Wives, Mothers, and the Red Menace

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Wives, Mothers, and the Red Menace: Conservative Women and the Crusade against Communism.
Even though women in post–World War II America were largely concerned with family and domestic responsibilities, they were soon forced to recognize the importance of events throughout the world. Soviet domination of Eastern European nations seemed unbreakable, while Mao’s victory over the U.S.-backed Nationalists raised new worries about the security of Asia. Moreover, the Soviets’ successful detonation of an atomic bomb raised the stakes to terrifying levels. Confused and frustrated, Americans wondered how their government, which had so competently dispatched the Japanese and Germans simultaneously, seemed so incapable of stopping the rapid spread of communism all over the globe. Anticommmunist women thus had little choice but to address issues of American foreign policy in an effort to defend the United States against the spread of communism.
In turning their attention to foreign policy, anticommunist women utilized all the weapons in their arsenal to mount a counterattack. Their newsletters alerted their less-aware compatriots of the threats events in other countries posed for America and stressed the necessity for the U.S. government to form an effective foreign policy to counter these dangers. As guest speakers at luncheons for women’s clubs as well as in letters to prominent people, anticommunist women lectured about the seriousness of the situation Americans faced, challenged their audiences to join the struggle, and pressured political leaders to take a stronger stand against the Red menace. A number of women wrote books explaining the background of the current crisis in an attempt to deepen the public’s sense of outrage and broaden their understanding of the state of the world.

These women’s efforts helped shape the anticommunist discourse as it related to the conduct of American foreign policy. Excluded from positions of power within the foreign policy establishment, the women nevertheless affected a portion of the public’s understanding of the international situation. Many Americans did not have access to detailed information about worldwide events. Busy mothers and housewives in particular got their news from catching snippets of radio broadcasts, skimming newspapers, or gossiping with their neighbors. At a club luncheon, however, they listened to speakers addressing foreign policy; they might also peruse a newsletter or glance at a book suggested by their bridge partners. With this information, they made decisions about which politicians to support and which causes deserved donations. With a few notable exceptions, such as Margaret Chase Smith and Phyllis Schlafly, anticommunist women lacked direct access to real political power or a national audience; still, through their everyday efforts, they played a significant role in describing the Cold War for the American people.

Anticommunist women who wanted to influence the U.S. government’s decisions concerning events around the world faced an impenetrable foreign policy establishment. Labeled the “Imperial Brotherhood” by historian Robert Dean, the men who dominated the State Department during much of the twentieth century shared class as well as gender characteristics. They attended the same prep schools and Ivy League universities, joined the same clubs, and worked for many of the same law firms or corporations. The version of masculinity preached and accepted by this elite emphasized conformity to the established order, obedience to those in authority, loyalty to one’s
class, and knowledge of that class’s superiority. Applauding athletic
ability, physical strength, and aggressive spirit on the playing field,
these men carried the same values into their adult relationships
and careers. Dean’s research and the earlier work of Richard Barnet
indicate that these men formed a foreign policy elite that controlled
many offices in the State Department and made most key decisions
concerning foreign affairs. Their worldview excluded women except
as victims, wives, or mothers.¹

Denied access to formal power, anticommunist women found
alternate methods of influencing the national debate over foreign
policy. Senator Margaret Chase Smith, the woman who held the
highest political office among the anticommunist women, fought long
and hard and finally had to obtain considerable support from well-
placed male senators before she won a position on the Armed Services
Committee.² In the meantime, she joined numerous other female activ-
ists in giving speeches on foreign affairs. Other women used newslet-
ters or books as a platform to try to encourage Americans to join their
crusade against communism and to force government policy makers
to stand tough against the Soviets and the Chinese. Some women
utilized their positions as wives of powerful men to play a role in inter-
national relations. The correspondence between Elizabeth Churchill
Brown, wife of journalist Constantine Brown, and Francesca Rhee,
wife of Syngman Rhee, president of South Korea, provides an inter-
esting example. Mrs. Brown and Mrs. Rhee frequently commented
on world events and served as conduits of information for and about
their husbands. At one point, for example, Rhee “wish[ed] a newspa-
perman” would question President Eisenhower about a certain policy
in hopes of getting Ike to change his stance on the issue. She did not
want Brown’s husband to do so, perhaps because of their known asso-
ciation, but she thought the question needed to be asked.³ Like count-
less women across the country, Liz Brown took any opportunities that
presented themselves to educate the public.

