atomic bomb, or the background of an individual recruited for spying, but in most messages there are large gaps, filled in by phrases such as “14 groups unrecoverable” and “35 groups unrecovered,”³³ which signify information that could not be deciphered. So, while much is revealed, one can only imagine what a total understanding of the codes would have produced.

An example of a message pertaining to atomic espionage provides some idea of what American decrypters were dealing with. The following is message No. 195 from New York to Moscow sent on February 9, 1944. It is taken directly from the Venona files (The square brackets include information that has been added in order to better understand the message):

Personal to VIKTOR [who was Lieutenant General Pavel Mikhailovich Fitin, the Soviet Union’s spymaster and head of the foreign intelligence section of the KGB from 1940 to 1946]. In reply to No. 302 [not available]. On 5th February a meeting took place between “GUS” [Gold] and “REST” [Fuchs]. Beforehand GUS was given a detailed briefing by us. REST greeted him pleasantly but was rather cautious at first, (1 group unrecovered) the discussion GUS satisfied himself that REST was aware of whom he was working with. R. [Fuchs] arrived in the COUNTRY (STRANA) [the United States] in September as a member of the ISLAND (OSTROV) [Great Britain] mission on ENORMOUS (ENORMOZ) [the U.S. Atomic Energy Project, better known as the top secret Manhattan Project].

According to him the work on ENORMOUS in the COUNTRY is being carried out under the direct control of the COUNTRY’s army represented by General SOMERVELL (SOMMERVILL) [Lieutenant General Brehan Burke Somervell, Commanding General Army Service Forces, War Department] and STIMSON [Henry Lewis Stimson, Secretary of War]: at the head of the group of ISLANDERS (OSTROVITYaNE) [the British] is a Labour Member of Parliament, Ben SMITH [Right Honourable Ben Smith, Minister Resident in Washington for Supply from 1943].

The whole operation amounts to the working out of the process for the separation of isotopes of ENORMOUS. The work is proceeding in two directions: the electron method developed by LAWRENCE (LAURENS) [Professor Ernest Orlando Lawrence] (71 groups unrecoverable) separation of isotopes by the combined method, using the diffusion method for preliminary and the electron method for final separation. The work (46 groups unrecovered) 18th February, we shall report the results. No. 92 ANTON [Leonid Romanovich Kvasnikov].³⁴

While the Venona files do leave much to the imagination, they also show there was ample reason for Americans to be concerned about communist infiltration. The deciphered Second World War cables between Soviet intelligence officers in America and their controllers in Moscow show that a large Soviet espionage ring had infiltrated the U.S. government during the war years.

As Haynes and Klehr point out, Venona:

shows that a disturbing number of high-ranking U.S. government officials consciously maintained a clandestine relationship with Soviet intelligence agencies and passed extraordinarily sensitive information to the Soviet Union that seriously damaged American interests.³⁵

According to Venonona, during the year prior to the end of the Second World War, agents who passed secrets directly to the Soviets included a White House aide (Lauchlin Currie), an assistant secretary of the Treasury (Harry Dexter White), an aide to the Secretary of State (Alger Hiss),³⁶ the first secretary of the British embassy in Washington (Donald Maclean), the executive assistant to the director of the Office of Strategic Services (OSS) (Duncan Lee), an analyst in the Justice Department (Judith Coplon) and the secretary to journalist Walter Lippmann (Mary Price), as well as several agents involved in the Manhattan Project at Los Alamos, including Klaus Fuchs (known in Venona by the codenames “Charles” and “Rest”), Theodore Alvin Hall and David

Greenglass.³⁷ Indeed, it may be confidently stated that never had the American government been so penetrated by the agents of a foreign government.

In addition to Hall, Fuchs and David Greenglass, the Soviets had at least two other sources in the Manhattan Project who supplied information beginning in 1943. They are identified in Venona as “Pers” and “Quantum.” However, the NSA to this day has been unable to figure out their true identities. In the case of Hall, it was not until Venona was actually made public in 1995 that he was fingered as a spy for the Soviet Union. He was identified as agent “Mlad,” which is Russian for “youngster.” In 1944 and 1945, Hall, an American physicist and graduate of Harvard, worked at the nuclear laboratory complex at Los Alamos where the first atomic bombs were built. He was investigated for espionage by the FBI from 1950 to 1952 but was not prosecuted. This was despite the fact that a 1950 internal FBI document stated: “Hall has been identified as a Soviet espionage agent while at Los Alamos.” Hall was not prevented from moving to England in 1962 when he was appointed to a research position in biophysics at Cambridge University. Haynes and Klehr suggest a couple of reasons why Hall may have escaped punishment:

One possibility is that the authorities provided Hall immunity in return for information about the KGB. Another is that they were unable to prosecute him, either due to insufficient evidence or because key evidence was based on top-secret information that the government did not wish to reveal in court.³⁸

A prominent British spy, Michael Straight, also is mentioned in Venona. Straight, who had connections with Hiss, bragged in a memo that Harry Hopkins,³⁹ President Franklin Roosevelt’s closest aide; Henry Wallace, Vice-President from 1941 to 1945 and a candidate for President in 1948; and Henry Morgenthau, Secretary of the Treasury

during the Roosevelt administration, were among his more influential New Deal contacts.⁴⁰

Secrecy of Venona

Many of those mentioned in Venona were investigated for espionage in the early 1950s, and were called to testify before the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC). And while the American government accumulated enough evidence in some cases to charge spies discovered through Venona, many were never prosecuted, in part because the government was not prepared to reveal that it had succeeded in cracking the Soviet codes.⁴¹ The intercepted telegrams (and thus the names of those spies) remained a closely guarded secret until the end of the Cold War. The official government version is that the authorities did not want the Soviets to learn how successfully the United States had penetrated Soviet message traffic.⁴² This position is controversial for at least a couple of reasons: It may have had a direct impact on the onset of McCarthyism, and U.S. authorities were reportedly aware by the late 1940s that the Soviet Union knew about the Venona project.⁴³

Keeping Venona secret from the public obviously had major drawbacks. For instance, as Haynes and Klehr point out, “had Venona been made public, it is unlikely there would have been a 40-year campaign to prove that the Rosenbergs were innocent,” as it clearly reveals Julius Rosenberg was involved in atomic espionage. These historians also suggest that making Venona public may have saved the life of Ethel Rosenberg because it shows that while she was guilty she was also really only an accessory to Julius’s activity.⁴⁴ Robert Meeropol, one of the Rosenbergs’ two sons, concurs with

Haynes and Klehr on this point. Even if the documents are taken at face value, he says, Ethel Rosenberg is not described in them as personally involved in any espionage. Expressing both anguish and indignation, Meeropol asks: “If this is all they have on my mother, they killed her for that?”⁴⁵ Some other spies who may have been convicted after being found through Venona include Harry Gold, David Greenglass, Alger Hiss, Judith Coplon, Morton Sobell and Klaus Fuchs.⁴⁶

Haynes and Klehr believe that one of the significant features of the Venona findings is that many of those convicted of espionage during the first decade of the Cold War have throughout history been defended vehemently by people who believe they were innocent.⁴⁷ Prime examples are the Rosenbergs and Hiss, who was convicted of perjury in 1950 for lying about his ties to Whittaker Chambers, a former communist spy who defected and went public with a story of an extensive communist underground that existed in Washington in the 1930s.⁴⁸ Chambers claimed that at least 25 government officials had been involved in varying degrees of pro-Soviet espionage in the late 1930s, and Hiss was one of those 25.⁴⁹ Hiss served 44 months in prison in a case that became a touchstone for anti-McCarthyites in the Cold War era and brought fame to Hiss’s chief nemesis on HUAC, Richard Nixon.⁵⁰ It has generally been perceived that the hysteria of the times resulted in the downfall of people like the Rosenbergs and Hiss. However, the Venona evidence suggests that these people, as well as others such as Harry Dexter White and Laurence Duggan, are not martyrs, although they have often been portrayed as such.

David Kahn said:

Without saying whether or not they should have been executed, without saying whether or not there was enough evidence to convict them in a

court of law, the Venona intercepts show without a doubt that the Rosenbergs spied for the Soviet Union against the United States.⁵¹

White, who was known in spy circles by the cover names “Lawyer”⁵² and “Jurist,”⁵³ was one of the most influential officials in New Deal Washington, rising to the position of Assistant Secretary to the Treasury and, in 1946, becoming Director of the International Monetary Fund. In 1948, Elizabeth Bentley, presented by the media of the time as the “Blonde Spy Queen”⁵⁴ or America’s notorious “Red Spy Queen,”⁵⁵ publicly accused White of espionage. Bentley, a disenchanted former member of the CPUSA who had been involved extensively in Soviet espionage, was supported by the testimony of Chambers. White was interrogated by HUAC and denied having ever had contact with Soviet intelligence. He died of a heart attack three days later. The Venona files show White lied and Bentley and Chambers, who were ridiculed by many for their testimony and for decades were mocked, were telling the truth.⁵⁶ Cables show White reporting to the Soviets discussions within the U.S. government on a number of sensitive matters, including a post-war loan to the Soviet Union and the dispute over who would rule post-war Poland.

In a December 1948 interview with the FBI, Duggan denied ever having spied for the Soviet Union. Ten days after the interview, the professional diplomat, who in 1935 became head of the State Department’s Latin American division, died suspiciously, falling from his 16th-floor office window.⁵⁷ Venona files from the years 1943 and 1944 show Duggan had reported to Soviet intelligence officers about a number of sensitive matters, including the invasion of Italy, U.S. diplomatic approaches to the military government in Argentina and secret Anglo-American discussions regarding a policy

toward oil resources in the Middle East.⁵⁸ Duggan reportedly had a strong link to Iskhak Akhmerov, an officer with the KGB.⁵⁹

Venona shows that a number of other high-ranking U.S. government officials aided the Soviet Union just prior to the Cold War. Lauchlin Currie, a trusted assistant to President Franklin Roosevelt known by the cover name “Page,” informed the KGB that the FBI was investigating Nathan Gregory Silvermaster, a key American agent for the Soviet Union⁶⁰ who headed one of two very productive spy rings in the pre-Cold War United States that included among others White; Solomon Adler (known in Venona as “Sax”), a senior Treasury Department official; and economists Frank Coe (“Pick”), William Ludwig Ullman (“Polo”) and George Silverman (believed to be “Eleron”).⁶¹ According to Haynes and Klehr, the warning allowed Silvermaster to escape detection and continue spying. Maurice Halperin, in charge of research for America’s chief intelligence agency, the OSS, from 1942 to 1945, before it was abolished and replaced by the CIA in 1947, leaked a huge number of secret American diplomatic cables to the KGB, Haynes and Klehr say. As well, William Perl, a United States government aeronautical scientist, provided the Soviet Union with the results of the tests and design experiments for American jet engines and aircraft, which allowed the Soviets to overcome the American technological lead in the development of jets.⁶²

There is little doubt that despite some controversy surrounding the Venona documents, these files have had and will continue to have a large impact on the reinterpretation of history during the Cold War period. It has been well-documented that due to atomic espionage at Los Alamos from within the top secret Manhattan Project, the Soviet Union developed atomic weapons likely much sooner than it would have. The Soviet bomb, tested for the first time in 1949, was a virtual copy of the first American

bomb tested in July 1945.⁶³ It was largely through the efforts of physicists Fuchs and Hall, and technician David Greenglass that the Soviets were able to obtain the formula for extracting bomb-grade uranium from ordinary uranium, the technical plans for production facilities and the “implosion” technique, making it possible to build an atomic bomb using plutonium, which was easier to manufacture than bomb-grade uranium.⁶⁴

Problems with Venona

In academic quarters, the authenticity of the Venona cables is only now being challenged. In an article that appeared in the autumn 2000 issue of *Intelligence and National Security*, John Lowenthal suggests “Venona errors regarding Hiss raise questions about the accuracy and reliability of the entire Venona process.” According to Lowenthal, comparing Venona file No. 1822 from 1945 – describing the activities of an espionage agent covernamed Ales whom the FBI identified as Hiss – “with undisputed facts about Hiss and the U.S. government’s case against him” confirms Venona does not support this case. Lowenthal says that another 1943 Venona file, No. 1579, which refers to “Hiss” openly, actually goes a long way toward exonerating him because not only was it Soviet practice to mention spies only by their covernames, but there were two Hisses working in the State Department at the time, Alger and his brother Donald, and “Hiss” could have referred to either one of them. Lowenthal warns, however, that just because, in his view, Venona does not support the case against Alger Hiss does not necessarily mean he was not a spy. There is other accumulating evidence outside of Venona that suggests otherwise.⁶⁵ Rather, it is a warning that researchers should be wary in viewing the contents of Venona, approaching these files with caution and skepticism.⁶⁶

In non-academic quarters, Morton Sobell, who in 1951 was convicted of conspiracy to commit espionage along with the Rosenbergs and spent more than 18 years in prison, has pointed out what he sees as a number of flaws in the Venona findings that warrant some consideration. Sobell, who presents an account of his capture and conviction in his autobiography *On Doing Time*, adamantly maintains his innocence to this day. According to him:

It is a matter of record that, with the possible exception of Klaus Fuchs, Venona did not result in the apprehension and conviction of a single individual. Nonetheless, the day after the initial Venona ceremony in 1995, all the major newspapers, with a single exception, attributed the arrest of Julius Rosenberg to Venona, and concluded that the case was now closed ... despite the evidence of Rosenberg's FBI files that contain a clear admission that the CIA had no idea who "Antenna/Liberal" [the cover name the CIA ultimately assigned to Julius Rosenberg] was until David Greenglass fingered him. Thus, it was only with backward processing that they were able to assign these cover names to Julius. And this is the crux of the decryption process – which the CIA refuses to reveal. How did they correlate the cover names with the true names?⁶⁷

In Sobell's case, they concluded that the cover names "Rele/Serb" were Morton Sobell until a message revealed that Rele had an artificial leg. Sobell does not have an artificial leg. "It would be both informative and interesting to learn how the decrypters made their 'mistake,' " he says, adding that the whole area of connecting cover names with real names remains clouded and mysterious. Robert Meeropol said, during a 1995 interview after some of the Venona files had been released, that since the messages were coded, U.S. authorities were free to "pop in anybody's name" as a Soviet agent.⁶⁸ Said Sobell:

I find it difficult to understand how academia can take Venona seriously, while the FBI/CIA maintain such secrecy; especially given the record of the CIA's propensity for fabrications.⁶⁹

Historian Hayden Peake agrees that the Venona material turned out to be inconclusive about Sobell and that the convicted spy was obviously mistakenly identified. However, he also points out that despite this *faux pas* Venona was definitely a credible operation and is convinced there remains a large amount of other evidence to suggest that Sobell was guilty of espionage. "The verdict stands," states Peake defiantly.⁷⁰

Sobell says the time frame in which the decrypting took place is yet another controversial aspect of Venona. Evidence produced by FBI agent Robert Lamphere suggests that by the mid-1940s the KGB had changed its codes and messages could not be decoded after that time. It is now apparent that code-breakers were not deciphering messages that had been sent beyond the mid-1940s, so those being accused of espionage in the 1950s, if they ever really were involved in spying, may have gotten out of the game years previously.

Finally, Kahn has stated that the reason the Venona messages were not introduced at the Rosenberg/Sobell trial in 1951 was in order not to compromise Venona. Sobell said that in actual fact the program admittedly had been compromised years earlier.⁷¹ It is believed by some that by 1948 Soviet intelligence had learned of Venona through Army Security Agency cipher clerk William Weisband.⁷² Others say Harold A.R. "Kim" Philby, a Soviet agent who became British liaison to the CIA in 1949, probably divulged the Venona secret to the Soviet Union after being shown the Venona files that year.⁷³ While he could not stop or slow the analysis of these messages, it is likely he kept the

Soviets informed about the American Security Agency's progress and "warned them when the American state of knowledge reached dangerous levels."⁷⁴

John Earl Haynes, who has written numerous books on the history of communism in the United States and has studied the Venona files as well as a limited number of Soviet archives that have been opened to the public, describes the Venona documents as an ordinary set of archival records with all of the strengths and weaknesses of such material.

They should be matched up with other evidence: FBI investigatory files, defectors' statements, court testimony, congressional committee testimony, Russian archival records and so on. I think it unlikely that the NSA/FBI analysts were 100 per cent accurate in all there identifications of cover names, to be so would be a miracle. But that they were highly accurate is established by the amount of independent evidence supporting their identifications. If one wished to quantify it, an artifice but for illustration, I would, based on my own research, put the accuracy of the identifications as well in excess of 95 per cent.⁷⁵

The Haunted Wood: Soviet Espionage in America – The Stalin Era, a book released by Weinstein and Vassiliev in 1999, provides further evidence that the Venona project is legitimate, as more than 40 Venona cables are matched up with those found in the KGB archives in Moscow.⁷⁶

McCarthy and Venona

However, in this book, Weinstein and Vassiliev conclude that by the time the Cold War really started to heat up at the close of the 1940s, and before McCarthy made his way on to centre stage, most of the spies had been forced out of key positions, largely chased away by the end of the Soviet-American alliance and the defections of spies Igor

Gouzenko in Canada, and Chambers and Bentley⁷⁷ in the United States, as well as the general anti-communist attitude prevalent in American society. “Communism was a defeated ideology in the United States, with its influence in steep and steady decline, and the KGB reduced to recruiting thieves as spies,”⁷⁸ they say. As a result, like the large majority of historians, they believe that McCarthy was waging a war on imaginary Communists.

However, it is interesting to note what Haynes and Klehr, who are in no way supportive of the actions of McCarthy, have to say about the spy situation at the advent of the Cold War. They suggest that while many spies had been clearly identified and taken care of by Venona, either via prosecution or by being moved out of key government positions, “of the 349 Americans the deciphered Venona cables revealed as having covert ties to Soviet intelligence agencies, less than half could be identified by their real names and nearly 200 remained hidden behind cover names.”⁷⁹ American officials assumed that some of the latter surely were working still in sensitive positions. Had they been promoted and moved into policy-making jobs?”⁸⁰ How can Weinstein and Vassiliev say with any real certainty that most of the spies had, indeed, been forced out of key government posts? Despite the fact that many had been identified prior to McCarthy, in all probability a large number of spies still could have been affecting U.S. policy in the 1950s.

Haynes and Klehr continue the historical trend of dismissing McCarthy as a demagogue, pointing out that he mixed accurate information about people guilty of betraying their country, like White and Hiss, with lies about innocent people, like President Truman’s Secretary of State Dean Acheson and George C. Marshall, the Army Chief of Staff under Franklin Roosevelt and Secretary of State and Secretary of Defense

under Truman,⁸¹ creating a witch-hunting frenzy. However, if what Haynes and Klehr say is true; that is, if there were some 200 unidentified cover names of spies who could still possibly be inhabiting policy-making positions in government, McCarthy may not have been as far off base as has largely been depicted.

Patrick Moynihan, the New York Democratic Senator who led congressional efforts to declassify the Venona documents, said that some unfortunate episodes of the McCarthy period might have been avoided had the government been prepared to disclose all the information in its possession during the 1950s. Other intelligence experts say the government's unwillingness to permit the Venona documents to be used in court had made it impossible to bring charges against many of the people named by Chambers and Bentley.⁸²

Endnotes:

- ¹*Venona: Soviet Espionage and the American Response 1939-1957*, ed. Benson and Warner, p. viii.
- ²Haynes and Klehr, *Venona: Decoding Soviet Espionage in America*, p. 12.
- ³Eric Breindel, "Goodies from the Venona files. Hiss's Guilt," *The New Republic*, 15 April 1996, p. 1.
- ⁴Morton Sobell, [hdiplo@ouvaxa.cats.ohiou.edu]. "Venona and the Rosenbergs: A Response to the CIA's Venona Ceremony of July 11, 1995," 27 February 1997, p. 2.
- ⁵George Carpozi Jr., *Red Spies in Washington* (New York: Trident Press, 1968), pp. 221-223.
- ⁶Obtained from discussions with Dr. Brian Villa, thesis advisor and professor of American history at the University of Ottawa.
- ⁷*Venona: Soviet Espionage and the American Response 1939-1957*, ed. Benson and Warner, p. vii.
- ⁸National Security Agency, *Introductory History of Venona and Guide to the Translations*, p. 1.
- ⁹Haynes and Klehr, *Venona: Decoding Soviet Espionage in America*, p. 30.
- ¹⁰*Venona: Soviet Espionage and the American Response 1939-1957*, ed. Benson and Warner, p. vii.
- ¹¹*Venona Historical Monograph 2 – The 1942-43 New York-Moscow KGB Messages*, p. 1.
- ¹²David A. Hatch, "Venona: An Overview," *American Intelligence Journal* 17 (1996), p. 72.
- ¹³*Venona: Soviet Espionage and the American Response 1939-1957*, ed. Benson and Warner, p. vii.
- ¹⁴National Security Agency, *Introductory History of Venona and Guide to the Translations*, p. 2.
- ¹⁵Haynes and Klehr, *Venona: Decoding Soviet Espionage in America*, pp. 32 and 48.
- ¹⁶*Ibid.*, p. 3; also Tim Weiner, "U.S. Tells How It Found Soviets Sought A-Bomb: Discloses Clues That Led to Code-Breaking," *The New York Times*, 12 July 1995, p. A10.
- ¹⁷Haynes and Klehr, *Venona: Decoding Soviet Espionage in America*, p. 33. It eventually became clear that the KGB had used a different code book for 1942 and most of 1943.
- ¹⁸Michael Dobbs, "Code Name 'Mlad,' Atomic Bomb Spy: Newly Declassified Soviet Cables Point to American Physicist at Los Alamos," *Washington Post*, 25 February 1996.
- ¹⁹Tim Weiner, "U.S. Tells How It Found Soviets Sought A-Bomb: Discloses Clues That Led to Code-Breaking," p. A10.
- ²⁰*Venona Historical Monograph 2 – The 1942-43 New York-Moscow KGB Messages*,

p. 7. For further discussion on how American cryptanalysts were able to decipher Soviet messages, see Hatch, "Venona: An Overview," p. 72; also see Haynes and Klehr, *Venona: Decoding Soviet Espionage in America*, Chapter 2; also see George Johnson, "The Spies' Code And How It Broke," *The New York Times*, 16 July 1995.

²¹Hayden B. Peake, "OSS and the Venona Decrypts," *Intelligence and National Security* 12, 3 July 1997, p. 21.

²²*Ibid.*, p. 20; also see Hatch, "Venona: An Overview," p. 72.

²³Haynes and Klehr, *Venona: Decoding Soviet Espionage in America*, pp. 32-34.

²⁴Hatch, "Venona: An Overview," p. 73.

²⁵Dobbs, "Code Name 'Mlad,' Atomic Bomb Spy: Newly Declassified Soviet Cables Point to American Physicist at Los Alamos." NSA code-breakers worked on Venona documents until as late as 1980.

²⁶Michael Warner and Robert Louis Benson, "Venona and Beyond: Thoughts on Work Undone," *Intelligence and National Security* 12, 3 July 1997, p. 5.

²⁷*Venona files, First Venona Release*, 11 July 1995, No. 195, 9 February 1944.

²⁸*Ibid.*, No. 1600, 14 November 1944.

²⁹*Ibid.*, No. 628, 5 May 1944.

³⁰*Ibid.*, No. 1773, 16 December 1944.

³¹*Ibid.*, No. 195, 9 February 1944.

³²Weiner, "U.S. Tells How It Found Soviets Sought A-Bomb: Discloses Clues That Led to Code-Breaking," p. A10.

³³*Venona files, Third Venona Release*, No. 709, 5 July 1945.

³⁴*Venona files, First Venona Release*, No. 195, 9 February 1944.

³⁵Haynes and Klehr, *Venona: Decoding Soviet Espionage in America*, p. 9.

³⁶In an article published in the autumn of 2000, John Lowenthal argues that a Venona document released by the United States and the United Kingdom in 1996 identifying Alger Hiss as an espionage agent "is erroneous and irreconcilable with the evidence presented by the United States at Hiss's trials; that KGB documents have been misconstrued as supporting the identification; and that another Venona document tends to exonerate rather than to implicate Hiss." From John Lowenthal, "Venona and Alger Hiss," *Intelligence and National Security* 15, no. 3, Autumn 2000, p. 98.

³⁷Warner and Benson, *Venona and Beyond: Thoughts on Work Undone*, p. 1.

³⁸Dobbs, "Code Name 'Mlad,' Atomic Bomb Spy: Newly Declassified Soviet Cables Point to American Physicist at Los Alamos."

³⁹According to an account in Herman's *Joseph McCarthy: Reexamining the Life and Legacy of America's Most Hated Senator*, p. 75, Iskhak Akhmerov, who worked for the KGB, said the most valuable asset the KGB had enjoyed during the Second World War had been Hopkins, who was believed to have been an agent for the Soviet union without even really being aware of it; see Christopher Andrews

and Andrei Gordievsky, *KGB: The Inside Story* (New York: HarperCollins, 1990), p. 287.

