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## Seeing Red in Double Vision

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SEEING RED IN DOUBLE VISION

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### Seeing Red in Double Vision

In recent times, with the fall of the Soviet Union over two decades behind us, it would be very easy to ignore the traditional Marxist-Leninist historical narrative of evolving ideological conflict between the two superpowers. To this day, however, most American students still are educated about the Cold War through the prism of exactly such an ideological conflict, as is made apparent in the title of the classic university course on such matters, “Comparative Political Systems.” But upon further research it becomes harder and harder to justify such an approach to describing the USA’s growing paranoia and fear regarding the specter of communism. While there was an intellectual and psychological angle to both Red Scares, its themes and motifs differed tremendously from what one would expect from a struggle between the haves and the have nots. While the First Red Scare played most of the original Marxist tropes straight – politicians, the wealthy and the religious were in a state of panic, while intellectuals and the working class kept an open mind – the Second Red Scare defied or subverted almost every stereotype regarding what a competition between capitalism and socialism should look like.<sup>1</sup>

The term “Red Scare” has come to be one of the most recognizable phrases identified with twentieth century American history and political science. Terms like “McCarthyism” and “un-American activities” have developed into ideologically loaded buzzwords and have been interpreted and re-interpreted countless times by political scholars on the left and the right. Most of these scholars also acknowledge that the Red Scare of the 1950s was not the first. The First Red Scare occurred in the very early 1920s. Despite its lesser impact on American politics and culture, the First Red Scare is still studied as an essential precursor to the McCarthy era. However, there has rarely been any attempt to directly compare and contrast the two Red Scares.

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<sup>1</sup> Colburn, David. “Governor Alfred E. Smith and the Red Scare, 1919-20.” *Political Science Quarterly*, 1973. Vol. 88, pg. 423-444.

Why did the Second Red Scare have such a greater impact? What truly motivated American anticommunists? What social, economic, and cultural factors facilitated these campaigns of government sponsored national hysteria?

My analysis of the diverse causes and effects of the two Red Scares has provided some startling and perhaps historically significant conclusions. To reference a broader historical perspective, I would like to highlight the support my research provides for an understanding of the Red Scare phenomenon as mainly the byproduct of internal cultural and economic factors within the United States. Aggressive actions on the part of the USSR of course had some role to play in the development of US hostility towards communism. However, the degree of hysteria inspired by both Red Scares was also largely dependent upon the economic situation faced by the wider American public. During times of economic success and national unity, anticommunists were able to effectively play upon our isolationist and exceptionalist tendencies. But during periods of economic uncertainty and chaos, such as the late thirties – a time period when an abortive Red Scare almost took place – these manipulations were less successful as most Americans were more than willing to look to new political ideas like communism for possible answers to their plight. This reasoning contradicts the common assertion that McCarthy's success was due in large part to some inherently paranoid attitude which supposedly pervaded 1950s American culture. If this were the case, wouldn't anticommunism have been more successful during the early 1920s, when anarchist bombings were a monthly occurrence and massive industrial strikes were destabilizing the economy? Rather, it was the security and plenty enjoyed by Americans in the 1950s, and the discipline and allegiance to the state upon which this prosperity was founded, which truly laid the groundwork for McCarthyism.

From a classical Marxist-Leninist perspective, the developing rivalry between the United States and USSR from the period of the Russian Civil War to the Cuban Missile Crisis would seem to have been inevitable.<sup>2</sup> From this viewpoint, the mere existence of the Soviet Union represented a direct challenge to the bourgeois democracies of the West. As the world's first socialist state, founded through proletarian revolution, the USSR supposedly presented a model for all the workers of the world to follow, an example that could quite potentially inspire the sort of global workers uprising Marx had originally envisioned. Alas, said global uprising never materialized, and any pretense to inspiring such a cataclysm was removed from the USSR's official discourse when Stalin took power.<sup>3</sup> Given this change in policy, it then seems quite odd that Americans in the 1920s – the time of the First Red Scare – were in fact much less afraid of socialist world conquest than they would be during the Second Red Scare of the 1950's.<sup>4</sup> Why was that?

From a psychological perspective, the Second Red Scare had much more in common with the Lacanian psychoanalytic notion of “the other” than with any real tensions that existed between the Soviet and American lifestyles.<sup>5</sup> In fact, if one looks at the United States of the 1950s, with its planned housing developments, the large role of the government in the economic lives of American citizens, and the conservative fashions and values of the time, one gets a picture of a society none too different from that of the “oppressive” Soviets. But in the minds of the American public, the rivalry between themselves and the Soviets took a wholly separate

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<sup>2</sup> Kara, Karel. “On the Marxist Theory of War and Peace.” *Journal of Peace Research*, 1968. Vol. 5, pg. 1-27.

<sup>3</sup> Van Ree, Erik. “Socialism in One Country: A Reassessment.” *Studies in East European Thought*, 1998. Vol. 50, pg. 77-117.

<sup>4</sup> Ceplair, Larry. “The Film Industry's Battle against Left-Wing Influences, from the Russian Revolution to the Blacklist.” *Film History*, 2008. Vol. 20, pg. 399-411.

<sup>5</sup> Slater, David. “Reimagining the Geopolitics of Development: Continuing the Dialogue.” *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 1994. Vol. 19, pg. 233-238.

character from that of a competition between economic and political systems. In the eyes of most of the American public, the Soviets were a sexually depraved, perpetually drunken, totally godless people<sup>6</sup> who were attempting to weaken America's proud democracy by promoting social deviance amongst the nation's youth, among other groups.<sup>7</sup> During the 1950s and early 1960s, homosexuals, pedophiles, drug dealers, women who were seen as excessively loose or prudish, rock n roll musicians, civil rights leaders, and more were all in some way equated with a grand Soviet plot to secretly subvert what was considered to be the traditional American lifestyle. How did such radicalism and deviance become somehow synonymous with socialism, when only two decades prior socialism was seen as simply a radical political ideology held by a few upstart union leaders and Midwestern farmers?<sup>8</sup> How did such an immense and oddly personal terror take hold of the American people so quickly after a period when the two superpowers had acted as cooperative allies?

To understand how the First Red Scare, which took place immediately following a US military intervention against the USSR and yet only motivated real paranoia and concern among the nation's elite, differed fundamentally from the Second Red scare, which took place immediately following an extended period of cooperation between the USA and USSR and yet managed to very quickly infect the majority of the population, it is necessary to comprehensively analyze the changing political and economic circumstances of the United States through the 1920s to the 1950s. Also of importance were the changing attitudes of our nation's intelligentsia, who largely supported, at least in theory, the goals of the fledgling Soviet Union of the 1920s

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<sup>6</sup> Bialer, "The Psychology of US-Soviet Relations". *Political Psychology*, 1985. Vol. 6, pg. 263-273.

<sup>7</sup> D'Emilio, John. *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities*. (University of Chicago Press, 1998) pg. 143-147.

<sup>8</sup> Knoles, George. "Populism and Socialism, with Special Reference to the Election of 1892." *Pacific Historical Review*, 1943. Vol. 12, pg. 295-304.

and 30s, but began to shift radically to a stance of almost total opposition to Soviet socialism in the late 1940s. Still, there existed a few commonalities between both Red Scares. Both scares gave justification for the expansion of the Federal government's role in policing internal domestic disturbances, as well as providing a convenient external explanation for Civil Rights agitation among African-Americans.<sup>9</sup> Both these similarities and differences highlight the changing American attitude toward socialism over this time period, which came to lose its association with likeable, well-intentioned Americans like Eugene V. Debs and instead became associated with an international conspiracy against the American people, as well as providing a great vantage point from which to study the complex realities of American social, economic, and political life during these two events.

Today, many Americans forget the US military's involvement in the Russian Civil War. The United States was hardly the only Western nation to become involved in the conflict—Japanese, British, Canadian, French, German, Australian—including two who received the Victoria Cross for their actions against the Red Army, Greek, and Czechoslovak soldiers were each deployed at some point in a supporting role to the anti-Bolshevik “White Army.”<sup>10</sup> It is worth noting that there was really no such thing as a unified “White” movement within the former Russian Empire. The Whites were not actually a single force, but several different armies led by different generals. In addition to fighting the Bolsheviks, these factions frequently fought each other as well. The Whites also had a tendency to be cruel to the local populations - and, for that matter, their own troops. At first, it may seem peculiar that the avowedly anti-monarchist, pro-national self-determination Wilson administration would allow possibly valuable military

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<sup>9</sup> Seligman, Herbert. *The Negro Faces America*. (Harper & Brothers, 1920) pg. 142-144.

<sup>10</sup> Lincoln, Bruce. *Red Victory: A History of the Russian Civil War, 1918-1921*. (Da Capo Press, 1999) pg. 51-57.

assets to be deployed in support of one side in a civil war while the US was simultaneously attempting to defeat Imperial Germany. Many Marxist historians have come to the somewhat justifiable conclusion that the West's eagerness to crush the budding Bolshevik movement reflects a panic amongst the bourgeois social order at the prospect of a true proletarian uprising. In this view, the goal of suppressing socialism immediately took precedence over the conflict in World War I, which most socialists considered to be a pointless conflict made inevitable by the belligerent nature of late capitalism.

