

FOUR

*Nightmare in Red*¹

In 1966 the conservative scholar Jeffrey Hart remarked that in the twentieth century the "style" of warfare had drastically changed. The day of traditional conflicts between nation-states was over; the era of the "internationalized civil war" had come. The first such war, said Hart, began in Spain in 1936 when the forces of General Franco rebelled against the Republic. Here was a struggle which divided not only Spain but Europe and the United States as well. To the battlefields of Iberia came men from Germany, Italy, France, Britain, Russia, America. The Spanish Civil War was, in Hart's opinion, the "prototype" of the transnational ideological war between Left and Right; the same "cleavage of opinion" had recurred ever since: "over Yugoslavia, over Greece, Cuba and Vietnam."² Spain, to borrow a phrase from Allen Guttman, opened a "wound in the heart";³ Jeffrey Hart believed it had never healed.

This sense of a civilization divided within, of the West racked by an "inner civil war," was not peculiar to Hart in the 1960s. Like ceaselessly beating drums—sometimes muffled and distant, sometimes throbbing and close at hand—an air of crisis and urgency haunted the American conservative intellectual movement in the decade after 1945. The sources of its malaise are varied, but one above all was decisive: the experience of Communism and the cold war. This was one of the formative influences on the American Right following World War II.

The magnitude of the "transformation of the Right"⁴ is obvious when one recalls the attitudes of prominent American conservatives toward foreign affairs between Versailles and Yalta. From Senator Lodge in 1919 to Senator Taft in 1940, many conservative spokesmen had long been extremely skeptical of extensive foreign involvements and "liberal" inter-

ventionism. In the post-1945 decade, however, this aloofness—at least among most intellectuals of the Right—declined. In an age of internationalized civil wars, "isolationism" was abandoned.

It did not happen all at once. One sign of residual conservative bitterness about President Roosevelt's foreign policy and its consequences was the efflorescence of revisionist historical scholarship after World War II. Led by Charles Beard, Harry Elmer Barnes, Charles Tansill, George Morgenstern, and William Henry Chamberlin,⁵ the revisionists argued that, in defiance of public opinion and personal pledges, Roosevelt had deceitfully maneuvered the United States into war and had then conducted it disastrously. Some critics claimed that he had deliberately created—or at least allowed—the Pearl Harbor disaster. Others denounced the "unconditional surrender" policy against Germany, the "appeasement" at Yalta, and the "betrayal" of Poland. To the indefatigable Barnes, writing in the early 1950s, the postwar world was proof of "the dolorous record of global meddling."⁶ To Chamberlin, who had hoped that Nazi Germany and Communist Russia would balance or destroy each other, our "Second Crusade" had been the "product of illusions."

It was an illusion that the United States was at any time in danger of invasion by Nazi Germany. It was an illusion that Hitler was bent on the destruction of the British Empire. It was an illusion that a powerful Soviet Union in a weakened and impoverished Eurasia would be a force for peace, conciliation, stability, and international co-operation. It was an illusion that the evils and dangers associated with totalitarianism could be eliminated by giving unconditional support to one form of totalitarianism against another. It was an illusion that a combination of appeasement and personal charm could melt away designs of conquest and domination which were deeply rooted in Russian history and Communist philosophy.

The fruit harvested from seeds of illusion is always bitter.⁷

In the middle of the fighting, conscript Russell Kirk reflected the revisionist sentiment. This was, he said, "the usual sort of war, fought by Russia for Russian aggrandizement and by America to satisfy a national passion for meddling."⁸ The war had been a liberal, internationalist crusade, and the "peace" a liberal creation, too. In the disappointing years after victory, the revisionists—who had generally opposed American intervention in the first place—felt vindicated.

If revisionism was a continuation of World War II on the level of scholarship, its long-range impact was limited for that very reason. For

most revisionism was essentially retrospective—a last intellectual gasp, however valid, of isolationism. This is not to deny its importance. It kept the foreign policy pot boiling; it raised plausible (if controversial) doubts about liberal efforts abroad and thus subverted the prestige of the architects of those policies. Nevertheless, as William Henry Chamberlin acknowledged, our foreign affairs “cannot come to a dead stop. Americans cannot wring their hands in hopeless disillusionment.”⁹ The controversies of the prewar and war years lived on, but their role in reviving the intellectual American Right was supportive, not decisive.

For in the tense and ominous years after Yalta, the follies of past wars necessarily yielded to apprehension about a future holocaust. “From Stettin on the Baltic to Trieste on the Adriatic,” a new colossus, warned Churchill, dominated Europe. This perception of Communism as a global menace came to dominate the American Right. The conservative intellectual movement was molded by its vision of Communism and by the relentless “inner civil war” in which it became engaged.

The intellectual roots of anti-Communist conservatism, like so much else in the intellectual traditions of the American Right since 1945, lie in responses to the 1930s. To the classical liberal wing of this heterogeneous movement, the 1930s were a time of collectivism and Big Government. To traditionalists the era was one of philosophical nihilism, totalitarianism, and the disturbing emergence of the mass man. To a small but extraordinarily significant group of ex-Communists and former fellow travelers, the 1930s was the Red Decade.

The term “Red Decade” was the invention of the journalist Eugene Lyons. A radical in the 1920s, Lyons had written a passionate defense of Sacco and Vanzetti and had then gone to Moscow as a correspondent between 1927 and 1933. There he saw the “future” and lost his illusions. Upon his return to the United States, Lyons became a vehement critic of Stalinist Russia and was outraged as significant numbers of prominent American liberals collaborated with Communists in the antifascist Popular Front. In 1941 he retaliated with *The Red Decade*.¹⁰

This fierce book was, in Daniel Aaron's words, “a melancholy record of self-delusion and even more reprehensible human failings.”¹¹ After boldly challenging the “hobgoblin of red-baiting,”¹² Lyons proceeded to document his contention that “the complex communist United Front tintured every department of American life while it lasted....”¹³ The Communist magnet was *real*, he argued, and dismaying numbers of lib-

erals had been attracted to it. Lyons relentlessly compiled his list of the liberals' sins: they had too often ignored or even apologized for such monstrous Russian behavior as the contrived famines, the grotesque purge trials, and the subversion of Republican Spain. They were repeatedly duped by clever Communists who manipulated scores of “fronts” for the Kremlin's advantage. Men like John Dewey who criticized the Soviet Union were slandered; anti-Communist books were often deliberately “sabotaged.” For the acerbic Lyons the “last loony scene” was the famous Open Letter of August 10, 1939. Four hundred of the most distinguished intellectuals in America signed this statement, which denounced “the fantastic falsehood that the U.S.S.R. and the totalitarian states are basically alike.” The perpetrators of such foolishness, the 400 declared, were “fascists and their allies,” anxious “to create dissension among the progressive forces.” The signers insisted that the Soviet Union was “a bulwark against war and aggression,” an unflagging supporter of “a peaceful international order.” Its policies were “diametrically opposed” to those of the Fascists. Less than two weeks later Russia and Germany signed a nonaggression pact. It was a sordid climax, Lyons felt, to a sordid decade of liberal hypocrisy and self-deception.¹⁴

While Lyons may have overestimated the strength of the Popular Front,¹⁵ he presented enough evidence to give plausibility to his central image: the 1930s as the Red Decade. He was not alone in his rebellion against that era; by the end of World War II a significant literature of disillusionment with Communism already existed. Lyons's own *Moscow Carousel* and *Assignment in Utopia*¹⁶ were two early contributions. Others included Freda Uteley's *The Dream We Lost*, Max Eastman's *Artists in Uniform* and *Stalin's Russia and the Crisis in Socialism*, and William Henry Chamberlin's *Collectivism: A False Utopia* and *The Confessions of an Individualist*.¹⁷ All had seen the Soviet Union; all could speak authoritatively about “the god that failed.” Eastman had been an admirer and biographer of the exiled Leon Trotsky. Uteley, a former English Communist, had married a Russian who disappeared forever in the purges of the mid-1930s. Lyons and Chamberlin had served as correspondents in Moscow and had learned of such atrocities as the artificial famines of the early 1930s. The effect was profound. “Under the challenge of Soviet collectivism,” Chamberlin observed, “I rediscovered with tenfold conviction my instinctive individualist faith.”¹⁸ In the decade after Yalta, Lyons, Eastman, Uteley, and Chamberlin would help to create the conservative intellectual movement.

There were other expressions of anti-Communism before 1945.

Books by former Communists like Walter Krivitsky, Benjamin Gitlow, and Jan Valtin appeared.¹⁹ *Partisan Review* (linked with Trotskyists) and the *New Leader* (dominated by former Mensheviks) printed frequent criticisms of Stalin's Russia. And yet, for all the disillusionment with Communism generated in the 1930s, the intellectual impact of this early revolt against the Red Decade remained decidedly marginal in 1945. The *New Leader*, for instance, may have been—as James Burnham believes—the most important anti-Communist magazine in the country,²⁰ but its influence was still limited. Eugene Lyons was among the first to criticize Yalta,²¹ but most Americans at the time apparently felt otherwise. As one historian has observed, the “tone of U.S. politics in 1945 was distinctly favorable toward a policy of détente toward the Soviet Union.”²² For the ex-Communists, as for the libertarians and traditionalists, 1945 was not an auspicious year.

Nevertheless, circumscribed as the intellectual revulsion against Communism was at war's end, the groundwork for the future had been laid. If the “premature” anti-Communists and the ex-Communists could as yet claim no major influence on public opinion or on the American Right, they still possessed the advantages of expertise. After all, they had seen the revolution. If, after 1945, events were to veer in “their” direction, if One World were to become two, the authors of the literature of disillusionment might acquire an audience.

And when the Iron Curtain did descend and the cold war did break out, the veterans of the “inner civil war” of the 1930s stepped forward to guide the conservative army.

The effects of Communism and the cold war on conservatism may be divided into two categories: responses to threats from abroad, and responses to threats from within.

The menace abroad seemed all too obvious in the early postwar years. In Europe, as the Right saw it, Poland had been betrayed²³ and the rest of the Iron Curtain countries abandoned. Czechoslovakia had fallen in a coup, and Berlin was continually threatened. France and Italy were weakened by substantial domestic Communist parties, while the head of France's atomic energy program for a period was the Communist Frédéric Joliot-Curie.²⁴ In Asia, the situation seemed increasingly desperate, as China fell and Korea became convulsed in an indecisive war. The execution of the anti-Communist Chetnik leader Mikhailovich in Yugoslavia, the death of Czech Foreign Minister Jan Masaryk, the flight of Chiang

Kai-shek to Formosa, the sudden invasion of South Korea, the massive intervention of the Chinese in Korea—these were *shocks* to conservatives and virtually all Americans. And so the anguished cry naturally went out: Why? Why were we reeling before Communism on the march? Why had the euphoria of Yalta yielded to the daily fear of global war? Who lost China? Who had so glaringly mishandled our foreign policy?

With increasing indignation and bitterness, right-wing critics charged that the liberals were responsible—the liberals who had been in power in Washington since 1933. At best, the liberals had been ineffectual; at worst, they had been duped or infiltrated by Communists. Three journals in particular spearheaded the assault: *Plain Talk*, founded in 1946 by Isaac Don Levine and Ralph de Toledano and heavily subsidized by its publisher, the “China lobbyist” Alfred Kohlberg;²⁵ *The Freeman*, with which *Plain Talk* merged in 1950; and the *American Mercury*, especially under William Bradford Huie, who became editor late in 1950. In these journals and in books like Freda Utley's *The China Story* and John T. Flynn's *While You Slept*,²⁶ the conservative case was articulated. Leading the critics were such former leftist sympathizers as Lyons, Chamberlin, Utley, Eastman, Toledano, and Burnham.