Liz was hardly alone. Anticommunists spent much of their time
presenting their version of the complicated foreign policy situation
in which the United States found itself. Since few Americans, male
or female, thoroughly understood what was going on in Europe or
Asia, most knowledgeable anticommunists attempted to explain
the key issues in simple terms. The American public might lack the
knowledge, ability, or desire to discern the intricacies of the Yalta
Agreement, for example, but they immediately comprehended the
accusation that President Franklin Delano Roosevelt “surrendered to Russian imperialism” and gave Eastern Europe to the Soviets. Since conservatives already thought of FDR as the Antichrist because of the New Deal’s social welfare legislation, they readily accepted anticommunists’ version of Roosevelt’s failures. Similarly, the anticomunist argument had appeal for Americans with religious or ethnic ties to the peoples of Eastern Europe who had watched in frustrated anger as the Iron Curtain cut them off from their compatriots. In a widely distributed report prepared for fellow Roman Catholics, John F. Cronin explained that the Soviets were bent on world domination and intended to take over all of Europe before moving on to Asia and Africa. The U.S. government, he concluded, was aiding the communists by adopting a “do-nothing policy” that gave the Soviets a free hand. Again, conservative anticommunists found a receptive audience as they blamed Roosevelt and then Harry Truman for being too soft in responding to Soviet aggression.

Anticommunists were further outraged by the U.S. government’s response to the situation in Asia. In fact, for some anticommunists, particularly those with more conservative leanings, their concerns about Asia—especially China—far outweighed their fears about Europe. Known as the China Lobby, these men fought to keep the situation in Asia before the American public. Time publisher Henry Luce, the son of a missionary to China, along with successful importer Alfred Kohlberg and California senator William Knowland, whose constant refrain won him the title “senator from Formosa,” used their influence to build support for Nationalist China generally and for Jiang Jieshi personally. These men had the financial means, as well as the access to political power and a national audience through various publications, to keep pressing Congress and the White House to fight the communists. They constantly reiterated the same message: Truman had “lost” China through incompetence at best and through deliberate action by communists working in the State Department at worst.

The outbreak of war in Korea added fuel to the anticommmunist conspiracy fires. According to the anticommmunist theory, Truman’s wimpy stance toward Mao and Red China had encouraged the North Koreans to attack the South. Right-wing columnist George Sokolsky argued, “[I]f our far eastern policy was not betrayed, why are we fighting in Korea?” Truman’s eventual firing of conservative hero General Douglas MacArthur further infuriated those on the Right.
by providing them with proof that Truman did not want to defeat communism. MacArthur, after all, agreed with them. In his famous (and career-ending) letter to House Minority Leader Joe Martin, MacArthur summed up the conservative viewpoint: “[H]ere [in Asia] we fight Europe’s war with arms while diplomats still fight with words. . . . [T]here is no substitute for victory.”8 (The general echoed the anticommmunist view that all communists, whether Chinese or Korean, still took their orders from Moscow. Hence, the real war should be fought in Europe.) Anticommmunists across the country lambasted Truman for firing the general. Indiana senator William Jenner demanded Truman’s impeachment for turning the country over to a “secret coterie” of communists, while a Chicago Tribune editorial advised that the nation was being “led by a fool surrounded by knaves.”9 Meanwhile, the fighting in Korea continued, frustrating a public that could not understand why a military machine that had crushed both Germany and Japan could not defeat North Korea. Anticommmunists, especially Republican ones, blamed the situation on the Democratic administration’s lack of will and understanding.

Consequently, many anticommmunists initially hailed the Republican Eisenhower’s election, assuming that he would take a stronger stand against the communist threat. His military background, political instincts, and active campaign against communists in the State Department greatly calmed the growing hysteria. Moreover, Eisenhower’s ending of the Korean conflict and his skillful handling of crises throughout the world reassured the general public that the Cold War had become manageable.10 Conservative anticommmunists were less impressed. Eisenhower’s campaign promise to liberate the captive nations of Eastern Europe and his appointment of John Foster Dulles as secretary of state heartened the Right momentarily. However, when Ike failed to come to the aid of Hungarians challenging Soviet domination in 1956, conservatives unleashed their anger at and frustration with his policies. His willingness to open a dialogue with Moscow sent some over the edge. Robert Welch, founder of the John Birch Society, went so far as to accuse the president of being a conscious agent of the communists.11