However, this explanation for US direct involvement in the Russian Civil War is far from definitive. While it is true that Wilson ignored the advice of his War Cabinet in agreeing to deploy troops to Siberia, his determination to support the Whites can adequately be explained as part of his pre-established stance on supporting democratic governments. To Wilson, the Bolsheviks had unjustly overthrown the Provisional Government and were now deliberately acting to suppress the democratic process within the parts of Russia under their control. This explanation does infer some ignorance on Wilson's part regarding the political leanings of the White Army, but given how murky White intentions were throughout the war, such confusion seems highly possible. Furthermore, if America were to truly commit to war against the Central Powers, it seems irresponsible for the President to allow one of the Entente's largest military powers to just walk out of the conflict before US troops had even entered the trenches. Since it was unclear at that time how much Russian territory would be put under German occupation, and given the recent deployment of German troops to Finland in the neighborhood of the strategic Russian port of Murmansk, where a large accumulation of Allied materiel might have fallen into enemy hands, it seems like a practical military justification existed for the US intervention.

The above example illustrates a central theme of this paper. Much of US policy regarding the Soviet Union as well as the American public's reaction to the imagined socialist threat was oftentimes wholly irrational given the actual state of affairs at the time. This irrationality is highly susceptible to analysis through the prism of competing ideologies. The notion arises that American overreaction to perceived Soviet threats makes plain the fact that these were two states with totally irreconcilable political, social, and economic differences and that the US concern over communism indicates that the US was always at its core the same corrupt bourgeois democracy originally described and vilified by Karl Marx. However, upon closer inspection it seems highly probable that much of this irrationality found its genesis in seemingly rational concerns. For a moment, consider the Red Scares and the Cold War as if they were one big game of telephone. CPSU policy decisions, economic development, and Soviet culture were being translated to both the American government and the American people through a series of intermediaries. Oftentimes, these intermediaries were foreign governments with their own concerns regarding the USSR, such as the British government which encouraged US involvement in the Russian Civil War. To the slightly unhinged, rabidly conservative British First Lord of the Admiralty Winston Churchill, intervention in Russia's Civil War was in fact an ambitious project to "strangle [Bolshevism] in its cradle."<sup>11</sup> But that does not mean his ambitions were representative of every nation involved in that military expedition. Similarly, while individual American politicians like Frank Hague and Joseph McCarthy may have sought to manipulate the public's perception of Bolshevism to suit their own ends, the public at large as well as most of the rest of the US government did not share such anti-communist ambitions, and were mostly motivated by the fear such figures inspired rather than any sort of irrational

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<sup>11</sup> Ruotsila, Markku. "The Churchill-Mannerheim Collaboration in the Russian Intervention, 1919- 1920". *The Slavonic and East European Review*, 2002. Vol. 80, pp. 1-20.

bourgeois aversion to the principles of socialism. In summary, it is important to realize that the US-USSR relationship did not always represent a transnational dialogue between the two countries, but instead often reflected misapprehensions about the nature of one another's culture, capabilities, and intentions. These misapprehensions were largely the product of politically motivated alarmism and the influence of third parties.

However, there invariably were a few points in the history of US-Soviet relations where the perceived Soviet threat matched with the USSR's true motives. During the 1920s, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics was both unstable internally and isolated internationally. With much of the old order still standing unchanged during the time of Lenin's NEP – a revivification of a limited market economy meant to correct the problems of scarcity brought on by the civil war – many Soviet citizens began to wonder if this new regime was simply going to collapse in on itself as quickly as the provisional government had. This mixture of anxiety and hopefulness was well articulated in the dissident literature of the time; Mikhail Bulgakov's *Heart of a Dog* provides a good example. The central plot tells the story of a dog who is, through the miracle of science, transformed into a man. At first he is happy with this transformation, but he eventually becomes overwhelmed by his new life. By the end of the book the man has been transformed back into a dog, and learns to enjoy the simplicity of living in servile poverty under the stewardship of a bourgeois doctor. In Bulgakov's short novel, we see the tensions that existed between the newly ascendant Russian proletariat, who in this depiction have been empowered by the new government but lacked the intelligence and experience necessary to govern themselves, and the remnants of the pre-revolutionary Russian bourgeoisie, who are depicted as arrogant but deservedly so given their talent for command.

Thus, one of the central objectives of the CPSU in those early days became the assertion of their revolution's relevance. They sought to reinforce the notion that the Soviet state represented an important event in the history of all mankind, rather than just another transition in saga of early 20th century Russia's political instability.<sup>12</sup> It should be remembered that in the time period between the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and Lenin's death in 1924, Russia had undergone not one, not two, but three revolutions, in addition to a civil war. Many Soviet citizens still remembered the days of absolute monarchy, and to believe that the Bolshevik revolution would have more staying power than the others must have seemed unlikely. To attempt to dispel this notion, many of the USSR's ideological leaders – including Lenin's right hand man, Leon Trotsky – continued to openly promote the belief that the October revolution was only the first step towards an inevitable global overthrow of the bourgeoisie. More moderate party officials – including Josef Stalin – still maintained what some Western historians have called a “siege mentality,” which describes the belief that the citizens of the Soviet Union would have to cooperate with their government if they hoped to resist foreign occupation by the capitalists.

We even see this radicalizing trend in Soviet historiography. For example, earlier Bolshevik histories of the Civil War, while by no means sympathetic to the goals of the Entente powers, acknowledge that their assistance to the Whites was primarily motivated by practical wartime concerns over Russia's exit from the conflict with Germany. The narrative began to change, however, and by the middle of the 1920s Russian historians began to treat the Entente intervention as the first in a global effort by the West to stymie Soviet progress. This continued hostility and mistrust between the USSR and the former Entente powers led to a Soviet foreign policy which explicitly called for the Soviet Union to promote violent communist insurgency

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<sup>12</sup> Barner-Berry, Carol. “Soviet Marxism-Leninism as Mythology”. *Political Psychology*, 1994. Vol. 15, pp. 609-630.

worldwide. This would remain the stated Soviet international agenda until at least the mid-thirties, when the threat from Nazi Germany became so grave that the Comintern began to officially endorse a “Popular Front” policy, which clearly stated Soviet willingness to assist and cooperate with various non-communist left wing movements in an effort to stop the spread of fascism.

Given that the stated Soviet agenda during the 1920s endorsed world Communist uprising, it seems surprising that the call to arms initiated by American conservatives and lawmen in the First Red Scare was not taken more seriously by the general public. The First Red Scare, unlike its successor, was initiated by actual acts of violence against American citizens. While it is true that the mail-bombs of the 1920s anarchists were play toys when compared with the atom bombs of the post-WW2 Soviet Union, it must be remembered that during the entire decade of the 1950s, not a single act of anarchist or communist terrorism took the life of an American citizen. The threat of nuclear war in the 1950s was based on a hypothetical premise, and given the US government’s hesitancy to warn the public of any of the other numerous dangers this new technology presented, it seems entirely possible that the American public could have gone on blissfully unaware of the threat if it were not for the warnings and fear mongering of some US journalists and politicians. This was a time period when many American shoe shops contained X-ray machines – machines that were not maintained by trained radiologists – for the purpose of allowing customers to find their shoe size without having to remove their footwear. In a world of Radon-enriched water and extensive nuclear testing in locations upwind of civilian population centers, the fact that the American public feared Soviet nuclear capabilities more than their own could perhaps be held as a great testament to the power of our media and government to shape our perceptions and anxieties. Baudrillard would have had a field day.

According to most American historians, the First Red Scare was the result of the 1919 anarchist bombings which targeted US politicians, business leaders and lawmen that had in some capacity worked to stymie the efforts of labor organizers and anarchist agitators in the past.<sup>13</sup> One bomb was intended for Seattle Mayor Ole Hanson, who had opposed the Seattle General Strike. On April 29, a package sent to U.S. Senator Thomas W. Hardwick of Georgia, a sponsor of the Anarchist Exclusion Act, exploded injuring his wife and housekeeper. In June 1919, eight additional bombs exploded almost simultaneously in several U.S. cities. These new bombs were believed to contain up to twenty-five pounds of dynamite, and all were wrapped or packaged with heavy metal slugs designed to act as shrapnel. Along with Attorney General Palmer, the intended victims included a Massachusetts state representative and a New Jersey silk manufacturer. Fatalities included a New York City night watchman, William Boehner. Though not seriously injured, Attorney General Palmer and his family were thoroughly shaken by the blast, and their home was largely demolished.

There were multiple rationales behind the various bombings. For the past two years, since the time of US entry into WWI, leftist and anarchist activists had been the subject of investigation and prosecution for activities which included organizing strikes and advocating resistance to the draft. Eugene V. Debs was famously imprisoned at this time, having used his trial as a soapbox from which to call upon his fellow Americans' sense of justice and to question the motives behind US participation in what was seen as a European conflict.<sup>14</sup> It is worth noting that despite being charged and convicted with ten counts of sedition, Debs still received almost a

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<sup>13</sup> Avrich, Paul. *Sacco and Vanzetti*. (Princeton University Press, 1996) pg. 141-142.

