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Anti-Communism Reshapes American Citizenry

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The anti-communist sentiment swept the nation and engulfed most of what Americans were hearing, reading, or watching; it had gotten a hold of the media. Mickey Spillane’s Mike Hammer series was wildly popular selling nearly three million copies of the first six books. Mike Hammer was an all American private eye with a niche for sniffing out danger, “They were Commies…They were real sons of bitches who should of died a long time ago…They never thought there were people like me in this country.” Mike was exemplifying what all good Americans should be, a hard working commie killer. An editor that Spillane went to with his work noted that Mike Hammer was not in the best taste but the climate of the time made it a good sell.¹ There were countless films ‘educating’ people about Communism and how to destroy it. These films were clearly anti-communist propaganda but would always end with a phrase similar to, “what you have seen is not entirely fiction,” fostering the idea that Communists were the evil spirits they were portrayed as in American media.

Anti-communism also leaked into actually the Hollywood movie industry with John “Joker” Jackson explaining a “great way to live. Keep your mouth shut until the day you die.”² People were being brought up in a time where silence was valued over expression because to most

there were only two modes of expression: pointing out a Communist

² The Defiant Ones, DVD, directed by Stanley Kramer (1958; New York: Curtleigh Productions).
or implementing Communism. The national best seller *Witness* by Whittaker Chambers preached that Communism, along with liberalism, was the enemy. The popular reverend Billy Graham wrote “the only way for America to combat Communism was through faith, prayer, and religious revival. America without the Bible could not survive.” America was being taught to live a certain way and to hate a certain way with journalists only furthering the problem. A journalist from the Chicago Tribune labeled anti-communism as “…a dream story, I wasn’t off page one for four years.” These journalists rarely asked for any evidence because they were enjoying the ride on the gravy train that was false accusations of Communism and by doing so were only leading Americans down a path of hate, suspicion, and ignorance.

The choice of either Americanism or Communism was critical and there would be no compromise between the two. Harding College tried to make the choice as easy as possible with its own line of propaganda. In one of their films, the speaker points out that “all of us can feel gratitude and pride toward American capitalism. Its record at improving human welfare is unmatched in all history.” Americans were taught that the economic abundance in America was made possible by our incentives for progress and that we were far better off than the rest of the world. Russia, according to an Iowa farmer who visited the country, has much lower production capability and much lower wages, not to mention

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3 Halberstam, *The Fifties*, 16.
7 *A Look At Capitalism*, DVD, directed by the National Education Program (1955; Searcy: Fotovox Inc).
8 *The Responsibilities of American Citizenship*, DVD, directed by the National Education Program (1955; Searcy: Fotovox Inc).
the lack of freedoms to work, dream, compete, advance, and invest.9 A Look At Capitalism taught Americans about the three pillars of American capitalism: ownership of private property, the profit motive, and the open market. While another film, In Our Hands, taught that money is vital to the American freedoms of producing, buying, selling, saving, and investing. Americans were being conditioned to love our capitalist system and everything that made up the system. They learned that under a Communist regime they would lose those freedoms due to the freezing of bank accounts, suspension of markets, government run insurance, and a redistributed labor force. They believed that a Communist government would forcefully take their savings for investment. Americans were learning to love their consumer society through an increased standard of living and through propaganda. To take away Capitalism was to take away a great American pastime, a love shared by all full-blooded Americans. Average Americans new found love of Capitalism would aid in the battle against Communism as the Communist were in complete opposition to the “American Way” and set out to destroy it.

Americans were learning (read: being fed) that to be a citizen of their great nation was one of the most precious gifts on Earth. They were also learning that their freedom was a privilege and to maintain that privilege they were to take on the responsibilities that came along with it. “One man stands between freedom and Communism, that man is you.”10 To be that brave American that stands in the way of “evil” one must first understand Capitalism, become active in government by being constantly vocal on the issue of preserving our great system, and make

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9 The Secret of American Production, DVD, directed by the national Education Program (1955; Searcy: Fotovox Inc).
sure to dedicate a part of everyday to the fight for freedom. “If every citizen, young and old, will accept the challenge of his citizenship then the Socialists, the Communists, and their followers will not prevail and America will go on toward the fulfillment of her great world destiny.”  

Americans were told that their nation’s power was limited because of the sinister forces pitted against them. To combat these forces Americans must understand the tactics of the Communists, their godless philosophy, their goal for world conquest, and to not be duped by Communist propaganda techniques. Returning to the “American Way” is the only way to fight the domestic dangers of Communism and Socialism. “Unless we understand and work effectively for the principles upon which our American way of life is founded the structure will crumble and our heritage of freedom will parish.” One of the ways to get back to the American way of living was to strive for spiritual growth by applying the principles of God’s truth to the American political and economic systems. During these Cold War times a belief in America equated to a belief in God, which pushed an atheistic minority out of full citizenship because true Americans were loyal believers.