The day-to-day details of conservative critiques of specific policies have been examined elsewhere and need not be discussed here.²⁷ The broad features of their analysis, however, are noteworthy. First, the conservatives alleged that America's reverses abroad were substantially attributable to the failure of domestic liberal leaders to comprehend the inherently revolutionary, expansionary, implacable nature of Communism. To liberal ignorance of Communism could be attributed Roosevelt's myopic “unconditional surrender” policy, which had created a vacuum that Stalin eagerly filled. Fatuous liberalism was responsible for the appeasement of “Uncle Joe” Stalin and the preposterous attempt to impose a coalition government in China; the sins of the Red Decade had not ceased in 1939. Second, relying heavily on congressional investigations of such matters as the *Amerasia* case and the Institute of Pacific Relations, right-wing critics personalized the controversy by pointing to individuals of (to them) dubious judgment and questionable loyalty who had disastrously affected American foreign policy. Alger Hiss, Owen Lattimore, Harry Dexter White, John Stewart Service, John Carter Vincent, and dozens of other government officials and advisers became targets of criticism from the Right.

Another important aspect of developing conservative anti-Communism was the effect upon it of exile scholars. Like the libertarians and

traditionalists, the anti-Communists were heavily indebted to Europe. In the early 1950s men like Gerhart Niemeyer, Stefan Possony, and Robert Strausz-Hupé—all émigrés from Central Europe—were becoming known as hard-line anti-Communist scholars;²⁸ in time all would become leading cold war strategists for the American Right.²⁹ The process by which an Eastern European exile could become embittered by the foreign policies of the Roosevelt and Truman administrations was abundantly illustrated by Bogdan Raditsa, formerly chief of the foreign press department of the Yugoslav Ministry of Information under Tito. Writing in 1951, Raditsa asserted that political refugees from the Iron Curtain countries were alarmed by the attitudes of their American colleagues. While the Europeans knew that Communism could not be placated, too many Americans did not. Instead, Americans were victims of cautious, relativistic, philistine "Machiavellian liberalism," expounded particularly by Walter Lippmann, George Kennan, and Barbara Ward. The trouble with this philosophy was its "ambivalent attitude toward despots and despotism." It failed to realize that democracy and totalitarianism were irreconcilable; it was too willing to let Communism alone as long as it did not invade Western Europe. Bemused by balance-of-power diplomacy and the desire to be "objective," it feared anti-Communist "hysteria." Raditsa charged that "Machiavellian liberals" were skeptical about the desirability of popular upheavals in the captive nations and were deliberately excluding both exiles and the most anti-Communist Americans from the anti-Soviet effort. Exiles were supposed to be too "emotional" and "prejudiced" about Communism. Raditsa warned that "you cannot destroy an ideological enemy without being yourself ideologically prepared." He therefore advocated an idealistic international crusade for the "universal establishment of liberty."³⁰

It was obviously not sufficient, however, for conservatives to berate liberal foreign policies and their makers. Even if liberals had been tainted with ignorance or pro-Communism, what did their critics propose? The title of Raditsa's article supplied a logical answer: "Beyond Containment to Liberation." In the postwar years, many conservative intellectuals demanded just that. In 1953 William Henry Chamberlin published *Beyond Containment*, a history of the cold war which urged the adoption of programs "starting the Soviet empire, the greatest threat to our Western civilization, on the road to decline and fall."³¹ Also in 1953, the new conservative Peter Viereck argued for the "overthrow" of the "Stalin terror." To Viereck it was "heartless" to prefer "containment" to liberation, and he cited Raditsa's article in his defense. "For the millions of slaves

behind the Iron Curtain," Viereck exclaimed, "peaceful' coexistence means not peace but a continuation of torture and murder." "How long today," he wanted to know, "can the Christian-Judaic moral basis of American freedom survive our tolerating by 'containment'—as opposed to liberation—the...horrors of the Soviet slave camps?"³²

It was one thing simply to propose liberation of Communist territories; it was quite another to devise a rationale and strategy to achieve it. This was the task performed by probably the most influential right-wing critic of liberal foreign policies after 1945: James Burnham. More than any other single person, Burnham supplied the conservative intellectual movement with the theoretical formulation for victory in the cold war.

Born in 1905, educated at Princeton and Oxford, Burnham served on the faculty of New York University as a professor of philosophy from 1929 to 1953. Like so many others who eventually found their home on the Right, Burnham had been a man of the far Left in the 1930s. Working with Communist unions in Detroit, Burnham eventually became associated with A.J. Muste and, in 1934, with the Fourth International of Leon Trotsky. Although Burnham later stated that he never became a full ideological Marxist, he was an active Trotskyist and editor of the *New International* for several years. Gradually, disillusionment set in, as it did for so many others. Burnham discovered that he could no longer accept Trotsky's contention that the Soviet Union, despite Stalin's "aberration," was still essentially a progressive "workers' state," to be defended at all costs. Burnham argued instead that the Soviet regime was profoundly "exploitative and imperialist"—a hypothesis confirmed, he believed, by the Nazi-Soviet pact of 1939 and the Russian war with Finland. In March 1940, Burnham severed all ties with the Trotskyists.³³

A year later Burnham published his provocative book *The Managerial Revolution*, soon followed by *The Machiavellians*. Meanwhile he contributed frequently to *Partisan Review*. During these years, Burnham later reflected, he was undergoing a process of "re-education":

Having come to know something of the gigantic ideology of Bolshevism, I knew that I was not going to be able to settle for the pigmy ideologies of Liberalism, social democracy, refurbished laissez-faire or the inverted, cut-rate Bolshevism called "fascism." Through the Machiavellians I began to understand more thoroughly what I had long felt: that only by renouncing all ideology can we begin to see the world and man.³⁴

Recoiling from the Left, Burnham developed a tough-minded perspective; he refused to be deceived by silly, moral platitudes or verbal camouflage of hard realities. He was determined to be a dispassionate scientist of power, a *realpolitiker*—in that sense, a “Machiavellian.”

In the decade after 1945, Burnham turned increasingly to the problems of global politics. Soon he became a formidable polemicist, writing with brisk, lucid self-assurance on the world conflict with Communism. The first of his influential books, *The Struggle for the World*, appeared in 1947; part of it was based on work done for the OSS.³⁵ Heavily influenced by Arnold Toynbee's *A Study of History*, which he cited often, and by the geopolitical theories of Sir Halford Mackinder, Burnham argued that the world had reached an intolerable crisis.

The discovery of atomic weapons has brought about a situation in which Western Civilization, and perhaps human society in general, can continue to exist only if an absolute monopoly in the control of atomic weapons is created. This monopoly can be gained and exercised only through a World Empire.... the present candidates for leadership in the World Empire are only two: the Soviet Union and the United States.³⁶

Burnham contended that the Communist drive for world domination had already begun; the “Third World War” was a fact. Relentlessly he asserted that the Communist goal was “irrevocable.” The Communists wanted total power, the conquest of the planet—a result which would mean the “destruction” of the most “cherished” values of Western civilization. The danger was imminent, the struggle “irrepressible.”³⁷

What, then, should be done? Only the United States could prevent a Communist triumph. Conciliation and drift meant defeat: “...you can get along with communism in only one way: by capitulating to it.”³⁸ In terms of defense, Burnham proposed measures to prevent Communist consolidation of the Eurasian World Island (Mackinder's term) and to thwart Communist infiltration. The United States should, for example, abandon the notions that its world objective is peace and that all nations are “equal.” It should “discard” the “verbal shell” of “non-intervention in the internal affairs of other nations”;³⁹ in the future, more, not less, intervention might be necessary. It should use massive worldwide propaganda, give all necessary aid to allies, and refuse to collaborate with the Soviet Union. It must immediately outlaw and suppress the domestic Communist movement. Offensively, America must initiate a “non-Communist World Federation”:

The reality is that the only alternative to the communist World Empire is an American Empire which will be, if not literally world-wide in formal boundaries, capable of exercising decisive world control....

The United States cannot help building an Empire.⁴⁰

As a first step, Burnham suggested “common citizenship and full political union” with Great Britain and its dominions.⁴¹

Behind Burnham's energetic prose lurked a deep sense of pessimism. While he did not consider all-out war technically inevitable, he was convinced that it was “very probable”; perhaps it would even occur before his book came off the presses.⁴² Burnham believed that his own proposals need not provoke war. Still, he argued, “the danger of this war will not disappear until the present Soviet regime is overthrown, and world communism as a whole rendered impotent.”⁴³ This must be the American goal. The problem was that Burnham could discern no such American resolve. Instead, despite some new official rhetoric of “toughness,” Burnham, writing in 1946, detected in American conduct of foreign policy only a “policy of vacillation.” If this continued (as he expected), “the defeat and annihilation of the United States are probable.”⁴⁴

In 1950 Burnham produced another fervent polemic, *The Coming Defeat of Communism*. In many respects this book was a recapitulation and “extension” of *The Struggle for the World*.⁴⁵ Here again was the mood of crisis, the dramatic insistence that we were already in a war with aggressive Communism, that compromise and neutrality were impossible, that the United States must mobilize now. Here again were withering blasts at weak, confused American diplomacy as contradictory, narrow, defensive, and lacking in objectives. Here again were the exhortations to a single goal: “the destruction of the power of Soviet-based Communism.”⁴⁶

There were also new elements in Burnham's analysis. First, he placed increased stress on signs of current “vulnerability” in the Communist camp, including restiveness in the satellites, economic disorder, and rigid bureaucracies. Burnham even conceded that “in a strictly military sense” the United States had little to fear from Russia for several years.⁴⁷ Nevertheless, the time to act was now. For if the Communists consolidated their postwar gains without hindrance (again the influence of Mackinder was obvious), and if the Americans continued passively to pretend that the Third World War had not yet begun, then total war would be inevitable. The immediate exploitation of Communist weakness, however, would enable the “free world” to defeat its foe *without* full-scale war.

Burnham insisted that we could win at the level of "political-subversive warfare." Indeed, it was "the only rational alternative to immediate armed attack" on the Soviet Union.⁴⁸

Second, and rather uncharacteristically, Burnham in 1950 allowed himself a little hope, as the very title of his book suggested. Between 1946 and 1949 the Communists had made sweeping gains, he observed, but the "net trend" had turned against them. Despite all the inadequacies of past and current U.S. policies, America had at least awakened somewhat to the danger and had slowed the rate of Communist advance. Burnham believed that the defeat of Communism was "inevitable" because Americans had the *will* to survive. This did not mean, of course, that we could get by with Coué-like slogans about improving every day in every way. Burnham's book bristled with practical suggestions, often involving what he labeled "untraditional methods."⁴⁹ Aim propaganda directly at the Communist elite. Break the Communist hold on the world labor movement. Initiate a "united front with the Vatican." Establish an East European Institute. Utilize refugees and the resistance movements behind the Iron Curtain. Establish an agency to guide and conduct "unorthodox" operations. Overthrow Albania. Prevent Moscow from reconquering Yugoslavia—even at the risk of war. These were but a few of Burnham's specific ideas—all of which depended on the will to survive and the development of intelligent leadership. At the end of this book, at least, Burnham considered the United States equal to the challenge.

The optimism in *The Coming Defeat of Communism* was gone from Burnham's next major postwar book, *Containment or Liberation?*, published in 1953. Burnham acknowledged that the U.S. government had at last developed a foreign policy of containment, principally devised by George Kennan. Unfortunately, it was totally inadequate. Burnham argued that "containment" was purely defensive, inapplicable to the gigantic Soviet Union, and fundamentally unable "to comprehend the revolutionary nature of the communist enterprise."⁵⁰ Moreover, it was spiritually deficient: "Who will willingly suffer, sacrifice and die for containment?"⁵¹ It was simply "a policy of drift" whose "inner law" was "let history do it."⁵² But, Burnham pleaded, we cannot rely on history to bail us out:

If the communists succeed in consolidating what they have *already* conquered, then their complete world victory is certain....