Other conflicts emerged between the president and conservative anticommmunists. One major issue that exploded during Ike’s tenure involved the relationship between the U.S. government and the United Nations. From its inception, the United Nations had given some conservative anticommmunists a queasy feeling. Old isolationists such
as Ohio senator Robert Taft feared the United Nations would force Americans into foreign wars. Over the years others, such as writers James Burnham and George Sokolsky, found that elements of UN policy made them uneasy. Appalled that the United States belonged to an organization in which the Soviets had so much influence, many worried that they were being led into “one world” government. For example, during his term as president of the American Bar Association, Frank Holman gave numerous speeches warning that the United States was at risk of becoming “a puppet state in a world-wide hegemony.” Of particular concern were the United Nations Educational, Social and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the UN Declaration on Human Rights, both of which contained what the Right perceived to be socialistic elements. In 1951, anticommunists across the country joined conservative Republicans in Congress in supporting the Bricker Amendment, a Senate resolution attempting to ensure that the United Nations could not make laws binding on U.S. citizens. Eisenhower vehemently opposed what he saw as an unconstitutional infringement on his presidential powers. The amendment was introduced in various forms throughout the mid-1950s. Conservative senators came close but never achieved the necessary votes to pass it.

Anticommunist women were very much a part of these arguments. Sometimes they sounded eerily like their male counterparts, shocking the public with their militancy. In other instances, however, women used their gender to add a unique perspective to the ongoing debate. Fear of communism compelled these women out of their homes and into the public arena to try to educate others about the seriousness of the situation. They were determined to convince Americans that communism could be stopped only if the people forced the government to take a firm stand. Driven by their concerns, they worked to frighten, challenge, or cajole other women to join the crusade. In so doing, they affected the language and imagery of the larger debate not only by feminizing anticommunism by bringing it into the home but also through their willingness to adopt a masculine stridency.

Crowning anticommunism with the mantle of patriotic motherhood proved a powerful lure for legitimizing women’s participation in politics. Instead of using maternalism to argue for pacifism as Women Strike for Peace had done, however, anticommunist women used motherhood to legitimize their more aggressive stance. Their biological makeup, some activists explained, provided women with knowledge men did not possess but that could—and should—influ-
ence governments. Because of their special insights, activists believed, women would not make the same mistakes men did when dealing with their enemies. Women would willingly do whatever was necessary to protect their offspring, whether the threat came from a foreign nation or ideology or an insidious influence within their own communities. They would even guard against women who did not carry out their maternal responsibilities as they should. Motherhood, like housewifery (discussed more fully in Chapter 4), legitimized women’s political involvement in any endeavor that protected their offspring.

In 1948, Congresswoman Frances Bolton explained the connection between motherhood and politics to participants at the Women’s Patriotic Conference on National Defense. This meeting, which had been held annually since the late 1920s, brought together representatives from various organizations including the Marine Corps League Auxiliary, Women of the Army and Navy Legion of Valor, Ladies Auxiliary of the Veterans of Foreign Wars, Daughters of the United States Army, National Women’s Relief Corps Auxiliary to the Grand Army of the Republic, and American Gold Mothers. Rejecting the idea that women represented a “poor downtrodden minority,” Bolton challenged women to play an active role in the defense of their country. “National defense,” she explained, consisted of more than the traditionally masculine “soldiers, trained reserves, guns, navies, planes and bombs.” Women might lack knowledge of these aspects of defense, but they had a “peculiar preparation” for involvement. Women knew, she stated, “that all birth is out of darkness through pain.” The birthing experience showed that women had the kind of “creative courage” necessary to go “down into the dark valley” and save the world. “This deep understanding of the meaning of suffering” gave women license to move into the male world of politics.17

Other anticommunist activists built on this image of mothers’ innate abilities to encourage female participation in their cause. Editors of New Mexico Women Speak agreed with Bolton that women had “a practical understanding of the worth of the family and the community.” As a result, more women had become involved in politics. They feared, however, that this was not enough. The editors felt there was a “great necessity for alarming the women of New Mexico of the dangers that beset them as individuals . . . [as well as] their state . . . and their country.”18 Leaders of the American Woman’s Party agreed that “woman power is mother power.” Since, in their view,
there was “no nobler human power” and “no power more just” than a mother’s influence, women had a duty to act.¹⁹