Many American’s were beginning to put more emphasis on their Christian beliefs. So much so that they were beginning to see their free market system as fundamentally Christian and most wanted the Communist regimes of the world to be replaced with upstanding Christian nations. The Cold War became an allegory for good versus 

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11 The Responsibilities of American Citizenship.
12 Halberstam, The Fifties, 53.
13 Ibid., 9.
14 The Responsibilities of American Citizenship.
15 Aiello, “Constructing Godless Communism.”
evil and reawakened the idea of American divine right. Americans were identifying themselves as God’s chosen people who were sent to rid the world of evil which took the form of Communism. Christianity became a major tool to fight Communism because, as Americans were told, Communists were all godless, and therefore, evil people. The reverend Billy Graham saw the Cold War as “igniting a virtual revival and an increasing resort to the Bible for battle with the Communist foe.”

Parents began to take their kids to Sunday School not only to fight Communism, but to ensure a proper American upbringing. The Cold War boosted church attendance in America from forty-nine percent of the population to sixty-five percent. As church membership rose anti-communism and Christianity became more intertwined. William Howard Melish, a Brooklyn clergyman in 1954, was branded a Communist after advocating for a world in which Christianity and Communism could coexist. The atheism that was associated with Communism was seen as an animalistic feature by these newly fanatic Christian Americans. They could not understand how some people could buy into collectivist ideas and still call themselves Christian.

Manifest Destiny had made its way back into America and the claim to superiority and godliness engaged the U.S. in a religious battle with the Soviet Union who had their claim to superiority and godlessness. American Christians saw themselves as Communism’s biggest victim as well as its most worthy adversary. President Truman was a believer in this epic battle telling a reporter that “Communism is the deadly foe of belief in God and of all organized religion.” Reverend Billy Graham

wrote that the Cold War was the battle between Christ and the anti-Christ and that one of them, Christianity or Communism, must die. The federal government was becoming heavily involved with fighting Communism by way of religion. Senator Hubert Humphrey of Minnesota 1959 said that the spiritual treasure established in the United States gave it an overwhelming advantage in the fight. Representative Louis Rabaut of Michigan 1959 spoke on the House floor about the Christian foundation that America was built upon and that our fundamental belief in God pitted us against the godless and despicable Communists. Many in the nation were beginning to draw a connection between their country and its constitution to Christianity and its Bible.

The American political system was set up perfectly to deal with situations like these, the majority would be satisfied. Truth took a backseat to outlandish public opinion and the government happily obliged. The people wanted Communism out of their country and it started with the government. Each branch of the federal government had its own investigative body to sniff out the godless among them: the House had the Un-American Activities Committee, the Senate had the Government Operations Committee, and the White House had the Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations. In 1954, the Communist Control Bill had passed through Congress with an overwhelming endorsement and was put into action immediately. The Bill stripped all Communist party members of their rights and had written guidelines for identifying a Communist:

8. Has written, spoken, or in any way communicated by signal, semaphore, sign, or in any other form of communication, orders, directions, or plans of the organization…
12. Has indicated by word, action, conduct, writing or in any other way a willingness to carry out in any manner and to any degree
the plans, designs, objectives, or purposes of the organization;
13. Has in any other way participated in the activities, planning,
actions, objectives, or purposes of the organization.\textsuperscript{20}

It was made so that if anyone even uttered the word, they would be
labeled a dirty commie and dealt with accordingly. Of course this would
mean disaster for some politicians’ careers.

With the Democrats having held the presidency for five terms
the Republicans had finally found their ace in the hole and the high
road in American politics would be barren for much of this time. It was
a rare free shot in politics but the Republicans would use it against the
Democrats trying to prove that they were soft on Communism and the
Democrats would spend the next thirty years trying to refute it.\textsuperscript{21} When
MacArthur was fired by Truman, Bill Jenner of Ohio said “this country
is in the hands of a secret inner coterie which is directed by Agents of the
Soviet Union.” Hugh Butler of Nebraska declared that “if the New Deal
is still in control of Congress after the election it will owe that control
to the Communist Party.” Anti-communism was no longer sitting in
the holster of Republicans’ belts as they were attempting to shoot down
every Democrat in office. George Smathers beat out incumbent Claude
Pepper of Florida by claiming that “Joe (Stalin) likes him and he likes Joe.”
Everett Dirksen beat out incumbent Scott Lucas of Illinois by declaring he
would clean house of any Communist and their sympathizers. Although
the well-respected Republican Senator Robert Taft thought the Cold War
would transform America from a democracy into an imperial power by
throwing it into the position of world police for which it was ill-suited he
encouraged McCarthy to keep making noise and keep picking up as many

writing.upenn.edu/~afilreis/50s/comm-control-act.html.
\textsuperscript{21} Halberstam, \textit{The Fifties}, 53.
cases as he could. Taft went as far as to call McCarthy “a fighting marine who risked his life to preserve the liberties of the U.S.” When Senator Millard Tydings of Maryland spoke out against McCarthy and the anti-communist wave that was making its way through Congress by calling it a “hoax and a fraud…an attempt to inflame the American people with a wave of hysteria and fear on an unbelievable scale,” he lost his seat in the next election.22