...What this means is that liberation is the only defense against a Soviet world victory.⁵³

How could liberation be achieved? Burnham dismissed the "west European strategy" of mere containment as "without hope." For one thing, Western Europe could not survive without Eastern Europe; the West would eventually either have to surrender to Moscow or free Moscow's satellites.⁵⁴ Nor would the "Asian-American strategy" proposed by Senator Taft suffice; the immediate threat to America lay in Europe, not the Far East. Obviously still reflecting the geopolitical view of Mackinder, Burnham declared that preoccupation with Asia "leaves the enemy free to go about his principal and decisive business: the consolidation of the Heartland and of the surrounding Empire...."⁵⁵ He proposed instead a third alternative: an "East European strategy" designed to take the offensive and carry the conflict to the enemy's base. Only this approach could repel the Communist threat. In the final section of his book he urged such initiatives as the recognition of exile governments and the establishment of military units of exiled soldiers as means for the liberation of the captive nations.⁵⁶

The degree to which the foreign policy debate had been personalized by 1953 was also evident in Burnham's volume. In a chapter entitled "Is Political Warfare Possible?" he expressed doubt that this crucial mode of conducting the cold war would ever be effectively employed by the United States. He attributed this American weakness to the presence of an "ideologized minority" of government officials whose views of the world were shaped "in the context of the economic depression of the '30's and the political struggle against Hitler and Nazism."⁵⁷ They were products (although Burnham did not use the term) of the Red Decade. Passionately antifascist, these men, said Burnham, never felt quite the same way about Communism.

Communism was not like fascism, not wholly evil as fascism was, because—they were taught without knowing they were being taught—communism "has the same ideals that we have, even if we differ on the methods." ...It was only about Nazism that they *felt* strongly.⁵⁸

Such men were not comfortable with "hard anti-communists." Who were these men? Burnham named examples: Dean Acheson, Charles Bohlen, John Paton Davies, Jr., and others who defended such men as Alger Hiss, Owen Lattimore, John Stewart Service, and other State Department officials and advisers suspected of treason or gross neglect of America's national interests in the 1940s.⁵⁹

The influence of Burnham's books on American attitudes toward

the cold war seems to have been substantial; certainly he gained a respectful hearing both inside and outside the government. When *The Struggle for the World* appeared in 1947, the *Christian Century* contended that Burnham's book coincided precisely with President Truman's new policy toward Greece and Turkey. It might even be no coincidence, the journal noted, that the Truman Doctrine and Burnham's book were published in the same week.⁶⁰ Burnham undeniably established significant government connections in the first cold war years. In the early 1950s he lectured "regularly" at the National War College, the Air War College, the Naval War College, and the School for Advanced International Studies.⁶¹ In *The Coming Defeat of Communism* he advocated the establishment of an East European Institute or University;⁶² perhaps it was only happenstance that on July 22, 1951, the founding of the Free Europe University in Exile was announced, with James Burnham as one of the trustees.⁶³ Early in 1950, the *New York Times* quoted New York University as saying that Burnham was "officially on leave to do research from the nation's capital."⁶⁴ His "research" may have included work for the Central Intelligence Agency, for which Burnham had been a consultant.⁶⁵ He was also very active in the American Committee for Cultural Freedom, which received financial assistance from the CIA.⁶⁶

Outside of government circles Burnham's writings also received careful attention. Each of his books was widely, often vehemently, reviewed and discussed. Moreover, as an editor of *Partisan Review* and contributor to the *New Leader*, Burnham had access to articulate, left-of-center audiences. More important for his later associations was his growing stature on the Right. In the early 1950s he increasingly contributed to the *American Mercury* and *The Freeman*. Substantial excerpts from all three of his foreign policy books were printed in the *American Mercury* in 1947, 1950, and 1952.⁶⁷ When *Containment or Liberation?* appeared, Frank Meyer, a former Communist, praised it in the *American Mercury*, while Eugene Lyons of *Red Decade* fame lauded it in *The Freeman*.⁶⁸ Another sign of his prominence in and acceptance by conservative groups was a comment in 1952 by Raymond Moley, a *Newsweek* columnist and former adviser to President Roosevelt. Moley claimed that *The Struggle for the World* "had no little influence in shaping the thinking of Republican critics of the Truman-Acheson diplomacy."⁶⁹

It seems safe to say, then, that James Burnham as much as anyone provided the theoretical formulation for the conservative critique of liberal foreign policies in the early cold war period. He as much as anyone made militant, global anti-Communism a characteristic of the postwar

intellectual Right. But Burnham, of course, did not do it alone. Events at home combined with reverses abroad to create and exacerbate the "inner civil war" between Left and Right.

In the late 1940s and early 1950s there appeared on the national stage, often before intent congressional committees, a growing band of men and women who had broken with the Communist Party. Unlike many of the intellectuals already discussed, who had been influenced by Communism but had not become fully committed Stalinists in the 1930s, the new group had usually been deeply involved in the party apparatus. To Eugene Lyons's portrayal of the Red Decade as an era of stupidity and hypocrisy was added the stunning new dimension of treason.

As these former Communists paraded before the public, they increasingly received the attention of the intellectual Right. Names of ex-Communist witnesses like Louis Budenz, Bella Dodd, Elizabeth Bentley, Hede Massing, and Nathaniel Weyl became nationally familiar. If—like Budenz, Massing, and others—they wrote books about their experiences,⁷⁰ these were usually noted in the *American Mercury* or *The Freeman*. Their testimony, combined with such powerful expressions of disillusionment as *The God that Failed* and *Verdict of Three Decades*,⁷¹ had an enormous educational impact on the Right.

Sometimes the links between the ex-Communists and the conservative intellectual revival were quite direct; Frank Meyer is a case in point.⁷² Born in 1909 in Newark, New Jersey, Meyer attended Princeton University and then Oxford, where he received his B.A. during the Depression. At Oxford in 1931, Meyer joined the Communist Party of Great Britain and became director of its Students' Bureau and a member of its Central Committee. While doing graduate work at the London School of Economics, he was elected president of the Students' Union as an avowed Communist, with the aid of Indian students led by Krishna Menon, later a fiery Indian defense minister under Nehru. From 1934, when Meyer returned to the United States, until 1945, he remained, in his words, a "dedicated Communist." He held many responsible positions in the party.⁷³

In 1945, when Earl Browder was deposed as the American Communist leader, Meyer broke with the movement—deeply influenced by Friedrich Hayek's *The Road to Serfdom*, which he had read while still a Communist.⁷⁴ The process of extrication from the Left was a slow one. At first he simply called himself a non-Communist. But as the pressures

of the cold war intensified⁷⁵ and as his personal reeducation continued (he was also profoundly affected by Richard Weaver's *Ideas Have Consequences*),⁷⁶ Meyer moved to the Right. According to his friend William Rusher, Meyer was at first a "doctrinaire socialist," then a Truman supporter in 1948, and a Republican by 1952,⁷⁷ when he began contributing to the *American Mercury* and *The Freeman*.⁷⁸

With Meyer and other recruits from the ranks of ex-Communists, the postwar American Right suffered from no lack of vivid acquaintance with the god that failed. But it is doubtful that the experience of Communism would have seared the conservative consciousness as irrevocably as it did were it not for a man named Whittaker Chambers and the trial of Alger Hiss.

In August 1948, Whittaker Chambers, a senior editor of *Time*, testified before the House Un-American Activities Committee that he had been an underground Communist in the 1930s and had known as a Communist a young State Department official named Alger Hiss. In the subsequent decade Hiss had become a senior State Department officer, a trusted member of the American delegation to the Yalta conference, and, for many, a symbol of the bright, young, successful New Dealer. When Hiss, who was now president of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, denied Chambers's story and sued him for libel, Chambers astounded the nation by producing secret government documents which implicated Hiss and Chambers in the Communist espionage apparatus of the 1930s. In 1950, after more than a year of furious litigation, Hiss was convicted of perjury (and, implicitly, espionage) and sentenced to prison.⁷⁹

The bare facts of this case, however, cannot begin to suggest its enduring effect on the post-1945 conservative intellectual renaissance. As much as any other event, the Hiss case forged the anti-Communist element in resurgent conservatism. While many men of the Left, like Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., believed Chambers to be truthful,⁸⁰ the whole affair tended to become a Left-Right confrontation. As the saying had it, "a generation was on trial"—the generation of the New Deal. To some, Hiss was a martyr to social justice and Chambers a vicious, pathological liar in league with reactionary Republicans led by Congressman Richard Nixon. To others, Chambers was an extraordinarily sensitive and gifted man who was willingly destroying himself in order to awaken the nation to the Communist peril symbolized by the unrepentant traitor Alger Hiss. The tendency to view the contest in partisan terms was augmented by President Truman's dismissal of the case in 1948 as a "red herring" and

by Secretary of State Acheson's remark, just after Hiss was convicted: "I do not intend to turn my back on Alger Hiss." (Acheson had long known Hiss and was a law partner of Hiss's brother Donald.) When many prominent liberals of the day—Acheson, Justices Frankfurter and Reed, Adlai Stevenson, Eleanor Roosevelt, and distinguished professors at famous universities—defended Hiss, at least initially, the lines were drawn tighter. "All right we are two nations"—so wrote John Dos Passos of the Sacco-Vanzetti trial. He might have said the same thing about Hiss and Chambers, for the case was undoubtedly the most ideologically divisive since the execution of the two Italian anarchists in 1927.

The ferocity of the dispute was indeed incredible. Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. observed that the "anti-Chambers whispering campaign was one of the most repellent of modern history."⁸¹ James Burnham was more angry: "At Washington dinners and cocktail parties held or attended by State Department and Intelligence officials, no bitterness or contempt was ever expressed against Alger Hiss. At those same gatherings no vile and shameless slander against Whittaker Chambers was omitted."⁸² Chambers himself developed a theme which conservatives adopted wholeheartedly:

No feature of the Hiss Case is more obvious, or more troubling as history, than the jagged fissure, which it did not so much open as reveal, between the plain men and women of the nation, and those who affected to act, think and speak for them. It was, not invariably, but in general, the "best people" who were for Alger Hiss and who were prepared to go to almost any length to protect and defend him. It was the enlightened and the powerful, the clamorous proponents of the open mind and the common man, who snapped their minds shut in a pro-Hiss psychosis, of a kind which,....in a nation, is a warning of the end.⁸³

The effect of the case on many who were or would become conservatives was graphically exemplified by the response of a young journalist named Ralph de Toledano. Born in 1916, raised in a very liberal environment, Toledano had entered Columbia University in the 1930s and had become an activist for left-wing causes. While never a Communist, he lived in "the same red haze" on the "cozy periphery" of the party.⁸⁴ Disillusioned by such events as the Moscow purge trials and the Hitler-Stalin pact of 1939, Toledano became in the 1940s a hardened anti-Communist. He worked for the *New Leader* and helped Isaac Don Levine found *Plain Talk* in 1946. (It was Levine, incidentally, who accompanied

Whittaker Chambers in 1939 to the home of A.A. Berle, to inform the then State Department security officer of the network of Communist espionage within the U.S. government.) While at the *New Leader* during the war, Toledano had befriended the émigré Italian anarchist, Carlo Tresca, who believed that he was marked for assassination by the Communists. When Tresca was mysteriously murdered in 1943, Toledano notified the police; his story reached the press. One night, not long afterward, as he was walking home, a car with lights off followed him down a dimly lit street. As he walked faster, the car came toward him. He thought: this was just the way death had come to Tresca. But this time the car veered off. Sitting in the back seat was an Italian Communist, Vittorio Vidali, the same man who had probably engineered the killing of Carlo Tresca:

...Tresca's murder was a landmark on the road to anti-Communism. It gave me a first-hand view of the MVD at work....
...My war against Communism suddenly acquired a very personal dimension.⁸⁵

With this and other chilling experiences affecting him deeply, Toledano covered the Hiss case for *Newsweek* beginning in 1948. For all his seasoned anti-Communism and rejection of the Popular Front mind, he was still, however tenuously, a man of the Left when the case began. But not for long. Embittered by what he regarded as A.A. Berle's craven, dishonest, and politically motivated account of his conversation with Chambers in 1939, Toledano resigned from the New York state Liberal Party, of which Berle was then chairman.⁸⁶ As a result, he believed, of his defection, Toledano suffered insults and discrimination from his erstwhile allies on the Left. He was outraged, too, by many liberals' responses to the controversy:

Identifying themselves with the criminal, they protested that he was innocent. Identifying themselves with the crime, they shouted that it was no crime at all but a commonplace of the era in which it was committed. And, in a triumph of perverse reasoning, they insisted that the evil was not in the cancer, but in the surgeon who had laid open the flesh to expose it....
...It was not what Chambers had done, but what he was, which infuriated and stampeded the "liberals." For Chambers was the first man of real and unconquerable stature to stand up before them....