<sup>14</sup> Debs, Eugene. "Statement to the Court upon Being Convicted of Violating the Sedition Act". November, 1918.

million write-in votes in the 1920 presidential election.<sup>15</sup> But despite some public antipathy towards the ultra-nationalistic rhetoric which was used to champion the war effort, those individuals within society's upper echelons still embraced this time period as an opportunity to crackdown on dissidents. The violence employed by police and federal troops against striking shipyard workers in the Seattle General Strike of January, 1919, is often cited as the most direct motive behind the bombings.

The historical figure most associated with the First Red Scare, Attorney General A. Mitchell Palmer, moved to find a way to attack the source of the violence. In August, he organized the General Intelligence Unit within the Department of Justice and recruited J. Edgar Hoover, a recent law school graduate, to head it.<sup>16</sup> Hoover pored over arrest records, subscription records of radical newspapers, and party membership records to compile lists of resident aliens for deportation proceedings. Palmer launched his campaign against radicalism with two sets of police actions known as the Palmer Raids in November 1919 and January 1920. Federal agents supported by local police rounded up large groups of suspected radicals, often based on membership in a political group rather than any action taken. Undercover informants and warrantless wiretaps helped to identify several thousand suspected leftists and radicals to be arrested.

Only the dismissal of most of the cases by Acting United States Secretary of Labor Louis Freeland Post limited the number of deportations to 556. Civil libertarians, the radical left and legal scholars raised protests. Officials at the Department of Labor, especially Secretary Post, asserted the rule of law in opposition to Palmer's anti-radical campaign. Post faced a Congressional threat to impeach or censure him. He successfully defended his actions in two

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<sup>15</sup> Kennedy, David. *The American Pageant*. (Wadsworth Publishing, 2008) pg. 176.

<sup>16</sup> Pietrusza, David. *1920: The Year of Six Presidents*. (Basic Books, 2008) pg. 267-270.

days of testimony before the House Rules Committee in June 1919 and no action was ever taken against him. Much of the press applauded Post's work at Labor, while Palmer was largely blamed for the negative aspects of the raids.

If any of this seems familiar, it is assuredly because of the similar actions taken by federal agents and elected lawmakers during the Second Red Scare of the 1950s. The red flag, a common symbol at the time which denoted sympathy for the working classes and a desire for radical change, was banned in 27 states.<sup>17</sup> Several state legislatures also passed Sedition Acts which infringed upon their residents' freedom of speech. Members of the US Socialist party were expelled from the New York State legislature, and a film campaign was initiated which attempted to depict the supposed excesses of the Soviets. *The German Curse in Russia* dramatized the German instigation of Russia's October Revolution.<sup>18</sup> The supposed Soviet "nationalization" of women was central to the plot of *The New Moon*, in which women between the ages of 23 and 32 are the property of the state.<sup>19</sup> Similarly, in *The World and Its Woman* the daughter of an American engineer working in Russia becomes an opera star and has to fend off attempts to "nationalize" her. Several other films used labor troubles as their setting, with the hero and heroine struggling to outwit manipulative left-wing agitators. *Dangerous Hours* tells the story of an attempted Russian infiltration of American industry. College graduate John King is sympathetic to the left in a general way. Then he is seduced, both romantically and politically, by a female agitator. Her superior is the Bolshevik Boris Blotchi, who has a "wild dream of planting the scarlet seed of terrorism in American soil." Boris turns his attention to the Weston

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<sup>17</sup> Franklin, F.G. "Anti-Syndicalist Legislation". *The American Political Science Review*, 1920. Vol. 14, pg. 291-298.

<sup>18</sup> Hanson, Patricia. *The American Film Institute Catalog of Motion Pictures Produced in the United States*. (Hollywood Film Archive, 1993) pg. 317.

<sup>19</sup> Hagedorn, Ann. *Savage Peace: Hope and Fear in America, 1919*. (Simon & Schuster, 2007) pg. 179.

shipyards that are managed by John's childhood sweetheart, May. When they threaten May, John has an epiphany and renounces revolutionary doctrine.

The moral such films sought to inculcate is blindingly obvious – that the Reds were a bunch of drunken adulterers seeking to threaten our women and young people. There was only one difference between this line and the one the House un-American Activities Committee tried to spoon-feed the American people three decades later. That is the fact that most Americans did not buy into the lie. These movies tanked. Critics savaged many of these jingoistic films. A reviewer in *Picture Play* protested the *Dangerous Hours*' stew of radical beliefs and strategies. "Please, oh please, look up the meaning of the words 'Bolshevik' and 'soviet.' Neither of them mean 'anarchist,' 'scoundrel' or 'murderer' – really they don't!"<sup>20</sup> Opposition to the expulsion of Socialists from state legislatures was widespread and crossed party lines.<sup>21</sup> And as was previously stated, many Americans still supported Socialist politicians like Debs. The mobilization of the Department of Justice and much of the media did not ensure large-scale public support for the excesses of the First Red Scare. When another anarchist bomb exploded on Wall Street in September 1920, newspaper response was comparatively restrained.

There are two potential historical approaches to explain the fact that the American public, in the early 1920s, was inhospitable to vitriolic anti-communist rhetoric. First, there are clear aspects of the US economic situation circa 1919 which may have greatly influenced many Americans' views on socialism. The average socioeconomic status of American households in 1950 was vastly different from that of American households in 1920. In 1950, the United States was in the midst of perhaps the greatest period of economic prosperity we as a nation had ever

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<sup>20</sup> Brownlow, Kevin. *The Parade's Gone By*. (University of California Berkeley Press, 1976) pg. 264.

<sup>21</sup> Cooper, John. *Pivotal Decades: The United States, 1900-1920*. (W.W. Norton & Company, 1990) pg. 329-330.

enjoyed. Poverty had dropped dramatically, and the widespread adoption of new vaccines and antibiotics led to a profound increase in life expectancy.<sup>22</sup> Childhood diseases were being eradicated or contained, and rural electrification and an expansion of the public school system led to a dramatic turnaround in the fortunes of America's long suffering southern states.<sup>23</sup> In 1920, however, the population had barely just recovered from an outbreak of influenza which managed to infect over a quarter of the population and had killed around 675,000 individuals. The South was still largely backwoods, with much of its population living in areas with no electricity and an abundance of malarial mosquitoes. Most Americans worked hard for little pay and lived lives divorced from science and progress. Education and medical care were of poor quality and only limited options were available, even to those who were middle class. In this situation, who wouldn't find Bolshevik promises of universal plenty and technological mastery of life and death appealing? While by no means were the majority of Americans actively socialist in their outlook, the conditions of the time made it obvious that some amount of change might be for the good, at least from the perspective of the nation's common people.

Another useful approach when attempting to make an assessment of the underwhelming public support for the First Red Scare would be to look at early 1920s America from the point of view of intellectual history. Note the communist sympathies of many of America's great writers during that time period. Ernest Hemingway, Jon Dos Passos, and Theodore Dreiser were all self-identified "fellow travelers."<sup>24</sup> Much of the popular literature of the past two decades, in fact, contained socialist themes. H.G. Wells, often considered the father of English science fiction, was an avowed socialist who had inserted warnings about widening

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<sup>22</sup> Shors, Teri. *Understanding Viruses*. (Jones & Bartlett, 2011) pg. 76-77.

<sup>23</sup> Beall, Robert T. "Rural Electrification." *United States Yearbook of Agriculture*, 1940.

<sup>24</sup> Aaron, Daniel. *Writers on the Left: Episodes in American Literary Communism*. (Harcourt, Brace & World, 1961) pg. 201-224.

class divisions in his 1895 bestseller *The Time Machine*. Given the lack of a real anti-communist streak in either the nation's literary and academic life prior to the outbreak of the First Red Scare, it seems sound to reason that many literate Americans were taken by surprise when the government and the young film industry both made a sudden attempt to slander what had previously been an acceptable political cause.

In addition, despite attempts made by the Wilson administration to rally the country to the cause of war with Germany, there were still many Americans who resisted the jingoism of the time. Wilson had won re-election in 1916 on the premise that "he kept us out of the war," and by this point in our history most Americans were still very isolationist.<sup>25</sup> So while the Soviet exit from WWI seemed like cowardice to our nation's leaders, to many others it just seemed like common sense. Because economic conditions made it hard for many Americans to feel invested in and grateful towards their country, the failure to stir up resentment against socialism and foreigners seems predetermined.

Because most Americans were not overly happy about US involvement in the Great War, and because conditions at home made socialism seem somewhat appealing, anti-communists in the American government found it difficult to encourage fear of the Bolsheviks. Figures of the time period who were interested in the defeat of communism, including the industrialist John D. Rockefeller, or who were simply looking to expand the US government's ability to police its citizens, including budding G-man J. Edgar Hoover, were prevented from stirring up a panic because of elements of our society which were not susceptible to their rhetoric and thus acted as "resistors" in the circuit connecting the US government and American corporate interests to the average American household. These "resistors" functioned in a similar manner to their electrical

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<sup>25</sup> Cooper, John. *Woodrow Wilson: A Biography*. (Vintage, 2011) pg. 201.

counterparts, dulling the hyperbolic claims of Red tyranny and excess and allowing most of the general public to remain unscathed. This lack of a public outcry for greater and greater persecution of alleged communists forced many US politicians to rescind their earlier anti-sedition laws.<sup>26</sup> Without these resisting elements – intellectual, social, and economic – perhaps the public might have gone into a frenzy to rival that of the Second Red Scare. US public opinion ultimately dictates US policy, but under the right conditions that same public opinion can be manipulated by those in power.