⁴⁰Weinstein and Vassiliev, *The Haunted Wood: Soviet Espionage in America – The Stalin Era*, p. 74.

⁴¹Michael Dobbs, “New Documents Name American As Soviet Spy,” *Washington Post*, 6 March 1996.

⁴²John E. Haynes and Harvey Klehr, “Messages From Moscow: What the Secret Cables Say,” *The Weekly Standard*, 13 November 1995, p. 32.

⁴³Hatch, “Venona: An Overview,” p. 73.

⁴⁴Haynes and Klehr, *Venona: Decoding Soviet Espionage in America*, p. 15.

⁴⁵Sam Vincent Meddis, “Soviet Documents Incriminate Rosenbergs,” *USA Today*, 12 July 1995, p. A4.

⁴⁶John E. Haynes and Harvey Klehr, “Outed From the Cold,” *The Weekly Standard*, 15 April 1996, p. 16.

⁴⁷Haynes and Klehr, “Messages From Moscow: What the Secret Cables Say,” p. 31.

⁴⁸Klehr, Haynes and Firsov, Russian documents translated by Sergay, *The Secret World of American Communism*, p. 14.

⁴⁹Caute, *The Great Fear: The Anti-Communist Purge Under Truman and Eisenhower*, p. 56.

⁵⁰Tom Bowman and Scott Shane, “Memo Revives Case Against Hiss,” *The Sun*, 6 March 1996.

⁵¹Weiner, “U.S. Tells How It Found Soviets Sought A-Bomb: Discloses Clues That Led to Code-Breaking,” p. A10.

⁵²Weinstein and Vassiliev, *The Haunted Wood: Soviet Espionage in America – The Stalin Era*, p. 157.

⁵³*Venona: Soviet Espionage and the American Response 1939-1957*, ed. Benson and Warner, p. xxvi.

⁵⁴*Ibid.*, p. vii.

⁵⁵Weinstein and Vassiliev, *The Haunted Wood: Soviet Espionage in America – The Stalin Era*, p. 109.

⁵⁶In fact, Elizabeth Bentley identified five OSS headquarters officers as KGB agents, including Helen Tenney, Iberian analyst, Research and Administration (R&A) Branch; Joseph J. Julius (known as “Ostorozhnyj” in Venona, which is Russian for “Cautious”), chief civilian economics sections, Far East Division, R&A Branch; Duncan Lee (“Koch”), executive assistant to the director; Donald Wheeler (“Izra”), editorial board, R&A Branch; and Maurice Halperin (“Zayats,” or “Hare” in English, and “Stowaway”), chief of the Latin American Division, R&A Branch. All except Tenney were mentioned in Venona. From Peake, “OSS and the Venona Decrypts,” p. 21.

⁵⁷Weinstein and Vassiliev, *The Haunted Wood: Soviet Espionage in America – The Stalin Era*, p. 21, also John E. Haynes and Harvey Klehr, “Two Gentlemen of Venona,”

The Weekly Standard, 13 May 1996, pp. 16-17.

⁵⁸Haynes and Klehr, "Two Gentlemen of Venona," pp. 16-17.

⁵⁹Weinstein and Vassiliev, *The Haunted Wood: Soviet Espionage in America – The Stalin Era*, p. 19; also see *Venona files*, No. 380, 28 March 1944, and No. 916, 28 June 1944.

⁶⁰Haynes and Klehr, *Venona: Decoding Soviet Espionage in America*, p. 10.

⁶¹Weinstein and Vassiliev, *The Haunted Wood: Soviet Espionage in America – The Stalin Era*, p. 158. Another spy ring, a Soviet military intelligence (or GRU) network – consisting of New Deal officials mainly from the Agricultural Adjustment Administration (AAA), including Alger Hiss, Lee Pressman, John Abt, Charles Kramer and Henry Nathan Witt; plus Henry Collins of the National Recovery Administration (NRA); George Silverman, an economist with the Railroad Retirement Board; Marion Bachrach (John Abt's sister); Donald Hiss (Alger Hiss's brother and also a government attorney); and Victor Perlo, a statistician for the NRA – was headed by Harold [Hal] Ware. It disbanded in 1935 after Ware died in a car accident. Perlo would later form his own spy network known as the Perlo group during the Roosevelt administration, which had informants in the War Production Board, the Treasury Department, the Senate Committee on War Mobilization and the Office of Strategic Services (predecessor to the CIA). From Weinstein and Vassiliev, *The Haunted Wood: Soviet Espionage in America – The Stalin Era*, pp. 5, 39 and 232; also Haynes and Klehr, *Venona: Decoding Soviet Espionage in America*, pp. 62-64 and pp. 116-129; also Haynes and Klehr, "Outed From the Cold," p. 16; also Klehr, Haynes and Firsov, Russian documents translated by Sergay, *The Secret World of American Communism*, pp. 81 and 82. It should be noted that historian Earl Latham does not classify the Ware group as an espionage ring. He explains the group did not exchange secret documents from the government departments, but did give sealed reports on the membership of the groups and on policy. "It was not a spy ring, but one far more important and cunning because its members helped to shape policy in their departments," he says. From Latham, *The Communist Controversy in Washington: From the New Deal to McCarthy*, p. 117.

⁶²Haynes and Klehr, *Venona: Decoding Soviet Espionage in America*, p. 10.

⁶³Dobbs, "Code Name 'Mlad,' Atomic Bomb Spy: Newly Declassified Soviet Cables Point to American Physicist at Los Alamos."

⁶⁴Haynes and Klehr, *Venona: Decoding Soviet Espionage in America*, p. 10.

⁶⁵Lowenthal, "Venona and Alger Hiss," pp. 98-99, 106 and 119.

⁶⁶*Ibid*, p. 120.

⁶⁷Sobell, "An Examination of the Authenticity of the Venona 'Intercepts,' " p.2.

⁶⁸Meddis, "Soviet Documents Incriminate Rosenbergs," p. 4A.

⁶⁹Morton Sobell [nancmort@igc.apc.org].

⁷⁰Hayden Peake [BkCollector@msn.com].

⁷¹Morton Sobell, [hdiplo@ouvaxa.cats.ohiou.edu]. "Venona and the Rosenbergs, Part II: An Examination of the Authenticity of the Venona 'Intercepts,'" a paper that was not presented at the Venona Conference Oct. 3-4, 1996, 27 February 1997, p. 3.

⁷²Weinstein and Vassiliev, *The Haunted Wood: Soviet Espionage in America – The Stalin Era*, p. 291.

⁷³Weiner, "U.S. Tells How It Found Soviets Sought A-Bomb: Discloses Clues That Led to Code-Breaking," p. A10; also Bill Gertz, "Papers from '40s Prove Rosenbergs Were Spies: Decoded Documents Detail KGB Work," *The Washington Times*, 12 July 1995, p. A1.

⁷⁴Hatch, "Venona: An Overview," p. 73.

⁷⁵John E. Haynes [jhay@loc.gov].

⁷⁶Weinstein and Vassiliev, *The Haunted Wood: Soviet Espionage in America – The Stalin Era*, p. xvii.

⁷⁷Carpozi, *Red Spies in Washington*, p. 276. Carpozi suggests Bentley supplied the FBI with the names of 37 employees of government agencies and wartime boards with whom she said she had dealt as a spy in Washington. However, historians Harvey Klehr, John Earl Haynes, Fridrikh Igorevich Firsov and Timothy D. Sergay, in *The Secret World of American Communism*, p. 14, say more than 40 government officials were named by Bentley. David Caute, in *The Great Fear: The Anti-Communist Purge Under Truman and Eisenhower*, p. 56, says Bentley actually identified 43 people as having belonged to the communist underground within the government service, including Lauchlin Currie.

⁷⁸Weinstein and Vassiliev, *The Haunted Wood: Soviet Espionage in America – The Stalin Era*, pp. 298 and 340.

⁷⁹These figures are debatable if only because many spies had more than one cover name. Thus, it is really impossible to say how many unknown spies did exist, but it would be fair to believe the number was, indeed, substantial.

⁸⁰Haynes and Klehr, *Venona: Decoding Soviet Espionage in America*, p. 12.

⁸¹*Ibid.*, p. 17.

⁸²Dobbs, "New Documents Name American As Soviet Spy."

CHAPTER TWO

A brief history of communism and espionage in the United States: Some milestones

“The wonder is not that there were many who made careers in the government. The wonder is that the total membership of the party did not do so after the party line had changed from red to true blue.”

**– Historian Earl Latham, regarding communist infiltration
of the U.S. government during President Franklin Roosevelt’s
New Deal years in the Popular Front era**

In any study of McCarthyism, it is important to note that Joseph McCarthy, while having an era named after him, was only a small part of that era. The Senator may be viewed as the outer layer of an onion, the part that everyone saw and reacted to. However, there were several more layers beneath the surface and without those layers there would have been no Joseph McCarthy. That is why it is so important when studying McCarthyism to look beyond the Senator himself. The roots of McCarthyism began in a much different time and place than 1950s America. It was only after years of legislation and buildup to the Cold War that McCarthy and the second Red Scare of the late 1940s and 1950s emerged.

The story really begins in 1917, with the Bolsheviks' seizure of power in Russia. Besides sparking a wave of revolutionary conduct around the world, the Russian Revolution caused anti-radical hysteria among a large portion of the American population who cherished private property, democracy and pluralism.¹ Following the Russian Revolution, Bolsheviks invited radical parties from around the world to join forces and promote world revolution, forming the Third International, or Comintern, in 1919. In theory, all communist parties were to be the Comintern's equal branches. However, in practice, the Soviet party dominated the organization.²

The first American Communist party was formed in 1919. In actuality, American radicals founded two communist parties at this time.³ There was the Communist Party of America, led by Charles Ruthenberg and claiming membership of about 24,000, and the rival Communist Labor Party, led by John Reed and Benjamin Gitlow, claiming membership of some 10,000. And America's early Communists did not receive the warmest of welcomes. In the fall of 1919, New York police began raiding dozens of radical clubhouses under the Deportation and Exclusion Laws of 1917-1920, in which

Attorney General A. Mitchell Palmer listed 12 organizations where membership would lead to automatic deportation for aliens.⁴ Several hundred people were arrested and radical literature was confiscated in what became known as the Palmer raids. The heated atmosphere of the first Red Scare, as it was later called, provoked government agencies to disregard normal legal restraints on official power. During the raids, officials often failed to obtain warrants for searching or arresting people, and those arrested were in many cases abused and held incommunicado. By 1921, however, the first Red Scare was over.⁵

Pressured by the Comintern, the two American communist parties merged in 1921 and Ruthenberg took control of the leadership. The revamped Communist Party of the United States of America (CPUSA) was ordered to abandon its underground operations and form an aboveground organization. And while the two parties did form one retooled unit, it remained deeply divided. Opposing factions spent much of their time and energy struggling against each other. Largely as a result of the Deportation and Exclusion Laws, the initial Red Scare and this internal bickering, the party remained weak and failed to make much of a mark on American society in the 1920s.⁶ By the end of the decade, the combined membership of the CPUSA reportedly fell to below 10,000.

But if the 1920s proved unkind to American Communists, the 1930s offered them new and improved opportunities. As the nation plummeted into depression after 1929, its economic promise shattered, the chance for a new political orthodoxy presented itself. The Great Depression restored communist dreams of revolution, and the party gained widespread publicity by leading a series of strikes and demonstrations. The CPUSA was the first group to organize nationwide demonstrations against unemployment during the early years of the Depression. However, throughout the first half of the 1930s, the

CPUSA remained a small organization on the fringes of American society. In 1932, 53 well-known writers and artists, dismissing the old parties and system as bankrupt, endorsed the communist ticket. Even though the Depression radicalized these and some other Americans, many more were attracted to Roosevelt's New Deal. Born in 1933, this program of social reforms was in many ways more acceptable because it fell within the confines of the country's democratic traditions. In Roosevelt's first months in power, called the "first hundred days," the public accepted bold experiments in federal intervention.⁷ He abandoned the gold standard, offered government loans to farmers and homeowners, funnelled aid through state and local governments to the unemployed and formed the Civilian Conservation Corps to put people back to work.⁸ Dozens of agencies were set up to dispense emergency and short-term governmental aid and to provide temporary jobs, employment and construction projects, as well as youth work in the national forests. The Tennessee River Valley Authority (TVA) undertook to provide flood control, hydroelectric power and economic reconstruction.⁹ At this time, American Communists denounced Roosevelt as a reactionary seeking to save capitalism. They called the New Deal an American version of fascism.¹⁰ In 1934, it has been estimated that CPUSA membership was still only 24,500. This number increased to about 31,000 in May 1935, according to reports to the party's Central Committee.¹¹

At the Seventh Congress of the Communist International held in Moscow in 1935, the new Comintern leader, Georgi Dimitrov, called for a Popular Front against fascism. Communist parties, which had been denouncing liberals and socialists, now called for an alliance with them. In the United States, the CPUSA embraced the New Deal. Aided by the Popular Front stance, Communists soon could be found in dozens of organizations, dealing with every aspect of American life. Many liberals remained suspicious of

Communists, but others, impressed by the CPUSA's newfound support for Franklin Roosevelt and by its ardent antifascism, were willing to co-operate with the party.¹² *The New Republic* and *The Nation*, leading journals of American liberalism, adopted a Popular Front stance and called for an alliance between liberals and Communists. According to Haynes, "Communists ceased being pariahs and gained a measure of respect and even of admiration from influential intellectuals and artists."¹³ In a few states and cities, this Popular Front alliance became a political force. Communists and their allies won control of the Washington Commonwealth Federation, the leading New Deal body in the state of Washington.¹⁴

Between 1935 and 1939, the Communist party enjoyed the greatest successes in its history, never to be matched again, say Haynes and Klehr. Not coincidentally, during this era, the basic directions of American and Soviet foreign policy were similar and the party was most moderate in its views of domestic politics.¹⁵ When American and Soviet foreign policies were much the same, as for example during the late 1930s and the Second World War, American Communists enjoyed some successes. When the United States and the Soviet Union were enemies, American Communists found themselves trying to defend the interests of their country's most dangerous foe.¹⁶

It was in the Popular Front period that the Communists helped build unions like the United Auto Workers and United Electrical Workers, and enticed intellectuals largely by their ardent anti-fascism. Richard Fried says full employment in the USSR, in contrast to the breadlines in the United States, impressed some observers, as did the liberal-sounding 1936 Soviet Constitution.¹⁷ As for American Communists, capitalism was considered an outmoded, irrational and exploitative system that benefited a small minority of wealthy people at the expense of the vast majority of Americans. They

fervently believed it would someday be replaced by a more humane, rational and democratic society modelled on the Soviet Union.¹⁸

In January 1937, reports to the Central Committee of the CPUSA put party membership at about 37,000. This number jumped to 55,000 a year later.¹⁹ Although there has been much debate about the actual size of the communist movement in the United States throughout its history, largely because of its underground aspect, membership in the late 1930s was reportedly four to five times what it had been earlier in the decade,²⁰ peaking in 1939 at what some have suggested was around 100,000. Others have put the figure at a more modest 60,000 to 80,000.²¹ However, it was not the actual number of people involved in this movement that is of the utmost importance, rather it was the zeal with which those who belonged went about their revolutionary task. And American Communists made no bones about the fact they identified totally with the Soviet Union as the workers' fatherland, more precisely with the Comintern.²² What made them such feared adversaries for their capitalist counterparts was their deep, almost religious, faith in their cause and its ultimate triumph, say Haynes and Klehr. It was that idealism that made many believe the communist movement was a huge challenge to American democracy.²³

It was during the mid-1930s that members of the Communist party began to occupy positions in federal agencies, largely due to the vastly expanding federal government of Roosevelt's New Deal. A 50-per-cent increase in the size of the federal government between 1933 and 1938 was recruited from the outside. The problem, according to Latham, was not keeping the enemy out, but getting enough people in to the government to run it. Latham says there is no evidence to suggest there was any master plan on the part of the Communist party to infiltrate the agencies of the U.S. government

with members of the party, but many members did, in any event, end up in sometimes key positions. “It doubtless did not take long for the party to realize it could make use of its members in Washington to gather information,” Latham says.²⁴ He suggests that those who did end up in government agencies were not primarily involved in espionage, but in the promotion of left revisionist tendencies in the development of public policies of the respective agencies. Some authors, including Daniel Bell, have ventured the view that the work of the Communists in these federal agencies was exaggerated.²⁵ Others, including James Burnham, believe that the penetration was massive, that a “veritable web of subversion was woven and that it had fateful and perhaps even decisive results in the advancement of Soviet interests.”²⁶ The public record even before the release of the Venona files supports the finding that there was considerable activity. Evidence, largely provided by Bentley and Chambers, suggests at least two principal centres of political espionage were at work in Washington during the war years, and that important sources for the transmission of information to Soviet agents had been established in a number of other places.²⁷

In 1936, CPUSA leader Earl Browder gave a speech at the National Press Club, showing support for Roosevelt by urging defeat of his Republican opponent. Under the influence of the Popular Front, American progressives by the hundreds showed their solidarity with their communist peers. Academic Philip Jessup, feminist judge Dorothy Kenyon and idealistic law student Fred Fisher (all of whom would later do battle with McCarthy) joined “front” organizations and signed petitions. They donated their money to communist-led fundraising drives and their names to open letters published in the *Daily Worker*. Herman says that in the late 1930s, Communists extended their influence to the American labour movement, particularly the Congress of Industrial Organizations

(CIO). Hollywood's Screen Writers Guild was for all intents and purposes communist controlled, through organizers V.J. Jerome and John Howard Lawson, as was the Conference of Studio Unions, he says. Herman adds that Communists broke into mainstream politics through their domination of the American Labor Party in New York.²⁸

However, despite the Popular Front movement, the U.S. government remained a little wary of communism. In 1938, the implementation of the Foreign Agents Registration Act made it mandatory for anyone issuing political propaganda on behalf of a foreign nation to register with the State Department.²⁹ As well, a Special House Committee on Un-American Activities, better known as the Dies Committee, chaired by Texas Congressman Martin Dies, was set up to investigate "un-American" propaganda. The Dies Committee attacked both the CIO and the New Deal for their alliance with Communists.³⁰ It has been suggested Dies pioneered in the methods of defamation and self-promotion, something McCarthy later picked up on.³¹ "Martin Dies named more names in one single year than Joe McCarthy named in a lifetime," says Griffith.

The membership of the Dies Committee perfected all the gambits that McCarthy would later use: 'I have reliable evidence which I am not at liberty to disclose at the present time.' Or, if the Justice Department will only investigate, it will 'have no difficulty getting the facts.'³²

Latham believes that from 1938 to 1948 the problem of Communists in federal employment increasingly became involved with the hostility of conservatives toward the New Deal. Anti-New Dealers did not always distinguish between liberals and Communists, Latham says, and some made great effort to embarrass the administration through attacks that seemed to say that subversion and social reform were the same thing.³³

While the tremendous advances the CPUSA made during the Popular Front period had given it a foothold in institutions throughout American society, its willingness to jeopardize everything it achieved to serve Soviet interests became apparent immediately after Josef Stalin and Adolf Hitler reached an agreement in 1939 on a nonaggression pact that paved the way for the beginning of the Second World War. The Nazi-Soviet Pact, signed on August 23, 1939, allowed the German leader, assured of Soviet neutrality, to attack Poland, while the Russian leader seized the Baltic states and eastern Poland.³⁴ It also made the Soviet Union an enemy of the United States. American Communists were soon informed they were to break with the New Deal and attack Roosevelt for his continued support of the European democracies. At the end of October, after Browder had been indicted on old charges of using a false passport and President Roosevelt had denounced the invasion of Finland, the Communist party ripped the Roosevelt administration as “Hitlerian” and slammed “bourgeois democracy.” This change of heart had serious consequences for the party’s status within American society. Most of the front groups that had achieved prominence were destroyed or severely weakened by defections of thousands of liberals unprepared to support the new policies. Although few party functionaries resigned, many ordinary Communists, particularly Jews, cut their ties to the CPUSA. Party officials estimated the loss to be about 15 per cent in one year, but Haynes and Klehr suggest it was probably much higher.³⁵

In 1939, Congress passed the Hatch Act, which included a section denying federal jobs to members of any organization or party that advocated overthrowing the government. The Civil Service Commission soon applied the Hatch Act to the Communist party, the Bund, “or any other Communist, Nazi or Fascist organization.”³⁶ In 1940, the government prosecuted the *Daily Worker*, International Publishers and

World Tourists Inc., for failure to register with the Justice Department as agents of the Soviet Union³⁷ under the Voorhis Act, which required foreign-controlled organizations to register with the government and provide information on their activities.³⁸ Also in 1940, the Alien Registration Act, universally known as the Smith Act and aimed at Communists, made it a federal offence for anyone to advocate the violent overthrow of the American government. It required all resident aliens to register with the government and be fingerprinted. It made it a crime to “interfere with or impair the loyalty, morale or discipline of the armed services.” It also outlawed teaching or advocating the “duty, necessity, desirability or propriety of overthrowing or destroying any government in the United States by force or violence,” or organizing or belonging to a group with that aim.³⁹ A year later, the administration invoked this act against 18 Trotskyists of the Socialist Workers Party.⁴⁰

In 1939-40, Congress considered more than 40 alien and sedition bills. And in 1941, it provided the FBI with \$100,000 to investigate federal employees or applicants who came under the Hatch Act. Thus began the security program, which was substantially broadened after the Second World War.⁴¹

The pendulum began to swing back in favour of the CPUSA in 1941 following the German invasion of the Soviet Union and the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. The Soviets were again considered an American ally and the Communists, who threw their support behind the American war effort and Roosevelt’s war policies, were once more viewed in a positive light,⁴² re-establishing the Popular Front after June 1941.⁴³ This allowed the rebuilding of many of the relationships destroyed during the period of the Nazi-Soviet Pact. The heroic resistance to the Nazi army also lessened the anti-communist sentiment of the American public.⁴⁴ Indeed, Browder even received

amnesty and was released from prison.⁴⁵ However, in April 1942, party membership stood at only 50,000. According to Haynes and Klehr, perhaps more important than the loss of members and sympathizers was the loss of goodwill that had been built up in the last half of the 1930s. The CPUSA had demonstrated that none of its principles was as important as loyalty to the foreign policy of the Soviet Union. Despite some reservations, the Communist party maintained a good working relationship with the American government until the end of the Second World War. Shortly after the onset of the Cold War, American Communists would again “be cast into political purgatory.”⁴⁶ However, during the war and for a year or so after, Richard Fried says a mix of optimism and antipathy characterized American opinion about Russia. In a 1945 poll, 39 per cent described the USSR as “peaceloving.” Two years later, just 12 per cent held that view, while the number labelling the Soviets “aggressive” rose from 38 per cent to 66 per cent.⁴⁷

The year 1945 is important in any study of communism and McCarthyism largely due to the *Amerasia* case. This case has been characterized as “one of the weirdest in the history of American criminal jurisprudence.”⁴⁸ An accidental discovery by a security officer at the Office of Strategic Services (OSS) set in motion events that led to the discovery of documents that had been supplied by government employees to the editors of *Amerasia*, a magazine controlled by communist sympathizers. On Feb. 28, 1945, the security officer at the OSS, Archbold van Beuren, visited the New York office of the director of investigations for the OSS, Frank Brooks Bielaski, and showed him a document prepared in the Research Division of the OSS by Kenneth E. Wells, a Far East analyst. When this document was compared to a recent article published in *Amerasia*, it was discovered that whole paragraphs from the secret report had been reprinted in the

public article. On March 11, 1945, agents from the Office of Naval Intelligence (ONI) entered the *Amerasia* offices. Dozens of photocopies of government documents were found, some marked “Top Secret,” one dealing with the disposition of units of the Japanese Navy after the battle of the Philippine Sea in the last three months of the previous year, and another concerning American strategic bombing of Japan. Although the papers had originated in a dozen places in the government service, they had all been received from the State Department. After an FBI investigation, six people were arrested.⁴⁹ None of the arrests resulted in a contested trial with the presentation of evidence.⁵⁰ Jaffe and Kate Mitchell were identified as editors at the magazine, who were in frequent contact with Emmanuel Larsen of the State Department; Mark Gayn, a writer for *Collier's*; Lieutenant Andrew Roth of the ONI; and John Stewart Service. The agents found some 800 documents: about 600 in Jaffe’s office, 200 in Larsen’s apartment, and 40 in Gayn’s home. No documents were found on Mitchell, Roth or Service.⁵¹ This case is of great significance because it was often pointed to by Republicans and anti-communists, including McCarthy, as a prime example of how high-ranking members of the Democratic government had coddled Communists, covered up their wrongdoing and were lax when it came to security matters.