...The "liberals" could not accept Chambers as a religious

man. They could not accept his concept of a religious war because they could not accept religion in the first place. It threatened their universe. They were baffled and outraged by a man who said simply that he believed in God and in freedom.⁸⁷

As the controversy grew increasingly bitter, Toledano was driven to reconsider liberalism as a philosophy. He found it wanting—compounded of conformity, statism, and ethical relativism:

To the liberals, from Samuel Adams to Harry S. Truman, there was never any room for disagreement....

In the context of morals, politics, and economics, liberalism was corrupt. And its corruption stemmed from one corrupting influence: the doctrine that all absolutes are evil with the exception of the absolute State.... in a system which held as relative all restraints on human behavior—the values of truth, justice, honor—where could the liberal find balance[?]⁸⁸

One source of balance for Toledano was Whittaker Chambers himself. During the turbulent months of the case, Toledano turned an acquaintance with the ex-Communist into "the most significant friendship of my life."⁸⁹ To the *Newsweek* reporter and rebel against the Left, Chambers was "a man of sensibility, graced or afflicted by an abiding sense of history, who realized that time was man's commodity, but eternity God's."⁹⁰ Ralph de Toledano thus became one of the first to exalt Chambers as one of the saints of the conservative intellectual revival. In 1950 Toledano contributed to Chambers's status as a hero of the Right by writing with another journalist, Victor Lasky, an account of the Hiss-Chambers case entitled *Seeds of Treason*. The book became a major best-seller and did much to familiarize the American public with this complicated and extraordinary affair.⁹¹

What personal experience did for Toledano was done for many more conservatives by Chambers's publication in 1952 of *Witness*. Recognized at once as "one of the most significant autobiographies of the twentieth century,"⁹² the book immediately became a best-seller. When the *Saturday Evening Post* serialized it prior to publication, the *Post*'s circulation jumped by hundreds of thousands.⁹³ Chambers's 800-page opus was in reality several books: a poignant story of a decadent home, a revelation of Communist infiltration of the government, an account of his famous confrontation with Alger Hiss. Above all, it was—in Chambers's eyes—a desperate attempt to alert the West to the most total challenge in its

history. It was one effort to convey to an unheeding world the redeeming truth for which Chambers believed he had suffered.

Three aspects of the autobiography's message appealed compellingly to the conservative consciousness in the 1950s. First, Chambers articulated eloquently the growing conservative conviction that America faced a transcendent crisis. His book was permeated by a sense of tragedy and by what William F. Buckley, Jr. once called "Spenglerian gloom."⁹⁴ He was convinced that in forsaking Communism he was probably leaving the winning side for a confused, vacillating, doomed West. Perhaps, he wondered at one bleak moment in the case, God did not *want* this nation to survive any longer. Perhaps the world was irremediably beyond rescue.⁹⁵ Still, he strove to find a reason for fighting on. He later wrote to Buckley:

I never really hoped to do more in the Hiss Case than give the children of men a slightly better, only slightly better, chance to fight a battle already largely foredoomed....

...How odd that most of the world seems to have missed the point in *Witness*; that it seems to suppose that I said: "Destroy Communism and you can go back to business as usual." Of course, what I really said was: "This struggle is universal and mortal, and only *by means of it*, on condition that you are willing to die that your faith may live, can you conceivably recover the greatness which is in the souls of men."⁹⁶

Second, Chambers developed an interpretation of the enveloping crisis which conservative intellectuals, so many of whom were religious, found congenial. In the "Letter to My Children" which opened *Witness*, Chambers argued that the crisis of the twentieth century, of which Communism was both catalyst and symptom, was a crisis of faith. Communism was fundamentally a religion, "man's second oldest faith," man's "great alternative faith." Its promise was "Ye shall be as gods." Its vision was "the vision of man without God," of "man's mind displacing God as the creative intelligence of the world," of "man's liberated mind, by the sole force of its rational intelligence, redirecting man's destiny...."⁹⁷ Communism starkly and insistently proclaimed an inescapable choice: "God or Man, Soul or Mind, Freedom or Communism."⁹⁸ To Chambers, the "crisis of the Western world exists to the degree in which it is indifferent to God."⁹⁹ No wonder, then, that he despaired of the West, for it seemed to him incapable of perceiving that the titanic struggle of the age was the irrepressible conflict of "two irreconcilable faiths."¹⁰⁰

The logic of his analysis led to a third point of crucial importance to

the resurgent Right. If Communism was an expression of the struggle between religion and atheism, between God and man, another form of the enemy—less violent but also unpalatable—was secular liberalism. One of the fundamental tenets of postwar conservatism, in fact, was this theory of the philosophical continuity of the Left. As Eric Voegelin put it in 1952, "...if liberalism is understood as the immanent salvation of man and society, communism certainly is its most radical expression."¹⁰¹ This interpretation of the Left was naturally an affront to those, such as Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., who regarded pragmatic, anti-Communist liberalism of the "vital center" as the best defense against the Soviet challenge.¹⁰² It was also a reflection of conservative rage at the way in which so many liberals (as they saw it) rushed to the defense of a traitor.

To this stream of conservative thought *Witness* contributed powerfully. Here was a man who spoke openly of God, was a devout Quaker, and interpreted history in religious terms. Moreover, he shed a disconcerting new light on the Red Decade. To most liberals, the New Deal seemed (at least in retrospect) to be a moderate reform movement which had preserved capitalism. To Chambers in 1952, the New Deal era seemed revolutionary. To be sure, the revolution—defined as the replacement of "the power of business" by "the power of politics"—had been nonviolent. But it had been a revolution nevertheless, and "at the basic point of the revolution" the "two kinds of revolutionists"—liberals and Communists—were in accord.¹⁰³ Chambers asserted that this essential continuity of the Left explained the Hiss case:

For men who could not see that what they firmly believed was liberalism added up to socialism could scarcely be expected to see what added up to Communism.... they reacted, not like liberals, but with the fierceness of revolutionists whenever that power was at issue....

Every move against the Communists was felt by the liberals as a move against themselves....

The simple fact is that when I took up my little sling and aimed at Communism, I also hit something else. What I hit was the forces of that great socialist revolution, which, in the name of liberalism...has been inching its ice cap over the nation for two decades.... It was the forces of that revolution that I struck at the point of its struggle for power....

It was the forces of this revolution that had smothered the Hiss Case (and much else) for a decade, and fought to smother it in 1948.¹⁰⁴

Like *The Road to Serfdom* and *Ideas Have Consequences*, *Witness* assaulted the American Left at a moment of acute uncertainty.

The impact of *Witness* on various conservatives was profound. Chambers's three essential themes—the sense of titanic struggle, the interpretation of that struggle as God versus Man, and the belief in the fundamental continuity of liberalism and Communism—struck deep chords and became part of the conservative “case” in the 1950s and after. According to William F. Buckley, Jr., the book tended to have emotional rather than intellectual influence, for Chambers’s “un-American” pessimism limited his effect.¹⁰⁵ But whatever their degree of receptivity to Chambers’s predictions of doom, for many conservatives the book was a crucial intellectual experience. William Rusher, then a New York lawyer and later the publisher of *National Review*, has remarked that *Witness* exerted a “tremendous influence” on him; it was the “Alpha and Omega” of his perception of the nature of the American Communist mind.¹⁰⁶ Another man deeply affected was John Chamberlain, a veteran journalist and anti-Communist of the 1930s. Chamberlain had met Chambers in 1939 when both were working for *Time*; at that time Chambers had inspired the anti-Communists in the *Time* section of the Newspaper Guild ‘to fight the Communists intelligently. Chambers’s “prophetic insight” had taught Chamberlain and others many valuable lessons. When *Witness* appeared, Chamberlain commended it enthusiastically to the readers of *The Freeman*.¹⁰⁷

The revolt against the Red Decade and all its works was strengthened in the early 1950s by the self-styled new conservative, Peter Viereck. In *Shame and Glory of the Intellectuals*, Viereck lambasted with wit and erudition the fellow-traveling intellectuals of 1930-1947 who, he insisted, had exerted “very real power.” The Popular Front “illusion,” he contended, had supplied the “moral sugar-coating to Russia’s aggression” at the end of World War II.¹⁰⁸ While most intellectuals had responded quickly to Hitler’s challenge (that was their “glory”), many had been much less perceptive and resolute in fighting Communism (that was their “shame”). Citing cases from the intellectual wars of his time, Viereck relentlessly exposes the failings of the left-wing Babbitts, “Lumpen-intellectuals,” and “Stalinoid upper-middlebrows” who exhibited “Nation-ite mentalities.”¹⁰⁹ Viereck believed that there were two menaces to civil liberties: “the McCarthyite exaggeration of communist infiltrations and the Nation-ite apathy or indulgence toward them.” By all means we should combat hysteria, he continued. “But let us also resist hysteria about hysteria.”¹¹⁰ Viereck criticized the “compulsive” fellow travelers who sought to

“whitewash” Alger Hiss and prophesied that Hiss might become “the mythic national symbol of the whole guilty 1930’s.”¹¹¹

The guilty 1930s. What Viereck argued in academic and liberal journals,¹¹² dozens of others zealously asserted in rightist-oriented magazines like *Plain Talk*, *American Mercury*, and *The Freeman*. The themes are evident enough in these few randomly selected titles: “Ten Fallacies of Fellow-travelers,” “Lattimore: Master of Omission,” “The Book Review-ers Sell Out China,” “The Value of the Ex-Communist,” “The Treason of ‘Liberalism,’” “Bankruptcy on the Left,” “How Many Other Harry Whites?” and “Men Who Scuttled China.” Often these articles were written by former Communists and fellow travelers.

It is sometimes said that this extraordinary upsurge of antiliberal sentiment was merely an unbalanced, retrospective, partisan assault on the New Deal, or only a tactic by which Republican politicians strove to regain power. Certainly the Roosevelt administration was often a target of the scholars and publicists of the anti-Communist Right. It would be a mistake, however, to attribute their attack on liberalism simply to political malice. What many anti-Communist conservatives abhorred about the Roosevelt administration was less its domestic reforms than its alleged appeasement of Communism at home and abroad. The Communist issue was not, in other words, just a convenient pretext for criticizing the New Deal, or seeking votes. It was, at least for many conservative intellectuals, the yardstick for measuring the New Dealers’ and the liberals’ performance in the struggle not just for office but for *survival*. Motivating the intellectual conservatives was something far more deep-seated than concern for the next election. It was the suspicion (for some the conviction) that liberalism meant treason. For the Communist issue was not an ordinary issue. As Forrest Davis, an adviser to Senator Taft and a contributor to *The Freeman*, asked, “Is it not the prevailing political ‘liberalism’ of the midcentury, that potpourri of indiscriminate do-goodism trending into statism and Marxism and blending so indistinguishably with treason, that is the deepest enemy of the traditional America and the West?”¹¹³ And not just liberalism, but liberals, *people*: Hiss, Lattimore, and all the rest, and the politicians who excused them. These, said conservatives, *these* were the enemy. The liberal, exclaimed Davis, “has looked upon the face of evil and found it half good.”¹¹⁴

“All right we are two nations.”