However, it would be a mistake to claim that the First Red Scare was a total failure. The 249 suspected communist agents who were deported on the infamous “Soviet Ark” might have some issue with such a total dismissal of the movement’s effectiveness. The First Red Scare’s effectiveness was buoyed somewhat by the hypernationalism and xenophobia that somewhat characterized the post-WWI era. The anti-red press had an easy enough time demonizing Russians and other foreigners.<sup>27</sup> Still, the impoverished material conditions of many Americans and the presence of a homegrown socialist intelligentsia in the US made a staunch anti-communist argument much harder to make. Put simply, America’s elite were capable of exciting the common people into a panic during the Second Red Scare due to both the nationalistic sentiment generated by a World War, the lack of large scale poverty as well as the lack of strong grassroots socialist movements across the country. The First Red Scare met with a mixed reception because while the first precondition was met, the American people were still being forced to endure poor living conditions and many saw socialism as an acceptable alternative to the then current status quo. For this theory to have real weight, however, a third

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<sup>26</sup> Chafee, Zachariah. *Free Speech in the United States*. (The Lawbook Exchange, 2001) pg. 195-198.

<sup>27</sup> Murray, Robert. *Red Scare: A Study in National Hysteria, 1919-1920*. (University of Minnesota Press, 1955) pg. 58-66.

“control” condition would have to be demonstrated as well. Luckily, for a good example of the ineffectiveness of anti-communist movements during periods of national uncertainty and economic crisis, one has to look no further than the various so-called “radical right” movements that cropped up during the New Deal period.

Most of America began a radical swing to the left during the Depression years.<sup>28</sup> However, it must be acknowledged that several protofascist movements, such as Huey Long's Share Our Wealth and Father Coughlin's National Union for Social Justice emerged during this time period as well.<sup>29</sup> The Black Legion, which had a peak membership of 40,000 was formed by former Klansmen and operated in Indiana, Ohio and Michigan. Unlike the Klan, its members dressed in black and its organizational hierarchy was based on the military, not fraternal organizations. Its members swore an oath to keep "the secrets of the order to support God, the United States Constitution, and the Black Legion in its holy war against Catholics, Jews, Communists, Negroes, and aliens." Gerald B. Winrod, a fundamentalist Christian minister who founded the Defenders of the Christian Faith revived the Illuminati conspiracy originally introduced into the United States in 1798. He claimed that both the French and Russian Revolutions were directed by a Jewish conspiracy.

Perhaps the most remarkable figure in this attempt at labeling the Depression as the product of a “red” conspiracy was Father Coughlin. Coughlin was a Catholic priest who had begun broadcasting on religious matters in 1926. However when his program went national in 1930, he began to comment on political issues, promoting a strongly ant-Communist stance. By 1932 Coughlin boasted that he had millions of regular viewers. The following year he set up the

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<sup>28</sup> Whitfield, Stephen. *A Companion to 20th-Century America*. (Wiley-Blackwell, 2007) pg. 346.

<sup>29</sup> Lipset, Seymour. *The Politics of Unreason: Right Wing Extremism in America, 1790-1977*. (University of Chicago Press, 1978) pg. 157-164.

"National Union for Social Justice." This organization became increasingly supportive of European fascism as the decade continued. In 1936 Coughlin began to endorse candidates for political office and supported the presidential campaign of William Lemke, who campaigned on the Union Party ticket. Lemke was also supported by Gerald L. K. Smith, head of the Share Our Wealth movement and Dr. Francis Townsend, head of the Townsend Old Age movement. At the time Coughlin claimed 5 million supporters of his organization, while Smith claimed his organization had 3 million members. In the election however Lemke received fewer than 900,000 votes.

Following this setback, Coughlin became more overtly fascist, attacking trade unionists and politicians for being pro-Communist, calling for a corporate state and setting up the "Social Justice Councils," which excluded non-Christians from membership. His magazine, *Social Justice*, named Benito Mussolini as man of the year in 1938 and defended Hitler's persecution of Jews, whom he linked with Communism. Once the US entered into WWII, major radio stations refused to air his broadcasts and the Post Office banned *Social Justice* from the mails in 1942. Threatened by a sedition trial against Father Coughlin, the Catholic Church told him to cease his political activities and Coughlin retired from political life.

Huey Long, who had been elected governor of Louisiana in 1928 and was a U. S. senator from 1932 until his death in 1935, built a national organization, Share Our Wealth. Long was considered to be right-wing because of his authoritarian style, building a large National Guard and police force, intimidating opponents and the press, and bringing the electoral process and prosecution service under his direct control. Long never introduced minimum wage or child labor laws, unemployment insurance or old age pensions, although other states did so at the time. He actively courted support from big business, and reduced taxes on corporations.

The common thread linking these movements was their suspicion of organized labor. Organized labor had become one of the most powerful forces in American politics during the 1930s. Ever since the Norris-La Guardia Act was passed - providing unions with some measure of protection from court injunctions during labor disputes – organized labor began gaining political power at an alarming rate.<sup>30</sup> In addition, one of Roosevelt's first New Deal initiatives was the National Industrial Recovery Act, which gave workers the right to organize into unions.<sup>31</sup> Though it contained other provisions, like minimum wage and maximum hours, its most significant passage was, "Employees shall have the right to organize and bargain collectively through representative of their own choosing, and shall be free from the interference, restraint, or coercion of employers."<sup>32</sup> This portion, which was known as Section 7(a), was symbolic to workers in the United States because it stripped employers of their rights to either coerce them or refuse to bargain with them.<sup>33</sup> While no power of enforcement was written into the law, it "recognized the rights of the industrial working class in the United States."<sup>34</sup> In response to both the Norris-La Guardia Act and the NIRA, workers who were previously unorganized in a number of industries—such as rubber workers, oil and gas workers and service workers—began to look for organizations that would allow them to band together. The NIRA strengthened workers' resolve to unionize and instead of participating in unemployment or hunger marches, they started to participate in strikes for union recognition in various industries. In 1933, the number of work stoppages jumped to 1,695, double its figure from 1932. In 1934, 1,865 strikes occurred, involving more than 1.4 million workers.

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<sup>30</sup> Sloane, Arthur. *Labor Relations*. (Prentice Hall, 2009) pg. 70-72.

<sup>31</sup> Wright, Russell. *Chronology of Labor in the United States*. (McFarland, 2003) pg. 51-53.

<sup>32</sup> Smith, Sharon. *Subterranean Fire: A History of Working-Class Radicalism in the United States*. (Haymarket, 2006) pg. 103-104.

<sup>33</sup> Cohen, Sanford. *Labor in the United States*. (Merrill, 1966) pg. 76.

<sup>34</sup> Milton, David. *The Politics of U.S. Labor*. (Monthly Review Press, 1982) pg. 30-32.

This massive upswing in the political power wielded by the USA's previously disenfranchised working class seriously scared some elements of society. The two groups who reacted with the most hostility to the rise of organized labor were the rural, agrarian, and strictly Protestant lower class of the American South and Midwest, and the elite, wealthy capitalists of the so-called "Old Right."<sup>35</sup> The former group's inclusion may seem curious, given the fact that the rural poor of the time period shared many of the same economic woes as the urban proletariat. However, cultural as well as physical distance between those two groups led many rural whites to feel as if their needs were being neglected in favor of the demands of the urbanites.<sup>36</sup> The short-lived appeal of these radical right wing groups among the nation's rural poor is quite adequately confirmed by statistics from the era.

This hostility to the newly empowered working class was not limited to the countryside. The nation's print media also ran a highly visible smear campaign against the more extreme aspects of Roosevelt's New Deal.<sup>37</sup> High powered media moguls such as William Randolph Hearst and Colonel Robert McCormick directed their journalists to attack FDR and his New Deal at every turn. Hearst papers even carried the old publisher's own rambling, vitriolic, all-capital-letters editorials. As the president himself was still highly popular, most of the individuals singled out in these articles were leaders of organized labor and members of far-left political parties. One target of particular interest to these journalists was John L. Lewis, president of the United Mine Workers of America and the driving force behind the founding of the Congress of Industrial Organizations. Lewis had thrown his support behind Franklin D.

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<sup>35</sup> Wolfskill, George. *Revolt of the Conservatives*. (Greenwood, 1974) pg. 249.

<sup>36</sup> Murphy, Paul. *The Rebuke of History: The Southern Agrarians and American Conservative Thought*. (The University of North Carolina Press, 2000) pg. 24.

<sup>37</sup> Best, Gary. *The Critical Press and the New Deal: The Press versus Presidential Power, 1933-1938*. (Praeger, 1993) pg. 65-66.