Their emphasis on a mother’s instinctual need to protect her offspring did not mean right-wing anticommunists were pacifists. Like earlier generations of conservative women, anticommunists during the 1950s and 1960s accepted the necessity of some wars to destroy great evils, such as communism and fascism. Moreover, conservative women tended to blame the communists for tricking gullible U.S. political leaders into military conflicts that drained American resources and morale. Once the United States was involved in a war, however, these women expected the government to do everything it could to protect their sons by fighting “to win.” As the victors in World War II, Americans should, anticommunists believed, be able to defeat easily anyone who challenged them. When victory proved more elusive, anticommunist women assumed communists must be undermining the war effort.²⁰

Generally, however, female anticommunists focused on many of the same issues and used many of the same images utilized by their male colleagues to describe the communist threat. Like anticommunist men, women who spoke out against communism tended to use dramatic phrases designed to shock and frighten their audiences. They obviously perceived communism as the most serious danger existing at the time and felt compelled to ensure that their listeners or readers understood this fact. Moreover, they hoped their words would persuade others to join their crusade against the Red menace.

In contrast to the public perception that women were only interested in home and family, these women crusaders spoke and wrote knowingly about foreign policy issues and expected their frequently all-female audiences to be interested in and capable of understanding the information. They used the recent past to discuss the state of affairs in Europe and Asia. They showed little hesitation in accusing U.S. government officials of making mistakes in dealing with both allies and enemies. Like their male counterparts, they assumed that their research and intelligence gave them every right to question U.S. government foreign policy decisions. They willingly waded into the fray without limiting their analysis to “womanly” topics.

Women, like many male anticommunists, focused on the atheistic basis of communism as the root of its problems. J. Edgar Hoover, for instance, said communists had no compass to guide their actions since they lacked any foundation in Judeo-Christian values. The absence
of core beliefs allowed communists to do whatever they deemed necessary to achieve their goals. One of those goals, anticommunists feared, was to eliminate religion wherever it existed. Arizonan Mrs. M. Conan’s concern over the communist threat drove her to send out her own newsletter to spread the word about those “demon-possessed persons.” She believed Soviet communists wanted to “control the world for Satan,” since they “hate God and all forms of religion.” Founded on “hatred and injustice,” the USSR, she claimed, had caused much of the suffering in postwar Europe. She included visual representations of her beliefs in her newsletter as well. One cartoon showed Stalin, his hands bloody, threatening Uncle Sam.  

Others focused on more earthly, but no less immoral, aspects of communism. Doloris Bridges, wife of the New Hampshire senator and an outspoken anticommunist crusader, for example, constantly reiterated communists’ wickedness in her speeches before women’s organizations. In one instance she lambasted the Soviet regime as a government of “pathological liars” that had proven over the years that its members could not be trusted. More shockingly, that same leadership, particularly Soviet premier Nikita Khrushchev, “close[d] his eyes to murder all around him.” Senator Margaret Chase Smith also blamed the Soviet and Chinese governments, rather than the people of those countries, for the situation. She emphasized that those leaders made false promises to their constituents; communists, she explained, guaranteed “the Chinese coolee [sic], the Hungarian peasant, the starving Rumanian” land reform and an improved lifestyle if they adopted communism. These desperate people, she implied, foolishly believed their conquerors. She did not want Americans to fall for the same tricks.  

Many anticommunist women shared the fear that the American people did not recognize the severity of the crisis and so would not step up to fight. Smith found it amazing that people criticized her for journeying to Moscow so she could see for herself how the Russians lived. She was “very glad” she had made the trip, since now she could tell Americans from firsthand experience “how lucky” they were not to be in Russia. In letters to her numerous correspondents, Elizabeth Churchill Brown described the American people as “amorphous” and worried that they would sleep through a communist takeover. While the rank and file clung to their false sense of security, she wrote, “the weak-kneed, the pinkoes and one-worlders” pressured the White House to get along with the Soviets. Without an effective counter-
balance, she worried that the “tides of evil” would overtake the free world. Helen Corson, another newsletter writer, put it more bluntly: “The only way to lick this hidden menace is for all free, God-loving people to unite in a strong opposition to them.” Corson cautioned her readers that the Reds would stir up trouble between the groups arrayed against communists. Without unity, she wrote, the free world would be doomed.  