Magnifying the problem of security was the Gouzenko case. Igor Gouzenko, a Russian spy, broke ranks with his leaders and defected in Ottawa in September 1945, offering evidence the Russians had infiltrated the Manhattan Project in a ring with branches in Great Britain, Canada and the United States.⁵² Gouzenko’s information showed that the Soviets had been operating an extensive espionage apparatus in Canada at a time when Canada was an ally of the Soviet Union, using personnel provided by the Canadian Communist party. Gouzenko’s documents initiated an espionage investigation

that led to the imprisonment of eight Canadians, including Fred Rose, a communist member of the Canadian parliament; Sam Carr, organizing secretary of the Communist Party of Canada; and Dr. Allan Nunn May, a nuclear scientist. Gouzenko's information indicated that intelligence operations out of the Soviet embassy in Ottawa had been just a branch of a much larger Soviet espionage effort aimed at penetration of American and British high-technology weapons programs. British security officers and the American FBI pursued Gouzenko's leads, and in both nations several scientists and engineers on sensitive projects were implicated in Soviet spying. Gouzenko's information also assisted the Venona project.⁵³

Also in 1945, according to James Drummey, a former senior editor of *The New American*, the security problem at the State Department had worsened considerably when a merger brought in thousands of employees from such war agencies as the OSS, the OWI and the Foreign Economic Administration – all of which were riddled with members of the communist underground. J. Anthony Panuch, the State Department official in charge of supervising the merger, told a Senate committee in 1953 that “the biggest single thing that contributed to the infiltration of the State Department was the merger of 1945. The effects of that are still being felt.”⁵⁴

Caute says that when Truman became President of the United States on April 12, 1945, the federal and state statute books “were already bristling with anti-communist legislation.” All that was required was the will to enforce it. On July 2, 1946, the House Civil Service Committee appointed a subcommittee to investigate the loyalty of federal civil servants, which prompted Truman, after the Republican mid-term election victory in November, to appoint his own Temporary Commission on Employee Loyalty. Then, on July 6, 1946, the passage of the McCarran Rider to the State Department Appropriations

Bill endowed the Secretary of State with powers of “summary dismissal in his absolute discretion.” The secretaries of the Navy and War departments had already acquired such powers during the war.

The 80th Congress of 1946-47 was a stormy one. Senator Clare E. Hoffman, a Republican from Michigan, said that “from the day that Mrs. [Eleanor] Roosevelt appeared with a group of Communists before the Dies Committee, the New Deal and, more recently, the Truman administration has been coddling and encouraging Communists, who, in federal positions, thrive on the taxpayers’ dollars.”

At the same time, Haynes says that in the first two years following the Second World War, with a membership of about 70,000, the CPUSA achieved its greatest institutional power, playing a large role in the CIO, where unions with Communist-aligned leaders represented about 1,370,000 members, a quarter of the CIO’s total. Their power within the labour movement gave Communists entry into mainstream politics, he adds.⁵⁵

In June 1947, a Senate Appropriations subcommittee addressed a secret memorandum to Secretary of State George C. Marshall, calling to his attention:

a condition that developed and still flourishes in the State Department under the administration of Dean Acheson. It is evident that there is a deliberate, calculated program being carried out not only to protect communist personnel in high places but to reduce security and intelligence protection to a nullity. On file in the department is a copy of a preliminary report of the FBI on Soviet espionage activities in the United States [that] involves a large number of State Department employees, some in high official positions.

The memorandum listed the names of nine of these State Department officials and said they were “only a few of the hundreds now employed in varying capacities who

are protected and allowed to remain despite the fact that their presence is an obvious hazard to national security.” On June 24, 1947, Assistant Secretary of State John Peurifoy notified the chairman of the Senate subcommittee that 10 persons had been dismissed from the department, five of whom had been listed in the memorandum.⁵⁶

However, by the late 1940s, the Cold War had intensified and more Americans began to view the CPUSA as the domestic ally of America’s most dangerous enemy. Beginning in 1948, the U.S. Justice Department used the Smith Act to imprison more than 100 communist leaders, including Eugene Dennis, for conspiring to teach and organize the overthrow of the government by force and violence.⁵⁷

The Chambers-Bentley hearings

And on the last day of July 1948, HUAC’s Republican majority launched the Chambers-Bentley espionage hearings. Bentley appeared before the House and Senate committees and told of how she had been a communist spy since the early 1930s, but had recently broken ranks. Bentley, 40, who had grown up in Milford, Conn., said that for two years she travelled regularly from New York to Washington as a courier to pick up documents collected by two groups of Communists in government service, one allegedly headed by Nathan Gregory Silvermaster, director of the War Administration, and the other purportedly under the direction of Victor Perlo, a Treasury Department analyst. Bentley claimed her involvement in espionage came as a result of her relationship with a Soviet agent and high-level Communist party functionary named Jacob Golos, who recruited her and became her lover.⁵⁸ Golos, she said, had given her the task of delivering government secrets from a group of secret Communists in Washington to her

Russian handlers in New York City. She named about 80 people, including a number of high-ranking government officials, involved in espionage.⁵⁹ She told how the death of Golos in 1943 had helped persuade her to switch her allegiance away from the Communists. Communism, she concluded, was “a dirty racket and not an idealistic movement.” At these congressional hearings, Bentley related how, among other things, she had received information on the production of aircraft and armaments and on the projected data for the invasion of Europe. Among the employees of government agencies and boards she had been in contact with, she included White, Truman’s Assistant Secretary of the Treasury, as her “most important source of information.”

Although Bentley’s testimony helped to convict 11 CPUSA leaders in 1949 for conspiring to advocate the overthrow of the government, her accusations alone were not enough for a federal grand jury to hand out indictments for spying against any of the persons she implicated. However, William Remington of the Commerce Department was convicted of perjury for testifying that he had never been a member of the Communist party. Bentley had testified she collected dues from Remington for two years. In return for her co-operation, Bentley escaped prosecution.

It was, in fact, from the Bentley-Chambers hearings that the Hiss case was born. Chambers swore that Alger Hiss fed him U.S. government documents in 1937 and 1938 from his position in the State Department to relay to Russian spies. Hiss did this, Chambers said under oath, because Hiss, too, was a Communist.⁶⁰ According to David Cate, late in 1945, Secretary of State James F. Byrnes, despite an FBI report damaging to Hiss, had retained him. Cate says it was just another example of the administration ignoring or frustrating the FBI’s drive against suspected pro-communists. In 1950, Hiss was convicted and sentenced to five years in prison.⁶¹ Many wondered that if a man like

Hiss, who had accompanied Franklin Roosevelt to Yalta, had helped organize the United Nations and was obviously being groomed for bigger and better things could have done this, who could be trusted?⁶²

A distinguished graduate of Johns Hopkins and the Harvard Law School, Hiss was appointed clerk to Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes on the recommendation of Felix Frankfurter, himself later a Supreme Court Justice and a character witness for Hiss.⁶³ Hiss had started his rise to positions of governmental responsibility in 1936 when he went to the Justice Department as a special attorney, and later in the year became an aide to Assistant Secretary of State Francis B. Sayre. Not long after, Chambers said, he told Hiss about a Colonel Boris Bykov, who was “head of the underground apparatus with which I was then connected, and with which Hiss was connected.” Hiss met Bykov in January or February 1937, according to Chambers, who claimed he was also present. The three then went to a restaurant where the colonel got Hiss to agree to pass along the secrets of the State Department. Hiss, who denied ever knowing Bykov, was accused by Chambers of delivering State Department documents from 1937 to 1938, mostly reports on Germany and Japan.⁶⁴ Hiss initially denied ever having known Chambers, but eventually confessed that Chambers may have been a man he had once known as George Crosley, “a mooch with bad teeth,” but well before 1938, the date Chambers had given for their last contact.

The two men confronted each other at a dramatic hearing on August 17, 1948: After inspecting Chambers’ teeth and hearing him talk, Hiss agreed his accuser was, indeed, “Crosley,” but he continued to deny any involvement in Communist party activities. Hiss challenged Chambers to repeat his charges outside Congress, where, without congressional immunity, he could be sued for slander. Chambers complied,

stating on the television show *Meet the Press* that Hiss had been a Communist “and may be one now.”⁶⁵ After Hiss filed a \$75,000 libel suit against him, Chambers led HUAC investigators to a garden at his Maryland home and produced from a hollowed-out pumpkin rolls of microfilm and documents he said he had saved at a relative’s apartment in Brooklyn, N. Y., against potential communist threats on his life. The documentation became known as the “pumpkin papers.”⁶⁶ Richard Fried says the material was of “generally peripheral interest,” and none dealt with secrets of major importance, but some of the information was useful to the Soviets. Most of the microfilmed materials consisted of typed copies of documents. The hunt was on to find an old Hiss family typewriter. According to Weinstein, Hiss had known the typewriter, a Woodstock with serial number N230099, had been given to an old family servant and could be relocated easily enough. Only when the investigators closed in did Hiss produce it. Although no one ever proved conclusively who had typed the documents given to Chambers, most expert testimony argued that the Hiss Woodstock had been used.

Richard Fried says the Communist party tried vigorously to recruit New Dealers and Hiss was a prize catch. He describes Chambers as a “rumpled, dingy figure” who joined the Communist party in the 1920s and worked for communist publications. In 1932, Chambers went “underground,” eventually serving as a communist courier in Washington.⁶⁷ In April 1938, after taking a post with the National Research Project, under the Works Progress Administration, Chambers said he finally came to regard communism as evil, quit the party and “set out to atone for what he had tried to do to his country by putting the nation on guard against Communists.”⁶⁸

In the words of Caute, Hiss’s background, style and career symbolized the ethos of the self-confident, left-wing, East Coast, Ivy League, New Deal bureaucrat.⁶⁹ In the

words of historian Alistair Cooke, the Hiss case symbolized a generation on trial and was a key element in the emergence of McCarthyite politics.⁷⁰

Communism coming undone

In retrospect, Herman says, the 1948 election proved to be the Communist party's last hurrah. A dreadful performance ended the party's bid for political influence. It sank in numbers and influence. It organized one final Popular Front-style gathering of intellectuals, artists, and academics – the Waldorf Conference on World Peace in New York in March 1949. Meanwhile, Walter Reuther of the United Auto Workers and the CIO's Philip Murray were driving communist-dominated unions out of their organizations⁷¹ and, by 1950, communist influence over organized labour was virtually a dead letter.⁷²

By the end of 1948, Stalin's grip over Eastern Europe was secure. Then China officially fell to Mao Tse-tung's communist forces, meaning almost all of Asia was now coloured red, and China was the most populous country on earth.⁷³ But perhaps the biggest blow came on September 23, 1949, when Truman announced the Soviets had successfully tested their own atomic bomb. For months, Acheson and others had argued that Russia could not develop such a weapon until mid-1950 or 1951.⁷⁴ Now, the possibility of war was thought of in Armageddon terms.

Coplon, Fuchs and espionage

It was in 1949 the FBI learned the Justice Department's Judith Coplon was leaking information to the Soviets.⁷⁵ On March 6 of that year, the FBI arrested Coplon, 28, during a rendezvous with an attaché of the Soviet delegation to the United Nations, Valentin Gubitchev,⁷⁶ a Soviet engineer. Agents caught her in the New York subway passing documents to Gubitchev. In Coplon's pocketbook was a handwritten memorandum containing top secret information about American counterintelligence work and the efforts of Amtorg to obtain a scientific instrument used in the making of the atomic bomb. There was also a sealed package containing information from the FBI reports Coplon read during the course of her work as a political analyst in the Justice Department's Foreign Agent Registration section. The bureau had Coplon under surveillance for several months and had observed two earlier rendezvous between her and Gubitchev in which the two had acted as if they were trying to avoid being followed.⁷⁷ They also learned that when the Justice Department had hired her in 1944, it knew she had communist associations but took her on anyway.⁷⁸ Coplon had been copying FBI reports for the Russians since February 1946.⁷⁹ Convicted in two successive trials, Coplon's case was overturned by the Court of Appeals in December 1950 on technical grounds, even though the evidence was overwhelming that she was a Soviet spy.⁸⁰ She had been arrested without a warrant and the prosecution case depended on inadmissible wire-tapping evidence.

In 1949 alone, 15 states passed anti-subversion laws and by 1953, 39 states had made it a criminal offence to advocate violent governmental change or to join an organization advocating such.⁸¹

Amidst this buildup in anti-communist legislation, the Korean War broke out in 1950. With American soldiers dying in battle against communist troops, the CPUSA lost just about all its allies. The early 1950s were, however, to continue to be filled with stories of communist espionage.

After the arrest and confession of the German-born British nuclear physicist Klaus Fuchs, nine Americans were arrested during the first half of 1950 and linked by the Justice Department to a “Klaus Fuchs spy ring.” Fuchs admitted having passed top secret information to a courier while he was working at Los Alamos in 1944-45. According to the FBI, soon after his imprisonment in Britain, Fuchs identified the Philadelphia chemist Harry Gold as the courier from FBI photographs. Gold was arrested on March 23, 1950, three weeks after Fuchs had been sentenced to 14 years imprisonment in London. A Swiss-born naturalized American employed by the Philadelphia General Hospital’s heart station, Gold confessed he had, indeed, funnelled information from Fuchs to Anatoli A. Yakovlev, Soviet vice-consul in New York, in September 1945. Soon after his arrest, Gold implicated a young machinist from New York named David Greenglass. Arrested on June 15, 1950, Greenglass confessed and implicated two more people, his sister and brother-in-law, Ethel and Julius Rosenberg. Arrested along with the Rosenbergs was Morton Sobell, who was charged with agreeing to conspire to supply defence data to the Soviet Union. He was not charged with atomic espionage. Sobell declined to take the stand and called no defence witnesses. He was convicted and sentenced to 30 years’ imprisonment. Although the sentence was eventually shortened, some of his prison time was spent in the notoriously severe Alcatraz federal penitentiary in San Francisco Bay.⁸² On June 19, 1953, the Rosenbergs, who had two young sons, were executed in the electric chair at Sing Sing prison. They were the first American civilians to be put to

death for espionage committed in war time. According to Cate, “the timing, the passions aroused, the worldwide appeals for clemency and the ritual-purgatory nature of the act, all enshrine June 19, 1953, as the midsummer’s night of postwar anti-communist, anti-Soviet hysteria.”

Some historical views of communism

In conclusion, it is important to emphasize a number of points raised by historians regarding the American communist movement. First, as Haynes points out, communist ideology was incompatible with the values held by most Americans. Americans have always held a variety of political views, but most support private property, individualism and political democracy. Soviet communism, in contrast, abolished private property, instituted the collective as the basis of society and established a one-party dictatorship that suppressed dissent.

Second, according to Haynes, most Americans are nominally religious and many place considerable importance on their freedom to worship God as they please. The Soviet state promoted atheism, suppressed Christian worship and murdered thousands of priests and religious adherents. To many Americans, communism was a godless abomination.⁸³

Third, Herman says, while McCarthy’s critics assume there was no real communist threat, some important statistics need to be noted. He says anyone trying to assess the “Soviet threat” in the McCarthy era had to take into account between 200 and 400 active espionage agents; 54,000 communist full-time party members; and, according to an estimate by Hoover, at least a half-million active sympathizers, who were protected

constitutionally from surveillance. In this sense, America faced a threat far out of proportion to the actual size of the CPUSA or its secret apparatus.⁸⁴

And, finally, Haynes says, the existence of the CPUSA underground, which for years was disputed by many historians, can no longer be denied. This underground carried out a number of missions, including the placement of concealed Communists in selected government agencies in order to gain information or to influence policy. This tactic, Haynes points out, is confirmed by documents found in Russia. As one document found in the Soviet archives from the 1940s states, referring to the infiltration of a single government agency, "...There are Communists taking part in the work of that commission [Roosevelt is unaware of this]. Communists found their way in to that commission through the communist faction of Washington officials."⁸⁵ Documents prove that Jay Lovestone, General Secretary of the CPUSA in the late 1920s, and Earl Browder, General Secretary of the party from 1932 to 1945, both recruited Americans to spy for the Soviet Union. Other documents show that Eugene Dennis, General Secretary of the party from 1945 to 1959, supervised communist penetration of America's wartime intelligence agency, the OSS, and its wartime propaganda arm, the OWI, during the Second World War. These documents confirm that the CPUSA's underground worked directly with and for Soviet intelligence officer Vasily Zubilin, who supervised the Soviet theft of atomic bomb secrets.⁸⁶

Though the proportions of the communist threat can be argued, the reality of that threat cannot. It was not fantasy as many *anti-anti-communists* would lead one to believe. And a large percentage of Americans truly feared this threat. Existing literature that denies these realities is going to have to be revised. Venona has made that much clear.

Endnotes:

- ¹Fried, *Nightmare in Red: The McCarthy Era in Perspective*, p. 39.
- ²Klehr, Haynes and Firsov, Russian documents translated by Sergay, *The Secret World of American Communism*, pp. 6-7.
- ³Fried, *Nightmare in Red: The McCarthy Era in Perspective*, p. 40.
- ⁴Caute, *The Great Fear: The Anti-Communist Purge Under Truman and Eisenhower*, p. 169.
- ⁵John E. Haynes, *Red Scare or Red Menace? American Communism and Anticommunism in the Cold War Era* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1996), pp. 8-9.
- ⁶Klehr, Haynes and Firsov, Russian documents translated by Sergay, *The Secret World of American Communism*, pp. 5-7.
- ⁷Fried, *Nightmare in Red: The McCarthy Era in Perspective*, pp. 40-44.
- ⁸Sharon Rasmussen, [<http://www.booth.k12.nf.ca/~wdowden/history/murray/fdr.html>]. Franklin Delano Roosevelt.
- ⁹Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal. [http://www.hyperhistory.com/online_n2/people_n2/persons6_n2/images_persons6/newdeal.html].
- ¹⁰Klehr, Haynes and Firsov, Russian documents translated by Sergay, *The Secret World of American Communism*, p. 8.
- ¹¹Latham, *The Communist Controversy in Washington: From the New Deal to McCarthy*, p. 57, from Nathan Glazer, *The Social Basis of American Communism* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1961), p. 92.
- ¹²Klehr, Haynes and Firsov, Russian documents translated by Sergay, *The Secret World of American Communism*, pp. 8-10.
- ¹³Haynes, *Red Scare or Red Menace? American Communism and Anticommunism in the Cold War Era*, p. 13.
- ¹⁴Klehr, Haynes and Firsov, Russian documents translated by Sergay, *The Secret World of American Communism*, pp. 8-10.
- ¹⁵Harvey Klehr and John Earl Haynes, *The American Communist Movement: Storming Heaven Itself* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1992), p. 79.
- ¹⁶*Ibid.*, p. 3.
- ¹⁷Fried, *Nightmare in Red: The McCarthy Era in Perspective*, p. 13.
- ¹⁸Klehr and Haynes, *The American Communist Movement: Storming Heaven Itself*, p. 6.
- ¹⁹Latham, *The Communist Controversy in Washington: From the New Deal to McCarthy*, p. 57, from Glazer, *The Social Basis of American Communism* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1961), p. 92.
- ²⁰*Ibid.*, p. 57.
- ²¹Arthur Herman, in *Joseph McCarthy: Reexamining the Life and Legacy of America's*

Most Hated Senator, p. 67, suggests the figure at this time was about 70,000, while David Caute, in *The Great Fear: The Anti-Communist Purge Under Truman and Eisenhower*, p. 185, says there were between 60,000 to 80,000 members “out of a population of 150 million.”

²²Albert Fried, *McCarthyism: The Great American Red Scare – A Documentary History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 11.

²³Klehr and Haynes, *The American Communist Movement: Storming Heaven Itself*, p. 7.

²⁴Latham, *The Communist Controversy in Washington: From the New Deal to McCarthy*, pp. 71, 75 and 94.

²⁵*Ibid.*, p. 151, from Donald Drew Egbert and Stow Persons, “Marxism Socialism in the United States,” *Socialism and American Life* 1 (1952), p. 358.

²⁶*Ibid.*, p. 151, from James Burnham, *The Web of Subversion* (New York: John Day, 1954), p. 221.

²⁷*Ibid.*, p. 152.

²⁸Herman, *Joseph McCarthy: Reexamining the Life and Legacy of America's Most Hated Senator*, p. 67.

²⁹Fried, *Nightmare in Red: The McCarthy Era in Perspective*, pp. 47-52.

³⁰Latham, *The Communist Controversy in Washington: From the New Deal to McCarthy*, p. 7; also see Klehr and Haynes, *The American Communist Movement: Storming Heaven Itself*, p. 88.

³¹Fried, *Nightmare in Red: The McCarthy Era in Perspective*, p. 47.

³²Griffith, *The Politics of Fear: Joseph R. McCarthy and the Senate*, Second edition with a new introduction, pp. 32-33. Griffith points out that the Dies Committee “named names” with a vengeance – 563 federal employees were on the mailing list of the American League for Peace and Democracy; 1,121 government workers were “sympathetic with totalitarian ideology”; and 72 New Deal officials had ties to the CIO’s Political Action Committee.

³³Earl Latham, ed., *The Meaning of McCarthyism, Second Edition*, p. viii.

³⁴Klehr, Haynes and Firsov, Russian documents translated by Sergay, *The Secret World of American Communism*, p. 10.

³⁵Klehr and Haynes, *The American Communist Movement: Storming Heaven Itself*, pp. 92-93.

³⁶Fried, *Nightmare in Red: The McCarthy Era in Perspective*, p. 52.

³⁷Caute, *The Great Fear: The Anti-Communist Purge Under Truman and Eisenhower*, p. 25.

³⁸Haynes, *Red Scare or Red Menace? American Communism and Anticommunism in the Cold War Era*, p. 33.

³⁹Fried, *Nightmare in Red: The McCarthy Era in Perspective*, pp. 52-53.

⁴⁰Caute, *The Great Fear: The Anti-Communist Purge Under Truman and Eisenhower*, p. 25.

⁴¹Fried, *Nightmare in Red: The McCarthy Era in Perspective*, p. 52.

⁴²Klehr and Haynes, *The American Communist Movement: Storming Heaven Itself*, pp. 95-96.

⁴³Haynes, *Red Scare or Red Menace? American Communism and Anticommunism in the Cold War Era*, p. 36. The Popular Front ended once more when the Cold War began shortly after the Second World War.

⁴⁴Klehr, Haynes and Firsov, Russian documents translated by Sergay, *The Secret World of American Communism*, p. 11.

⁴⁵Caute, *The Great Fear: The Anti-Communist Purge Under Truman and Eisenhower*, p. 25.

⁴⁶Klehr and Haynes, *The American Communist Movement: Storming Heaven Itself*, pp. 4-6.

⁴⁷Fried, *Nightmare in Red: The McCarthy Era in Perspective*, p. 16.

⁴⁸Latham, *The Communist Controversy in Washington: From the New Deal to McCarthy*, p. 203, from Nathaniel Weyl, *The Battle Against Disloyalty* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1951), p. 219.

⁴⁹*Ibid.*, pp. 203-211.

⁵⁰Haynes, *Red Scare or Red Menace? American Communism and Anticommunism in the Cold War Era*, p. 53.

⁵¹Latham, *The Communist Controversy in Washington: From the New Deal to McCarthy*, pp. 203-211.

⁵²Caute, *The Great Fear: The Anti-Communist Purge Under Truman and Eisenhower*, p. 55.

⁵³Haynes, *Red Scare or Red Menace? American Communism and Anticommunism in the Cold War Era*, p. 55.

⁵⁴Drummey,

[http://www.thenewamerica.com/tna/1996/vol2no18/vol2no18_mccarthy.htm]. "The Real McCarthy Record: A Longtime Smear Campaign Has Clouded the Truth." It is important to note that Drummey, used as a source throughout this paper, presents a conservative bias in his views. *The New American*, the journal for which he was formerly a senior editor, is affiliated with The John Birch Society, which makes clear in its mission statement its aim is "to restore and preserve freedom under the U.S. Constitution" and its members share "a love of liberty and a rejection of totalitarianism in any form." For more on The John Birch Society, see [<http://www.jobs.org/>]. Haynes and Klehr suggest that the total number of Communists in the OSS alone was at least 50 and perhaps as high as 100, at least one in seven and perhaps as many as one in three Communists in the OSS were spies. From Haynes and Klehr, *Venona: Decoding Soviet Espionage in America*, p. 196.

⁵⁵Caute, *The Great Fear: The Anti-Communist Purge Under Truman and Eisenhower*, pp. 21-36.

⁵⁶Drummey,

[http://www.thenewamerica.com/tna/1996/vol12no18/vol12no18_mccarthy.htm]. "The Real McCarthy Record: A Longtime Smear Campaign Has Clouded the Truth."