Americans were taught that Communism was an evil, godless, and vile philosophy so they would vote to keep out the scoundrels that were determined to destroy their American way of life. Propaganda films were being produced faster than entertainment films and most were showing what America would be like under a Communist regime. The film *In Our Hands* was telling Americans that under Communist rule their rights would be whatever the government decides and that those rights are subject to change pending certain circumstances. In the movie *Red Nightmare*, produced by the Department of Defense, the protagonist is sentenced to be shot because “he challenged the supreme authority of the State, he has questioned its practices and its decisions. By these actions he has proved himself to be a dangerous enemy to the proletariat.” Americans are made to believe that all Communism is the same and that under Communism people are slaves to the State. In the Defense Department’s movie the citizens are required to have a permit number to make phone calls with no personal calls are allowed, soldiers could barge into your home unannounced and without a warrant, at work there are quotas that must be met even if that means working through lunch or unpaid overtime. The protagonist’s daughter leaves to work on a farm because she was convinced to free herself of family life and his two

22 Ibid., 56-58.
younger children are leaving for state school because “home life does not encourage the collective character of which the party wishes to develop in its young people.” 23 When the father goes to court he is guilty until he proves his innocence and, to make matters worse, his wife testifies against him. Private property was a thing of the past and people were moved to new locations to work at new jobs, neither of their choosing.

Through the various propaganda films that were in circulation Americans were “learning” that life as a Communist was not a life worth living. This horrid life that is Communism is able to survive due to the evil that runs through its doctrine. Fredrick Brown Harris, chaplain of the Senate 1954, referred to Communism as the “most monstrous mass of organized evil that history has ever known,” describing the philosophy as being “lower in its practice than primitive, cannibalistic tribes.” 24 Former President Herbert Hoover identified Communism as human slavery and a prominent Tennessee minister, in 1957, asserted that he “would rather see (his) nation die cleanly under the H-bomb than rot away under Socialism.” 25

Communism was an evil unmatched by any other in the gullible eyes of mainstream America. All Americans ever heard were nasty, dirty things about Communism, its followers, and any philosophy that resembled it. The propaganda film What Is Communism taught its viewers just exactly what it takes to be a Communist and the character traits that came along with it. According to the film Communists are taking orders from another government to do everything possible to destroy the American government. In the process of carrying out these venomous deeds Communists show their true colors of being a lying, dirty, shrewd,

23 Red Nightmare.
godless, murderous, and determined group of dastardly people. They lie because to a Communist the truth is anything that will abolish their ideals, so Americans were conditioned to believe that every word coming out of a Communist’s mouth is a bold face lie, and a subversive one at that. They are dirty because they do not recognize human dignity or individual rights unlike the tolerant Americans who never struck their fellow man down no matter their conviction, as long as they were not Communist (or anything other than a wealthy white person). They are shrewd because they take over American organizations through infiltration and agitation. When that happens you only need one successful Communist to wreck hopes, slaughter soldiers, and weaken the nation. They are godless and set out to destroy the Church. They are murderous because they casually shoot anyone in their way. They are determined and America is their number one goal. “The Socialists and Communists would like to see the American spirit extinguished.”

They are challenging every aspect of American life which constituted, many believed, the greatest crisis in the short history of their nation.

Anti-communism spread quickly and sunk deep into the idea of what it meant to be an American. At this time fighting was all Americans knew. The citizens of the time saw both World Wars, the Korean War, and the Vietnam War. The Cold War was a way to fight without being enlisted. The anti-communism that was flowing freely through America was forcing its people to conform to a certain way of life and to act in a certain way, be it for fighting back Communism, limiting suspicion, or seeking out Communists to destroy. This new life style was very different from the life styles most Americans were leading but they would follow suit as to not seem unpatriotic. These new Americans were to love

26 Responsibilities of American Citizenship.
Capitalism, hate Communism, and carry out new American duties that would demonstrate both of those feelings. American pop culture became tailored to the anti-communist attitude and trained people how to feel and act. The government caught hold of this mind-set too and never let it die. Christianity had its revival in the States to combat the godless philosophy. American citizenship drastically changed from exemplifying freedom, to a uniform set of rules expectations. The ultimate freedom that was lost in this hysteria turned America into a state closely resembling the ones in the propaganda that filled the heads of its masses. Anti-communism changed America by making it forfeit some freedoms and adhere to some strict guidelines. American’s had lost their sense of what it meant to be citizen of their great nation and filled it with a fabricated mess of intolerance and ignorance.