In developing their case against the Communists, the liberals, and the wretched Red Decade, conservatives relied heavily on what became, in effect, a significant genre of right-wing literature in the late 1940s and

1950s: the hearings and reports of congressional committees investigating Communist influence on American life and politics. These proliferating sources were taken very seriously indeed. They reveal once more the conservative conviction that ideas—and their purveyors—affect the course of history. In one case—the exhaustive Senate Internal Security Subcommittee investigation of the Institute of Pacific Relations and U.S. China policy—the link between Congress and the conservatives was direct: James Burnham worked for the committee and wrote a portion of its final report.¹¹⁵ This was the report which concluded in 1952 that Professor Owen Lattimore of Johns Hopkins University—an Asian specialist and a principal target of Senator Joseph McCarthy—was “from some time beginning in the 1930’s, a conscious articulate instrument of the Soviet conspiracy,”¹¹⁶ and that the Institute of Pacific Relations had disastrously influenced American policy in ways “favorable to Communist objectives in China” before the defeat of the Nationalists in 1949.¹¹⁷ The influence of such documents was obvious and immediate; conservatives quoted them from one end of the country to the other. Sometimes their influence was felt in more subtle ways. During the Korean war, for example, a young New Yorker named Jeffrey Hart enlisted in the navy and was sent to Naval Intelligence school. There he became “political” and read the entire twenty-odd volumes of the Senate investigation of the Institute of Pacific Relations. To Hart this seemed to be, all things considered, a very respectable effort at investigation, and it affected him significantly. It convinced him that there really had been a massive Communist penetration of the government bureaucracy. It was one of several influences that moved Hart on a road to the Right, culminating in the 1960s with a senior editorship at *National Review*.¹¹⁸

In 1954 the indefatigable Burnham published *The Web of Subversion*, a survey of Communist penetration of the government since the 1930s. The book was backed by *Reader’s Digest*, then edited in part by Eugene Lyons.¹¹⁹ Relying on the huge amount of testimony compiled by various congressional inquiries, he drew a frightening portrait of massive Communist influence on American foreign policy. Burnham summarized what so many conservatives of the early 1950s believed fervently:

I do not think that the Communist victory in China was “inevitable.” I believe that it would not have occurred without a breakdown in U.S. policy, and that this breakdown could have been avoided—at least sufficiently—if not for the influence of the web of subversion....

...[T]he units of the underground provided the political

cover on the American flank for the Soviet Empire’s triumphant swallowing of Eastern Europe; for the unimpeded Communist conquest of the bulk of the Italian and French trade union movements; for the liquidation, under slogans of reprisal against “collaborationists,” of tens of thousands of Europe’s anti-Communists; for the forced return eastward of hundreds of thousands of anti-Communist war prisoners, refugees and deserters. The underground can take legitimate pride in its clever manipulation of American “anti-colonial” attitudes in connection with Indonesia, the Middle East and North Africa; its contribution to our continuing paralysis in the face of Guatemala’s creeping subjection to Communist rule; its sly use of our genuine concern for civil liberties as a protective shield for its own treachery....¹²⁰

The “web” had not always achieved its objectives, Burnham recognized, but it had gained many. And—said the conservatives—it had used many liberals in the process.

The Hiss-Chambers case and the subsequent investigations left a residue of bitterness that has not yet disappeared from American life. Yet this cause célèbre was only a prelude to the even more incredible and savage controversy remembered today as “McCarthyism.” If the Hiss case presented American conservatives with (in Ralph de Toledano’s words) “a view of the chasm,”¹²¹ in the ensuing “McCarthy era” many conservatives plunged in.

On January 25, 1950, Alger Hiss was sentenced to five years in prison for perjury. On February 9, 1950, Joseph McCarthy, an obscure junior senator from Wisconsin, informed an audience of Republican women in Wheeling, West Virginia that he had in his hand a list of Communists or Communist sympathizers affiliated with the foreign policy apparatus of the United States. Barely had the nation recovered from the Hiss-Chambers storm when a new political tornado swirled across the land.

To what extent was the developing postwar conservative intellectual movement shaped by the McCarthy controversy? The answer is: substantially. It would, of course, be a gross error to equate conservatism with McCarthyism. The intellectual roots of the conservative revival were extremely diverse, and the ex-Communists and fervid anti-Communists were only one segment of a broad spectrum. Anti-Communism did not originate with Senator McCarthy; neither did libertarianism or traditionalism. Nevertheless, in the great polarization of the early 1950s, a large

segment of conservative intellectuals found themselves on McCarthy's side of the ideological barricades, and a considerable number proclaimed themselves his allies. Joseph McCarthy left a visible mark on the American Right.

The deep identification of some conservatives with McCarthy was manifested in many ways. When the Wisconsin lawmaker made a lengthy speech denouncing the foreign policy record of General George C. Marshall, his speech was applauded in *The Freeman* by Suzanne La Follette,¹²² a former associate of Albert Jay Nock, a member in the 1930s of the American Committee for the Defense of Leon Trotsky (against Moscow purge charges), and, in 1950, a founder and managing editor of *The Freeman*.¹²³ When McCarthy published in 1952 his book *McCarthyism: the Fight for America*, it received sympathetic attention from John Chamberlain, another survivor of the ideological wars of the 1930s. Chamberlain reiterated some of the standard conservative complaints about the Red Decade:

In the late thirties and on up to 1945 and 1946 any author who deliberately provoked the Communists could count on a standard smear treatment....

...By their oblique control of writing in the thirties and the early forties, the Communists managed to poison the intellectual life of a whole nation—and the poison has lingered on.¹²⁴

The time had come, he said, to eliminate the disease and its "end-result," subversion in government. Chamberlain was pleased that McCarthy's book was full of "sober citations" and that the formerly "unsophisticated young politician from the Middle West" was maturing as an anti-Communist leader.¹²⁵

Undoubtedly the most systematic—in fact, the only significant—effort to defend McCarthy was undertaken in 1954 by two young Yale alumni, William F. Buckley, Jr. and L. Brent Bozell. Buckley was already famous for *God and Man at Yale*, while his brother-in-law Bozell, a lawyer, had been converted in college to vigorous, anti-Communist Roman Catholicism. In *McCarthy and His Enemies* they examined the record of the senator and his foes through 1952. The two authors strove to give the appearance, at least, of scrupulous fairness. Their analysis of McCarthy's charges was detailed and buttressed by extensive appendices. Rather frequently they criticized McCarthy outright: an "egregious blunder" here, "gratuitous sensationalism" there, occasionally "outrageous," "censurable," and "reprehensible" conduct. But despite McCarthy's faults and lapses,

Buckley and Bozell concluded that the senator was fundamentally correct. There *had* been extensive Communist subversion of the government. The State Department *had* been incredibly negligent in its loyalty-security program. Buckley and Bozell were especially angered by what they regarded as the high-handed, one-sided, partisan misconduct of the Tydings Committee, established by the Senate in 1950 to investigate McCarthy's initial accusations. McCarthy, in short, had not been refuted. He had not created a "reign of terror." Nor were his methods generally objectionable; at worst, they were no more objectionable than those of other rough-and-tumble politicians of his day—like Harry Truman. Buckley and Bozell emphasized that McCarthy had become a leader in mobilizing America's response to Communism and warned that "if McCarthy's enemies are successful in discrediting him, the mobilization will lose momentum and, perhaps, grind to a dead halt."¹²⁶ The two authors contended that "on McCarthyism hang the hopes of America for effective resistance to Communist infiltration."¹²⁷ In a sentence that affronted many liberals, they declared: "...as long as McCarthyism fixes its goal with its present precision, it is a movement around which men of good will and stern morality can close ranks."¹²⁸

On the day the Buckley-Bozell book was published, a reception for the young authors was held in New York City; among those who attended were Senator McCarthy and his assistant Roy Cohn.¹²⁹ At the reception Buckley stated that he did not expect to receive fair treatment because of the "mass distortion of facts" in the controversy.¹³⁰ Certainly liberals were critical.¹³¹ In conservative circles, however, the response, not surprisingly, was more favorable. In *Faith and Freedom*, the journal of Spiritual Mobilization, the antistatist Frank Chodorov praised the book.¹³² In *The Freeman*, the ex-Trotsky supporter Max Eastman concurred. McCarthy's weakness, Eastman explained, was "a temperamental failure" to do the necessary job in "a mature and thoughtful way." The sins of the "McCarthy-baiters" were far more dangerous: the policies that lost China and much of Europe, and a "refusal" to recognize the desperate struggle of the West with Communism.¹³³

The services of Buckley and Bozell to McCarthy's cause went beyond their book. In 1953, for instance, Buckley wrote a speech for McCarthy criticizing President Eisenhower's nomination of James B. Conant to be high commissioner to Germany. In 1954 McCarthy temporarily designated Buckley a stand-in for a televised rebuttal to Edward R. Murrow's attacks.¹³⁴ Bozell also worked extensively for the Wisconsin senator by serving as a speechwriter on many occasions.¹³⁵

The authors of *McCarthy and His Enemies* were not the only people to defend the senator energetically. In 1953, twenty-eight right-wing partisans sent a letter to 700 newspapers accusing the media of treating the anti-Communist leader unfairly. Lambasting the book reviewers for ignoring *McCarthyism: The Fight for America* while lavishly and thoughtlessly praising Owen Lattimore's *Ordeal by Slander*, the twenty-eight demanded to know what methods the critics of McCarthy had used to defeat the Communist menace within the U.S. government. How accurate, they asked, is the assertion that McCarthy had "attacked and injured innocent people"? Among the signers were several prominent conservative intellectuals: John Chamberlain, Frank Chodorov, Ralph de Toledano, John T. Flynn, Suzanne La Follette, Eugene Lyons, Felix Morley, Frank Hanighen of *Human Events*, Devin Garrity of the Devin-Adair publishing firm, and Henry Regnery.¹³⁶ A year later, as the Senate moved toward censure of McCarthy, a number of conservatives again protested. To them the censure proposal of the Watkins Committee was an attempt "to suppress unpopular people and unpopular ideas." Never in the history of Congress, they claimed, had a senator been censured for "discourtesy toward a witness,"¹³⁷ and the seven signers doubted that the code being invoked against McCarthy would ever be used again. To the seven the Watkins Committee report was an "abject surrender" to executive power—a clear sign of totalitarian government. The signers included George Schuyler, a black journalist, Frank Hanighen, Eugene Lyons, Freda Utley, James Burnham, William F. Buckley, Jr., and John T. Flynn.¹³⁸ When, in mid-1954, the Joint Committee Against Communism in New York held a dinner in honor of Roy Cohn, many right-wing figures, including Buckley, were there. The *New York Times* reported that the audience of 2,000 was "wildly enthusiastic."¹³⁹

Not all conservative intellectuals, by any means, participated in the McCarthy crusade. Peter Viereck was particularly critical of what he perceived as a neo-populist threat to civil liberties. To Viereck, both Lattimore and McCarthy aided Communism, Lattimore "by the way he defended it," McCarthy "by the way he attacks it."¹⁴⁰ Moreover, he wrote in 1955, McCarthyism was not conservative at all. It was status-resentful "radical anti-conservatism," a vengeful expression of "the same old isolationist, Anglophobe, Germanophile revolt of radical Populist lunatic-fringers against the eastern, educated Anglicized elite."¹⁴¹ It—the New Right—was "the most anti-conservative uprising in native Americana since the Whiskey Rebellion of 1794."¹⁴² It was easy enough to guess the side with which Viereck—an Oxford-educated internationalist in foreign policy and

a professor at an Eastern college—identified. To Viereck, this New Right was a revolt of the masses, "the plebeian insurrection of right-wing direct democracy,"¹⁴³ of "Rousseauistic mass democracy,"¹⁴⁴ which true, aristocratic, antidemocratic conservatism was duty-bound to oppose. For him, conservatism and McCarthyism were antithetical.

Viereck's analysis was corroborated in part by the respected Jewish sociologist, Will Herberg. A native of New York City with a doctorate from Columbia University, Herberg had been an active Communist during the late 1920s and early 1930s. Expelled from the party in an ideological feud, Herberg eventually became research analyst and educational director for the International Ladies Garment Workers Union (1935-1948). After several years as a writer and lecturer, he joined the faculty of Drew University in 1955.¹⁴⁵

Although he still considered himself a liberal in 1950, Herberg was gradually moving toward a Burkean conservative position in the 1950s.¹⁴⁶ One sign of his shift was an essay on McCarthyism for the *New Leader* in 1954. "McCarthyism," he argued, was only the latest form of a menacing national phenomenon, "government by rabble-rousing." According to Herberg, the Founding Fathers in their wisdom had established a carefully balanced government designed to prevent turbulent, "irresponsible mass-democracy." Now, however, with the advent of mass communications (especially radio), it was possible for political leaders to bypass deliberative institutions and appeal directly to the masses. The first great breach had been made by President Franklin Roosevelt, who used his "fireside chats" to pressure Congress. Indeed, modern liberals from Roosevelt to Senator Kefauver (with his spectacular televised investigations of crime) must bear much of the responsibility, said Herberg, for making "government by rabble-rousing" so commonplace. There was plenty of blame to go around:

Here is where "McCarthyism" comes in. "McCarthyism" is the logical outcome of the system of government by rabble-rousing initiated in the first years of the New Deal.... McCarthy, like Roosevelt, is impatient with the restraints and limitations of what are called proper constitutional channels....