Drummey says that from June 1947 until McCarthy's Wheeling speech in February 1950, the State Department did not fire one person as a loyalty or security risk.

In other branches of the government, however, more than 300 persons were discharged for loyalty reasons alone during the period from 1947 to 1951.

⁵⁷Klehr, Haynes and Firsov, Russian documents translated by Sergay, *The Secret World of American Communism*, pp. 12-13.

⁵⁸Carpozi, Jr., *Red Spies in Washington*, p. 225.

⁵⁹Schrecker, Ellen, "Before the Rosenbergs: Espionage Scenarios in the Early Cold War." In *Secret Agents: The Rosenberg Case, McCarthyism and Fifties America*, ed. Marjorie Garber and Rebecca L. Walkowitz (New York: Routledge, 1995), p. 134.

⁶⁰Carpozi, Jr., *Red Spies in Washington*, pp. 225-228.

⁶¹Caute, *The Great Fear: The Anti-Communist Purge Under Truman and Eisenhower*, pp. 59-61.

⁶²Fried, *McCarthyism: The Great American Red Scare – A Documentary History*, p. 71; also see Carpozi, Jr., *Red Spies in Washington*, p. 228.

⁶³Caute, *The Great Fear: The Anti-Communist Purge Under Truman and Eisenhower*, p. 58.

⁶⁴Carpozi, Jr., *Red Spies in Washington*, p. 229.

⁶⁵Fried, *Nightmare in Red: The McCarthy Era in Perspective*, pp. 19-20.

⁶⁶Caute, *The Great Fear: The Anti-Communist Purge Under Truman and Eisenhower*, pp. 59-61.

⁶⁷Fried, *Nightmare in Red: The McCarthy Era in Perspective*, pp. 18-21.

⁶⁸Carpozi, Jr., *Red Spies in Washington*, p. 229.

⁶⁹Caute, *The Great Fear: The Anti-Communist Purge Under Truman and Eisenhower*, p. 59.

⁷⁰Athan G. Theoharis, ed., *Beyond the Hiss Case: The FBI, Congress and the Cold War* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1982), p. 8.

⁷¹Herman, *Joseph McCarthy: Reexamining the Life and Legacy of America's Most Hated Senator*, p. 84.

⁷²Ibid, p. 84, from Klehr and Haynes, *The American Communist Movement*, pp. 123-125.

⁷³Fried, *McCarthyism: The Great American Red Scare – A Documentary History*, p. 70.

⁷⁴Herman, *Joseph McCarthy: A Reexamination of the Life and Legacy of America's Most Hated Senator*, p. 84

⁷⁵Fried, *McCarthyism: The Great American Red Scare – A Documentary History*, p. 106.

⁷⁶Caute, *The Great Fear: The Anti-Communist Purge Under Truman and Eisenhower*, p. 61.

⁷⁷Schrecker, "Before the Rosenbergs: Espionage Scenarios in the Early Cold War,"

p. 136.

⁷⁸Fried, *McCarthyism: The Great American Red Scare – A Documentary History*, p. 106.

⁷⁹Caute, *The Great Fear: The Anti-Communist Purge Under Truman and Eisenhower*, p. 61.

⁸⁰Fried, *McCarthyism: The Great American Red Scare – A Documentary History*, p. 106, from Haynes, *Red Scare or Red Menace? American Communism and Anticommunism in the Cold War Era*, p. 57.

⁸¹Caute, *The Great Fear: The Anti-Communist Purge Under Truman and Eisenhower*, p. 70.

⁸²*Ibid.*, pp. 61-66.

⁸³Haynes, *Red Scare or Red Menace? American Communism and Anticommunism in the Cold War Era*, pp. 7-15.

⁸⁴Herman, *Joseph McCarthy: Reexamining the Life and Legacy of America's Most Hated Senator*, p. 107.

⁸⁵Haynes, *Red Scare or Red Menace? American Communism and Anticommunism in the Cold War Era*, pp. 7-15.

⁸⁶*Ibid.*, p. 61.

CHAPTER THREE

Joseph McCarthy: The eye of the storm

“McCarthy’s carnival-like four-year spree of accusations, charges and threats touched something deep in the American body politic, something that lasted long after his own recklessness, carelessness and boozing ended his career in shame.”

– Historian David Halberstam

It was into the middle of this bizarre confrontation between the world's two superpowers, a battle that included mounting accusations of espionage and other traitorous acts, that the Senator from Wisconsin, Joseph McCarthy, seemingly materialized out of nowhere in 1950, at least according to many historical accounts. On February 9, 1950, McCarthy, who had been elected Senator of Wisconsin in 1946, delivered a now very famous stump speech before the Ohio County Women's Republican Club in Wheeling, W. Va., just 15 days after Alger Hiss had been sentenced to five years' imprisonment for perjury.¹ According to one report, McCarthy first quoted from Marx, Lenin and Stalin their stated goal of world conquest and said that "today we are in a final, all-out battle between communistic atheism and Christianity." He then blamed the fall of China and other countries to the Communists in the previous six years on "the traitorous actions" of the State Department's "bright young men."² He claimed the Truman administration was "thoroughly infested" with Communists, and that Communists in the State Department controlled American foreign policy.³ Before this speech, McCarthy was a relative unknown. Afterward, his name was on everyone's lips.

Historian Reinhard Luthin has reconstructed a passage of the unrecorded speech along the following lines:

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 that were known to the Secretary of State as being members of the Communist party and who, nevertheless, are still working and shaping the policy in the State Department.⁴

However, like much else about the controversial McCarthy, people cannot agree what it was he actually did say on that fateful night more than 50 years ago. According to James Drumme, what McCarthy really said was:

I have in my hand 57 cases of individuals who would appear to be either card-carrying members or are certainly loyal to the Communist party, but who nevertheless are still helping to shape foreign policy.⁵

Regardless of what the exact words were, McCarthy's speech became front page news across the nation. Following the Wheeling speech, the Senator continued westward, guns ablazing. Luthin says that in Denver, Colo., the Senator substituted "205 bad risks" for the "205 members of the Communist party and of a spy ring." At Salt Lake City, Utah, the figure became 57, but he now referred to these 57 as "card-carrying Communists." McCarthy's charges were greeted with skepticism by large sections of the press and the public, although many thousands accepted their authenticity. One of McCarthy's most severe critics, the *Milwaukee Journal*, on February 14, 1950, editorialized: "We suspect very much that his weekend oratorical spree is cut of demagogic cloth. It is up to the Senator to prove that it is not." Luthin says that suddenly McCarthy had a new number – 81 – which he was to use in the following weeks.⁶

Drummeys says McCarthy did, indeed, mention all of these numbers, but he was not being quite as erratic and inconsistent as his critics would have people believe.

In the Wheeling speech, McCarthy referred to a letter that Secretary of State James Byrnes sent to Congressman Adolph Sabath in 1946. In that letter, Byrnes said that State Department security investigators had declared 284 persons unfit to hold jobs in the department because of communist connections and other reasons, but that only 79 had been discharged, leaving 205 still on the State Department's payroll. McCarthy told his Wheeling audience that while he did not have the names of the 205 mentioned in the Byrnes letter, he did have the names of 57 who were either members of or loyal to the Communist party. On February 20, 1950, McCarthy gave the Senate information about 81 individuals – the 57 referred to at Wheeling and 24 others of less importance and about whom the evidence was less conclusive.⁷

An investigation was in order, and President Truman put together the special Senate subcommittee of the Foreign Relations Committee, headed by Millard E. Tydings,

a Democrat, to do just that.⁸ During the Tydings probe, Truman ordered the Loyalty Review Board, the loyalty program's highest tribunal, to look into the files of anyone McCarthy had accused. In front of the Tydings Committee, McCarthy presented public evidence on nine people: Esther Brunauer, Haldore Hanson, Gustavo Duran, Dr. Harlow Shapley, Frederick Schuman, Owen Lattimore, Dorothy Kenyon, John Stewart Service and Philip Jessup.⁹ Drummey says there was good reason for all nine of the people McCarthy mentioned to be considered security risks if membership in the Communist party or front organizations made them security risks. He points out that Hanson and Duran had been identified as members of the Communist party, that Kenyon, Schuman and Shapley had extensive records of joining communist fronts and supporting communist causes and that Brunauer had sufficient questionable associations, including her husband Stephen, to be dismissed from the State Department as a security risk in June 1952.¹⁰ Drummey says the record shows Jessup belonged to at least five communist-controlled fronts, that he associated closely with Communists and that he was an influential member of the IPR, which the Senate Internal Security Subcommittee (SISS) described in 1952 as "a vehicle used by Communists to orientate American Far Eastern policy toward communist objectives." The SISS also reported that 46 persons connected with the IPR while Jessup was an important figure there had been named under oath as members of the Communist party.

After 31 days of hearings, the committee decided there was no evidence to support the Senator's charges. In total, McCarthy provided the Tydings Committee with 110 names to be investigated. Sixty-two of them were employed by the State Department at the time of the hearings. The committee cleared everyone on McCarthy's list, but within a year the State Department started proceedings against 49 of the 62, according to

Drummey, who added that by the end of 1954, 81 of those on McCarthy's list had left the government either by dismissal or resignation.¹¹

Tydings, himself, called McCarthy a charlatan, a man who knew nothing about the communist menace. According to Tydings, McCarthy's idiotic charges were the sort of thing one would expect from the town dunce, leaving no doubt that this town dunce was a U.S. Senator. The danger, Tydings made clear, was that people were more likely to believe him than someone "on the corner of 9th and G streets who is carrying on a casual conversation." McCarthy was using his office as a platform to deceive the citizenry, Tydings said. When people heard him, they assumed that he was "the voice of the government." This had to be stopped.¹²

Except the Tydings ruling did little to stop McCarthy. In fact, it seemed to give him momentum. Polls in April 1950 showed that those who had followed his charges (about 70 per cent) sided with McCarthy by a 4-to-3 margin, not overwhelming but substantial support. Thousands of dollars poured into his office.¹³ In a famous three-hour speech on the Senate floor on June 14, 1951, McCarthy claimed that George C. Marshall was involved in a "great conspiracy" to aid the Soviet Union. The Senator implied that reluctance to aid Chiang Kai-shek, leader of the Nationalist Chinese government, in a conflict with Mao Tse-tung's Communist rebels was due to the presence of concealed Communists in the State Department, and that officials, aware of the situation, had failed to remove them.¹⁴ As a result, China had been lost to communism. He said both Marshall and Acheson were ready to sacrifice America's interests in order to advance Soviet power.¹⁵ In 1946, Truman had sent Marshall as his special ambassador to mediate the battle between Chiang's government and Mao. In January 1947, Marshall admitted the mission had failed and returned to the United States. By 1949, the Communists had

conquered the entire Chinese mainland. McCarthy also spoke of “the unusual affinity for communist causes” of the department’s chief trouble-shooter, Philip Jessup, and characterized Owen Lattimore, one-time department consultant, as being both the chief architect of Far Eastern policy and a top Soviet espionage agent.¹⁶

McCarthy was soon heard regularly on radio and seen on television. He made personal appearances at gatherings of all sorts throughout the country. The Senator began to acquire a national following numbering in the millions. Although McCarthy had nothing to do with the uncovering, prosecution or conviction of any communist spy or infiltrator, Luthin said, the Senator had shrewdly sensed the mood of the people and capitalized on it.¹⁷

By the time of the 1952 presidential election, Republican party leaders, among them Eisenhower, routinely deferred to the Senator. Albert Fried says they did not want to alienate someone who was doing such a great job of smearing Democrats, in particular Truman, Marshall, Acheson and Democratic presidential candidate Adlai Stevenson, for having committed “20 years of treason.”¹⁸ Following the Republican election victory that year, Senate Majority Leader Robert Taft rewarded McCarthy by appointing him chairman of the Senate Committee on Government Operations. McCarthy appointed himself chairman of its Subcommittee on Investigations, the famous “McCarthy Committee.”¹⁹

In rapid succession, he battled with the State Department, the Voice of America, the International Information Agency, the Government Printing Office, the UN and finally the U.S. Army itself over the issue of communist subversion.²⁰ In his highly publicized Red-hunting crusade, he had the volunteered assistance of unidentified employees in the federal agencies who supplied him with information about their

colleagues and superiors. McCarthy repeatedly told two million federal employees that he felt it was their duty to provide information about graft, corruption, communism and treason. McCarthy's invitation created a situation in which those who had an axe to grind with someone had the opportunity to do so, says Latham.²¹ Cate says McCarthy fought subversion by practising it. In various executive departments, he set up what he called the "loyal American underground," a network of spies whose names he refused to divulge even when under oath to tell the whole truth. To help him in his investigations, McCarthy appointed Roy Cohn, who had been involved in the Remington, Rosenberg and Lattimore cases, as his chief counsel. Cohn, in turn, appointed G. David Schine as his "chief consultant."²²

Drumme says that one of the biggest myths about McCarthy is the fact he smeared thousands of innocent people and that he conducted a "reign of terror" in the 1950s.²³ It has been well documented that McCarthy's attacks forced many people to take up false fronts, change their names and find new careers. Academics have pointed out that many of the most talented figures in Hollywood were caught in the communist trap, notably the Hollywood Ten, and that lawyers who defended "suspected Communists" were scrutinized and teachers with liberal viewpoints were fired. People from all walks of life were reportedly affected. Yale Professor Ralph Brown estimates that a minimum of 10,000 people directly lost their jobs due to McCarthyism.²⁴

However, Joseph McCarthy, a lonely U.S. Senator, certainly cannot be blamed for all of this activity. The ill that befell many "innocent" people must surely be placed on the doorstep of both the government and American society. A particular anti-communist mindset had been developing throughout American institutions long before McCarthy came along. Indeed, it could be argued that McCarthy was simply a product of this

mindset. Highly visible, he became the symbol of all that was wrong with America in the 1950s.

Buckley and Bozell pointed out that from February 9, 1950 until January 1, 1953, McCarthy actually only questioned the loyalty and reliability of a total of 46 people publicly, and particularly dramatized the cases of just 24 of these 46. They said that McCarthy “never said anything more damaging about [government officials] Lauchlin Currie, Gustavo Duran, Theodore Geiger, Mary Jane Keeney, Edward Posniak, Haldore Hanson and John Carter Vincent²⁵ than that they are known to one or more responsible persons as having been members of the Communist party, which is in each of these instances true.”²⁶

In 1953 and 1954, McCarthy accused the Army of “coddling” Communists, a charge that culminated in the televised Army-McCarthy hearings conducted by the special Subcommittee on Investigations. Robert Griffith says that McCarthy’s “coddling” charge was based on the fact the Army had made the mistake of first promoting and then honourably discharging Major Irving Peress,²⁷ a dentist who had been named before the McCarthy Committee as a Communist. On February 18, 1954, Army Brigadier General Ralph Zwicker appeared before a closed session of McCarthy’s Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations, where he was questioned about Peress. Zwicker refused to reveal the names of the officers involved in the promotion and discharge, and McCarthy’s abuse of the general was one of the factors leading to the Army-McCarthy hearings.²⁸ Before the hearing was over, McCarthy suggested Zwicker, a man decorated for heroism, “did not have the brains of a five-year-old child” and was “not fit to wear” his uniform.²⁹

On March 11, 1954, the Army accused McCarthy and his staff of using improper means in seeking preferential treatment for Schine prior to and after Schine was drafted into the Army in November 1953. McCarthy countercharged that these allegations were made in bad faith and were designed to prevent his committee from continuing its probe of communist subversion at Fort Monmouth³⁰ and from issuing subpoenas for members of the Army Loyalty and Screening Board. A special committee, under the chairmanship of Senator Karl Mundt of South Dakota, was appointed to adjudicate these conflicting charges, and the hearings opened on April 22, 1954.³¹ For 36 days, from April into June, the Army-McCarthy hearings, viewed by an estimated 20 million people, “offered the nation an unparalleled spectacle. In their grip on the media, in their circus atmosphere, and in the emotions they churned up,” Richard Fried says they resembled the 1925 Scopes “monkey” trial. “Neither side bathed itself in glory. The hearings proved little, but they helped to destroy McCarthy. Chiefly, they exposed his uglier traits on TV.”³² After hearing 32 witnesses and two million words of testimony, the committee concluded that McCarthy himself had not exercised any improper influence, but that Cohn had engaged in some “unduly persistent or aggressive efforts” on behalf of Schine.³³ The Army-McCarthy hearings brought McCarthy’s public standing so low that the Eisenhower administration and his liberal critics teamed up to finish him off.³⁴

McCarthy’s demise as a major political influence began shortly after, in August 1954, when Senator Ralph Flanders of Vermont introduced a resolution to censure him for conduct unbecoming a U.S. Senator, calling him an adult “Dennis the Menace.”³⁵ McCarthy was accused of 46 counts of allegedly improper conduct and a special committee was set up under the chairmanship of Senator Arthur Watkins to study and evaluate the charges. It was to be the fifth investigation of McCarthy in five years. After

two months of hearings and deliberations, the Watkins Committee recommended to censure McCarthy on two of the 46 counts.³⁶ On December 2, 1954, by a 67-22 vote, McCarthy was censured. All 44 Democrats present voted for censure, as did 22 Republicans and the Independent Wayne Morse. The 22 negative votes were all Republican.³⁷

But even after all the supposedly unsubstantiated lies and allegations McCarthy had made throughout his short stint as communist fighter, it is perhaps a telling tale that there were still high-ranking Americans willing to support the man. Senator Barry Goldwater, later to run for President, charged that the anti-McCarthy drive had been inspired by Communists, and an organization headed by Lieutenant General George Stratemeyer, called "Ten Million Americans Mobilizing for Justice," launched a drive for 10 million signatures to urge rejection of the censure resolution.³⁸ Nonetheless, the censure was upheld and McCarthy ceased to be an influential figure following his condemnation.

McCarthy died three years later, on May 2, 1957, at the age of 48, of cirrhosis of the liver.³⁹ He left behind a mixed legacy. Pro-McCarthyites, which by the end were few and far between, saw the man as a patriot, someone who tried in difficult times to weed out hated Communists from the American government, while anti-McCarthyites, which numbered many, many more, associated his name with the practice of making baseless accusations and engaging in the character assassination of innocent victims.

Consequences of McCarthyism

Guenter Lewy wrote in an American Enterprise Institute publication:

Perhaps the greatest damage that Senator Joseph McCarthy has caused this nation is that he succeeded in casting doubt upon the need for a serious and responsible concern with communism and domestic security. His excesses have discredited the cause of anti-communism.

Many academics have agreed with this assertion. Because of his reckless attacks on government officials who appeared very unlikely to be Communists, sympathizers or security risks, several people have argued that in the long term McCarthy may have actually aided those in sympathy with communism. Sniegowski believes the harm the Senator did to American civil liberties was not nearly as important as that which he caused to anti-communism. Focusing on and distorting McCarthy's methods, liberals were able to shift the issue away from the threat of communist subversion to McCarthy's alleged threat to civil liberties. Thus, since the 1950s, any charge of communist infiltration has been quickly silenced by the charge of McCarthyism.⁴⁰

In his memoirs, Charles Bohlen, who came into conflict with McCarthy over his nomination for the ambassadorship to the Soviet Union, said that at one point during the 1952 election campaign, Mundt told him while he thought McCarthy's actions were crude and perhaps a little unfair in some ways, they were essential to awaken the American public to the dangers of communism. "I disagreed," said Bohlen, "pointing out that eventually McCarthyism would be so discredited that it might not be possible to win public support for valid cases where communist actions threatened American security."⁴¹

McCarthy's supporters

It is important in studying the life of McCarthy and his legacy to understand how his stance on communism was viewed by others at the time, that he was not simply a radical causing chaos with little in the way of public backing. Herman writes that in a

Gallup poll conducted in early 1954, just before the televised Army-McCarthy hearings, McCarthy had a 46-per-cent favourable rating.⁴² The American Institute of Public Opinion found that in January 1954 50 per cent of the American population was favourable to McCarthy and only 29 per cent unfavourable, but by May of that year, those in favour of McCarthy had been reduced to 35 per cent and those unfavourable had risen to 49 per cent.⁴³

While the majority of the information sector, including radio, television and newspapers, came out against McCarthy, there were a large number supporting the Senator, as witnessed by an informal poll done by the American Broadcasting Company in 1951. A number of journalists tentatively offered a defence. Gould Lincoln of the *Washington Evening Star* asked: "What do you think the State Department would be like and would be doing if there had been no McCarthy?" Another journalist, Walter Trohan of the pro-McCarthy *Chicago Tribune*, wrote: "There are no grounds for McCarthy's removal [from the Senate] except the blatherings of Senator [Thomas Hart] Benton and the phony pious incantations of characters like Senator Margaret Chase Smith and Senator [Robert] Hendrickson. Benton, Smith and Hendrickson all have a vested interest in smearing McCarthy because they are linked with his disclosures." Yet a third unnamed journalist had this to say: "McCarthy has performed a duty as a Senator that those lacking guts to do it themselves now decry. He has been rough, yes; but the job wasn't one for silk-gloved hands. He has used a sledgehammer because in his judgment, I should imagine, he thought a tackhammer wasn't heavy enough."⁴⁴

However, it should be noted that the larger percentage of the information sector felt much the way journalist Drew Pearson did. On April 23, 1950, Pearson wrote: "I will

probably lose some newspapers and get some people mad, but I wound up the radio program tonight with a comparison between Salem witch-burning and McCarthyism.”⁴⁵

Surprisingly, even a large number of government officials were initially favourable toward the Senator. “McCarthy’s campaigning will result in a net substantial good to America,” said Congressman Charles Kersten of Wisconsin on October 2, 1951. “Top State Department officials hold the destiny of our nation and our nation’s children in their hands. In the present life and death struggle with world communism, we cannot have questionable characters in that high and important post.” Guy Gabrielson, the Republican National Chairman, said on February 2, 1952: “The American people should be proud of what the Senator has done. McCarthy has brought out to the American people the tremendous infiltration of pinks and fellow travellers in our government.”⁴⁶

Robert Morris, a well-known loyalty-security investigator who had begun his career with McCarthy on the Tydings Committee before joining the Internal Security Subcommittee under Democratic Senator Pat McCarran and Republican Senator William E. Jenner, did not find McCarthy’s methods excessive. Rather, Morris admired his courage and his thick skin, but realized his limitations. “Hoover knew that Joe wasn’t the best guy in the world to be doing this,” Morris recalled. “We all did. But his attitude was, ‘Thank God somebody’s doing it.’”⁴⁷

Hoover and McCarthy

The Hoover-McCarthy relationship bears further scrutiny, largely because it has long been suspected by many that there may never have been a Joseph McCarthy running amok in the State Department if it were not for the FBI Director. Indeed, perhaps a more

apt name for McCarthyism is Hooverism. There have been suggestions that McCarthy was really just Hoover's stooge. Author Anthony Summers says that Hoover cultivated the Senator, fed him information and helped him whenever possible. "McCarthy was never anything more than a tool of Mr. Hoover's," a former aide recalled. "He used him when he was useful and then, later, dumped him when he wasn't."

This relationship between Hoover and McCarthy is perhaps magnified in importance when one considers what Venona has revealed. While Venona was largely considered a NSA project, Haynes notes the FBI did the bulk of the work in identifying the real names behind cover names. While there were not a large number involved in the project, Haynes points out that "more than a few FBI agents involved in counter-intelligence were aware of Venona." Says Haynes:

NSA had no field investigative force and could only identify a real name behind a cover name when it was given in clear text or was otherwise obvious, as it was sometimes. Consequently, the FBI was the best informed agency regarding the extent of Soviet espionage. NSA knew what it gleaned from Venona and other intercepts and what the FBI told it. The FBI had all that NSA had and its own independent and very extensive investigations.⁴⁸

Author Curt Gentry dates the Hoover-McCarthy friendship to 1947. Upon arriving in the capital, the Senator had been quick to visit the FBI Director, says Gentry, and the pair seemed to hit it off right away. In February 1948, Hoover honoured McCarthy by having him address the graduating class of the FBI National Academy. Gentry says that McCarthyism was, "from start to finish, the creation of one man, FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover." Hoover supplied McCarthy with the ammunition to attack both individuals – including Truman, Eleanor Roosevelt, "Ad-lie" Stevenson, as the Senator often called the Governor of Illinois, and James Wechsler, a journalist with the *New York Post* – and organizations.⁴⁹

William W. Turner, a former FBI agent, confirms “it was very doubtful whether Senator Joseph McCarthy would have long survived in his reckless smearing campaign without the ammunition provided him by Hoover. FBI agents put in long hours poring over bureau security files and abstracting them for Roy Cohn during the hearings in the early 1950s.”⁵⁰

Up until the 1952 election, historians Athan Theoharis and John Stuart Cox say, the FBI director’s assistance had been “manifold, including making supportive speeches, monitoring McCarthy’s critics and offering direct assistance,” – including altering documents he released to McCarthy in order to prevent them from being traced back to the FBI.⁵¹ Hoover’s aid reportedly went far beyond helping McCarthy with security files. Crime Records supplied speechwriters for McCarthy, Cohn and Schine. Louis Nichols, a top aide to Hoover, personally tutored McCarthy on how to release a story just before press deadlines, so that reporters would not have time to ask for rebuttals. He also advised him to avoid the phrase “card-carrying Communist,” which usually could not be proven, substituting instead “communist sympathizer” or “loyalty risk,” which required only some affiliation with an organization on the Attorney-General’s list.⁵²

Oshinsky, among others, points out the close friendship the Senator had with the FBI director early on:

He and Hoover often went to the track together or dined at Harvey’s Restaurant in Washington. When they corresponded, their letters were filled with effusive compliments. “No one need erect a monument to you,” Joe told “Edgar” in 1952. “You have built a monument in the form of the FBI – for the FBI is J. Edgar Hoover and I think we can rest assured that it will always be.” “Any success the FBI has had,” Hoover replied, “is due in no small measure to the wholehearted support and co-operation we have always received from such fine friends as you.”⁵³

McCarthy was reportedly the only elected official allowed to use Hoover's private box at Charles Town race track in West Virginia in his absence. Hoover was "crazy about McCarthy," according to a race-going companion, former secretary of the Democratic National Committee, George Allen.