These anticommunist women wanted Americans to lead the unity effort and take control of the worldwide anticommunist movement. The problem, they explained, was not just a lack of initiative on the part of the U.S. government. They also worried about Europeans who refused to follow American guidance and so risked being seduced by communism. Former ambassador to Italy and Congresswoman Clare Boothe Luce wrote General A. C. Wedemeyer in 1947 saying it was time for Americans to make up their minds whether to assume “the complete leadership of the democratic world or turn Europe and Asia over to the Soviets.” The devastation resulting from World War II made Europeans vulnerable to communist propaganda. Even though Mrs. Conan wrote in her newsletter that “much of Europe’s suffering [was] due to Russian plundering,” she fretted that the weak and starving people might succumb to Soviet seduction. Doloris Bridges, back from a 1947 tour of Europe, told her clubwoman audience about the malnutrition and hopelessness she had seen. She recommended that a “sensible, self-supporting program” be designed to prevent the growth of radicalism and to keep Europe from becoming a drag on the U.S. economy. Years later, she still worried about U.S. aid to Europe and its effect on the budget at home. She did not want American dollars “sent down the drain all over the world” by pouring funds into countries harboring communists or adopting socialist policies. Journalist Brown agreed. Her concern was less the U.S. economy and more the willingness of aid recipients to go their own way. Frequently warning her correspondents and readers about the treachery of America’s European allies, she predicted that a “neutralist Europe” would work to thaw the Cold War by encouraging talks between Americans and the Soviets.  

In addition to blaming American allies for communist victories around the world, many of the women found fault with various aspects of U.S. foreign policy. Margaret Chase Smith blamed Americans’ preoccupation with themselves for their having lost the propaganda war around the world. “We can’t get far,” she scolded the women
of the Rumford Rotary-Lions club, “by telling the poverty stricken people of how wonderful life in America is with cars, homes, television sets, refrigerators, washing machines.” Instead, she advocated teaching these people how the American system would “actually and specifically . . . bring such things to them in their own country.” With her Yankee practicality and frugality, Smith assumed that plans to bring about a change in living conditions would attract more converts than philosophical tracts preaching the wonders of capitalism and democracy.26

Others saw the problem in broader terms. Since the earliest days of the Cold War, some anticommunists had worried that government officials did not truly understand the problem they faced. According to these individuals, although American leaders said they were fighting the communists, the truth contradicted them. For example, the Women Investors Research Institute (WIRI) warned that American foreign policy “ignore[d] the very heart of Stalin’s program to conquer the world.” WIRI members looked to history to understand current Soviet actions. Stalin’s strategy, they declared, was a “combination of 10th century Russian plans to conquer Eastern Europe and Genghis Khan’s plan to rule the world.” Ironically, their perspective mirrored that of the men they were chastising. Like many of those working within the foreign policy establishment, this group of women saw the struggle between the United States and the USSR as a geopolitical/balance-of-power fight rather than an ideological one.27 In fact, despite their maternalist rhetoric, these women thought about the struggle in very masculine terms; rather than advocate compromise, they pushed the competitive angle. They wanted more, not fewer, guns.

Despite this area of agreement, however, some anticommunist women felt the State Department and, in fact, the entire federal government were implicated in the communist victories, particularly in Asia. Echoing the sentiments of the China Lobby, the Minute Women printed a letter in their Houston chapter newsletter from Dr. Marguerite Atterbury, a missionary in China. In the letter, Atterbury described conditions in China before and after the communist victory. With nothing but praise for Jiang Jieshi and his government, Atterbury lamented the current limitations to his power. She blamed the United States for allowing the communists to “push Free China around” by continuing to accept “the fiction that the Nationalist Government was a culprit in the loss of the Mainland.” In her view, the Americans maintained a false story to cover the mistakes they had made in their Asian
policy. Other Minute Women took a darker view of the situation. In a 1951 statement in response to Truman’s firing of General Douglas MacArthur, the Minute Women argued that Secretary of State Dean Acheson and British prime minister Clement Atlee had conspired to give Eastern Europe and China to Stalin. MacArthur, in their estimation, had been trying to stop this move, which was why he had to be removed from the scene.²⁸