...Both ["Liberals" and "nationalists"], though of course they would not admit it, are actually *radicals* whose whole approach is subversive of American constitutional democracy.

The remedy, Herberg stated, was "a good, sound, responsible conservatism" of the kind being offered by Viereck and Reinhold Niebuhr.¹⁴⁷

Once again the new conservatives' aloofness from the masses and "totalitarian democracy" was evident.

Still another new conservative who kept his distance from McCarthy was the historical sociologist Robert Nisbet. As a graduate student at Berkeley in the late 1930s, Nisbet had fought a strong local Popular Front influence. In the mid-1940s he became a charter member of the Berkeley chapter of Americans for Democratic Action, organized in large part, he thought, to eliminate the taint of Communism from liberal ranks. At about that time, Arthur Schlesinger, Jr.'s *The Vital Center* appealed to Nisbet greatly. Within a few months, however, as the ADA became in Nisbet's eyes just one more segment of the liberal wing of the Democratic Party, Nisbet resigned and followed an independent path. In the turmoil of the 1950s, he tried to steer a middle course. On the one hand, as a firm anti-Communist, he "detested utterly" Henry Wallace's Progressive Party and, a little later, the "professional, twenty-four-hour-a-day McCarthy-haters." But McCarthy himself and his crusade were equally distasteful. McCarthy and his supporters seemed to him, as they did to Viereck, to represent a recrudescence of radical, xenophobic populism. Distrustful of both extremes, Nisbet adopted what he considered the appropriate attitude: "A plague on both your houses."¹⁴⁸

The wariness of McCarthy which Viereck, Herberg, and Nisbet evinced found an echo in an unexpected quarter: Whittaker Chambers, the very symbol for conservatives of the anti-Communist hero. When McCarthy and *His Enemies* appeared in 1954, Chambers and Buckley began a correspondence which lasted until Chambers's death in 1961. While Chambers was impressed by the Buckley-Bozell book, he was dubious about McCarthy from the beginning. In letter after letter he expressed his concern: "...we live in terror that Senator McCarthy will one day make some irreparable blunder which will play directly into the hands of our common enemy and discredit the whole anti-Communist effort for a long while to come." The trouble, said Chambers, was that McCarthy "can't think. He is a slugger and a rabble-rouser" who "simply knows that somebody threw a tomato and the general direction from which it came." When McCarthy died in 1957, Chambers observed that McCarthy never understood the struggle against Communism. He never had any strategy—only one tactic: "Attack." And that was not sufficient.¹⁴⁹

Chambers's deep reservations about the senator from Wisconsin were shared by his friend Ralph de Toledano. In his autobiography, published a few years after McCarthy's death, Toledano recounted his uneasy role in the great controversy. He had been, undeniably, a "hostage to the

McCarthy forces," driven into the maelstrom by the "malevolence" of the opposition. But Toledano had not really been happy. McCarthy was a "nihilist" who had damaged the conservative cause by irresponsible charges, such as the suggestion that General Marshall was a traitor. Buf-feted by Left and Right, Toledano arrived at a point where he felt he could neither defend nor attack McCarthy, so appalled was he by the passions of both sides.¹⁵⁰

The attitude of one of the principal figures in the conservative revival—Russell Kirk—is especially interesting, for in a sense Kirk was a man in the middle of this controversy. On the one hand, he was, like Viereck, a new conservative, a disciple of Burke, Tocqueville, Ortega, and Nock—critical of the masses, undiluted democracy, and "the silent tyranny of the majority."¹⁵¹ "I am," he wrote to Viereck,

a kind of American W.H. Mallock, devoted to the classical tradition in literature and society, wandering about to decaying country houses, and dedicated to the cause of conservatism in all things.¹⁵²

Intellectually and temperamentally he was worlds apart from Senator McCarthy. On the other hand, Kirk was a Midwesterner, an opponent of American foreign policy in World War II, and a supporter of Senator Taft for president in 1952.¹⁵³ If Viereck's sociological profile of provincial, "populist" McCarthyites is correct, there is some reason to expect that Kirk might have supported the Wisconsin senator in his heyday.

Perhaps because of his varied intellectual background, Kirk's position in the McCarthy affair cannot be characterized in a single phrase. Kirk was certainly no admirer of the senator: "I think of Joseph McCarthy substantially what I thought of Claude Pepper," he told Viereck.¹⁵⁴ Both men were demagogues. Nevertheless, Kirk was not prepared to dismiss utterly all the charges which McCarthy and his cohorts made.¹⁵⁵ He denounced the Tydings Committee's "indifference to truth" and indicated that he took seriously *The Web of Subversion* and *McCarthy and His Enemies*.¹⁵⁶ With particular relish he scoffed at the notion—spread by "doctrinaire liberals" like Henry Steele Commager and Harold Taylor—that America was in the grip of a near-fascist hysteria. The "curious pretended terror of Senator McCarthy," he called it, noting that "the dispute over loyalty has resulted in very little actual injustice or repression in America, as yet."¹⁵⁷ Like some other conservatives, Kirk believed that the McCarthy "menace" had been exaggerated.¹⁵⁸

Kirk's views on the loyalty-security issue were developed at length in

an article in *Confluence* in 1954. While calling the Buckley-Bozell effort a "sober and well-written book,"¹⁵⁹ Kirk dissociated himself from McCarthy. McCarthy had "abused" his privileges—and so had other senators:

But to endeavor to convince the friends of America abroad that Senator McCarthy is a dread menace to American society and to the future of humanity, as certain well-meaning "liberals" are doing, is to create a tempest in a teapot and to distort the truth about American politics. Senator Joe McCarthy, whatever one thinks of him, is not undemocratic, being the gift of the Congress of Industrial Organizations to America (which supported him against La Follette) and immensely popular in his own state. Neither does he have any totalitarian program; he has no program at all; he is, instead, in the old line of destructive critics in the American Congress whose function it is to bedevil the executive arm of government for good or ill.¹⁶⁰

McCarthy was really a product of a vacuum in the Senate, a vacuum left by the death of Taft. Kirk was severely critical of liberals who, having cheered such demagogic investigations as the Nye Committee's exposé of the "merchants of death" in the 1930s,¹⁶¹ now professed alarm about investigations of Communism. In fact, he strongly implied, the rise of McCarthy was in part the fault of the sinful liberals. Americans in the 1950s were properly anxious to secure "loyalty toward the prescriptive values of American society."

This is not a loyalty to be derided.... If already certain ugly and ominous tendencies may be discerned in the American insistence upon "loyalty," I suspect that these are the consequences of the mocking of loyalty among many of the *illuminati*, for some years past, and of a growing realization that many persons endowed by the public with high responsibilities had lost all idea of what is loyalty to a nation's traditions.¹⁶²

Not surprisingly, Kirk's position failed to satisfy Peter Viereck. When Viereck attempted to organize conservative intellectuals to oppose McCarthy, Kirk refused—repelled, he later said, by Viereck's overzealous "reverse McCarthyism."¹⁶³ Several years later Viereck would accuse Kirk and his "group" of being "McCarthy-corrupted" and of failing to repudiate the "dangerous" senator from Wisconsin.¹⁶⁴

Thus a fair number of conservative intellectuals—particularly the new conservatives—remained in varying degrees aloof from McCarthy.

But the pressures of the controversy were intense and virtually insupportable to avoid. In many cases they hardened the intellectual Right. The careers of two men, William Rusher and James Burnham, exemplify this effect.

Born in 1923 in Chicago of Republican parents (his mother was from Alf Landon's home town), Rusher moved to New York City at an early age and grew up as a moderate-liberal Republican. A supporter of Landon for president in 1936 and of Wendell Willkie in 1940, Rusher dedicated his senior thesis at Princeton in 1943 to Willkie and supported Dewey in 1948. During the postwar years he was "fascinated and surprised" by the House Un-American Activities Committee's exposure of Communism in government; he was affected by the conviction of Alger Hiss, Truman's dismissal of General MacArthur from the Korean War command, and, especially, by *Witness*. Still, in 1952, Rusher was an Eisenhower Republican; he had never been an isolationist and had been little interested in the *laissez-faire* economics of *The Freeman*.

The McCarthy controversy helped push Rusher further Right. Although never temperamentally attuned to McCarthy, Rusher was "totally sickened" by the "dishonest" attack that the liberals launched against him. By 1954, Rusher was disillusioned with Eisenhower as well, in part because of the President's role in the McCarthy affair, and was "ripe" for the founding of *National Review*, to which he became a charter subscriber in 1955. Rusher, a lawyer, served as a special counsel to the Senate Internal Security Subcommittee in 1956 and 1957, when he became publisher of *National Review*. The liberal, Eastern-oriented Republican had, thanks in part to McCarthyism, become a dedicated conservative.¹⁶⁵

The effect of the controversy on Burnham was similarly harsh. Shortly after World War II, Burnham still considered himself a man of the anti-Communist Left—rather like Sidney Hook.¹⁶⁶ He remained on *Partisan Review* even while contributing to right-wing journals and assisting a congressional investigation. By 1953, however, Burnham was no longer comfortable at *Partisan Review*. In a letter severing his last ties with the Left, he noted that many felt his presence there an "anomaly" and that the journal seemed to regard "McCarthyism" as "the dominant issue." But, he insisted, it was *not* the dominant issue; in fact "McCarthyism" was "an invention of the Communist tacticians, who launched it and are exploiting it." Burnham professed to be neither "pro" nor "anti" McCarthy the man; like all politicians' records, McCarthy's was a mixture of good and bad. But Burnham refused to be part of an Eastern intellectual anti-McCarthy crusade abhorrently reminiscent of the Red Decade. He there-

fore resigned from *Partisan Review*;¹⁶⁷ two years later he became a founding editor of the militantly conservative *National Review*.

Obviously, then, the McCarthy episode had a traumatic importance for the American intellectual Right that far transcended the day-to-day argument about loyalty risks, security clearances, and McCarthy's methods. During these years and long afterward, many conservative intellectuals strove to understand what the larger significance of the uproar was. To William Rusher, the key to the dispute lay in the peculiar circumstances of 1950. The conviction of Hiss, he claimed, was the "nadir" of liberalism: guilt ridden and defensive, the liberals "desperately needed an issue upon which to base a counterattack against their tormentors." McCarthy's speech at Wheeling supplied it—so they thought. But when McCarthy, astonishingly, refused to budge, the liberals were driven to escalate the conflict and obtain "some symbolic act of judgment." When that judgment—censure by the Senate—was finally attained, the furor over McCarthyism disappeared.¹⁶⁸ Others emphasized the cleavage between the intellectuals and the rest of the country as a significant element in the turmoil. This, in part, was Viereck's analysis; it was also, in part, Buckley's. To Buckley the country consisted of two groups: the "university crowd" and the "non-university crowd"; Joe McCarthy appealed to the latter. In doing so, he could not, Buckley argued, use the "protocol" of the graduate student. To make his point he had to be blunt and audacious.¹⁶⁹ Many others also interpreted the debate in terms of a compromised elite versus the mass of the country.¹⁷⁰

A few years after the affair subsided, James Burnham assessed its larger significance. Clearly something more than the number of Communists in government was at stake. According to Burnham, during the 1930s and much of the 1940s Communism was "legitimized within most of the structure of our community"; it did not hurt anyone to be known as a Communist. But as the cold war intensified, the United States deliberately engaged in "a non-violent manhunt" designed to extirpate Communism as a legitimate force in American life. The "basic strata of citizens" had come to the conclusion that Communists did not belong here, that "the line must be drawn somewhere." And this decision, said Burnham, was resisted by the liberals. Therein lay the crisis of the 1950s:

The issue was philosophical, metaphysical: what kind of community are we? And the Liberals, including the rationally anti-Communist Liberals, were correct in labeling McCarthy The Enemy, and in destroying him. From the Liberal standpoint—

secularist, egalitarian, relativist—the line is not drawn, Relativism must be Absolute.¹⁷¹

As Burnham's article revealed, McCarthyism furnished the context for the emergence of one of the principal elements of conservative thought since 1945: the critique of the liberal theory of the open society. In a sense, McCarthyism *was* this critique. With typical fearlessness, Buckley and Bozell led the way. No society, they contended, has ever been or ever can be totally "open" or totally indifferent to its central values.