Roosevelt at the outset of the New Deal. After the passage of the Wagner Act in 1935, Lewis traded on the tremendous appeal that Roosevelt had with workers in those days, sending organizers into the coal fields to tell workers "The President wants you to join the Union." His UMW was one of FDR's main financial supporters in 1936, contributing over \$500,000.<sup>38</sup> Despite his obvious ties to the Democratic Party and mainstream American politics, the US print media went out of its way to depict Lewis and others like him as radicals and communists. One issue of *Time* magazine even featured a cover that depicted John Lewis as a dangerous volcano, representing proletarian dissent which, the cover article claimed, could threaten to undermine American democracy.

While the largely conservative print media attempted to discredit the ascendant left wing and accuse Roosevelt and his followers of promoting bolshevism, some members of the country's upper crust sought to take even greater initiative to reassert themselves. The Business Plot was an alleged political conspiracy in 1933. Retired Marine Corps Major General Smedley Butler claimed that wealthy businessmen were plotting to create a fascist veterans' organization and use it in a coup d'état to overthrow President of the United States Franklin D. Roosevelt, with Butler as leader of that organization. Contemporaneous media dismissed the plot, but while historians have questioned whether or not a coup was actually close to execution, most agree that some sort of "wild scheme" was contemplated and discussed.

So if there was so much hostility towards the radical left during the 1930s, why was there never a country-wide panic regarding the potential subversive influence of communism? The traditional view of many political scholars is that the US has historically always leaned center-right in political matters. And if the conspiracy theories and moneyed support for such

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<sup>38</sup> Dubofsky, Melvyn. *John L. Lewis: A Biography*. (University of Illinois Press, 1986) pg. 561.

rhetoric was present, why didn't collective insecurity grip the nation as firmly as it had in the 1950s or even the 1920s? There are multiple possible explanations for this.

The simplest explanation would be that the efforts of the right-wing were stymied in this period by a combination of inflexibility and insufficient government support for their campaign. While Roosevelt openly reached out to the poorer members of American society, few within the Old Right were willing to associate themselves with the reactionary movements that were sprouting up in the countryside at that time. The era of Kevin Phillips and the "southern strategy" was still two decades away; today's awkward alliance between social and economic conservatives had yet to develop.<sup>39</sup> Furthermore, both the First and Second Red Scares relied largely upon the power of federal agencies like the FBI to carry out raids and witch-hunts. During the 1930s, Roosevelt purposefully limited the role of these agencies in his administration. The repeal of Prohibition during the first part of the decade and the passage of the 1934 Communications Act – which illegalized phone tapping – dealt huge blows to the power and prestige J. Edgar Hoover and other federal lawmen.

Yet, not investigating the root causes of these movements' failure leaves us with an incomplete picture of the social and economic factors that shaped the time period. While it's true that the era of the conservative alliance with the "moral majority" was still years away, the fact cannot be overlooked that many of the previously mentioned radical organizations did not only direct their hostility to organized labor and the federal government. Huey Long and Father Coughlin both equated Big Finance with global communism and Jewish conspiracy as part of the mysterious factors which had brought about the stock market crash. The credibility of the traditional laissez faire doctrine defended by the upper class had been largely annihilated by the

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<sup>39</sup> Boyd, James. "It's All in the Charts". *New York Times*, May 17 1970. Pg. 215.

crash of 1929. Coughlin, Long, and many others within the radical right still held the "international bankers" responsible for the depression.

Furthermore, it must be recognized that neither the First nor the Second Red Scares originated from within the political mainstream. The anarchist bombings of 1919 prompted the overreaction of Attorney General Palmer, and the Second Red Scare was stymied by the reluctance of the executive branch to give in to the demands of Senator McCarthy and the radical faction he represented.<sup>40</sup> Both Red Scares managed to function without broad political support from the top tiers of the US Federal government.

If my previous explanation for the lack of receptivity to anti-communist rhetoric in 1920s America is taken into account, the same reasoning can quite easily explain the antipathy to such rhetoric that existed in the 1930s. However, from the standpoint of intellectual history, the 1930s represent something of a mixed bag for the evolution of Marxist theory in America. The fractures which had developed within the Communist Party of the Soviet Union since the death of Lenin sent shockwaves across the communist parties of the West. Splits between Trotskyites and Stalinists developed within the CPUSA. These crises of leadership led many former fellow travelers to become disillusioned with socialism. Of communism, John Dos Passos would later write: "I have come to think, especially since my trip to Spain, that civil liberties must be protected at every stage...the trouble with an all-powerful secret police in the hands of fanatics, or of anybody, is that once it gets started there's no stopping it until it has corrupted the whole body politic. I am afraid that's what's happening in Russia."<sup>41</sup> In the mid-1930s he wrote a series of scathing articles about Communist political theory, and created an idealistic Communist in

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<sup>40</sup> Herman, Arthur. *Joseph McCarthy: Reexamining the Life and Legacy of America's Most Hated Senator*. (Free Press, 1999) pg. 302-303.

<sup>41</sup> Diggins, John. "'Organization is Death': John Dos Passos". *Up From Communism*. (Columbia University Press, 1975) pg. 74-117.

*The Big Money* who is gradually worn down and destroyed by groupthink in the party. However, as a result of socialism gaining popularity in Europe as a response to Fascism, there was a sharp decline in international sales of Dos Passos' books.

Still, many western intellectuals still believed the Soviet system held boundless promise. It was during this time period that H.G. Wells visited the Soviet Union and was greatly impressed by such feat of engineering as the new Moscow Metro. Ernest Hemingway and Herbert Matthews, both former friends of Dos Passos, publicly distanced themselves from Dos Passos and began to openly criticize his character in some of their writings. Meanwhile, other emerging literary heavyweights such as George Orwell began to make a name for themselves by openly criticizing the Soviet intervention in the Spanish Civil War. In sum, the degree to which the Western literary and cultural establishment was willing to condone the expansion of socialism had in fact stayed the same, or only slightly diminished, since the early 1920s.

Therefore, the most valid explanation for the widespread public antipathy to the Right's anticommunist agitation can be found by observing the economic plight experienced by most Americans during the 1930s. In 1920 the United States faced many of the issues which tend to plague near-developed economies. There was a profound disparity in wealth between the rich and the poor. Many who were sick, disabled, or elderly found themselves impoverished without a social safety net to support them. And the majority of the population worked long hours for little pay.<sup>42</sup> However, at least they had jobs. During the Great Depression, unemployment skyrocketed to 25% while deflation pushed real wages into a downward spiral.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Steinberg, Ronnie. *Wages and Hours: Labor and Reform in Twentieth-Century America*. (Rutgers University Press, 1982) pg. 379-392.

<sup>43</sup> Swanson, Joseph. "Estimates of National Product and Income for the United States Economy, 1919-1941". *Explorations in Economic History*, 1972. Vol. 10, pg. 53-73.

The economic collapse fundamentally changed many people's view of the United States, leading many to question not only the US government or American capitalism, but also the country's ideals and fundamental way of life. One Soviet trading corporation in New York averaged 350 applications a day from Americans seeking jobs in the Soviet Union. In 1929, there were 279,678 immigrants recorded, but in 1933 only 23,068 came to the US. In the early 1930s, more people emigrated from the United States than immigrated to it. The US government sponsored a Mexican Repatriation program which was intended to encourage people to voluntarily move to Mexico, but thousands, including some US citizens, were deported against their will. Altogether about 400,000 Mexicans were repatriated.<sup>44</sup> Meanwhile, New York social workers reported that 25% of all schoolchildren were malnourished. In the mining counties of West Virginia, Illinois, Kentucky, and Pennsylvania, the proportion of malnourished children was perhaps as high as 90%. Many people became ill with diseases such as tuberculosis. The US had been transformed overnight from the economic engine of the capitalist world into what 21<sup>st</sup> century observers looking back might seem like a Third World country.

Indeed, while the Great Depression was crippling America, the Soviet Union seemed to be scoring spectacular economic advances. From 1929 into 1933, when US industrial output shrank by nearly half, the USSR claimed that its production more than doubled. While it would take decades for reports of the gulag system and the manufactured famines that characterized Stalinism to reach the West, many Americans were more concerned with the immediate, bleak reality they faced in their own country.<sup>45</sup> During this period the CPUSA saw a great increase in its membership, as many Americans were willing to embrace far-left politics as a possible solution to the current crisis. Even the political elite of the time sympathized with the

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<sup>44</sup> Katz, William. *Great Depression*. (Franklin Watts, 1978) pg. 46-48.

<sup>45</sup> Applebaum, Anne. *Gulag: A History*. (Anchor, 2004) pg. 58.

goals of these newly minted socialist radicals. As President Harry Truman was later fond of saying, it was the “silo of misery” and poverty that had turned people toward communism around the world. Addressing poverty, and thus, reversing communism’s advance, was one of the primary motivations behind Roosevelt’s New Deal.<sup>46</sup>

So while it would be appropriate to describe the American public’s view of communism in 1920 as one characterized by both curiosity and skepticism, and their view during the 1950’s as terrified and hateful, many Americans in the 1930s were prepared to openly embrace certain aspects of socialism. This embrace of socialist principles showcases how little importance events in the USSR really had in the minds of Western activists. During the 1930s, as the American public first began to develop sympathy for the communist devil, the Soviet Union devolved further into totalitarianism under Stalin. Since the Soviet Union was largely a closed society, Stalin was successful in his attempts to present his nation as a model of prosperity and progress. Grain that could have fed the starving Ukraine was shipped off for export. As the decade wore on, Stalin’s paranoia drove the expansion of overseas Soviet espionage. Many of the American citizens acting as Soviet spies who were targeted by McCarthy had first been recruited by the Soviets during the Great Depression.<sup>47</sup> As any federal action against supposed communist interlopers could be misinterpreted by organized labor as a repression of the working class, the FBI and the HUAC both lacked the support necessary to carry out any significant countermeasures to this infiltration.