When McCarthy was challenged to come up with proof regarding his charges about the State Department, he asked Hoover for help. "We were the ones," said William Sullivan, former assistant director at the FBI, "who made the McCarthy hearings possible. We fed McCarthy all the material he was using. I knew what we were doing. I worked on it myself. At the same time, we were telling the public we had nothing to do with it." Other sources confirm the McCarthy-FBI association. "He did feed stuff to McCarthy, a great deal of it," said Hoover's journalist friend Trohan. "Joe would tell me himself that he'd got this or that from the FBI." Ruth Watt, chief clerk to McCarthy's committee, later admitted having received "a lot of FBI reports."⁵⁴

It has been documented that in the early days of the Tydings investigations, Hoover kept McCarthy well informed at weekly meetings in his office. Hoover also helped McCarthy to expose Edward Posniak's communist connections, which the State Department's own loyalty file had failed to show.⁵⁵ And while McCarthy was a major sponsor of Cohn, more importantly behind Cohn stood Hoover. Hoover guided Cohn through his earliest excursions into the world of communism, providing him with information and advice during the course of Cohn's prosecution of the Rosenbergs.⁵⁶

McCarthy's first chief investigator, Donald Surine, was a former FBI agent recommended by Hoover.⁵⁷ In the realm of more distant assistance, it might be noted that the Senator's future wife, Jean Kerr, asked for Hoover's assistance when McCarthy

was chasing a secretary married to an FBI agent. The agent was transferred, along with his wife, to Alaska.⁵⁸

“I’ve come to know him well, officially and professionally,” Hoover once said of McCarthy. “I view him as a friend and I believe he so views me.”⁵⁹

However, Herman believes McCarthy’s bungled treatment of the Owen Lattimore case damaged this close relationship. Declassified records show the FBI had Lattimore under surveillance for years and was well aware of his underground contacts. By dragging Lattimore into the limelight, McCarthy had endangered the entire operation. McCarthy’s compulsion for making public what Hoover believed should be kept under wraps led to a growing distrust and distance between the two men, Herman says. FBI agent Lamphere, who oversaw the FBI’s connection with the original Venona decryption program, noted that Hoover believed McCarthy to be a hopeless amateur.⁶⁰

Summers says Hoover was simply playing games with McCarthy all along, using him until he was no longer needed and then dumping him. Once Eisenhower and his people seemed ready to do the job, Hoover could afford to drop the McCarthy connection, says Summers, pointing out that from 1953 on, Hoover would act as the ally of the White House, not the Senator. Knowing that Eisenhower detested McCarthy, Hoover told the President the Senator’s activity was now impeding the hunt for Communists.⁶¹

Despite all that has been written about the close relationship between Hoover and McCarthy, there are still some who believe there were no secrets revealed between the two men, that they were simply good friends. Haynes continues to believe it is very unlikely the FBI director would have provided a loose cannon such as the Wisconsin Senator with valuable information about possible spies in government because of

McCarthy's reckless methods, his insensitive way of dealing with any kind of information and his tendency toward distorting facts.⁶²

The truth is McCarthy often did distort the facts in order to make his point. He often said he was not presenting anything except what is confirmed by the files, when he clearly was not, says Herman,⁶³ who points out that critics then and now rightly blame McCarthy for this. Usually they offer it as blatant disregard for the truth. A more likely explanation, Herman says, is that McCarthy simply believed the information he had was not enough to generate maximum public impact in the face of an administration and a Democratic party determined to block any sort of investigation. During his short career as the Senate's leading Red baiter, McCarthy learned to bluff his way through, Herman says, in hopes that subsequent research would confirm what he had said. While the public might forget the denials, he believed they would grasp what the essential point was: Someone at the top was covering up.⁶⁴

Haynes, for one, is unforgiving of the Senator's methods. McCarthy brought into the line of fire people who were not part of the political arena, he was careless and indifferent about evidence and he did not care if some of those he forced into the limelight were innocent, Haynes says, pointing out that McCarthy's chief target was the Truman administration in particular and New Deal liberalism in general. The communist issue was simply a means to a political end.⁶⁵ While polls often showed McCarthy with a favourable public image, says Haynes, that was chiefly because most citizens did not follow his actions closely and knew only from headlines that he exposed hidden Communists – a good thing in most people's minds.⁶⁶

McCarthy and communism

Many scholars have tried to discover when and why McCarthy decided to launch his anti-communist crusade. This is of some importance because a large number of historical accounts have used McCarthy's perceived lack of knowledge and conviction about the communist cause as evidence that he was only trying to make political hay. According to Herman, the least credible accounts are McCarthy's own. In 1952, McCarthy claimed that shortly after arriving in Washington, he had lunch with Secretary of the Navy James Forrestal, who told him about the seriousness of the communist threat. McCarthy is said to have told a different story to Cohn. In 1949, McCarthy said, he had been approached by a former Army intelligence officer who showed him an FBI report on communist subversion in the government. McCarthy became an overnight convert to the cause. Says Herman, nothing exists to corroborate the story, and Cohn seems to be the only person to have heard it. A third, frequently cited story has McCarthy eating dinner with Georgetown's Edmund Walsh, dean of the School of Foreign Service, and a group of friends in January 1950. McCarthy confessed he needed a campaign issue for his 1952 re-election bid. Walsh said, "How about communism?" He sketched out the details and McCarthy liked what he heard.⁶⁷

However, those who contend that McCarthy stumbled across communism while searching for an issue to use in his 1952 re-election campaign will be unhappy to learn that the Senator had been speaking out against communism for years. He made communism an issue in his campaign for the Senate against Howard McMurray in 1946, charging that McMurray had received the endorsement of the *Daily Worker*, the Communist party newspaper. In 1947, McCarthy told the *Madison Capital Times* that his top priority was "to stop the spread of communism."⁶⁸ Albert Fried points to the

Senator's appearance on the popular Town Hall Meeting of the Air radio program of the 1930s and 1940s. "On April 3, 1947, Joseph R. McCarthy, the recently elected and attractive young Wisconsin Senator, took the affirmative on the question 'Should the Communist party be Outlawed in the United States?' " McCarthy reportedly said:

The Communist party might well be compared to a huge iceberg in a shipping lane. The most dangerous part of the iceberg is under water and invisible and you can no more bring the underground communist organization up to the surface than you can cause that huge iceberg to float upon the face of the sea.⁶⁹

Oshinsky is another historian who agrees McCarthy was "an outspoken anti-communist throughout his political life."⁷⁰

During a speech in Milwaukee in 1952, McCarthy dated the public phase of his fight against Communists to May 22, 1949, the night that Forrestal was found dead outside Bethesda Naval Hospital. The death, shrouded in mystery, is believed to have been a suicide. "The Communists hounded Forrestal to his death," said McCarthy. "They killed him just as definitely as if they had thrown him from that 16th-storey window in Bethesda Naval Hospital." McCarthy said:

while I am not a sentimental man, I was touched deeply and left numb by the news of Forrestal's murder. But I was affected much more deeply when I heard of the communist celebration when they heard of Forrestal's murder. On that night, I dedicated part of this fight to Jim Forrestal.

Thus, says Drummey, McCarthy was receptive in the fall of 1949 when three men brought to his office a 100-page FBI report alleging extensive communist penetration in the State Department. The trio had asked three other Senators to awaken the American people to this dangerous situation, Drummey says, but only McCarthy was willing to take on the fight.⁷¹

McCarthy's demise

For those who disliked the Senator, some of the distaste was more often than not aesthetic. That is to say, in his official role, he often came across as obnoxious and rude, something less than a gentleman. And like Nixon in the televised Nixon-John F. Kennedy presidential debates a few years later, McCarthy always seemed to sport a five o'clock shadow, which made him look mean and perhaps a little shifty. In the end, how he appeared on television, maybe more than anything else, led to his downfall. Edward R. Murrow spent two months putting together a special edition of *See It Now*, the famous CBS TV show, called "Report on Senator McCarthy," which aired on March 9, 1954.⁷² Murrow and his staff had edited film clips to show McCarthy in the worst possible light. Murrow showed McCarthy belching, picking his nose, ignoring or berating witnesses in front of his committee, and giggling at his own "Alger – I mean Adlai" remark, referring to comments he made about presidential candidate Adlai Stevenson's association with Alger Hiss during the Eisenhower-Stevenson election campaign of 1952. There were no clips presenting McCarthy in a positive manner. At times, McCarthy seemed unsteady on his feet, obviously under the influence of alcohol. *See It Now* was a full-scale assault, says Herman, employing exactly the same techniques of "partial truth and innuendo" that critics accused McCarthy of using.⁷³ It was around the time of the airing of this show that McCarthy's popularity began to drop dramatically.

Endnotes:

¹Curt Gentry, *J. Edgar Hoover: The Man and the Secrets* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1991), p. 366.

²DrummeY,

[http://www.thenewamerica.com/tna/1996/vol2no18/vol2no18_mccarthy.htm].

“The Real McCarthy Record: A Longtime Smear Campaign Has Clouded the Truth.”

³Oshinsky, *A Conspiracy So Immense: The World of Joe McCarthy*, p. 108.

⁴Reinhard H. Luthin, “The Making of McCarthy.” In *The Meaning of McCarthyism, Second Edition*, ed. Earl Latham (Lexington: D.C. Heath and Company, 1973), pp. 8-9. Taken from the *Wheeling Intelligencer*, and sent out by The Associated Press, where it was printed in newspapers throughout the nation.

⁵DrummeY,

[http://www.thenewamerica.com/tna/1996/vol2no18/vol2no18_mccarthy.htm]. “The Real McCarthy Record: A Longtime Smear Campaign Has Clouded the Truth.”

⁶Luthin, “The Making of McCarthy,” pp. 8-9.

⁷DrummeY,

[http://www.thenewamerica.com/tna/1996/vol2no18/vol2no18_mccarthy.htm]. “The Real McCarthy Record: A Longtime Smear Campaign Has Clouded the Truth.” Although many historians believe McCarthy never really had a list, John Haynes is in agreement with DrummeY about the source for the Senator’s initial figure of 205.

He says that in 1946 Secretary of State Byrnes had told Congress that a security screening of 3,000 department employees had cleared all but 284, and that of the latter group 79 had been discharged, leaving 205. But McCarthy had no idea what had happened to the 205. McCarthy was bluffing for rhetorical effect, says Haynes; from Haynes, *Red Scare or Red Menace? American Communism and Anticommunism in the Cold War Era*, pp. 144-145.

⁸The Tydings Committee included Tydings, a Senate veteran who had survived President Franklin Roosevelt’s effort to “purge” him in 1938, as well as Brien McMahon and Theodore F. Green, both important Democrats, plus Republicans Bourke Hickenlooper, an Iowa Conservative and McCarthy ally, and Henry Cabot Lodge Jr., a Massachusetts internationalist and moderate; from Fried, *Nightmare in Red: The McCarthy Era in Perspective*, p. 124.

⁹Fried, *Nightmare in Red: The McCarthy Era in Perspective*, p. 125. Esther Brunauer had associated with a few groups in the 1930s and 1940s later cited as communist fronts. She had served as an assistant to Alger Hiss. Her husband, Stephen, was a Navy Department employee who allegedly had admitted to associates that he was a Communist and a close friend of Communist Noel Field, from Reeves, *The Life and Times of Joe McCarthy: A Biography*, pp. 254-255.

¹⁰DrummeY,

[http://www.thenewamerica.com/tna/1996/vol2no18/vol2no18_mccarthy.htm]. "The Real McCarthy Record: A Longtime Smear Campaign Has Clouded the Truth." See Buckley Jr. and Bozell, *McCarthy and His Enemies*, chapter 7.

¹¹Drummey,

[http://www.thenewamerica.com/tna/1996/vol2no18/vol2no18_mccarthy.htm]. "The Real McCarthy Record: A Longtime Smear Campaign Has Clouded the Truth."

¹²Oshinsky, *A Conspiracy So Immense: The World of Joe McCarthy*, p. 170.

¹³Fried, *Nightmare in Red: The McCarthy Era in Perspective*, p. 127.

¹⁴Haynes, *Red Scare or Red Menace? American Communism and Anticommunism in the Cold War Era*, pp. 144-145.

¹⁵On January 30, 1949, about a year before McCarthy's Wheeling speech, a young Congressman from Massachusetts also spoke out against "the disasters befalling China and the United States," and declared that "it is of the utmost importance that we search out and spotlight those who must bear the responsibility for our present predicament." The Congressman placed a major part of the blame on "a sick Roosevelt," Marshall and "our diplomats and their advisers," including Lattimore. He concluded: "This is the tragic story of China, whose freedom we once fought to preserve. What our young men had saved, our diplomats and our President have frittered away." The Congressman's name was John F. Kennedy, from Drummey,

[http://www.thenewamerica.com/tna/1996/vol2no18/vol2no18_mccarthy.htm]. "The Real McCarthy Record: A Longtime Smear Campaign Has Clouded the Truth."

¹⁶Foster Rhea Dulles, *1898-1954: America's Rise to World Power* (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1954), p. 253.

¹⁷Luthin, "The Making of McCarthy," p. 11.

¹⁸Fried, *McCarthyism: The Great American Red Scare – A Documentary History*, p. 73.

¹⁹During 1953 and the first three months of 1954, McCarthy's committee held 199 days of hearings and examined 653 witnesses. These individuals first appeared in executive session and were told of the evidence against them. If they were able to offer satisfactory explanations, they were dismissed and nobody ever knew they had been summoned. Of the 653 persons called by the McCarthy Committee during that 15-month period, 83 refused to answer questions about communist or espionage activities on constitutional grounds and their names were made public. Nine additional witnesses invoked the Fifth Amendment in executive session, but their names were not made public. Some of the 83 were working or had worked for the Army, the Navy, the Government Printing Office, the Treasury Department, the OWI, the OSS, the Veterans Administration and the United Nations. Others were or had been employed at the Federal Telecommunications Laboratories in New Jersey, the secret radar laboratories of the Army Signal Corps in New Jersey and General Electric defence plants in Massachusetts and New York, from Drummey,

[http://www.thenewamerica.com/tna/1996/vol2no18/vol2no18_mccarthy.htm]. "The Real McCarthy Record: A Longtime Smear Campaign Has Clouded the Truth."

²⁰Caute, *The Great Fear: The Anti-Communist Purge Under Truman and Eisenhower*, p. 106.

²¹Latham, ed., *The Meaning of McCarthyism, Second Edition*, pp. xi-xii.

²²Caute, *The Great Fear: The Anti-Communist Purge Under Truman and Eisenhower*, pp. 106-107.

²³Drummey,

[http://www.thenewamerica.com/tna/1996/vol2no18/vol2no18_mccarthy.htm]. "The Real McCarthy Record: A Longtime Smear Campaign Has Clouded the Truth."

²⁴Marlene Nolet,

[<http://www.mta.ca/faculty/arts-letters/music/material/3241-51/readings/figures2/Nolet/mccarthy.html>]. "McCarthyism and the Communist Witch Hunts."

²⁵Gustavo Duran was a brother-in-law of Soviet agent Michael Straight and worked for the Spanish Communist secret police during the Spanish Civil War, from Daniel J. Flynn, [<http://www.academia.org/CampusReport/January2000/mccarthy.html>]. "The Hidden Truth About Joseph McCarthy." Theodore Geiger was a U.S. State Department economist during the early years of the Cold War. After serving as part of a special U.S. mission to help the Europeans restart their economies after the Second World War, he joined the Marshall Plan administrative team as a top aide to Assistant Administrator Richard Bissell, from CNN interactive CNN.com: A CNN perspectives series available now on home video at

[<http://www.cnn.com/SPECIALS/cold.war/episodes/03/interviews/geiger/>]. Mary Jane Keeney worked in very sensitive overseas State Department jobs during the 1940s before settling in at the United Nations. She and husband Philip were librarians who worked for both the KGB and GRU, from Haynes and Klehr, *Venona: Decoding Soviet Espionage in America*, pp. 178-180. Both Keeney and Duran, as employees of the UN, while not actually members of the State Department, were nonetheless being paid by the State Department, from Flynn,

[<http://www.academia.org/CampusReport/January2000/mccarthy.html>]. "The Hidden Truth About Joseph McCarthy." Edward Posniak was a State Department economist whom an FBI undercover agent had reported to the Tydings Committee was a member of the Communist party from 1938 to 1942. Another unnamed informant linked him to the party in the 1930s and yet another anonymous scholar who had worked with Posniak in 1946 tagged him a pro-Soviet. In 1948, Posniak was investigated by the State Department Loyalty-Security Board and cleared. However, Posniak's case was reopened after McCarthy attacked him in the Senate, and he resigned, from Reeves, *The Life and Times of Joe McCarthy: A Biography*, p. 313. Haldore Hanson was the executive director of the Secretariat of the Inter-Departmental Committee on Scientific and Cultural Cooperation for the Democratic government of Franklin Roosevelt. McCarthy charged that Hanson was a "pro-communist" whose record of sympathy toward the Chinese Communists could be traced to 1938, four years before he joined the State Department. He had run a Communist magazine in Peiping when the Japanese-Chinese war broke out, McCarthy

said, adding that Hanson also had published articles in *Pacific Affairs* and *Amerasia*, from Reeves, *The Life and Times of Joe McCarthy: A Biography*, p. 254.

John Carter Vincent was a foreign service officer and expert in Chinese affairs. In 1953, a panel of the Civil Service Loyalty Review Board recommended his dismissal. The panel concluded by a 3-2 vote that the 28-year veteran of the Foreign Service was a loyalty risk, from Reeves, *The Life and Times of Joe McCarthy: A Biography*, p. 456.

²⁶Drummey,

[http://www.thenewamerica.com/tna/1996/vol2no18/vol2no18_mccarthy.htm].

“The Real McCarthy Record: A Longtime Smear Campaign Has Clouded the Truth.”

²⁷Griffith, *The Politics of Fear: Joseph R. McCarthy and the Senate*, p. 246.

²⁸Tyler Abell, ed., *Drew Pearson Diaries 1949-1959* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1974), p. 299.

²⁹Fred I. Greenstein, *The Hidden-Hand Presidency: Eisenhower as Leader* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., Publishers, 1982), p. 184.

³⁰During 1953 and 1954, the McCarthy Committee, acting on reports of communist infiltration from civilian employees, Army officers and enlisted personnel at the Army Signal Corps installation at Fort Monmouth, N.J., heard 71 witnesses at executive sessions and 41 at open hearings. The Army responded by suspending or discharging 35 persons as security risks. Virtually all of those suspended eventually were restored to duty at Fort Monmouth, from Drummey,

[http://www.thenewamerica.com/tna/1996/vol2no18/vol2no18_mccarthy.htm].

“The Real McCarthy Record: A Longtime Smear Campaign Has Clouded the Truth.”

³¹Drummey,

[http://www.thenewamerica.com/tna/1996/vol2no18/vol2no18_mccarthy.htm]. “The Real McCarthy Record: A Longtime Smear Campaign Has Clouded the Truth.”

³²Fried, *Nightmare in Red: The McCarthy Era in Perspective*, p. 138.

³³Drummey,

[http://www.thenewamerica.com/tna/1996/vol2no18/vol2no18_mccarthy.htm].

“The Real McCarthy Record: A Longtime Smear Campaign Has Clouded the Truth.”

³⁴Herman, *Joseph McCarthy: Reexamining the Life and Legacy of America's Most Hated Senator*, pp. 160-161.

³⁵Cook, *The Nightmare Decade: The Life and Times of Senator Joe McCarthy*, pp. 521-533.

³⁶Drummey,

[http://www.thenewamerica.com/tna/1996/vol2no18/vol2no18_mccarthy.htm].

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The two charges McCarthy was censured on were that the Senator had “failed to co-operate” in 1952 with the Senate Subcommittee on Privileges and Elections that was looking into certain aspects of his private and political life in connection with a resolution for his expulsion from the Senate; and that in conducting a senatorial inquiry, McCarthy had “intemperately abused” General Ralph Zwicker.

- ³⁷Fried, *Nightmare in Red: The McCarthy Era in Perspective*, p. 141.
- ³⁸Latham, ed., *The Meaning of McCarthyism, Second Edition*, p. xv.
- ³⁹Richard Rovere, "McCarthy: As a National Demagogue." In *The Meaning of McCarthyism, Second Edition*, ed. Latham, p. 183.
- ⁴⁰Sniegowski, "Joseph R. McCarthy and The Historians," pp. 137-141.
- ⁴¹Charles E. Bohlen, *Witness to History 1929-1969* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, Inc., 1973), p. 311.
- ⁴²Herman, *Joseph McCarthy: Reexamining the Life and Legacy of America's Most Hated Senator*, p. 160.
- ⁴³Dwight D. Eisenhower, *The White House Years: Mandate For Change, 1953-1956* (Garden City: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1963), p. 328.
- ⁴⁴Jack Anderson and Ronald W. May, *McCarthy: The Man, the Senator, the "Ism"* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1952), p. 392.
- ⁴⁵Abell, ed., *Drew Pearson Diaries 1949-1959*, p. 121.
- ⁴⁶Anderson and May, *McCarthy: The Man, the Senator, the "Ism,"* p. 407.
- ⁴⁷Herman, *Joseph McCarthy: Reexamining the Life and Legacy of America's Most Hated Senator*, p. 164, from Oshinsky, *A Conspiracy So Immense: The World of Joe McCarthy*, p. 258.
- ⁴⁸Haynes, [jhay@loc.gov].
- ⁴⁹Gentry, *J. Edgar Hoover: The Man and the Secrets*, pp. 378-380.
- ⁵⁰William W. Turner, *Hoover's FBI* (New York: Thunder's Mouth Press, 1993), pp. 182-183.
- ⁵¹Herman, *Joseph McCarthy: A Reexamination of the Life and Legacy of America's Most Hated Senator*, p. 212, from Athan G. Theoharis and John Stuart Cox, *The Boss: J. Edgar Hoover and the Great American Inquisition* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1988), pp. 284-287.
- ⁵²Gentry, *J. Edgar Hoover: The Man and the Secrets*, p. 379.
- ⁵³Oshinsky, *A Conspiracy So Immense: The World of Joe McCarthy*, p. 257 (from Senator Joe McCarthy to J. Edgar Hoover, July 30, 1952; J. Edgar Hoover to Senator McCarthy, August 6, 1952, both in the Papers of the FBI); also see Caute, *The Great Fear: The Anti-Communist Purge Under Truman and Eisenhower*, p. 114; also see Gentry, *J. Edgar Hoover: The Man and the Secrets*, p. 378; also see Anthony Summers, *Official and Confidential: The Secret Life of J. Edgar Hoover* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1993), p. 179.
- ⁵⁴Summers, *Official and Confidential: The Secret Life of J. Edgar Hoover*, p. 179.
- ⁵⁵Herman, *Joseph McCarthy: A Reexamination of the Life and Legacy of America's Most Hated Senator*, p. 164.
- ⁵⁶Thomas L. Dumm, "The Trial of J. Edgar Hoover." In *Secret Agents: The Rosenberg Case, McCarthyism and Fifties America*, ed. Garber and Walkowitz, p. 80; also see Herman, *Joseph McCarthy: Reexamining the Life and Legacy of America's Most Hated Senator*, p. 211; also see Oshinsky, *A Conspiracy So Immense: The World of Joe*

McCarthy, p. 257.

⁵⁷Gentry, *J. Edgar Hoover: The Man and the Secrets*, p. 379.

⁵⁸Summers, *Official and Confidential: The Secret Life of J. Edgar Hoover*, p. 179.