Not only is it *characteristic* of society to create institutions and to defend them with sanctions. Societies *must* do so—or else they cease to exist. The members of a society must share certain values if that society is to cohere; and cohere it must if it is to survive. In order to assert and perpetuate these values, it must do constant battle against competing values....

A hard and indelible fact of freedom is that a conformity of sorts is always dominant.... [Therefore] the freeman's principal concern is that it shall be a conformity that honors the values he esteems rather than those he rejects.¹⁷²

Liberals, they continued, were hypocritical in pretending that they opposed all orthodoxy; in reality the liberals merely wanted to impose their own "conformity—with Liberalism"¹⁷³

The question of orthodoxy, the two authors maintained, was the heart of the McCarthy issue. Yes, they said, America was indeed "rallying around an orthodoxy": the exclusion of Communism from respectability and influence in national life. Yes, they cheerfully admitted, McCarthyism was indeed solidifying "conformity"—"on the *Communist issue*." This was the meaning of the Smith Act, the McCarran Act, and various "social sanctions" being imposed against domestic Communists and their sympathizers. The American people, Buckley and Bozell argued, had carefully examined and "emphatically rejected" the claims of Communism. Now, embroiled in a worldwide war against Communism, they were moving—deliberately, properly, and by means of McCarthyism—to penalize and curtail an unassimilable philosophy and "those in our land who help the enemy."¹⁷⁴

At times Buckley and Bozell seemed uneasy about the possible implications of their argument. After all, Buckley in particular had been influenced by libertarianism and knew personally both Albert Jay Nock and Frank Chodorov. How, then, could he propose "conformity"? The two young authors therefore stressed that McCarthyism was aimed "not

at *new* ideas but at *Communist* ideas" and that it was not likely to go beyond that limitation. Moreover, they noted that McCarthyism was "nine parts social sanction to one part legal sanction," and even the legal restriction of freedom was slight compared to "the total tyranny of compulsory military service." They cautioned the "balanced libertarian" to apply legal curbs only when "the exigencies of the situation" require them. But—and here was the transitional argument—that time was now.¹⁷⁵

The Buckley-Bozell attack upon the "open society" was unmistakably dependent on the theories of a man who had been their teacher and friend at Yale: the political scientist Willmoore Kendall. Indeed, there is evidence to suggest that Kendall himself may have written part of *McCarthy and His Enemies*.¹⁷⁶ A native of Oklahoma, a Rhodes Scholar in the 1930s, Kendall had been a man of the far Left in the Red Decade. But by the late 1940s he was known as a defender of Whittaker Chambers and a vehement, articulate critic of liberalism.¹⁷⁷

Never one to be cautious, Kendall argued daringly in his dissertation in 1941 that John Locke, far from being a devotee of inalienable natural rights, had actually been a majority-rule democrat.¹⁷⁸ This was what Kendall called himself in the early cold war years, and what he meant by it he made clear in a letter in 1949. It was "not only the right but the *duty*" of the members of a democracy "to use public policy as an instrument for creating the kind of society their values call for..." As an "old fashioned majority-rule democrat," he rejected as inherently undemocratic any effort to limit majorities by bills of rights. Discussing the Nixon-Mundt bill to control Communism, Kendall suggested deportation as a possible sanction against Communists. (Back in the 1930s, the sanction would have applied to Nazis, too.) Kendall acknowledged that "liquidation of a minority" must be a very careful undertaking. But he insisted on two principles:

...a) that a democratic society that has a meaning to preserve, as I think ours still does, must stand prepared to make such decisions, and b) that the surest way for it to lose its meaning is for it to tell itself, and its potential dissidents, that where dissidence is concerned, the sky's the limit.

In another letter several years later Kendall amplified his point. *His* campaign against Communists would not depend, as Buckley's and Bozell's ultimately did, on proving that domestic Communists were a clear and present danger. Indeed, at the moment they were not a *clear* and *present* danger at all. His argument was different: "we do not make sense as a

community so long as we tolerate Communists and pro-Communists in our midst." Or as he put it on another occasion, "The reason for striking at [domestic] Communists is not so much that they are dangerous as that they are incapable of participating in democratic government."¹⁷⁹ Kendall's breathtaking majoritarianism was diametrically opposed to the natural rights philosophy which undergirded so much of the concurrent libertarian conservative revival. It was also, needless to say, anathema to the civil libertarian Left in the McCarthy era.

A few years after the McCarthy episode faded into history, Kendall attempted to explain the true meaning of McCarthyism. The basic issue had not been McCarthy himself; after all, people were "mad" at one another in the Hiss case, long before McCarthy was heard of. Nor had the issue simply been one of different opinions about the seriousness of the Communist threat; this answer could not explain the intensity of the dispute—indeed, its "civil war dimension." The issue had not been one of the executive versus the legislative branch, either; people do not become *that* angry over abstract "separation of powers." The clue to the proper explanation, rather, lay in the fact that each side was really accusing the other of "heresy." The battle was a debate ("with genuine civil war potential") over the fundamental nature of American society. Were we or were we not an "open society"? Could the United States proscribe and "persecute" an "undesirable" movement like the Communists *even if* there were no immediate peril? Did the United States have a consensus—an orthodoxy—which could be defended by legal and other sanctions? Were all questions "open" questions, or did we hold certain truths to be beyond dispute? In all the confusion and maneuvering of the battle, said Kendall, "McCarthyites" (that is, broadly speaking, the Right) answered these questions one way, and "anti-McCarthyites" (the Left) answered other. The McCarthy episode was thus an intellectual and spiritual crisis of the gravest dimensions.¹⁸⁰

Kendall was not the only conservative intellectual to plead for orthodoxy and to attack the purely open society. In the same period Peter Viereck, while solicitous of civil liberties and hostile to "thought-control nationalists," called America a properly "semi-closed" society and criticized the "liberalism of suicide" which would allow "a communist military conspiracy" to function as "a political party."¹⁸¹ Similarly, the conservative émigré sociologist Ernest van den Haag argued that the outlawing of groups with subversive and totalitarian aims was quite compatible with democratic principles.¹⁸² But it was Kendall who articulated most systematically this fundamental challenge to liberal theories. It was

one of his principal contributions to postwar American conservative thought.

Clearly, then, the inner civil war of the McCarthy years elicited a variety of interpretations of its meaning for conservatives. But whatever their divergent emphases, on one point, at least, many conservatives would have agreed: the crusade of Joseph McCarthy had drawn many of them together in a bruising, common struggle and had helped to forge part of the conservative movement.

Yet it is probable that many conservatives came to realize that this was not sufficient compensation for the defeat they received. For the extraordinarily bitter McCarthy affair¹⁸³ was, in a larger sense, a defeat.¹⁸⁴ Ralph de Toledano sensed this in 1960 when he wrote sadly, "We became partisans, and by the dialectics of the situation, we took over some of the characteristics of our antagonists—thereby losing the sense of moral ascendancy we had until then enjoyed."¹⁸⁵ But more than that was involved. If McCarthyism helped shape the conservative intellectual movement, it also left that movement weakened and defensive; the ghost of McCarthy has remained a burden upon it. In 1971, William F. Buckley, Jr. reflected on this fact. Up to 1954, he observed, most conservatives had supported McCarthy, "however fastidiously." Then they began to turn, particularly after McCarthy attacked President Eisenhower.¹⁸⁶ In the turmoil of the Wisconsin senator's downfall, the "backlash" set the conservative cause back to the pre-McCarthy period. Many liberals, according to Buckley, had "genocidal urges" toward any conservatives who had ever defended McCarthy. Right-wing columnists George Sokolsky and Fulton Lewis, Jr. lost business because of their support of the senator. Nearly two decades later, Buckley himself still received criticism because of his earlier support of the Wisconsin senator. He therefore concluded that the whole controversy had injured conservatism "a good deal."¹⁸⁷

For better or for worse, the domestic cold war branded the American Right for a generation.

By 1955 the contours of conservatism had in some ways changed considerably from those of fifteen or even ten years earlier. Global anti-Communism had triumphed over "isolationism"; the exigencies of the cold war conflicted, at times, with the tenacious antistatism characteristic of much of the Right. The magnitude of this transition was rendered even more striking by the fact that many conservatives of 1955—including

ing some of the most militant anti-Communists—had been "isolationists" (even, in some cases, members of America First) before Pearl Harbor. The list included John Chamberlain, Frank Chodorov, William Henry Chamberlin, Henry Regnery, Devin Garrity, William F. Buckley, Jr., Russell Kirk, and Edmund Opitz. Two questions therefore arise: How easy was the transition? How did conservatives rationalize it?

The tensions between "Old Right" nationalism and "New Right" internationalism were repeatedly evident in the postwar decade. In 1947, for instance, James Burnham opposed the rapid demobilization that had followed the war;¹⁸⁸ yet only three years earlier, Sergeant Russell Kirk, then in the army, had vigorously applauded demobilization and had skeptically noted the army leadership's distrust of the Communists. In 1944 Kirk predicted that New Dealers would prolong the state of war after the Axis powers' defeat in order to maintain prosperity. They would justify keeping men in arms (and off the job market) by *creating* an enemy: Russia.¹⁸⁹ While Burnham, formulating global strategy in 1947, considered conscription a sheer necessity, Kirk and many others regarded it as "slavery."¹⁹⁰ In 1947 the isolationist-revisionist Harry Elmer Barnes castigated Burnham's *The Struggle for the World* as "the most dangerous and 'un-American' book of the year." It was, Barnes claimed, "a blueprint for aggressive war" and "confirmation" of his thesis that World War II would cause "the ultimate triumph of Hitlerian attitudes and policies in this country."¹⁹¹ Felix Morley, an editor of *Human Events*, was similarly alarmed. He accused Burnham, "as a former Marxist," of failing to understand American traditions and principles. While Morley shared Burnham's anti-Communism and agreed that "we must stop trying to appease" the Russians, Burnham's book revealed that "the very real threat of Soviet Russia... will be utilized to advocate the dissolution of the American Republic" and "the establishment of an American empire in its place."¹⁹²

Later, during the Korean war, Leonard Read at the Foundation for Economic Education criticized American intervention in that conflict. In a celebrated pamphlet, *Conscience on the Battlefield*, Read repudiated the justification of Korea on anti-Communist grounds alone. Coercion of men to fight there was wrong; indeed, coercion was "the essential characteristic of communism." If Americans really believed that Korea was so vital to their country's security, Read implied, they would go to Korea on their own free will. But "this war could not have happened short of involuntary service." Moreover, "...interference in strange areas may make you the initiator of violence rather than the protector of

rectitude." And initiation of violence was evil. "To fight evil with evil is only to make evil general."¹⁹³ Read's article, which he considers the best piece he ever wrote, aroused a considerable stir on the Right.¹⁹⁴ It revealed starkly the simmering divergence of views in the heterogeneous conservative intellectual movement.