However, before diving into the mess those two organizations managed to make in the early 1950s, it is important to first discuss WWII and its impact on US-Soviet relations.

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<sup>46</sup> Leuchtenburg, William. *Franklin D. Roosevelt and the New Deal, 1932–1940*. (Harper Perennial, 2009) pg. 300-324.

<sup>47</sup> Olmsted, Kathryn. *Red Spy Queen: A Biography of Elizabeth Bentley*. (The University of North Carolina Press, 2002) pg. 22-23.

Many historians view WWII as a period of extraordinary cooperation between the USA and USSR brought about by extraordinary circumstances. In the popular narrative, these two countries developed a bond which had never before existed and which would be quickly and unceremoniously severed at the end of the war. The reality is, of course, a great deal more complex.

Yes, during this period the American media began to praise the Soviets as dutiful allies in the fight against fascism. Depicting the Soviet Union in American propaganda was a delicate issue throughout the war, as the Soviet Union could not possibly be presented as a liberal democracy.<sup>48</sup> However, the Nazi attack on the Soviet Union inspired propaganda in its favor, and Hollywood produced pro-Russian movies.<sup>49</sup> At Roosevelt's urging, the film *Mission to Moscow* was made and depicted the purge trials as a just punishment of a Trotskyite conspiracy.<sup>50</sup> Yet the 1939 Greta Garbo film *Ninotchka* was not re-released as it ridiculed Russians.<sup>51</sup> Frank Capra's *Why We Fight* series included *The Battle of Russia*. The first part of the film depicted the Nazi attack on the Soviet Union, recounted past failures to invade Russia, and described Russian scorched earth and guerrilla tactics. It also omitted all references to the pre-War Molotov – Ribbentrop Pact.<sup>52</sup> The second part of the film depicts Germany being drawn too far into Russia; and mostly concentrates on the siege of Leningrad.

But it must be remembered that the success of American propaganda during this time period was reliant upon the fact that World War Two was a very rare sort of conflict. For one of the few times in US history, the American people found themselves engaged in a total

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<sup>48</sup> Overy, Richard. *Why the Allies Won*. (W. W. Norton & Company, 1997) pg. 294.

<sup>49</sup> Rhodes, Anthony. *Propaganda: The Art of Persuasion*. (Book Sales, 1988) pg. 152.

<sup>50</sup> Brendon, Piers. *The Dark Valley: A Panorama of the 1930s*. (Vintage, 2002) pg. 498.

<sup>51</sup> Kennet, Lee. *For the Duration*. (Scribner, 1985) pg. 164.

<sup>52</sup> O'Neill, William. *A Democracy at War: America's Fight at Home and Abroad in World War II*. (Harvard University Press, 1998) pg. 256.

war. Mass participation in the war effort ensured the people's compliance with the will of the federal government. While the US government espoused a policy of goodwill towards the Soviets during the war, upon analysis of private correspondence within the executive branch it becomes obvious that this alliance was seen as very much a temporary affair. The US government had the intention of severing its ties with the USSR upon the war's completion. The amount of control the US government had come to wield over citizen's private lives during the war would eventually make the justification of this seemingly sudden shift in policy a very easy story to sell. The American public trusted its government during the mid to late 1940s as it never had before.<sup>53</sup>

During the war, Truman argued that it did not matter to him if a German or a Russian soldier died so long as either side is losing. The feeling was most certainly mutual; Stalin repeatedly stated his hostility towards his allies in private meetings with his advisors and staff. While Stalin openly admired Hitler's ruthlessness, he suspected the Western allies of cowardice due to the perceived delay of an amphibious invasion of German-occupied Europe.<sup>54</sup> As early as 1925, Stalin had stated that he viewed international politics as a bipolar world in which the Soviet Union would attract countries gravitating to socialism and capitalist countries would attract states gravitating toward capitalism, while the world was in a period of "temporary stabilization of capitalism" preceding its eventual collapse.<sup>55</sup>

In turn, in 1944, the Soviets appeared to the Allies to have deliberately delayed the relief of the Polish underground's Warsaw Uprising against the Nazis. The Soviets did not supply

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<sup>53</sup> Flynn, George. *The Draft, 1940-1973*. (University of Kansas Press, 1993) pg. 175.

<sup>54</sup> Gaddis, John. *Russia, the Soviet Union, and the United States*. (McGraw-Hill, 1990) pg. 151-153.

<sup>55</sup> Tucker, Robert. *Stalin in Power: The Revolution from Above, 1928-1941*. (W. W. Norton & Company, 1992) pg. 47-48.

the Uprising from the air, and for a significant time also refused to allow British and American air drops.<sup>56</sup> On at least one occasion, a Soviet fighter shot down an RAF plane supplying the Polish insurgents in Warsaw. The Hungarian-British journalist Arthur Koestler called the Soviet attitude "one of the major infamies of this war which will rank for the future historian on the same ethical level with Lidice." George Orwell was moved to make a public warning about Soviet postwar intentions. A "secret war" also took place between the British SOE-backed AK and Soviet NKVD-backed partisans.<sup>57</sup> British-trained Polish special forces agent Maciej Kalenkiewicz was killed by the Soviets at this time. The British and Soviets also sponsored competing factions of resistance fighters in Yugoslavia and Greece.

However, toward the end of the war, the prospects of an Anglo-American front against the Soviet Union seemed slim from Stalin's standpoint. At the end of the war, Stalin assumed that the capitalist camp would resume its internal rivalry over colonies and trade, giving opportunity for renewed expansion at a later date, rather than pose a threat to the USSR. Stalin expected the United States to bow to domestic popular pressure for postwar demilitarization. Soviet economic advisors such as Eugen Varga predicted that the U.S. would cut military expenditures, and therefore suffer a crisis of overproduction, culminating in another great depression. Based on Varga's analysis, Stalin assumed that the Americans would offer the Soviets aid in postwar reconstruction, needing to find any outlet for massive capital investments in order to sustain the wartime industrial production that had brought the U.S. out of the Great Depression.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Hart, B.H. *History of the Second World War*. (Konecky & Konecky, 2007) pg. 611.

<sup>57</sup> Piotrowski, Tadeusz. *Poland's Holocaust: Ethnic Strife, Collaboration with Occupying Forces and Genocide in the Second Republic, 1918-1947*. (McFarland & Company, 2007) pg. 88-90.

<sup>58</sup> McCagg, William. *Stalin Embattled, 1943-1948*. (Wayne State University Press, 1978) pg.

However, to the surprise of Soviet leaders, the U.S. did not suffer a severe postwar crisis of overproduction. As Stalin had not anticipated, capital investments in industry were sustained by maintaining roughly the same levels of government spending. In the United States, a conversion to the prewar economy nevertheless proved difficult. Though the United States military was cut to a small fraction of its wartime size, America's military-industrial complex that was created during the Second World War was not eliminated. Pressures to “get back to normal” were intense.<sup>59</sup> Congress wanted a return to low, balanced budgets, and families clamored to see the soldiers sent back home. The Truman administration worried first about a postwar slump, then about the inflationary consequences of pent-up consumer demand.<sup>60</sup> The G.I. Bill, adopted in 1944, was one answer: subsidizing veterans to complete their education rather than flood the job market and probably boost the unemployment figures. In the end, the postwar U.S. government strongly resembled the wartime government, with the military establishment – along with military-security industries – heavily funded. The postwar capitalist slump predicted by Stalin was averted by domestic government management, combined with the U.S. success in promoting international trade and monetary relations.

The only major industrial power in the world to emerge intact – and even greatly strengthened from an economic perspective – was the United States.<sup>61</sup> As the world's greatest industrial power, and as one of the few countries physically unscathed by the war, the United States stood to gain enormously from opening the entire world to unfettered trade. The United States would have a global market for its exports, and it would have unrestricted access to vital

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151-158.

<sup>59</sup> Hamby, Alonzo. *Harry S. Truman and the Fair Deal*. (Heath & Co, 1974) pg. 100-114.

<sup>60</sup> Dallek, Robert. *Harry S. Truman: The American Presidents Series: The 33rd President, 1945-1953*. (Times Books, 1998) pg. 11-17.

<sup>61</sup> Wallerstein, Immanuel. *The End of the World As We Know It: Social Science for the Twenty-First Century*. (University of Minnesota Press, 2001) pg. 72-78.

raw materials. Determined to avoid another economic catastrophe like that of the 1930s, US leaders saw the creation of the postwar order as a way to ensure continuing US prosperity.