⁵⁹Turner, *Hoover's FBI*, p. 72.

⁶⁰Herman, *Joseph McCarthy: A Reexamination of the Life and Legacy of America's Most Hated Senator*, p. 164.

⁶¹Summers, *Official and Confidential: The Secret Life of J. Edgar Hoover*, pp. 191 and 212.

⁶²Haynes, [jhay@loc.gov].

⁶³Herman, *Joseph McCarthy: Reexamining the Life and Legacy of America's Most Hated Senator*, p. 115; from McCarthy, *Congressional Record* (20 February 1950), 1968.

⁶⁴*Ibid.*, p. 115.

⁶⁵Haynes, *Red Scare or Red Menace? American Communism and Anticommunism in the Cold War Era*, pp. 147-149.

⁶⁶*Ibid.*, pp. 160-161.

⁶⁷Herman, *Joseph McCarthy: Reexamining the Life and Legacy of America's Most Hated Senator*, p. 96.

⁶⁸Drummey,

[http://www.thenewamerica.com/tna/1996/vol2no18/vol2no18_mccarthy.htm].

"The Real McCarthy Record: A Longtime Smear Campaign Has Clouded the Truth."

⁶⁹Fried, *McCarthyism: The Great American Red Scare – A Documentary History*, p. 76.

⁷⁰Oshinsky, *A Conspiracy So Immense: The World of Joe McCarthy*, p. 108.

⁷¹Drummey,

[http://www.thenewamerica.com/tna/1996/vol2no18/vol2no18_mccarthy.htm].

"The Real McCarthy Record: A Longtime Smear Campaign Has Clouded the Truth."

⁷²Oshinsky, *A Conspiracy So Immense: The World of Joe McCarthy*, pp. 397-399.

⁷³Herman, *Joseph McCarthy: Reexamining the Life and Legacy of America's Most Hated Senator*, p. 253; also see Oshinsky, *A Conspiracy So Immense: The World of Joe McCarthy*, pp. 397-399.

CHAPTER FOUR

The early days: The man, the myth, the legend

“Though a demon himself, he was not a man possessed by demons.”

– **Historian Richard Rovere, describing McCarthy**

Many historians, in attempting to understand Joseph McCarthy better, have done what most good historians do. They look to his past, before he became a Senator, for clues. While the majority of accounts depict McCarthy in a mostly uncomplimentary light, there have been a small number of accounts that present the Senator in more flattering terms.

Joseph Raymond McCarthy was born in Grand Chute, Wis., on November 14, 1909, to an Irish-American couple, Tim and Bridget McCarthy.¹ Since money was tight, Tim McCarthy encouraged his children to start out on their own early. This is what led Joe as a teen to start a chicken farm, selling eggs to grocery stores in Appleton, Wis. After his chickens reportedly died, McCarthy took on several more jobs until 1929, when he decided to enroll at Little Wolf High School in Manawa. Joe, almost 21, would be sharing a classroom with 14- and 15-year-olds. According to Herman, McCarthy persuaded the principal to let him take more than twice the normal course load. While working at a night job, he still managed to finish four years of study in nine months. He made the honour roll every quarter and was voted vice-president of the freshman class. In June 1930, he received a high school diploma.²

In 1935, McCarthy graduated from law school at Marquette University. He practised law for a year in Waupaca, Wis. Then Mike Eberlein, a leading anti-Robert LaFollette Republican,³ gave the future Republican Senator a job in his law office. However, within five months, McCarthy decided to become a Democratic politician. He was elected president of the Young Democratic Clubs of the Seventh Congressional District, and he announced his candidacy for District Attorney of Shawano County.

McCarthy's politics

Some, including Reinhard Luthin, have tried to equate McCarthy's wavering political persuasion with his alleged lack of conviction on the anti-communist issue. Luthin says: "One wonders whether Republican Joseph McCarthy in 1954 remembers his appearance on a Democratic ticket during the period of Democratic rule, which he later called '20 years of treason.' " He then points out how in 1939 Wisconsin's political future seemed to be in Republican hands, and "perhaps this was Joseph McCarthy's reason for leaving Democratic ranks and joining the Republican party."⁴ McCarthy would not be the first nor the last person whose political views changed over time or whose ambition caused them to switch party allegiance. However, he has received more negative print than perhaps anyone else. A prime example of another politician who switched political allegiance in mid-career and received much less criticism for doing so is the man McCarthy ran against for the Republican nomination in 1946, Robert LaFollette Jr. LaFollette was originally leader of the Wisconsin Progressive Party, which ideologically was much closer to the more liberal Democratic Party but by the end of the Second World War was in a shambles. As Harry Truman stumbled through his early months in office, it appeared that 1946 was going to be the year of the Republican Party. So, this is the party LaFollette decided to hitch his wagon to. Said one LaFollette supporter: "I, for one, won't pretend that [our] desire ... to rejoin the Republicans is anything but opportunistic. Bob can't afford to suffer from ideological squeamishness now."⁵ Despite this obvious opportunism on the part of LaFollette, the history books tend to look upon him and his family in a decidedly much more positive light than McCarthy. According to Oshinsky, "many still view the LaFollettes, not the Roosevelts, as the founders of America's modern reform traditions."⁶

While McCarthy did not win in his trial run as a Democrat,⁷ Herman points out that when he decided to get involved in Democratic politics, he was hoping he would stand out from a sorry field, and even if he could not win, he would at least make a name for himself. Indeed, McCarthy turned out to be the most effective organizer Shawano Democrats had for years, Herman says. He attacked the national Republican ticket as reactionary and called its presidential candidate, Alfred Landon, the “puppet” of conservative business interests like publishing tycoon William Randolph Hearst. Since he had no chance of winning without a sensational issue, McCarthy accused the Progressive Party incumbent of maintaining a private law practice even though it was forbidden by state law. The incumbent, in turn, published a large advertisement denouncing McCarthy’s charges as “unfair” and dirty politics, foreshadowing what was to come, say some historical accounts, except McCarthy had been technically correct, says Herman.

Perhaps a more serious example of his distortion and lying came when McCarthy ran for judge in Wisconsin’s Tenth Judicial Circuit in 1939, Herman says. Borrowing an idea from a Shawano County judge who had defeated an opponent by making age an issue, McCarthy decided to tell the voters that his opponent, the 66-year-old Edgar Werner, was seven years older. Werner denied the story, but the truth was that Werner looked and acted like he was 73, Herman says. The newspapers never bothered to check out McCarthy’s allegation, and the claim that Werner was too old to serve stuck. McCarthy won handily, with 43 per cent of the vote, compared to Werner’s 31.7 per cent. He had deliberately lied about his opponent, distorted the record and had learned it could work, Herman says. Richard Rovere, among others, would later point to the Werner case and claim it showed McCarthy was someone who “would unashamedly persist in misrepresenting a simple truth even when the truth was accessible to everyone and when

everyone could see what he was doing.” But, says Herman, if Werner hadn’t acted the part, or if the local papers had done their job and forced McCarthy to retract the lie, he probably would have been forced to change his tactics. The real point was that McCarthy did not need to lie, Herman says. He proved to be a terrific campaigner, personally visiting everyone he thought might vote for him.⁸ Besides, according to Reeves, Werner was not exactly lily white in representing himself.

As a candidate for the [judge’s] office in 1916, [Werner] had listed the year of his birth as 1866, instead of 1872, in order to impress voters with his maturity. Later, he neglected to correct the fabrication. Joe spotted the date in the Martindale-Hubbell directory of attorneys and decided to hold the judge to it.⁹

So, while two wrongs do not make a right, it appears that McCarthy was not the only one who could be questioned for using devious tactics. Besides, in today’s rough-and-tumble world of politics, in which television advertising during election campaigns regularly involves slamming one’s opponent and sometimes distorting the truth in very negative ways, McCarthy’s methods seem a little tame by comparison.

McCarthy as judge

Even his tenure as a judge has evoked tremendously different reactions from different sources. Luthin says McCarthy “evinced a remarkable scorn for the law.” He points out that in 1941 McCarthy dismissed a Wisconsin Department of Agriculture petition to force the Appleton Quaker Dairy Company to abide by the state milk marketing law. He says McCarthy also destroyed the notes of his statement dismissing the case on the grounds “they weren’t material.” It seems McCarthy had a friend

interested in the dairy's case, Luthin says. The State Supreme Court called his action "an abuse of judicial power," adding that "ordering destruction of these notes was highly improper." Says Luthin: "This scorn for the processes of law and disregard of evidence established a pattern that was to become much clearer in McCarthy's subsequent career."¹⁰ However, Reeves' account of this situation is much different than Luthin's. He points out that, following the State Supreme Court's attack, McCarthy would defiantly rule in favour of the Quaker Dairy Company once again, lashing out at the Department of Agriculture "for oppressing the poor by maintaining artificially high milk prices during a period of economic recovery and milk shortages." Reeves says McCarthy's ruling received the support of the public and the press, and the Department of Agriculture suspended enforcement of price controls in the area.¹¹

Drummey points out that when McCarthy was elected as a circuit judge, he took over a district court that had a backlog of more than 200 cases. By eliminating a lot of legal red tape and working long hours, keeping the court open past midnight on at least a dozen occasions, McCarthy cleared up the backlogs quickly and, in the words of one local newspaper, "administered justice promptly and with a combination of legal knowledge and good sense."¹² Reeves concurs. The historian points out that McCarthy would even work Saturdays and "once tried 40 cases in 40 days."

Almost 250 cases were in backlog when Joe assumed the bench. To the delight of local lawyers and their clients, he tackled these cases with a vengeance ... Whenever possible he invited opposing attorneys into his chambers and helped them reach out-of-court settlements. Divorces were often handled swiftly, sometimes in five or ten minutes if nothing was contested. The procedure was legal, if not ceremonious, and no one complained. Litigants got what they came for.¹³

McCarthy's military career

His military career is another area where the information about McCarthy has been interpreted very differently in different quarters. Says Herman, McCarthy made the most of his war service just as other ambitious politicians of his generation did. When his unit sailed for the South Pacific, McCarthy broke his leg during his "shellback" ceremony, the initiation rite for sailors who crossed the equator for the first time. That November, he sent out a release telling Wisconsin newspapers that he had been wounded in action. Years later, he related various stories about how he had obtained his "war wound": how his Helldiver had overturned on the runway and burned, or how he had been hit by anti-aircraft fire and was still carrying "10 pounds of shrapnel" in his leg.

In 1951, a reporter uncovered what some say is the basic outline of his real war record. McCarthy claimed that he had regularly flown missions with the dive bombers as a gunner-observer – hence the nickname Tail-Gunner Joe. The reporter learned that McCarthy had actually flown with the squadron only 12 times in seven months of front-line duty, although he had claimed 32 combat missions in order to qualify for a Distinguished Flying Cross, which he received in 1952. McCarthy pointed to a letter praising his combat service signed by his commanding officer and countersigned by Admiral Chester Nimitz. It turned out that McCarthy had written the letter to himself, in his capacity as unit intelligence officer, Herman says. By the time the media had finished, very little of McCarthy's reputation as a Marine war hero remained.

Herman goes on to compare McCarthy's war experience with that of another politician "war hero," Lieutenant Commander Lyndon Johnson, and the Senator's actions suddenly seem less flagrantly foul. In 1940, the Texas Congressman used his political connections to get a commission in the Navy Reserve, knowing, like McCarthy, that a

military service record would come in handy in a political career. When war broke out, Franklin Roosevelt sent him in 1942 on a fact-finding mission to Douglas MacArthur's command in Australia and New Guinea. Johnson managed to get himself involved in a bombing raid over New Guinea, and the plane was struck by shrapnel. He did not leave Australia until he had secured a citation for a Silver Star. According to David Halberstam, it was "the least deserved but most often displayed Silver Star in American military history." Johnson enjoyed relating different versions of the exploits he had performed to earn the medal. Reporters and historians generally treated Johnson's storytelling with amusement, Herman says, while McCarthy received the cold shoulder treatment.

Herman points out that academics have been so determined to paint the Senator as a liar they have overlooked what McCarthy did do. Although being an intelligence officer was officially a desk job, McCarthy insisted on learning how to operate the Helldiver's rear guns and did participate in several combat missions. McCarthy flew one mission after he had complained about the quality of the photographs crews were taking of their bombing runs, and narrowly missed being hit when the bomber he was flying got caught in tracer fire. McCarthy was too busy firing back to stop to think what was happening, so the legend of Tail-Gunner Joe perhaps has some truth to it after all, Herman says.¹⁴

Drummey presents McCarthy's military career in a much more positive light than others have. Although his judgeship exempted him from military service, Drummey says, McCarthy enlisted in the Marines and was sworn in as a first lieutenant in August 1942. He served as an intelligence officer for a bomber squadron and risked his life by volunteering to fly in the tail-gunner's seat on many combat missions. Those who argue

over the number of combat missions he flew have missed the point, Drummey says, allowing that McCarthy did not have to fly any missions. The enemies of McCarthy have taken his remarks about shooting down coconut trees from his tail-gunner's spot, documented in the late 1970s in a movie about McCarthy called *Tail-Gunner Joe*, and made fun of his military accomplishments, he says. However, Drummey does not accept the story that McCarthy wrote his own letter praising his combat service. Not only were McCarthy's achievements during 30 months of active duty unanimously praised by his commanding officers, he says, but Nimitz, Commander in Chief of the Pacific Fleet, issued the following citation regarding the service of McCarthy:

For meritorious and efficient performance of duty as an observer and rear gunner of a dive bomber attached to a Marine scout bombing squadron operating in the Solomon Islands area from September 1 to December 31, 1943. He participated in a large number of combat missions, and in addition to his regular duties, acted as aerial photographer. He obtained excellent photographs of enemy gun positions, despite intense anti-aircraft fire, thereby gaining valuable information [that] contributed materially to the success of subsequent strikes in the area. Although suffering from a severe leg injury, he refused to be hospitalized and continued to carry out his duties as Intelligence Officer in a highly efficient manner. His courageous devotion to duty was in keeping with the highest traditions of the naval service.¹⁵

Reeves points out that those who served with McCarthy "admired him greatly." And according to Maj. Gen. Field Harris, air commandant of the Marines, "without exception, the commanding officers under whom he served spoke of the performance of his duties in the highest terms."¹⁶

McCarthy's early years in the Senate

McCarthy's early years in the Senate again are presented in two antithetical versions. The first, and most popular, is that he was a flop. By 1950, he had been "voted the worst U.S. Senator in one poll of the press corps," say authors Evan Thomas and Walter Isaacson, and was "more visible to Washington barflies than to his Wisconsin constituents."¹⁷ According to this view, McCarthy finally seized on the anti-communist crusade as a way to salvage his failing career.

The other version is that the Senator was one of the brightest and most popular members of the freshman class, "charming and handsome in a dark square-jawed way," who had Georgetown hostesses "scratching for the decorative McCarthy's presence at dinners and cocktail parties."¹⁸ In fact, both versions contain some truth, says Herman. McCarthy was a crowd pleaser with a flair for getting noticed, Herman says. He sent Wisconsin cheese to the National Press Club for its luncheons and once gave a party for a group of female Senate reporters, appearing at the door in an apron and cooking up homemade fried chicken.¹⁹

So, was McCarthy evil incarnate as more than a few have depicted him? Or was he a well-intentioned politician who somehow got led down the garden path by people more in the know? Was he an inveterate liar? Or was he like many politicians who, in certain situations, stretch the truth a little for political gain? Did he have any political convictions? Or was he like a feather in the wind? Unfortunately, the answer to all of these questions has too often been clouded by politics and the aforementioned anti-McCarthy bias that has permeated academia. The one thing we know for certain about Joseph McCarthy is that he was the lightning rod of his generation.

Endnotes:

¹Luthin, "The Making of McCarthy," p. 3.

²Herman, *Joseph McCarthy: Reexamining the Life and Legacy of America's Most Hated Senator*, p. 23.

³In 1925, Robert LaFollette Jr. became the youngest U.S. Senator since Henry Clay a century before. From 1900 until 1946, at least one member of the LaFollette family sat in the Wisconsin governor's chair or in the United States Senate, from Oshinsky, *A Conspiracy So Immense: The World of Joe McCarthy*, pp. 36-37. However, battling head to head with Joseph McCarthy for the Republican nomination in 1946, McCarthy beat him, on his way to becoming Senator of Wisconsin.

⁴Luthin, "The Making of McCarthy," pp. 3-4.

⁵Oshinsky, *A Conspiracy So Immense: The World of Joe McCarthy*, p. 39.

⁶Ibid., p. 36.

⁷Luthin, "The Making of McCarthy," pp. 3-4.

⁸Herman, *Joseph McCarthy: Reexamining the Life and Legacy of America's Most hated Senator*, pp. 25-26.

⁹Reeves, *The Life and Times of Joe McCarthy: A Biography*, p. 27.

¹⁰Luthin, "The Making of McCarthy," p. 4.

¹¹Reeves, *The Life and Times of Joe McCarthy: A Biography*, p. 42.

¹²Drummey,

[http://www.thenewamerica.com/tna/1996/vol2no18/vol2no18_mccarthy.htm].

"The Real McCarthy Record: A Longtime Smear Campaign Has Clouded the Truth."

¹³Reeves, *The Life and Times of Joe McCarthy: A Biography*, p. 35.

¹⁴Herman, *Joseph McCarthy: Reexamining the Life and Legacy of America's Most Hated Senator*, pp. 30-31;

also see Reeves, *Life and Times of Joe McCarthy: A Biography*, p. 50.

¹⁵Drummey,

[http://www.thenewamerica.com/tna/1996/vol2no18/vol2no18_mccarthy.htm].

"The Real McCarthy Record: A Longtime Smear Campaign Has Clouded the Truth."

Reeves points out that this citation resulted from a letter of recommendation dated February 19, 1944, and bearing what was purported to be the signature of Maj. Glenn A. Todd, then McCarthy's commanding officer. He says that, in fact, Todd neither wrote nor signed such a letter, adding that it seems almost certain McCarthy was the document's author. As Todd explained in 1977, "Intelligence officers had very little work to do so we gave them all sorts of odd jobs. They wrote citations for awards." After apparently forging Todd's signature to the letter, McCarthy sent it through the proper channels, says Reeves, adding that Admiral Nimitz routinely signed thousands of such documents during the war, from Reeves, *The Life and Times of Joe McCarthy: A Biography*,

pp. 47-48.

¹⁶Reeves, *The Life and Times of Joe McCarthy: A Biography*, p. 60.

¹⁷Herman, *Joseph McCarthy: Reexamining the Life and Legacy of America's Most Hated Senator*, p. 51, from Walter Isaacson and Evan Thomas, *The Wise Men: Six Friends*

and the World They Made (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1986), p. 493.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, p. 51, from Reeves, *Life and Times of Joe McCarthy: A Biography*, p. 113.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, p. 51.

CHAPTER FIVE
A thorn between two presidents:
How Truman and Eisenhower dealt with McCarthy
and McCarthyism

The direct assault against Hitler was replaced by an indirect assault against McCarthy, one so indirect as to be scarcely discernible, and one which contributed only indirectly – at best – to McCarthy's downfall.

- **Historian Stephen Ambrose explains how Eisenhower dealt with the McCarthy situation**

Recent historical revelations have not only resulted in a renewed interest in Senator Joseph McCarthy, but may shed new light on the reactions to the anti-communist movement by those in power during McCarthy's meteoric rise and fall: Harry S Truman and Dwight D. Eisenhower, two Presidents, a Democrat and a Republican respectively, who had in common their dislike for each other¹ as well as for McCarthy. Truman was President when McCarthy first burst on to the scene with his famous Wheeling speech about Communists in the State Department on February 9, 1950. Eisenhower followed Truman to the White House and held office at the time McCarthy was censured in 1954. They have both received some criticism for the part they played in the McCarthy drama.

Truman may have underestimated McCarthy when the Wisconsin Senator first started making accusations. A couple of months after McCarthy's Wheeling speech, the President wrote Secretary of Commerce Charles Sawyer that he was on his way to dedicate Grand Coulee Dam in Washington State, and "I think by the time I arrive evidence will have been presented which will put Mr. McCarthy in the 'dog house' for good and we won't have to mention him anymore, even politically."² How wrong he proved to be. McCarthy was still very much a force almost five years later.

When Truman put together the Tydings Committee to investigate McCarthy's accusations, its findings a few months later were criticized as being highly politicized.³ Haynes says the Tydings Committee not only failed to put an end to McCarthy, it brought him so much publicity that he became identified as a leading anti-communist.⁴

Politics probably also played an important role in the fact Truman was obviously much more publicly vocal about McCarthy than Eisenhower eventually would be. Being a member of the opposing Democratic party allowed Truman greater opportunity to express his negative opinions about the Senator. Shortly after McCarthy's Wheeling

speech, Truman publicly denounced the Senator as a mishandler of the truth.⁵ And he often made scathing comments at his press conferences, saying there was “not a word of truth” in McCarthy’s allegations. He told reporters McCarthy and his supporters were “the greatest asset the Kremlin had.”⁶ However, historian Robert Ferrell, for one, believes Truman’s record would look better today if he had done more to curb McCarthy and the onset of McCarthyism.⁷ While Truman was a vocal McCarthy basher, at times he held back. For instance, soon after McCarthy’s Wheeling speech, the Senator sent Truman a wire reiterating his claim that 57 Communists worked within the State Department. Truman penned a scathing reply to McCarthy, but for some reason the President decided not to mail it:

My dear Senator: I read your telegram of February eleventh from Reno, Nevada with a great deal of interest and this is the first time in my experience, and I was ten years in the Senate, that I ever heard of a Senator trying to discredit his own officials. Your telegram is not only not true and an insolent approach to a situation that should have been worked out between man and man but it shows conclusively that you are not even fit to have a hand in the operation of the Government of the United States. I am very sure that the people of Wisconsin are extremely sorry that they are represented by a person who has as little sense of responsibility as you have.⁸

Not only did Truman not take McCarthy seriously enough, the President from Missouri may have taken too lightly some of the cases in which government members were accused of being security risks or worse. For example, he dismissed the Alger Hiss case as a “red herring,” a Republican political plot designed to embarrass the Democrats.⁹ Truman actually came out in support of Hiss.

This and other cases, including Truman’s support of top government official Harry Dexter White, bring into question the President’s awareness of the Venona

program and its significance. In 1946, the FBI sent evidence to Truman that White was, indeed, involved in espionage. Truman reportedly read the FBI report and decided it contained only the evidence offered by “a crook and a louse,”¹⁰ Bentley and Chambers. In the end, not only did Truman dismiss the charges against White, he promoted him from Assistant Secretary of the Treasury to the executive board of the International Monetary Fund.¹¹

While the evidence is not entirely clear, it would appear that Truman was denied direct knowledge of the Venona project because of his poor relationship with FBI Director Hoover,¹² perhaps the most avid communist hunter in the United States. Stephen Ambrose points out that the relationship between Truman and Hoover may not have been as bad as it has often been portrayed. For the most part, the two have been depicted as enemies. However, Ambrose says that according to Truman, the President eventually admitted he had, indeed, read the FBI report on White, but instead of disregarding it, he claimed he actually had entered into a plot with Hoover. This plot involved keeping White on the job “because firing him would tip off others under surveillance who were a part of White’s spy team.” Hoover denied such a deal ever existed.¹³

Ferrell relates a story that may explain the root cause of what most historians believe was a hostile relationship between Truman and Hoover:

When Truman became President, Hoover sent word throughout the ranks of the FBI that he wanted an agent or other bureau employee who knew Truman personally to advise the Director of the fact. After much pondering, an agent who was the son of a longtime Truman friend reluctantly decided to identify himself. Hoover was delighted, and instructed the agent to renew his acquaintance with the new President and carry a message for Mr. Hoover. The message, relayed by the old friend’s

son to the new President, was that Hoover and his organization stood ready, without resort to the Attorney General, to comply with any request the chief executive might make. 'No thanks,' Truman told his friend's son, and added: 'Tell Mr. Hoover that any request I have I'll pass on – through my Attorney General.' Truman never made a request of Hoover, directly or through the Attorney General. The chilliness in the relationship between Truman and the FBI director that followed the President's rebuff never thawed.¹⁴

Following the election of the Eightieth Congress, which came on the heels of the *Amerasia* case and Gouzenko revelations, Truman decided to tighten security. On March 22, 1947, he acted on the recommendations of a Temporary Commission on Employee Loyalty and adopted Executive Order No. 9835, the Federal Employee Loyalty Program, which resulted in a "name check" of each employee and was the first serious general loyalty program throughout the federal establishment,¹⁵ not counting some minor measures taken during the Second World War.¹⁶ Truman signed the order, according to Cate, largely to steal the Republicans' thunder.¹⁷ The premise behind the order was that government workers possessed no right to their jobs, that if found disloyal – a term left to the review boards to define based on a list of organizations compiled by the Attorney General – they could be fired easily.¹⁸ Following Truman's executive order, the Internal Security Division of the Justice Department put together a list that included 78 subversive organizations.¹⁹

While the executive order had its many opponents then and now, there were also supporters of the bill. James Wechsler was one of the latter. In a piece published in *Harper's* magazine in November 1947, the *New York Post* journalist defended the government's action:

Two persuasive premises guide the thinking of the men who are now shaping government policy in this elusive realm. The first is that we are

engaged in a worldwide diplomatic and ideological struggle with Russia with little prospect that the conflict will be swiftly or easily resolved. The second is that one of Russia's most valuable weapons – present and potential – is an international army of agents organized as “native” Communist parties. Reasonable men must be legitimately frightened by the dimensions this two-world conflict has reached and the danger that it will end in the ultimate catastrophe of war; but unless one argues ... that the burden of guilt in this duel rests on America and unless one dismisses as fantasy the modern record of the Communist parties, the need for minimum safeguard seems inescapable. Any “purge,” however circumspect and limited, involves risks to democratic institutions. The hazards must be balanced against the consequences of wide-eyed innocence and simple-minded incredulity.²⁰

Says Ferrell, by mid-1952, when more than four million actual or prospective employees had been checked out, boards had charged only 9,077, brought 2,961 to hearings and dismissed or denied employment to 378, roughly .002 per cent of the total. Ferrell points out that none of the discharged cases was for espionage.