Another product of the friction between Old Right and New Right was the resignation of Felix Morley as an editor of *Human Events* in 1950. As a classical liberal, antimilitarist, and anti-imperialist, Morley often found himself at odds with coeditor Frank Hanighen about foreign policy issues in the late 1940s. When Morley unhappily concluded that "the Communist grip on Eastern Europe could not and would not be shaken," he urged *Human Events* to support the strengthening of "the German and Japanese barriers to Communism but avoid any direct affronts to Russia...." Hanighen disagreed and argued (according to Morley) that Morley was "tending to be soft on Communism."¹⁹⁵ Morley returned from a trip to Europe in 1949 "with doubts about the value of the Cold War" and a desire to secure full editorial control of *Human Events*. When, in 1950, Hanighen and Henry Regnery (the other two stockholders of *Human Events*) rejected Morley's proposal, he resigned. A generation later, Morley stated that the "cleavage" between himself and Hanighen had reflected the developing differences between Old Right and New—"between a generally pacific, even isolated, America and an actively interventionist America."¹⁹⁶

The foreign policy differences among conservatives were felt with special force by William Henry Chamberlin and William F. Buckley, Jr. In a letter in July 1949, Chamberlin praised Senator Robert Taft for his integrity and domestic record but lamented his opposition to NATO. Taft was "so dreadfully wrongheaded" in foreign affairs; if Taft were to be opposed by a liberal but anti-Communist Democrat for President in 1952, Chamberlin said he would face a "painful dilemma."¹⁹⁷ Buckley was also aware of the tensions. An enthusiastic America Firster in 1941,¹⁹⁷ he was, as the pupil of both Nock and Kendall, almost the personification of the conflicting strands of conservative thought. In an election year essay in 1952, Buckley's ambivalence was acute. While the first half of his article bristled with references to Nock, Herbert Spencer, and the "Leviathan State," the second half declared that "the thus far invincible aggressiveness of the Soviet Union" was a "menace to our freedom" and even to American survival. Rather gloomily he concluded that until Communism ceased to endanger us, we would have to acquiesce in the Big Government required to defeat it.¹⁹⁸ The foreign danger came first.

These tensions and pressures burst forth in 1954 and 1955 in a series of polemics in the conservative press. In *Faith and Freedom*, Murray Rothbard debated William Henry Chamberlin and William Schlammm, a former adviser to Henry Luce. In *The Freeman* Schlammm and Frank Chodorov exchanged fusillades. The arguments of the isolationist libertarians (Rothbard and Chodorov) were essentially twofold. First, they denied that the Soviet Union posed any immediate military threat to the United States. The United States had not been attacked, said Rothbard; both men insisted that Russia's recent territorial conquests were a source of weakness. Secondly, both feared that war would enhance the powers of government and destroy liberty at home. The real enemy, they strenuously declared, was the State, of which Communism was but one variant. In reply, Schlammm (a German ex-Communist) and Chamberlin (a former sympathizer with the "Russian experiment") declared vehemently that the Communist threat was imminent and ominous. Communism was *inherently* expansionary, totalitarian, unappeasable, and "incurably aggressive"; the Soviet goal was world conquest. Later, writing in the *New Leader*, Chamberlin characterized as "appeasement" Rothbard's suggestion that the United States trade with the Communists and abandon all its foreign bases. Chamberlin denied that he was advocating crusading liberal internationalism. Invoking the Taft-conservative language of national interest, he contended simply that "vital interests" of the nation were definitely at stake abroad.¹⁹⁹

Viewing this developing controversy in 1954, Buckley was pessimistic. The dispute between what he called "liberation or interventionist conservatives" and "containment conservatives" represented "an enormous fissure" in the Right, and he was certain that the movement would be harmed by it.²⁰⁰ In a sense the young activist was correct; in intellectual terms, the two sides were irreconcilable. But in immediate, practical terms, no cataclysmic fissure occurred. The unmistakable tendency of conservative thought was illuminated early in 1955 by that sensitive barometer, Buckley himself. Commenting on the Schlammm-Chodorov exchange, Buckley conceded that the future might bring "both war and slavery." Still, he would rather take his chances later with a powerful domestic State than adopt a foreign policy that would allow Communism to conquer the world. He therefore counted himself, "dejectedly, among those who favor a carefully planned showdown, and who are prepared to go to war to frustrate communist designs."²⁰¹ The anti-Communists had won the mind of Buckley and the great bulk of the Right.

One of the most notable features of the transition, as both Buckley

and Rothbard later agreed,²⁰² was precisely the ease with which it occurred. The debates did not last very long, really; the movement was not substantially ruptured. How was it possible? How could such an apparently massive shift take place so smoothly? Four factors account for this remarkable development. First, as Rothbard has noted, the hard-core "isolationist" Old Right was weakened by attrition in the 1950s. Senator Taft died in 1953; the anti-imperialist journalist Garet Garrett (one of Rothbard's heroes) died a year later; Frank Chodorov suffered a paralyzing stroke in the late 1950s. Leonard Read and his colleagues at FEE, after venturing into the Korean war debate, withdrew. Rothbard said, into their more conventional, nonpolitical activities. Rothbard himself drifted away. After supporting Senator Everett Dirksen of Illinois for president in 1952 (he considered Senator Taft a compromising "Socialist sellout"), Rothbard left the Republican Party when Eisenhower "stole" the nomination from Taft. In the mid-1950s, despite his debates on foreign policy, he exerted no significant influence on the Right. Second, according to Rothbard the social base of the Old Right—the Protestant Midwest—yielded in preeminence to the rising Eastern, urban Roman Catholics for whom people like Buckley allegedly spoke.²⁰³ Certainly there is a measure of truth in this observation. A disproportionate number of conservative intellectuals in the 1950s were Catholics, at a time when the Church, headed by Pope Pius XII, was uncompromisingly anti-Communist. Nor should one overlook the fact that many Catholics by birth or ancestry were from Eastern Europe and were thus doubly cognizant of Communism. All these factors tended, no doubt, to pull conservatism—both intellectually and politically—out of the orbit of the Old Right.

A third important lubricant of the transition was the simple fact that for most conservative intellectuals the world of 1955 looked very different from the world of 1940. Hence, American foreign policy, to some degree, had to be different also. Europe and Asia did not seem so remote any longer. This factor explains in particular William Henry Chamberlin's conversion from isolationism. In 1940, he later wrote, there were two evil nations, Germany and Russia; Chamberlin had hoped to balance them off and let them destroy each other. As a result of World War II and the resultant rise of the Soviet Union, such "maneuvering" was now impossible: "There is no balance of power in the world—except as we supply it ourselves."²⁰⁴ The United States must fill the vacuum.

Finally, despite the complaints in the 1950s of extreme antistatists like Chodorov and Rothbard, and despite the ambivalence of Buckley, active anti-Communism at home and abroad fitted in very well with other

strands of the multifaceted conservative intellectual revival. Most libertarians, for instance, did *not* feel any burning inconsistency between support for individual liberty (especially economic liberty) at home and tough anti-Communism either at home or abroad. The former depended on the latter. Indeed, for libertarians such as Chamberlin, Frank Meyer, and Max Eastman, the experience of Communism—its deification of the State, among other things—actually reinforced and motivated their acceptance of a free-market, limited-government philosophy. Eastman's *Reflections on the Failure of Socialism*, for example, was replete with condemnations of socialism and Communism, and encomiums of the "only" alternative—capitalism.²⁰⁵

Even the purest antistatists, Chodorov and Rothbard, shared at times in the anti-Communist crusade. After all, Chodorov himself was a partial supporter of McCarthy, who, he said, demonstrated the "ubiquity" of Communists in the government. McCarthy's only mistake, the arch-individualist continued, was that he did not go far enough: "The only thing to do, if you want to rid the bureaucracy of Communists, is to abolish the bureaucracy."²⁰⁶ Rothbard was similarly inclined; when he read in the *New York Times* that McCarthy was destroying the morale of the executive branch, he was delighted.²⁰⁷ Not all the ex-Communists or anti-Communists adopted libertarian economics; James Burnham was one conspicuous exception,²⁰⁸ Willmoore Kendall another. But many did—enthusiastically—and felt quite comfortable with their position. After all, why shouldn't we be anti-Communist? Isn't Communism the negation of everything we believe in?

The revolt against Communism was also easily integrated with traditionalist, often religious conservatism. Was not Communism a secular, atheistic, messianic challenge to the Christian West? Was this not the lesson of *Witness*, the lesson dramatized by the return to religion of such former Communists as Louis Budenz and Bella Dodd? Were not the anti-Communist critics of the "open" society saying essentially what many traditionalists were simultaneously observing about the roots of totalitarianism? That the open, indifferent, permissive society was an empty society. That without values, without absolutes, without consensus, a civilization would degenerate into moral anarchy and eventual tyranny. Ex-Communists and traditionalists agreed that liberalism—the ideology of openness—was, in John Hallowell's words, an "invitation to suicide." Was not Communism an excellent example of all that the traditionalists feared?

Anti-Communism, in short, was for the most part easily assimilated into the conservative credo of the 1950s. Both libertarians and tradition-

alists discerned in the "god that failed" a case study for their deepest convictions. Communism was a threat to liberty *and* tradition. If conservatism in 1955 was an amalgam, anti-Communism was a vital part of its cement.

In addition to their global perspective, their knowledge of Communism, and their criticism of the "treason" of the intellectuals,²⁰⁹ the anti-Communists and ex-Communists brought to early postwar conservatism two noteworthy characteristics. First, in contrast to the elitist concept of the Remnant and the disdain for "crowd culture" that permeated much libertarian and traditionalist thinking in these years, the ex-radicals and anti-Communists began to apotheosize Middle America. Whittaker Chambers noted that common people, humble people, "the plain men and women of the nation," had stood by him in his need. James Burnham, leaving the "ingrown" East and driving across the continent in 1948-1949, was almost lyrical in his description of the country. "The United States," he concluded, "is not, not by centuries, ready to quit." Willmoore Kendall, Oklahoma-born, urged in 1950 that foreign policy be based on "the native good sense of the American people." William Schlam, introducing the Buckley-Bozell book, observed approvingly that Joseph McCarthy had come out of "the heartland of America."²⁰¹ Was this sympathy for the American people an unconscious reflection of the ex-Communists' Marxist past? Was this a right-wing variant of the almost mystical faith in the virtue and good sense of the masses? Perhaps. But it was more. If the passions of the cold war drove some pluralist liberals to criticize "populism" and the mass society,²¹¹ these pressures also generated among some conservatives a hitherto forbidden identification with the people. On the Communist issue some conservatives sensed that *they* were on the popular side. This new and more optimistic mood was not dominant—not yet. But in the raging storms of the McCarthy era one catches the first glimpses of later conservative praise for the "silent majority."

Second, the ex-radicals and their allies brought to the conservative intellectual movement the evangelical vigor of an ideological crusade. They supplied much of the "zeal," the "ginger," the "tone"²¹²—and helped the articulate Right to acquire a fervent mass following for the first time in years. In part their almost apocalyptic sense of urgency was probably due to the expectation of war. In 1947, James Burnham wondered whether war would break out before his book reached the public. In 1950, just after the Korean conflict began, Peter Viereck wrote that we had only "thirty days to save the peace" by warning the Soviets that we would fight

to prevent any impending move against Yugoslavia, Berlin, or Iran.²¹³ Willmoore Kendall's letters during the early 1950s often expressed the belief that a world war would break out soon.²¹⁴ In part this urgency reflected the bitter suspicion of betrayal. Moreover, what if it *really* was too late? What if Whittaker Chambers was right: that the West really was the losing side?

Chambers himself was at times bleakly pessimistic, Nock-like in his resignation. In 1954 he wrote to Buckley:

No, I no longer believe that political solutions are possible for us... The enemy—he is ourselves. That is why it is idle to talk about preventing the wreck of Western civilization. It is already a wreck from within. That is why we can hope to do little more now than snatch a fingernail of a saint from the rack or a handful of ashes from the faggots, and bury them secretly in a flowerpot against the day, ages hence, when a few men begin again to dare to believe that there was once something else, that something else is thinkable, and need some evidence of what it was, and the fortifying knowledge that there were those who, at the great nightfall, took loving thought to preserve the tokens of hope and truth.²¹⁵

Most conservative intellectuals did not share Chambers's despair. But in the background...

"C'est la lutte finale" — "Tis the final struggle."

So goes the "Internationale." Partly via the ex-Communists and their supporters, this crusading spirit came to pervade the Right and to make post-war intellectual conservatism a fighting faith.