Elizabeth Churchill Brown looked higher than the State Department for responsibility for America’s failure to stop communist encroachment around the world. She blamed President Dwight Eisenhower for not providing decisive leadership against the Soviets and the Chinese. She lamented that what she labeled his “confusion” had spread throughout the White House, the Pentagon, and the National Security Council—turning his foreign policy into a mishmash of ideas and actions. Some of Ike’s confusion, she wrote, stemmed from his reliance on his brother Milton Eisenhower, who Brown saw as a bad influence on the president. Milton Eisenhower encouraged his brother to talk to the Soviets and had even gone to Moscow to arrange for the Soviet premier to visit the United States.²⁹ Many anticommunists saw this as the ultimate in hypocrisy and stupidity. How could the government claim to be fighting the Soviets with everything it had and allow its leader to pay a diplomatic visit? In fact, the trip set off a wave of protests and demonstrations against the Eisenhower administration, including one featuring William F. Buckley Jr., publisher of the National Review, that filled Carnegie Hall almost to capacity.³⁰

Some anticommunist women found things to praise about the Eisenhower administration. Doloris Bridges, according to a news account of one of her talks, “commended the administration for moving forces into Lebanon and the standing up in defense of Formosa [Taiwan].” In particular, Bridges applauded Ike’s actions in supporting Quemoy and Matsu, two islands claimed by Nationalist Chinese and attacked by the People’s Republic of China. Without such a reaction, much of Asia would eventually “go behind the Bamboo Curtain.” Rather than lay all the mistakes on the president’s shoulders, Bridges looked accusingly at Congress and its role in not supporting the president in his efforts to fight communism at home and abroad.³¹

Another favorite target of anticommunists was the United Nations. Criticism generally fell into two categories, although both were related to the same larger issue—surrendering control to a non-American authority. One theory expounded by Conan in her news-
letter argued that the United Nations was “only a cloak for Communism, the most horrible form of slavery ever hatched out of the mind of Satan.” Communism’s influence at the United Nations resulted from Soviet control of the votes of its satellite peoples. According to Florence Dean Post, vice chair of the Minute Women of the USA, the Soviets represented over 800 million people, while the United States had only 160 million. In addition, she asserted, the Russians could usually count on the votes of “undefined nations.” This meant, she explained, that the United States would be outvoted at almost every turn. Compounding the problem for both Post and Katharine Reynolds of the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) was their belief that the United Nations was harboring communist spies. Sometimes these undercover agents were described as foreign workers who used their diplomatic status to send information and technology back to the mother country. More shocking for these women, however, were the Americans at the United Nations who did not represent the interests of the United States but instead were working with America’s enemies. According to groups like the DAR and the Minute Women, some Americans working at the United Nations had failed security screenings by the federal government or had “taken the fifth” at congressional hearings. Still, the United Nations hired them. No wonder the institution could not be trusted, they maintained.

The other concern many anticommunists voiced about the United Nations was what they perceived to be a tendency toward world government. Unwilling to relinquish American control over U.S. territory and citizens, these women feared UN leaders planned to undermine federal and state constitutions in the name of international peace. Anticommunists who espoused this belief feared the “one-worlders” would “seek a gradual approach to world government through the United Nations.” Mrs. James Lucas, executive secretary of the DAR, explained in testimony before the Senate Judiciary Committee that the DAR’s position was that “our national sovereignty is essential to the freedom of the American people and the preservation of our constitutional Republic.” She went on to “expose the fallacies inherent in the world-government idea.” Chief among these flaws, in her opinion, was the idea that the peoples of the world had so much in common that they could unite as one. She found this absurd. She also worried that a world government would be allowed to tax the American people as well as create its own army and set up an international court system. Many of the Minute Women joined Lucas and the DAR in
their views, and the New York chapter reprinted Lucas’s statement in its newsletter.33

Florence Fowler Lyons was another concerned opponent of world government. She set her sights on UNESCO as the main culprit in trying to bring about world government. In particular, she focused on UNESCO’s educational efforts, fearing the group was spreading one-world propaganda to innocent children without their parents realizing what was happening. Lyons spent years examining UNESCO’s activities and reports so she could expose anything with which she found fault.34

Although Lyons and most other newsletter writers had a limited readership, making it difficult to ascertain the true extent of their influence on the broader anticommunist movement, the plethora of publications and the longevity of some of them indicate that these women were, at the least, getting their opinions out to the public. Even if they did not change the view of one person, which seems unlikely considering that some of the newsletters required subscriptions, their writings added to the overall debate on the issues. These activists explained the issues of the day in their own words, in language their readers would understand. For women who did not have the time or the inclination to read through a newspaper or watch the news, these brief newsletters might have been their only source of information on these topics.