However, many historians, including Ferrell, believe that Truman's executive order led directly to McCarthyism. The standard by which government officials dismissed people was “reasonable grounds ... for belief that the person involved is disloyal.” By early 1951, the standard was made worse by allowing the review board to include the phrase “reasonable doubt”²¹ when discussing loyalty risks. Richard Fried says the order was a major impetus in the development of McCarthyism because “it provided the language and methods that, in more extreme form, were taken up by the McCarthyites.”²² Albert Fried says the Truman executive order sought to reassure Americans, but its effect was the opposite: “It heightened anxieties and, thus, invited promises of greater security, which in turn, further heightened the anxiety.”²³

Truman's executive order went hand in hand with a decision he had made 10 days earlier, on March 12, 1947, to provide economic and military support for the Greek and

Turkish governments against the Soviet Union in what became known as the Truman Doctrine. He presented the doctrine to the American people as a necessary defence against a totalitarianism whose aim was the enslavement of mankind.²⁴ The Truman Doctrine condemned communism everywhere “because its adherents subverted their governments for the sake of Soviet expansion and conquest.”²⁵ Wherever “aggression” threatened peace or “freedom,” Truman said, America’s security was involved, and it would be necessary to “support free peoples who are resisting attempted subjugation by armed minorities or outside pressures.”²⁶ The Truman Doctrine, by conjuring a world divided into irreconcilable realms of good and evil, committed the United States to a policy of containment and global intervention.²⁷ According to Albert Fried, Truman’s introduction of the doctrine so close in time to a “loyalty review” program to root out Communists from among the millions of federal employees was no coincidence.²⁸

Haynes believes that another part of Truman’s cold war strategy played an important role in committing the United States to the containment of communist expansion around the world. In June 1947, Secretary of State George C. Marshall announced a plan for massive American aid to deal with a severe European economic crisis that was threatening to bring powerful Communist parties to power in Italy and France. This strategy was known as the Marshall Plan.²⁹

And yet another important step Truman took in 1947, which showed he may have been much more aware there was a security problem than many have given him credit for, was the submitting to the Republican-controlled Congress his proposal for the creation of a peacetime Central Intelligence Agency as a permanent arm of government and a mechanism for co-ordinating intelligence to provide the President, Secretary of State and Secretary of Defense with analysis of the country’s national security. While the

needs prompting the creation of this agency were much greater than just issues of national security, Truman made certain the CIA was equipped to deal with the communist tactics of “coercion, subterfuge and political infiltration.”³⁰

Truman said he was “determined that the United States shall be secure.”

However, he wrote in his memoirs that he was “equally determined that we shall keep our historic liberties.” He pointed out that on September 23, 1950, Congress enacted the Internal Security Act, perhaps better known as the McCarran Act, over his veto, a bill he disagreed with because it would give government officials “vast powers to harass all of our citizens in the exercise of their right of free speech,” and that “government stifling of the free expression of opinion is a long step toward totalitarianism.” He said:

One of the bad results of the act soon came to pass. The Communists now began to scurry underground. Through many devices such as changes of name, of physical appearance, of occupations and residence, they made it more difficult for our agents to keep track of them.

The act principally dealt with four subjects: the registration of “communist organizations”; the strengthening of espionage laws; the amendment of immigration and naturalization laws; and the detention of potential spies and saboteurs in times of emergency. All this was justified by a preamble concluding that world communism’s sole purpose was the establishment of a totalitarian dictatorship in America to be brought about by treachery, infiltration, sabotage and terrorism. American Communists were said to have transferred their allegiance to a foreign power. S.4130, as it was labelled, was designed as a substitute bill providing for camps in times of national emergency, invasion or insurrection to detain without trial anyone who had been a member of the Communist party since January 1, 1949. The bill was passed in the House on September 20, 1950, by 312 votes to 20 and in the Senate by 51 to 7. Opposed to the bill, Truman said it was like

asking thieves to register with the sheriff, was unworkable, was authoritarian and was putting the government in “the thought control business.”³¹

Truman made it clear he felt the security program of the United States had been “wickedly used by demagogues,” including McCarthy. After the Internal Security Act passed, Truman set up the Subversive Activities Control Board, appointing Republican Seth Richardson as chairman.³² The five-man, nonpartisan board evaluated and added groups to the Attorney General’s list. The law also empowered the President to round up and detain “subversives,” which in 1950 meant Communists, in the event of a national emergency.³³

Eisenhower and McCarthy

A much more interesting and multi-faceted relationship existed between McCarthy and Eisenhower than the one between McCarthy and Truman. While McCarthy’s attacks on Truman were expected, as it would, in fact, be unusual if a Republican Senator did not attack the leader of the opposition party, attacks on Eisenhower and other Republicans were much different because he was accusing members of his own party.

More even than in Truman’s case, recent findings seem to be substantially altering our picture of the Eisenhower presidency and his failure to react to McCarthy. Eisenhower suggested in diaries and memoirs that he detested McCarthy and thought he was simply a publicity seeker,³⁴ yet he did nothing concrete to try and combat what were perceived by many at the time and many more afterward as wild accusations. In fact, when the Republican-controlled Congress was organized in January 1953, McCarthy was

given choice committee assignments, particularly the chairmanship of the Government Operations Committee and its Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations. Eisenhower often overlooked and forgave McCarthy's attacks on the administration's policies and policy-makers.³⁵ The President predicted the Senator would fade away if ignored. McCarthy eventually did fade away, but only after wreaking havoc for the first two years of Eisenhower's presidency.

In Eisenhower's defence, it should be pointed out the President was restricted somewhat in what he could do to prevent McCarthy from spreading his accusations. In the American government, the system of checks and balances carefully delineates responsibilities. According to Section 5 of the Constitution:

Each House shall be the Judge of the Elections, Returns and Qualifications of its own Members, and a Majority of each shall constitute a Quorum to do Business; but a smaller number may adjourn from day to day, and may be authorized to compel the Attendance of absent Members, in such Manner, and under such Penalties, as each House may provide. Each House may determine the Rules of its Proceedings, punish its Members for disorderly Behaviour, and, with the Concurrence of two thirds, expel a Member.³⁶

Thus, it would seem that it was truly the job of McCarthy's fellow Senators, not the President, to punish or expel him if there were a problem with his actions, as the President pointed out on several occasions. Having said this, it is also true that by not being a publicly vocal opponent of McCarthy, some believe Eisenhower was in essence providing quiet support for the Senator. His failure to react against the Senator has also been perceived as showing the President's fear of doing battle with McCarthy, a viewpoint expressed by historians Chester Pach and Elmo Richardson.³⁷

If he had been more open in his criticism of McCarthy, Eisenhower, being the popular President he was,³⁸ may have created a situation in which he could have garnered more support against the Senator, from the public and from the Senate. As a result, McCarthy's demise may have occurred in a much shorter time frame.

Eisenhower's April 1954 Gallup approval rating among those with opinions was 76 per cent. From inauguration to McCarthy's censure, Eisenhower's approval rating ranged from 57 per cent to the mid-70s.³⁹ In Harvard sociologist Samuel Stouffer's study, *Communism, Conformity and Civil Liberties*, done during and just after the Army-McCarthy hearings, when asked if they thought there were Communists in government at the time, only 7 per cent of 5,000 respondents said "no," whereas 79 per cent said "yes," although only 6 per cent estimated the number of Communists in the government to be as great as in the thousands. Only 2 per cent said that if there were Communists in government their presence would not hurt the country; 42 per cent said they would present "a great danger"; 41 per cent said "some danger"; and only 14 per cent said "not much." In short, the prevailing view was that there were some Communists in government and their presence was dangerous. But, Stouffer asked, what if Eisenhower were to say that the menace had been eliminated? He then added as a followup question, alluding to McCarthy: Suppose "the chairman of a congressional committee investigating communism said there was still a great danger from Communists within the government, would you still believe President Eisenhower was right, or not?" When asked if they would believe Eisenhower, 49 per cent of the sample said they would if he said the danger was gone, 40 per cent said they would not and 11 per cent had no opinion.⁴⁰ So why did Eisenhower not do more to try and bring about

McCarthy's demise in a quick, public manner? Perhaps having McCarthy around was a much better alternative than not having him around.

Known by more recent historians as the hidden-hand President for his behind-the-scenes methods of controlling the reins of power, Eisenhower's relationship with McCarthy has been described in just such terms. While he received much flak at the time for failing to take action against McCarthy, history has been much kinder to Eisenhower. His treatment of the Senator from Wisconsin has been depicted as just another facet of his brilliant behind-the-scenes manoeuvring.⁴¹ Eisenhower's actions were actually well calculated, it has been said. He allowed McCarthy his freedom because he knew that eventually the Senator would hang himself with his lies and accusations. According to Stephen Ambrose, "Eisenhower came to loathe McCarthy, almost as much as he hated Hitler," and while he was determined to destroy McCarthy as the Allies had destroyed Hitler, he had to go about it in a much different manner. "Eisenhower went after Hitler with everything he had. With McCarthy, he kept all his ammunition in reserve," writes Ambrose. "During the war, he had insisted on keeping Hitler at the centre of everyone's attention. In his first years as President, he did his best to get people to ignore Joe McCarthy."⁴²

However, what if Eisenhower, in fact, knew about the Venona project and was aware of a large network of spies and security risks occupying high levels of government, but was unaware of who those people were? It is believed that Eisenhower, indeed, was aware of the Venona project, perhaps as early as 1947, when he was Army Chief of Staff,⁴³ and that during his presidency there were a large number of spies who had not been identified.⁴⁴ So the possibility that this hidden-hand President had other motives for not attacking McCarthy may, indeed, be valid.

The aspect of Eisenhower's treatment of McCarthy deserves much more attention than historians have generally given it. For example, why did Eisenhower not provide public support for his long-time friend and supporter, George C. Marshall, when McCarthy accused him of being a traitor to his country? In McCarthy's words, Marshall was someone "whose every important act for years has contributed to the prosperity of the enemy."⁴⁵ The Marshall situation further eroded any regard Truman had once had for Eisenhower and resulted in public tongue lashings of Eisenhower by the former Democratic president.⁴⁶ Regarding Marshall, Eisenhower had personally written a short paragraph in a speech he was to deliver in Wisconsin during the 1952 election campaign expressing his respect for the man. He recalled "this paragraph had been the subject of staff concern because I had thrown it in the talk with little supporting context." His staff pointed out that only a short time earlier the President had made a strong statement emphasizing Marshall's outstanding character and achievements, and that repetition would be seen as a "chip-on-the-shoulder" attitude. After listening to them, Eisenhower agreed to the deletion. When this became known, it gave the opposition and the press an opportunity to charge that Eisenhower had "capitulated to the McCarthyites."⁴⁷

His actions in the Marshall case seemed to go against his stated beliefs, as noted in correspondence with a childhood friend, Swede Hazlett. The President said: "...we should support – even militantly support – people whom we know to be unjustly attacked, whether they are public servants or private citizens."⁴⁸ In the case of Marshall, Eisenhower did not do this.

In campaigning for the 1952 election, Eisenhower said, as an opponent of communism, he would initiate measures to make certain that no Communist or fellow traveller would remain in government. At the same time, he pledged that, in an attempt to

discover and uproot Communists, he would support only methods that were legal and that respected the individual rights of those accused:

Although he was a Republican Senator and I, as the presidential nominee, would be expected in the campaign of 1952 to support all Republican candidates for office, I was determined to give no appearance of aligning my views with his.

Some of his good friends and most trusted advisers would, occasionally, urge Eisenhower to censure McCarthy publicly in the hope of destroying his political power, but the President could not be swayed:

It seemed that almost every day I had to point out that if I were to attack Senator McCarthy, even though every personal instinct prompted me, I would greatly enhance his publicity value without achieving any constructive purpose. I was convinced that his influence, such as it was, would be gone completely if he lost his headline value.

Eisenhower said he was sure the only person who could destroy McCarthy as a political figure was the Senator himself; that McCarthy's erratic behaviour and unfounded accusations would eventually lead to his own downfall. Eisenhower related that while he continued to ignore the Senator, he certainly did not agree with his methods.

But, at the same time, I declared that I opposed, to the limit of my official power and personal influence, all unfair, unjust and un-American practices in trials, investigations and inquiries.⁴⁹

It has been suggested by some of Eisenhower's aides that the decision to take a hands-off approach to McCarthy was made initially on the grounds that the man was a potent electoral asset to the Republican party and should not be alienated. The Eisenhower administration tried to appease him, but to no avail.⁵⁰ According to this interpretation, the President remained silent in a supreme effort to maintain party

harmony and national unity because the Republican party was split over the issue of McCarthyism. Nixon said in his memoirs that after the election in 1953:

Most Republicans in the House and Senate were then still strongly pro-McCarthy and wanted Eisenhower to embrace him, while the predominantly liberal White House staff members opposed McCarthy and wanted Eisenhower to repudiate him. The President himself was torn.⁵¹

Ambrose points out that Eisenhower cited two basic reasons for his non-approach to McCarthy. The first had to do with his attempt to maintain the dignity of the presidency. “I just don’t want to get into a pissing contest with that skunk,” he told friends, “... the headline writers screamed ever more loudly for me to enter the list against him. As you and I well know, such an attempt would have made the Presidency ridiculous.” The second reason was his belief that he needed to appease McCarthy whenever possible because the President needed his support in the Senate.⁵² Of course, there are many other reasons why Eisenhower may have reacted to McCarthy the way that he did, including the fact that “behind McCarthy stood millions of Americans. They were an important part of the electorate that had put him in office. To attack and alienate McCarthy would be to alienate the Senator’s millions of supporters, driving them farther away from the middle road in American politics.”⁵³ As well, as Ambrose points out, “Eisenhower was more on McCarthy’s side than not on the issue of communism in government. It was McCarthy’s methods he disapproved of, not his goals or his analysis.”⁵⁴ In fact, Eisenhower once told Attorney General Herbert Brownell to “search out some positive way to put ourselves on the side of individual rights and liberty as well as on the side of fighting communism to the death.”⁵⁵ David Caute points out that in

Eisenhower's 1954 State of the Union message, the President himself went so far as to propose depriving Communists of citizenship.⁵⁶

Eisenhower's program

The security-loyalty distinction was central to Eisenhower's program. To Truman's criterion that public servants must not be loyalty risks, Eisenhower added that they must not possess personal qualities that might endanger national security.⁵⁷ Eisenhower believed "a drunk or a homosexual could be as loyal as Uncle Sam himself, and still be a security risk because he could be blackmailed." On April 27, 1953, Eisenhower issued Executive Order No. 10450, which drastically revised the federal government's internal security program by authorizing the heads of all federal departments and agencies to fire any employee if there were reasonable doubt not only about their loyalty but also reliability, or "good conduct or character."⁵⁸ Henceforth, "security," not "loyalty," would be the test for appointments and retention.⁵⁹ Grounds for refusing or terminating federal employment included homosexuality, considered an invitation to blackmail; heavy drinking, considered a possible cause of revealing secrets; and indiscriminate talkativeness.⁶⁰ This executive order and two others issued during the next 15 months stripped away most of the protection that accused employees had against dismissal, including hearings to determine the accuracy of any charges, appeals before dismissal and an opportunity to exercise the Fifth Amendment right to avoid self-incrimination.⁶¹ As well, the Communist Control Act of 1954 made the Communist party illegal.

All the new legislation did not turn up many alleged communist sympathizers, but grouping them with homosexuals, alcoholics and other “unreliables” gave the appearance that increasing numbers of “security risks” were being denied government employment.⁶² Eisenhower said such drastic restriction of due process was necessary because the top ranks of the State Department were filled with subversives, a claim that McCarthy made many times only to be ridiculed in the end. Internal security officials boasted of removing almost 500 employees in less than a year.⁶³

Changing views of Eisenhower

Views of Eisenhower’s leadership have changed dramatically over time. Some contemporary accounts of the Eisenhower presidency depicted him as a golf- and bridge-playing leader who put in short work weeks and left many of the tough political decisions to Secretary of State John Foster Dulles and capable staff members. He was viewed by some as out of touch and incapable of making the tough decisions required of a U.S. President. He was presented in very unflattering terms by such respected journalists of the day as Walter Lippmann,⁶⁴ Richard Rovere⁶⁵ and Drew Pearson,⁶⁶ who described him as lazy, uninformed and incapable of dealing with difficult situations, including his relationship with McCarthy.

However, more recently, historians have provided a much different view of Eisenhower. In the 1980s, Fred Greenstein led a wave of revisionist historical studies that shed new light on the former general’s decision-making capabilities. Greenstein said that the President used “hidden-hand influence” to slowly defuse and defeat the Senator. This approach involved condemning unfair tactics and executing policies that would make

McCarthy's activities unnecessary and diminish his importance. Greenstein pointed to five elements that comprised Eisenhower's political style: hidden-hand leadership; instrumental use of language; refusal to "engage in personalities"; action based on personality analysis; and delegation of power selectively practised. To these, he added the maintenance of public support for the Presidency. Through this style, he said, Eisenhower was able to slowly defuse McCarthy.⁶⁷

Republican Senator Henry Cabot Lodge agreed that by seemingly ignoring McCarthy, the man, Eisenhower failed to magnify the Senator's persona and quickened his political demise.⁶⁸ A more recent historical account by Stephen J. Whitfield concurs with Lodge's belief that Eisenhower's handling of the McCarthy situation helped to put an end to McCarthyism:

Far from facilitating the spread of McCarthyism, the Republican President helped grease its skids and slowly curtailed its excesses, first by ending the Korean War, then by letting the Wisconsin Senator have enough rope to overreach himself.⁶⁹

In the early 1980s, Ambrose depicted Eisenhower as a Second World War military leader who exhibited a win-at-all-costs attitude. One of the key figures in Allied military operations, Eisenhower was leader of the Overlord intelligence campaign, which helped to swing the outcome of the war in favour of the Allies. He reportedly took the operation so seriously that at times security came before friendship⁷⁰ and that on occasion he did not enter into his official office log meetings with military personnel.⁷¹ It has been suggested that Eisenhower's single greatest advantage during the Second World War was that due to a superior espionage system he knew where and when the battle would be fought, while his opponents had to guess. To keep them guessing, Eisenhower would and did go to any length to keep the secret of Overlord secure, Ambrose says.⁷²

Ambrose followed this work up with another book, this time dealing with Eisenhower's presidency, which depicted Ike, in much the same way Greenstein did, as a hidden-hand leader.⁷³

Then, in the 1990s, historian Craig Allen suggested that Eisenhower manipulated the media to his own benefit.⁷⁴ According to Allen, Eisenhower was the ultimate competitor when it came to keeping secrets during the Cold War:

Inaccuracies, distortions and faulty interpretations had always bothered Eisenhower, yet he considered them venial sins and dealt with them mildly. In contrast, Eisenhower viewed the publication of classified information as a mortal trespass. Only in this situation did he single out reporters by name and actively attempt to follow up.

Allen describes a number of episodes in which Eisenhower drew a clear line in the sand between what should and should not be made public, including an episode that occurred in April 1959 during disarmament negotiations with the Soviets when CBS correspondent Daniel Schorr leaked the fact that John Foster Dulles, stricken with cancer, had resigned. Fearing the impact this announcement would have on the Russians, Eisenhower responded to Schorr with a statement that read, "This is about as irresponsible reporting as I know of." He again reacted heatedly in early 1960 when *The New York Times* hinted at the existence of the still-secret U-2 flights, referring to the reporter of the piece as "the lowest form of animal life on earth."⁷⁵

Over time, a President whom some initially had considered to be laid back and out of touch has evolved into one of the United States' more complex leaders, who could perhaps best be described as a master manipulator. Ambrose paints the picture of a man who was anything but out of touch and peripheral in the decision-making process. Of the traits Eisenhower first deployed in the Second World War, Ambrose has written:

Eisenhower is at the centre of events. Just as in Overlord, when he was the funnel through which everything had to pass, the one man who was responsible for the whole operation, so too as President, he was the one man who could weigh all the factors in any one decision – the political repercussions, the effect on foreign policy, the economic consequences and the myriad of other considerations involved – before acting.⁷⁶

Under Eisenhower's leadership and Allen Dulles' direction, the size and scope of the CIA's activities increased dramatically during the 1950s.⁷⁷ A prime example of this was the CIA's successful overthrow of Mohammed Mossadegh, the Iranian Prime Minister. Plans for a coup had started in November 1952, when the British Secret Service had approached CIA agent Kermit Roosevelt. Partly because of his experience with wartime intelligence, Pach and Richardson say, Eisenhower decided to place far more emphasis than had Truman on covert operations, and Operation Ajax in Iran was the CIA's first major test during the Eisenhower Presidency. Under Roosevelt's direction, CIA operatives distributed the equivalent of \$100,000 in Iranian currency to recruit street demonstrators who demanded Mossadegh's removal. The coup succeeded in mid-August.⁷⁸ Eisenhower had ordered the Mossadegh government overthrown, and it had been done. It seemed to him the end results more than justified the means. In his diary, Eisenhower wrote, "The things we did were 'covert,' " and he admitted that the United States would have been embarrassed if the CIA's role in the coup became known.⁷⁹

After the CIA's successful plot to bring down Mossadegh, Eisenhower used undercover operations to deal with another regime that had been troublesome to the United States, the government of Jacobo Arbenz Guzman in Guatemala. In mid-1954, covert intervention swiftly put an end to Guzman's reign.⁸⁰ It was yet another instance of Eisenhower using behind-the-scenes manoeuvring as a means to gain his objectives.

Evidence from the CIA and NSA suggests that while the first Venona translations occurred in 1946, many of the Soviet telegrams were not translated until much later,⁸¹ and even after many of the telegrams were translated there remained a strong possibility there still existed a large number of unidentified people in the upper echelons of American society with ties to the Soviets. This evidence could help to create a more Machiavellian view of the Eisenhower presidency than some of the 1980s and 1990s interpretations if it can be proven that his dealings with McCarthy were, indeed, influenced by his knowledge of Venona.