The US emerged from World War Two as a nation which had undergone a profound reversal in fortunes. The American capitalist economy, which previously had been seen as racked by greed and corruption, stood tall as an example of progress and prosperity. It was during this time period that the American public began to buy into the idea that the whole world should rightfully be expected to follow the US example. American Exceptionalism, which had been thoroughly discredited by the Depression, was now embraced with greater fervor than ever before. Even popular culture underwent a fundamental change.

In the late 1930s, comic books enjoyed the highest sales and circulation in the history of the medium.<sup>62</sup> During this “Golden Age” of comics, writers for these series did not shy away from socially conscious topics. Superman was first envisioned by his creators as “a thorn in the side of the establishment.” Issues that featured Superman taking on corrupt industrialists sold like hotcakes, and several other comics of the time period also dealt with similarly proactive themes. Batman made his debut as a murderous vigilante who used guns and made readers question the brutal nature of justice. Many, many strong female heroines also debuted during this time period.

The strange circumstances surrounding the genesis of Wonder Woman are perhaps a fitting metaphor for the sort of “world turned upside down” that had been created by the Great Depression. Wonder Woman was first conceived by William Moulton Marston. He developed Wonder Woman with his wife Elizabeth, whom Marston believed to be a model of that era's unconventional, liberated woman. Marston was also inspired by Olive Byrne, who

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<sup>62</sup> Goulart, Ron. *Comic Book Culture: An Illustrated History*. (Collectors Press, 2000) pg. 43.

lived with the couple in a polyamorous relationship.<sup>63</sup> Marston was the creator of a systolic-blood-pressure-measuring apparatus, which was crucial to the development of the polygraph. Marston's experience with polygraphs convinced him that women were more honest and reliable than men and could work more efficiently.<sup>64</sup> "Wonder Woman is psychological propaganda for the new type of woman who should, I believe, rule the world," Marston wrote.<sup>65</sup>

So, by the eve of the Second World War, millions of people were reading a comic book that promoted female empowerment and was inspired by science and free love. It is no wonder then why, in the 1950's, comics were considered a negative form of popular literature and a serious cause of juvenile delinquency. But how did American society transform so greatly as to totally abandon the ambition for social progressivism and social justice which had dominated American culture not two decades prior? In 1954, a German-American psychiatrist name Fredric Wertham published *Seduction of the Innocent*, a supposed expose of the negative impact of comics on the youth. At the same time, a US Congressional inquiry was launched into the comic book industry. Wertham's claimed Wonder Woman's strength and independence made her a lesbian.<sup>66</sup> Wertham also claimed that Superman was both un-American and a fascist.

The Second Red Scare had a cultural and political influence which dwarfed the First Red Scare. While general disillusionment with the current establishment allowed for social and political radicalism to blossom during the 1930s, the developing commitment many Americans felt to their country after World War Two helped to make dissent seem reprehensible again. As the US government began to work more actively to ensure the success of US businesses both at

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<sup>63</sup> Daniels, Les. *Wonder Woman: The Complete History*. (Chronicle Books, 2004) pg. 28-30.

<sup>64</sup> Bunn, Geoffrey C. "The Lie Detector, Wonder Woman and Liberty: The Life and Works of William Moulton Marston," *History of the Human Sciences*, 1997. Vol. 10, pg. 91-119.

<sup>65</sup> Hendrix, Grady. "Out for Justice". *New York Sun*, December 11, 2007. pg. 13.

<sup>66</sup> Wertham, Frederic. *Seduction of the Innocent*. (Main Road Books, 2004) pg. 234-235.

home and abroad, the old stereotype of the wealthy, aloof plutocrat began to diminish. In its stead came a general trust for those in positions of high power. Concepts of loyalty and duty to the state developed during the war years; dissent was equated with insubordination and dereliction of duty. It's easy to see how this militaristic mindset could be redirected after the war in order to combat the imagined threats American democracy faced from Soviet communism. Also, as the US government began to take a more active role in the nation's economy, the fortunes of Washington, Wall Street, and Main Street all became intertwined. In a somewhat literal sense, the American people now had a much larger investment in the success of US government and industry.

The historical period that came to be known as the Second Red Scare or the McCarthy era began well before Joseph McCarthy's own involvement in it. The factors which encouraged the rise of McCarthyism were more subtle than some historians remember. It had long been a practice of more conservative politicians to refer to progressive reforms such as child labor laws and women's suffrage as "communist" or "Red plots."<sup>67</sup> This tendency had increased in the 1930s in reaction to the New Deal policies of President Franklin D. Roosevelt. Many conservatives equated the New Deal with socialism or communism, and saw its policies as evidence that the government had been heavily influenced by communist policy-makers in the Roosevelt administration.<sup>68</sup> In general, the vaguely defined danger of "communist influence" had been a more common theme in the rhetoric of anti-communist politicians than espionage or any other specific activity.

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<sup>67</sup> Fried, Richard. *Nightmare in Red: The McCarthy Era in Perspective*. (Oxford University Press, 1991) pg. 41.

<sup>68</sup> Brinkley, Alan. *The End of Reform: New Deal Liberalism in Recession and War*. (Vintage, 1996) pg. 141.

However, it took a re-alignment of Federal policy to legitimize the efforts of the anti-communists. In March 1947, President Harry S. Truman signed Executive Order 9835, creating the “Federal Employees Loyalty Program” establishing political-loyalty review boards who determined the “Americanism” of Federal Government employees, and recommended termination of those who had confessed to spying for the Soviet Union, as well as some suspected of being “Un-American.” Truman, a Democrat, was probably reacting in part to the Republican sweep in the 1946 Congressional election and felt a need to counter growing criticism from conservatives and anti-communists.<sup>69</sup> It also was the template for several state legislatures’ loyalty acts, such as California’s Levering Act. The Levering Act was a law enacted in 1950. It required state employees to subscribe to a loyalty oath that specifically disavowed radical beliefs. It was aimed in particular at employees of the University of California. Several teachers lost their positions when they refused to sign loyalty oaths. In addition, the President of the University of Washington famously published an article titled “Communists Should Not Teach in American Colleges” in 1949. In this letter he put forward his assertion that “a member of the Communist Party is not a free man,” and thus lacks the required intellectual freedom necessary to serve as a qualified academic.

Interestingly, this particular criticism of American communists was actually far more well-founded than most. Declassified documents from the Soviet archives have now revealed that the CPUSA was indeed almost totally controlled by the NKVD. However, the fact that the CPUSA was under Soviet control did not mean that the CPUSA had been plotting anti-American activities. Once again, it must be reemphasized that it was Stalin’s firm belief that western capitalism would simply wither away without the USSR having to undertake violent

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<sup>69</sup> Fried, Albert. *McCarthyism, The Great American Red Scare: A Documentary History*. (Oxford University Press, 1996) pg. 165-168.

action. Furthermore, the policies of the CPUSA reflected the pragmatism of Marshal Stalin and the extraordinary necessities brought on by World War Two. In 1941, after Nazi Germany invaded the Soviet Union, the CPUSA's official position became pro-war, opposing labor strikes in the weapons industry and supporting the U.S. war effort against the Axis Powers. With the slogan "Communism is Twentieth-Century Americanism," the chairman, Earl Browder, advertised the CPUSA's integration to the political mainstream. In contrast, the Trotskyist Socialist Workers Party opposed U.S. participation in the war and supported labor strikes, even in the war-effort industry. For this reason, James P. Cannon and other SWP leaders were convicted of treason and jailed.

However, by the end of the 1940s the CPUSA had become a shadow of its former self. At the time McCarthyism began in the late 1940s, the CPUSA was considered an ineffectual fringe group, and communism itself was discredited as an ideology amongst most of the western intelligentsia. Again, this paradigm shift may seem jarring at first glance. How did the intellectual view of socialism in the west totally change in a single decade? The view of socialism among the intelligentsia was so positive during the 1930s that even respected writers like John Dos Passos were ostracized for criticizing the USSR. However, the war years had not been kind to this view of socialism. One important reason for this was the increase in opportunities for travel which had been afforded to westerners in the periods immediately before and after the war. Given the chance to observe the Soviet state firsthand, many scholars came away from this experience with a tarnished view of the much touted Soviet utopia, as well as a new appreciation for the freedoms they enjoyed back home.

The second important reason for this intellectual movement towards the center can be traced to the publication and success of one very influential book. The *Road to Serfdom* was

written by the Austrian-born economist and philosopher Friedrich Hayek, and was first published in March 1944. It was quite popular, leading Hayek to call it “that unobtainable book.”<sup>70</sup> Hayek’s book “warned of the danger of tyranny that inevitably results from government control of economic decision-making through central planning.” He argued that the abandonment of individualism and classical liberalism inevitably leads to a loss of freedom. Significantly, Hayek challenged the general view among Western academics that fascism was a capitalist reaction against socialism, instead arguing that fascism and socialism had common roots in central economic planning and the power of the state over the individual.