A historical view of the presidents

While both Truman and Eisenhower claimed they were vehemently opposed to McCarthy and his tactics, neither prevented him from waging his crusade against Communists in the State Department. Author Roy Jenkins provides a rather apt summary of the situation:

Truman was staunch but he lacked the guile in dealing with him that Roosevelt would have shown. He was not good at digging pits for the Senator and mocking him when he fell into them. Lack of guile, however, was better than lack of courage, which was the deficiency [that] Eisenhower displayed, and which was to make the period of his campaign and the first 18 months of his presidency the apogee of McCarthy's parabola. In Truman's day, he sullied America. In Eisenhower's, he ran amok and threatened to undermine the Army as well as the State Department.⁸²

Endnotes:

- ¹Stephen E. Ambrose, *Eisenhower: The President, Volume 2* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1984), pp. 14-15.
- ²Robert H. Ferrell, *Harry S Truman: A Life* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1994), p. 304.
- ³Luthin, "The Making of McCarthy," p. 9. The final tally had 45 Democrats voting against the Republican McCarthy and 37 Republicans voting for their Senator.
- ⁴Haynes, *Red Scare or Red Menace? American Communism and Anticommunism in the Cold War Era*, p. 146.
- ⁵Luthin, "The Making of McCarthy," p. 9.
- ⁶Roy Jenkins, *Truman* (London: William Collins Sons & Co. Ltd., 1986), p. 157.
- ⁷Ferrell, *Harry S Truman: A Life*, p. 305.
- ⁸Monte M. Poen, ed., *Strictly Personal and Confidential: The Letters Harry Truman Never Mailed*, pp. 114-115.
- ⁹Edwin Yoder, "Documents Reveal Spy Secrets," *The Montgomery Advertiser*, 12 March 1996, p. 6A.
- ¹⁰Ambrose, *Eisenhower: The President, Volume 2*, p. 137.
- ¹¹Carpozi, *Red Spies in Washington*, p. 227.
- ¹²Haynes, and Klehr, *Venona: Decoding Soviet Espionage in America*, p. 15; also Benson and Warner, ed., *Venona: Soviet Espionage and the American Response 1939-1957*, p. xxiv; also Weinstein and Vassiliev, *The Haunted Wood: Soviet Espionage in America – The Stalin Era*, p. 291.
- ¹³Carpozi, *Red Spies in Washington*, p. 227; also Ambrose, *Eisenhower: The President, Volume 2*, p. 139.
- ¹⁴Ferrell, *Harry S Truman: A Life*, p. 302.
- ¹⁵Latham, ed., *The Meaning of McCarthyism, Second Edition*, p. viii.
- ¹⁶Fried, *McCarthyism: The Great American Red Scare – A Documentary History*, p. 24.
- ¹⁷Caute, *The Great Fear: The Anti-Communist Purge Under Truman and Eisenhower*, p. 27.
- ¹⁸Fried, *McCarthyism: The Great American Red Scare – A Documentary History*, p. 24.
- ¹⁹Caute, *The Great Fear: The Anti-Communist Purge Under Truman and Eisenhower*, p. 169.
- ²⁰Fried, *McCarthyism: The Great American Red Scare – A Documentary History*, p. 76.
- ²¹Ferrell, *Harry S Truman: A Life*, p. 301; also Caute, *The Great Fear: The Anti-Communist Purge Under Truman and Eisenhower*, p. 28.
- ²²Fried, *Nightmare in Red: The McCarthy Era in Perspective*, p. vii.
- ²³Fried, *McCarthyism: The Great American Red Scare – A Documentary History*, p. 25.
- ²⁴*Ibid.*, p. 4.

- ²⁵Ibid., p. 24.
- ²⁶Caute, *The Great Fear: The Anti-Communist Purge Under Truman and Eisenhower*, p. 30.
- ²⁷National Security Agency Fort Meade, Maryland, *The Origins of NSA – Center for Cryptologic History*, p. 32.
- ²⁸Fried, *McCarthyism: The Great American Red Scare – A Documentary History*, p. 4.
- ²⁹Haynes, *Red Scare or Red Menace? American Communism and Anticommunism in the Cold War Era*, p. 38.
- ³⁰Carpozi, *Red Spies in Washington*, p. 223.
- ³¹Caute, *The Great Fear: The Anti-Communist Purge Under Truman and Eisenhower*, pp. 38-39.
- ³²Harry S Truman, *Memoirs by Harry S Truman: Years of Trial and Hope, Volume 2* (New York: Doubleday & Company, 1956), p. 284.
- ³³Herman, *Joseph McCarthy: Reexamining the Life and Legacy of America's Most Hated Senator*, p. 149.
- ³⁴Robert H. Ferrell, ed., *The Eisenhower Diaries* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1981), p. 233; also Robert Griffith, ed., *Ike's Letters to a Friend 1941-1958* (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1987), p. 110.
- ³⁵Luthin, "The Making of McCarthy," pp. 15-17.
- ³⁶Alan Brinkley, *American History: A Survey, Volume II: Since 1865, Tenth Edition* (United States: McGraw-Hill Companies, Inc., 1999), pp. A-12 and A-13.
- ³⁷Chester J. Pach and Elmo Richardson, *The Presidency of Dwight D. Eisenhower* (Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1991), p. 67.
- ³⁸In December 1953, Gallup asked what would happen if Dwight Eisenhower and Joe McCarthy squared off for the Republican nomination in 1956. Almost 80 per cent of respondents said they would prefer Eisenhower. The prospect of a McCarthyite third party, the sort of radical populist specter many of his critics feared, garnered exactly five per cent support, from Herman, *Joseph McCarthy: Reexamining the Life and Legacy of America's Most Hated Senator*, p. 161.
- ³⁹Greenstein, *The Hidden-Hand Presidency: Eisenhower as Leader*, p. 201.
- ⁴⁰Ibid., pp. 225-226.
- ⁴¹Ibid., p. 219.
- ⁴²Ambrose, *Eisenhower: The President, Volume 2*, p. 57.
- ⁴³Benson and Warner, ed., *Venona: Soviet Espionage and the American Response 1939-1957*, p. xxix.
- ⁴⁴Haynes and Klehr, *Venona: Decoding Soviet Espionage in America*, p. 12.
- ⁴⁵Jenkins, *Truman*, p. 158.
- ⁴⁶Poen, ed., *Strictly Personal and Confidential: The Letters Harry Truman Never Mailed*, p. 125.

⁴⁷Dwight D. Eisenhower, *The White House Years: Mandate For Change, 1953-1956* (Garden City: Doubleday and Company, 1963), p. 318.

⁴⁸Griffith, ed., *Ike's Letters to a Friend 1941-1958*, p. 110.

⁴⁹Eisenhower, *The White House Years: Mandate For Change, 1953-1956*, pp. 317-320.

⁵⁰Luthin, "The Making of McCarthy," p. 17.

⁵¹Richard Nixon, *The Memoirs of Richard Nixon* (New York: Grosset and Dunlop, 1978), p. 139.

⁵²Ambrose, *Eisenhower: The President, Volume 2*, p. 57.

⁵³Gallup polls at the end of 1953 revealed that almost two-thirds of the public agreed with McCarthy and that his approval rating had climbed significantly since the previous summer, from Pach and Richardson, *The Presidency of Dwight D. Eisenhower*, p. 68.

⁵⁴Ambrose, *Eisenhower: The President, Volume 2*, p. 58.

⁵⁵*Ibid.*, p. 136.

⁵⁶Caute, *The Great Fear: The Anti-Communist Purge Under Truman and Eisenhower*, p. 49.

⁵⁷Greenstein, *The Hidden-Hand Presidency: Eisenhower as Leader*, pp. 171-212; also Ambrose, *Eisenhower: The President, Volume 2*, pp. 45-46.

⁵⁸Pach and Richardson, *The Presidency of Dwight D. Eisenhower*, p. 64; also, Latham, *The Communist Controversy in Washington: From the New Deal to McCarthy*, pp. 368-369.

⁵⁹Ambrose, *Eisenhower: The President, Volume 2*, p. 9.

⁶⁰At one time or another, there was speculation that McCarthy himself fit into each of the three categories. At various times, he was labelled a homosexual, an alcoholic and an indiscriminate talker.

⁶¹Pach and Richardson, *The Presidency of Dwight D. Eisenhower*, p. 64. The Fifth Amendment is supposed to guarantee that no person "shall be compelled in any criminal case to be a witness against himself." In the United States, the Fifth Amendment became, to some extent from 1948 onward, and to a much larger extent from 1950, the favourite resort of radicals called to account for their beliefs, affiliations and associations by grand juries and congressional committees. Some 500 witnesses invoked the privilege between 1950 and 1956, from Caute, *The Great Fear: The Anti-Communist Purge Under Truman and Eisenhower*, p. 150.

⁶²Greenstein, *The Hidden-Hand Presidency: Eisenhower as Leader*, pp. 213-219.

⁶³Pach and Richardson, *The Presidency of Dwight D. Eisenhower*, p. 64. Justice Minister Herbert Brownell announced on October 23, 1953, that 1,456 persons had been driven from the federal payroll, from Ambrose, *Eisenhower: The President, Volume 2*, p. 136.

⁶⁴Ronald Steel, *Walter Lippmann and the American Century* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1980), p. 520; also John Luskin, *Lippmann, Liberty and the Press* (Alabama: The University of Alabama Press, 1972), p. 202.

⁶⁵Richard Rovere, *Final Reports: Personal Reflections on Politics and History in Our*

Time (Garden City: Doubleday and Co., Inc., 1984), pp. 151-152.

⁶⁶In a diary entry from May 10, 1953, Pearson says: "Few people realize how little time Eisenhower spends at work. He golfs at least three days a week and is spending a three-day weekend in Phillipsburg, New Jersey, and gets away for an equally long period during most weekends. The newspapermen protect him. I think it boils down to the fact that Ike is really not at all well, also probably rather lazy. I understand he has colitic poisoning, as well as high blood pressure," from Abell, *Drew Pearson Diaries*, p. 267.

⁶⁷Greenstein, *The Hidden-Hand Presidency: Eisenhower as Leader*, pp. 213-219.

⁶⁸Henry Cabot Lodge, *As It Was* (New York: Norton, 1976), p. 137.

⁶⁹Stephen J. Whitfield, "The Cultural Cold War as History," *The Virginia Quarterly Review: A National Journal of Literature and Discussion* 69, no. 3 (Summer 1993), p. 379.

⁷⁰When General Henry Miller, chief supply officer of the Ninth Air Force, a West Point classmate and a very close friend of Ike's, talked too freely at a cocktail party about his problems in obtaining supplies and how they would end following D-Day, information he was asked not to discuss, Eisenhower ordered the general reduced to colonel and sent him back to the States, the ultimate disgrace for a career soldier, from Stephen E. Ambrose with Richard H. Immerman, research associate, *Ike's Spies: Eisenhower and the Espionage Establishment* (Garden City: Doubleday and Company, 1981), pp. 91-92.

⁷¹Ambrose, with Immerman, research associate, *Ike's Spies: Eisenhower and the Espionage Establishment*, p. 12.

⁷²*Ibid.*, p. 90.

⁷³Ambrose, *Eisenhower: The President, Volume Two*, pp. 9-12.

⁷⁴Craig Allen, *Eisenhower and the Mass Media: Peace Prosperity and Prime-Time TV* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1993), pp. 1-9.

⁷⁵*Ibid.*, p. 187.

⁷⁶Ambrose, *Eisenhower: The President, Volume 2*, p. 9.

⁷⁷*Ibid.*, p. 111.

⁷⁸Pach and Richardson, *The Presidency of Dwight D. Eisenhower*, pp. 88-89.

⁷⁹Ambrose, *Eisenhower: The President, Volume 2*, pp. 129-130.

⁸⁰Pach and Richardson, *The Presidency of Dwight D. Eisenhower*, p. 89.

⁸¹Hatch, "Venona: An Overview," p. 73.

⁸²Jenkins, *Truman*, p. 158.

CONCLUSION

Senator McCarthy: A more complex assessment

“I say one Communist in a defence plant is one Communist too many. One Communist on the faculty of one university is one Communist too many. One Communist among the American advisors at Yalta was one Communist too many. And even if there were only one Communist in the State Department, that would still be one Communist too many.”

– Joseph McCarthy

In many ways, the most surprising thing that has occurred in the more recent historiography of McCarthy and McCarthyism is that the confirmation of his charges of communist infiltration, contained in Soviet espionage traffic and decrypted under the Venona project, has not really changed the debate very much. On closer examination, the reasons for this become apparent. First, there is the problem that the authoritativeness of the Venona documents, only made public six years ago, is still being studied. To date, very few scholars have had their minds changed by the hard evidence that many of the suspects were, indeed, in contact with Soviet intelligence. The mere release of texts of telegrams has generally been judged insufficient by those skeptical of the charges. How were the cables processed? When specifically was each cable processed? How did the authorities link code names and real names? If more is not released to answer these questions, it is fair to say that a large number of historians will simply stand by their present invocation of the ancient Scottish jury verdict: "Not proven."

This can be evidenced by a conference held on February 9, 2000. Exactly 50 years to the day Joseph McCarthy made his famous speech in Wheeling, W. Va., the National Archives and Records Administration, in conjunction with the Eisenhower Center at the University of New Orleans and Yale University Press, held a special symposium called *McCarthyism in America* in Washington, DC, to commemorate this historical event. The conference was a virtual cornucopia of American Cold War historians. Arthur Schlesinger Jr., Thomas C. Reeves, Seymour Martin Lipset, Ellen Schrecker, Sam Tanenhaus, John Earl Haynes, Harvey Klehr and David Oshinsky were among the academics who presented papers dealing with different aspects of McCarthyism. The

Senator was presented in a variety of ways, from the oft-repeated demagogue to tragic figure and everything in between, but all academics agreed the new information, while changing some views about the Cold War period, has done little, if anything, to reform the consensus negative historical view of the man himself.

Schlesinger started off the conference by presenting a portrait of McCarthy many school children have become familiar with, calling the former senator a demagogue who had a “con man’s instincts for improvisation,” and accusing McCarthy of being unprincipled and unbelieving in his anti-communist cause.¹

Reeves, the author of the massive *The Life and Times of Joe McCarthy: A Biography*, was next in line, producing a paper titled “Seven Truths About Joe McCarthy”² in which he described the Senator as highly intelligent; anti-intellectual, pointing out he may have never even read a book (which is hard to believe, considering the man graduated from law school); charming; aggressive; a consummate bluffer; a true believer in the anti-communist cause; and an alcoholic. Reeves said that while new evidence points to a large amount of espionage activity around the time of the McCarthy era, much as the Senator had claimed, it provides no excuse for his smearing of innocent victims. “Because McCarthy condemned a few we are now sure were involved in Soviet espionage, there will be some who will conclude his Red-hunting was beneficial,” Reeves said. “It was inevitable he would hit on a few secret agents, but his discoveries were not original. Joe McCarthy did not discover a single Communist in government or anywhere else,” he said. Reeves concluded by saying that McCarthy was justly condemned and that his life was tragic and pathetic. “His escape into the bottle in the last

years of his brief life was somehow a fitting end to talent squandered and opportunities wasted,” he said.

Oshinsky touched on the theme of McCarthy as true believer versus McCarthy as opportunist, suggesting the Senator may have become a true believer in his anti-communist cause, but it came later in his career. The historian spent considerable time criticizing the recent work of Herman, downgrading the author’s attempt to provide a more balanced account of McCarthy’s life. “If good sense prevails, the right-wing revisionist account of McCarthy will go the way of the Hitler diaries ...” Oshinsky said, adding that the evidence was slim not only for right-wing revisionists but also their left-wing counterparts, who concluded the 1950s decade was a nightmare in red, “with the FBI replacing the Communist party as the ... instrument of evil.”³

Klehr and Haynes, who have perhaps done more than anyone else in recent times to stir up the anti-communist issue once again with their sensational book *Venona: Decoding Soviet Espionage in America*, also provided little in the way of comfort for the McCarthy legacy. Klehr concluded that “the new material has very little to say about Joseph McCarthy, but a good deal to say about the need to once again disentangle anti-communism from McCarthyism.” He pointed out that it is now certain there were more than 300 American agents connected with Soviet espionage during the Second World War and there were sometimes so many in certain agencies that they were literally tripping over each other. Klehr continued:

No one in the American government or intelligence community could know for sure where the 100 to 150 unidentified Soviet agents from

Venona were in 1948 or in 1952. What they were confident about is that most or all of them would have been secret Communist party members or people who had ties to the Communist Party of the United States [of America]. This does not excuse the excesses of the loyalty/security program, but does help to explain the context in which they operated.

Haynes followed by adding:

while Senator McCarthy's historical reputation does not, in my mind, benefit from the new evidence about Soviet espionage, the broader anti-communist consensus does. Anti-communists in the post-war era were right on the nature of the American Communist party co-operation with Soviet espionage and the existence of a security threat in the presence of American Communists in the government.⁴

Thus, even those who accept the full validity of the Venona documents, including Haynes and Klehr, remain visibly embarrassed by McCarthyism, and repeatedly have taken their distance from the memory of the Senator. They clearly do not want their work to be appropriated by the extreme right.

In a way, this reaction was to be expected with the end of the Cold War. Looking back, many see the conflict as having posed a fundamental threat to American constitutionally protected liberties. And, undeniably, some compromises were made. Had McCarthy had his way, more would have been made. With the Cold War threat removed, no one today wants for anyone to justify or attempt to justify the abridgment of fundamental constitutionally protected liberties. McCarthy, whether right or wrong on the facts, is still perceived as an embarrassing moment in the history of the Republic, an embarrassment that would only be perpetuated with a full defence of the man.

This is not to say the reputation of McCarthy will not change, particularly if the Venona legacy is legitimized by more supporting documentation and by more releases from the Soviet Intelligence files. All this, which is quite probable, will reduce a little the negative representation of the Senator, but it is not likely to ever totally reverse it. One area in which historiography of McCarthy is likely to change has been suggested in this thesis. It is convenient for mainstream liberals to demonize McCarthy and blame him for the Red Scare, but it is obvious that he was the product of many forces at work in American society.

And as the introduction to this paper reveals, at least a handful of those accused by the Senator of being, if not Communist spies, at the very least security risks were just that, including Owen Lattimore, John Stewart Service, Lauchlin Currie, a number of those in the IPR, Annie Lee Moss and Martha Dodd, not to mention Irving Peress. The chapter on Venona reveals many, many more names of people who were working under cover for the Soviet Union, giving further credence to McCarthy's charges that a large network of security risks inhabited the State Department. While some have argued that communism was a dead issue in the United States by the late 1940s, a strong counter-argument has been presented that the hard-core Communists likely were still around and there was a very good chance some inhabited important decision-making posts in the U.S. government. There remained a large number of cover names the Venona project had been unable to identify, and out of 25,000 intercepted Soviet intelligence telegrams, not even 3,000 would be translated.⁵

While Venona itself has not produced a large laundry list of names that match those McCarthy accused of traitorous acts, this does not necessarily mean the Senator was off base and was haphazardly accusing innocent people. On the contrary, the hunt was on for unidentified cover names and McCarthy was being fed information by someone who had a very good idea of how dire the situation was and who also knew a large number of people with questionable backgrounds, FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover. As Haynes has pointed out, the FBI was the best-informed American agency regarding the extent of Soviet espionage and was very involved in the Venona project. So Hoover knew firsthand about the security problem in the State Department. Thus, his relationship with McCarthy becomes magnified in importance. He and others in the FBI fed the Senator with important information to keep his Red-hunting crusade going and perhaps even had the Senator convinced that he was providing a righteous service by hunting down Communists. Indeed, this thesis has suggested there is increasing evidence that, in some ways, McCarthy was the tool, if not the invention, of the FBI, one used and then discarded when he became too much of an embarrassment.

Brian Villa, a professor of history at the University of Ottawa, points out the FBI alone of the major Federal agencies does not have a historian to answer questions or supply documents. The only FBI documents that have been made “available” are under the Freedom of Information Act. These documents are kept in a single room, comprising about 20 stacks, all 10th to 20th generation xerox copies, barely legible. When copies are ordered, they arrive still more illegible. Freedom of Information requests proceed slowly

and with difficulty.⁶ Even so, it is already clear that the FBI connections with McCarthy were much deeper than contemporaries suspected.

This may help to shed a little more light on the attitudes of the Presidents, especially Eisenhower, toward McCarthy. It would not be an exaggeration to say the actions of both he and Truman contributed immensely to McCarthyism. Albert Fried says that “repression occurred during Truman’s watch, and to a measurable extent by his initiative,” prior to McCarthy making his appearance.⁷ Truman started the ball rolling with the Truman Doctrine and Executive Order No. 9835, which perhaps provided impetus for a McCarthy to come along and wage a battle against “loyalty risks.” Eisenhower simply made matters worse by issuing Executive Order No. 10450, which clamped down even harder on “security risks,”⁸ and other anti-communist legislation. He may have said he was opposed to McCarthy’s methods, but during his Presidency, the trend toward further erosion of civil liberties continued. And while Truman, for political reasons, may not have believed the security threat was as real as was being portrayed, it appears Eisenhower was well aware of how serious the situation was, and this may, in fact, be why he did not react to McCarthy in a more aggressive manner. This, or perhaps the fact that a drag-’em-out fight with McCarthy may have involved a like battle with Hoover and the FBI. The costs of anything along those lines were incalculable.

So it was left to McCarthy to hoist himself on his own petard, which in large measure he did, and to the hounds of the Fourth Estate to tear him to shreds, which they in large measure did, fairly in some cases but not so fairly in others. This is not one of the sterling chapters in the life of the much-esteemed Edward R. Murrow and his famed *See*

It Now television program, for it is not a usual principle in journalism that the ends justify the means so far as to sanction outright misrepresentation, which is what he did in publicly tearing apart and humiliating Joe McCarthy.

Some have said McCarthy deserves the criticism that has been heaped on him for the simple fact it is not really the job of a U.S. Senator to prosecute spies. He really had no business inserting himself in a situation that is governed by constitutional guarantees of due process. However, as an elected member of the Senate, he had a legitimate responsibility to monitor the effectiveness of the Executive branch of the government in providing for the safety of the Republic.⁹ And it would seem that the Executive branch was not doing such a great job of this.¹⁰ After all, there were a significant number of security risks inhabiting important positions in the American government. And while it has been well-documented that the identities of many of these people were known and that the Executive failed to prosecute in order to protect the Venona program, there were many more who were unknown. Thus, McCarthy may have served a useful purpose.

As well, it has been pointed out that the time was right for someone like McCarthy to turn all of the government anti-communist legislation and espionage accusations into a witch hunt. The chapter on the history of communism and espionage in the United States leading up to McCarthyism reveals this legislation buildup from the time of the Russian Revolution, intensifying along with the Cold War. As the Cold War heightened to a frenzied pitch with the Hiss case, the explosion of the atomic bomb in the Soviet Union, the uncovering of the Fuchs spy ring, the Korean War and the execution of the Rosenbergs, many Americans really were scared about the future of the nation and

the future of the world. And though McCarthy's methods may be questioned, it was perhaps comforting for many of these Americans to believe that someone like the Senator, someone with some power and authority, was looking after their interests, ensuring, at least in some people's minds, that freedom and democracy remained a part of American life.

Endnotes:

¹Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr., “Theories of McCarthyism,” a paper presented at the McCarthyism in America conference sponsored by the Eisenhower Center for American Studies, The University of New Orleans, and hosted by The National Archives and Records Administration, on February 9, 2000.

²Thomas C. Reeves, “Seven Truths About Joe McCarthy,” a paper presented at the McCarthyism in America conference sponsored by the Eisenhower Center for American Studies, The University of New Orleans, and hosted by The National Archives and Records Administration, on February 9, 2000.

³David M. Oshinsky, “McCarthyism: What We Know,” a paper presented at the McCarthyism in America conference sponsored by the Eisenhower Center for American Studies, The University of New Orleans, and hosted by The National Archives and Records Administration, on February 9, 2000.

⁴John Haynes and Harvey Klehr, “Soviet Espionage and Communist Subversion in the United States in the Early Cold War,” a paper presented at the McCarthyism in America conference sponsored by the Eisenhower Center for American Studies, The University of New Orleans, and hosted by The National Archives and Records Administration, on February 9, 2000.

⁵Haynes and Klehr, *Venona: Decoding Soviet Espionage in America*, front flap.

⁶Obtained from discussions with Dr. Brian Villa, thesis advisor and professor of American history at the University of Ottawa.

⁷Albert Fried, *McCarthyism: The Great American Red Scare – A Documentary History*, p. 4.

⁸Whereas Congress authorized 285 investigations into government subversion between 1789 and 1925, it authorized 225 investigations between 1950 and 1952, from Cate, *The Great Fear: The Anti-Communist Purge Under Truman and Eisenhower*, p. 85.

⁹Obtained from discussions with Dr. Brian Villa, thesis advisor and professor of American history at the University of Ottawa.

¹⁰In 1939, Whittaker Chambers informed Assistant Secretary of State Adolf Berle about his former spy connections with the CPUSA-GRU network of which he had been a part. Berle kept written notes of the meeting that show Chambers gave him the names and provided short descriptions of several mid-level government officials whom he described as secret Communists and members of the CPUSA. The Venona decryptions confirm eight of those whom Chambers named spied for the former Soviet Union against the United States, including Alger Hiss; Laurence Duggan; Frank Coe, then a Treasury Department official who worked in international economics; Charles Kramer, then on the

staff of the National Labor Relations Board; John Abt, a prominent labour lawyer; Isaac Folkoff, a senior leader of the California Communist Party; Lauchlin Currie; and Harry Dexter White. Five others named by Chambers and in Berle's notes that have been proven to have participated in Soviet espionage included Julian Wadleigh, a State Department official; Vincent Reno, a civilian at the Army's Aberdeen Proving Grounds; Noel Field, who had been a State Department official in the mid-1930s; Solomon Adler; and Philip Rosenblit, a New York dentist and participant in the CPUSA underground. Berle's notes did not reach the FBI until June 1943. Chambers had given him a list of 13 persons, several of them senior officials of the U.S. government, who had been involved in espionage, but he did not act, from Haynes and Klehr, *Venona: Decoding Soviet Espionage in America*, pp. 89-92.

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