In fact, one could utilize Hayek’s arguments to help develop an economic explanation for why the American public was so complicit with the violation of civil liberties during the Second Red Scare. Before the New Deal and World War Two fundamentally reshaped America’s economy, members of the American working class lived the sort of insecure existence which had been described by Marx and Lenin as the ultimate result of capitalist exploitation. Men, women, and children worked long hours, for little pay, in unsafe conditions. If a person was injured on the job or became too old to work, neither the state nor the employer was under any obligation to support that person. Almost 25% of the population lived in poverty before the Great Depression, and the percentage of Americans who were “middle class” is estimated at only about 30% of the total population. Taxation unfairly targeted the poor and exempted the rich. Thousands upon thousands of Americans died every year from preventable diseases. But this sad condition was indicative of one arguably positive aspect of this time period – the free market was exceptionally liberated. While the public sector was extremely small, businesses big and small were allowed to do what they wished. This situation caused a certain disconnection to develop

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<sup>70</sup> Ebenstein, Alan. *Friedrich Hayek: A Biography*. (University Of Chicago Press, 2003) pg. 128.

between the interests of the government, the interests of business, and the interests of the common people. This disconnection bred dissent, as many citizens felt that the state and big business had left them behind. This dissent helped to stifle attempts by those at the top to generate targeted hysteria among the masses.

By the late 1940s, many of the causes for this dissent had vanished. The New Deal had established the US as one of the first modern welfare states. The size of the federal government had increased immensely, with public sector employment shooting through the roof during this time period. The government used this newfound power to take a more active role in guaranteeing the health and welfare of its citizens. Poverty had dropped to record lows by the early 1950s. In addition, US businesses also came to rely more heavily on the government for support. Subsidies for essential wartime industries such as steel and oil production were maintained long after Germany and Japan had surrendered. The Roosevelt administration's embrace of Keynesian economics resulted in a new synthesis between the American government, the American economy, and the American people. Since each was now expected to provide for the greater good, few individuals were left who stood outside this cycle of prosperity and national pride. The only groups which continued to be persecuted and neglected on a national scale were generally minority groups – blacks and homosexuals. Any attempt by these groups to protest the status quo could easily be written off as the result of their inferior genetics or mental illness.

Despite the rejection of Soviet socialism by many in western academia, the Second Red Scare still utilized anti-intellectualist prejudices to promote its core message. Some scholars have asserted that the Second Red Scare profoundly altered the temper of American society. In cinemas across the country, the popularity of anti-communist espionage and science fiction

movies soared. These movies told stories with themes of infiltration, subversion, invasion, and destruction of American society by un-American thought and inhuman beings. The main villain of *The Thing from another World* is a research scientist named Dr. Carrington who incorrectly believes the bloodthirsty “Thing” can be reasoned with. Carrington goes so far as to actively help the “Thing” and attempts to protect the creature from harm. The heroes in this story are of course good red-blooded American soldiers who immediately treat the monster with the fear and hostility it deserves. *The Thing from Another World* was released in April 1951. By the end of that year the film had accrued \$1,950,000, making it the year's 46th highest grossing film, beating all other science fiction films released that year, including more pacifistic *The Day the Earth Stood Still*. While the anticommunist propaganda films of the early 1920s were met with derision, films like *The Thing from another World* were met with critical praise.

While it may seem a bit of a stretch to equate low brow science fiction movies of the early 1950s with anti-communism, it must be remembered that by this point every film Hollywood produced was being scrutinized by The House Committee on Un-American Activities. In 1947, HUAC held nine days of hearings into alleged communist propaganda and influence in the Hollywood motion picture industry. After conviction on contempt of Congress charges for refusal to answer some questions posed by committee members, the "Hollywood Ten" were blacklisted by the industry. In 1947, studio executives were told by the committee that wartime films commissioned by the FDR government such as *Mission to Moscow*, *The North Star*, and *Song of Russia* could now be considered pro-Soviet propaganda. In response to the House investigations, most studios produced a number of anti-communist and anti-Soviet propaganda films such as John Wayne's *Big Jim McLain*, *Guilty of Treason*, *The Red Menace*, *The Red Danube*, *I Married a Communist*, *Red Planet Mars*, and *I Was a Communist*

*for the FBI*, which was nominated for an Academy Award for the best documentary in 1951 and also serialized for radio.

While it is often argued that the blacklists were seen as an egregious violation of personal liberty at the time they were introduced, that argument is not well supported by the facts. Yes, while some did oppose the new regulations, many more embraced these new policies. During the early 1950s, private loyalty-review boards and anti-communist investigators began to fill a growing demand among certain industries to certify that their employees were above reproach. Companies that were concerned about the sensitivity of their business, or who, like the entertainment industry, felt particularly vulnerable to public opinion made use of these private services. For a fee, these teams would investigate employees and question them about their politics and affiliations. At such hearings, the subject would usually not have a right to the presence of an attorney, and as with HUAC, the interviewee might be asked to defend himself against accusations without being allowed to cross-examine the accuser. These agencies would keep cross-referenced lists of leftist organizations, publications, rallies, charities and the like, as well as lists of individuals who were known or suspected communists. Books such as *Red Channels* and newsletters such as *Counterattack* and *Confidential Information* were published to keep track of communist and leftist organizations and individuals. Insofar as the various blacklists of McCarthyism were actual physical lists, they were created and maintained by these private organizations.

Hollywood's support of the anti-communist propaganda effort was one common theme between the two Red Scares. J. Edgar Hoover's prominent role in identifying and crushing supposed communists was another point of continuity. Both Hollywood and FBI would see their role in the fight against communism magnified greatly during the Second Red Scare. By this

time, J. Edgar Hoover was both director of the FBI and one of the nation's most fervent anti-communists. Hoover designed President Truman's loyalty-security program, and its background investigations of employees were carried out by FBI agents. This was a major assignment that led to the number of agents in the Bureau being increased from 3,559 in 1946 to 7,029 in 1952. Hoover's extreme sense of the Communist threat and the politically conservative standards of evidence applied by his bureau resulted in thousands of government workers losing their jobs. From 1951 to 1955, the FBI operated a secret "Responsibilities Program" that distributed anonymous documents with evidence from FBI files of Communist affiliations on the part of teachers, lawyers, and others. Many people accused in these "blind memoranda" were fired without any further process.<sup>71</sup>

Given that the critical press and liberal intelligentsia both refused to take a stand against the Scare, it should come as no surprise that the sort of bipartisan opposition that stood against First Red Scare was nowhere to be found during the Second Red Scare. Both of the major political parties were too afraid of being labeled as soft on communism to speak out in defense of those who were being persecuted. The Communist Control Act of 1954 was passed with overwhelming support in both houses of Congress after very little debate. Jointly drafted by Republican John Marshall Butler and Democrat Hubert Humphrey, the law was an extension of the Internal Security Act of 1950, and sought to outlaw the Communist Party by declaring that the party, as well as "Communist-Infiltrated Organizations" were "not entitled to any of the rights, privileges, and immunities attendant upon legal bodies." The Communist Control Act was perhaps most notable for the odd mix of liberals and conservatives among its supporters.

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<sup>71</sup> Schrecker, Ellen. *Many Are the Crimes*. (Princeton University Press, 1999) pg. 212.

Although far-right radicals were the bedrock of support for McCarthyism, they were not alone. A broad "coalition of the aggrieved" found McCarthyism attractive, or at least politically useful. Common themes uniting the coalition were opposition to internationalism, particularly the United Nations; opposition to social welfare provisions, particularly the various programs established by the New Deal; and opposition to efforts to reduce inequalities in the social structure of the United States.<sup>72</sup> One focus of popular McCarthyism concerned the provision of public health services, particularly vaccination, mental health care services and fluoridation, all of which were deemed by some to be communist plots to poison or brainwash the American people. While these claims were totally specious, they were entertained as plausible by some on the right-wing who sought to manipulate the fears and prejudices of the uneducated. At times, the anti-internationalist aspect of McCarthyist literature took on an anti-Jewish tone. Suspected homosexuality was also a common cause for being targeted by McCarthyism. The hunt for "sexual perverts", who were presumed to be subversive by nature, resulted in thousands being harassed and denied employment in what some queer historians have termed the Lavender Scare.

In addition, many ordinary Americans became convinced that there must be "no smoke without fire" and lent their support to McCarthyism. In January 1954, a Gallup poll found that 50% of the American public supported McCarthy, while 29% had an unfavorable opinion of the senator. Earl Warren, the Chief Justice of the United States, commented that if the United States Bill of Rights had been put to a vote it probably would have been defeated.

The term "Red Scare" is one of the most recognizable phrases in modern American politics. In my analysis of the two Red Scares I have attempted to do my best to

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<sup>72</sup> Rovere, Richard. *Senator Joe McCarthy*. (University of California Press, 1996) pg. 21-22.

illustrate the broader social and cultural impact of the Second Red Scare relative to the First. My research has led to the development of what is perhaps a novel perspective on the circumstances which made this apotheosis of anti-communism possible. The comparative level of panic motivated by either Red Scare was determined by the economic situation the wider American public was faced with at the time. In periods of economic success and national unity, anticommunists successfully played upon American isolationist and exceptionalist tendencies. But during periods of relative economic uncertainty and chaos, such as the early 1920s and especially the late 1930s, anticommunism was less influential as many Americans were willing to look to new political ideas like communism and socialism for potential solutions to their problems. It was the security and plenty enjoyed by Americans in the 1950s, and the discipline and allegiance to the state upon which this prosperity was founded, which truly laid the groundwork for McCarthyism.