A few women succeeded in helping shape anticommunist dialogue on a national level. Freda Utley, Elizabeth Churchill Brown, and Phyllis Schlafly are three examples of such writers and activists. Although they shared the same basic message—that American political leaders had allowed communism to gain strength throughout the world—the three women came from divergent backgrounds, wrote under different circumstances, and met with varying levels of acceptance. Utley, a highly educated, cosmopolitan former communist, used her own experiences in the Soviet Union as the foundation to try to convince the American public to heed the dangers of communism. As a former society columnist and a journalist’s wife, Brown struggled to be taken seriously as a political writer. Through her obstinate refusal to be silenced and her willingness to almost force people to read her book, she succeeded in making her opinions known. Schlafly gained more commercial success, perhaps because she was the most politically astute of the three women, perhaps because she benefited from a resurgence of conservatism.
Freda Utley was one of the few women who belonged to a small group of former communist intellectuals who helped shape the evolution of modern conservatism. Along with men such as Whittaker Chambers, Max Eastman, and William Henry Chamberlin, Utley provided firsthand knowledge of the reality of communism. These former leftists did more than tell tales of good and evil; they laid an intellectual framework to justify the emerging anticommunism of the Right. Their work imbued a political and partisan movement with philosophical overtones, tying anticommunism to a conservative ideology and helping to unite sometimes dissenting factions on the Right. After all, economic conservatives, traditionalists, and right-wing politicians all feared communism’s effect on their world. Focusing on the Red menace gave them common ground to overlook differences and concentrate on their enemies at home and abroad.

Although the writings of each of these former communist intellectuals had a specific focus, they all tended to agree on the general outline of what they portrayed as America’s disastrous foreign policy. In their minds, Europe’s fate had been predetermined before World War II ended. FDR and a communist clique in the State Department, with the help of General George Marshall, organized their military strategy to allow the Soviets to gain control of Eastern Europe. They argued that the insistence on the unconditional surrender of Germany, the naive view of Stalin’s actions, and tolerance of the Soviet presence in Poland were proof of the conspiracy. Unfortunately, as they saw it, Roosevelt’s death had not ended the troubles. Truman had continued the same plan. His containment policy only made things worse.

For her part, Utley concentrated on Asia. Prior to 1941 she had written several books and articles on the conflict between Japan and China, encouraging American policy makers to take a tough stand and expose what she called Japan’s “feet of clay.” American policy during and especially after the war further frustrated and angered Utley. As early as 1946, she warned publisher Clair Boothe Luce that “illusions about the Chinese Communist are largely responsible for our absurd policy in China.” In her book The China Story, published in 1951 with Mao Zedong’s successful seizure of power still fresh in Americans’ minds and in the midst of the Korean conflict, Utley argued that China had been delivered to the Communists “with what amounted to the blessing of the United States Administration.” A combination of “ignorance, refusal to face facts, romanticism . . . political immaturity or a misguided humanitarianism, and the influence of
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Communist sympathizers and the careerists who staked their reputations on a pro-Soviet policy resulted in the United States selling out its ally, Jiang Jieshi, and abandoning the people of Asia to communism. Even after the communists forced Jiang and the Nationalists to Formosa, Americans continued, according to Utley, to “nurture illusions about Communism.” Their naïveté led to the conflict in Korea and was ultimately leading, she warned, to a potential “third world war.”

Utley released The China Story at an opportune time. The domestic Red Scare was in full swing, the war in Korea appeared mired in stalemate, and Truman’s dismissal of MacArthur had aroused fierce debate. The timing of the publication, combined with her reputation as an experienced journalist with solid academic credentials and her experience as a former communist, helped legitimize both the book and its message. Utley’s appearance the year before the book was published during the Senate’s investigation of Owen Lattimore added to her reputation. In reviewing the book for the New York Times, Richard L. Walker, a history professor at Yale, pointed out these facts. Although troubled by her “bitterness” and willingness “to view events and personalities in black and white colors,” he encouraged his readers to take up the volume, absorb her “useful information,” and engage in the national debate. The Times continued its support later that year by listing the book among the 110 volumes chosen as recommended “vacation” reading.

Utley continued her work throughout the decade even as the public became less obsessed with the communist menace. Her later books resulted from extensive reading as well as research conducted during personal visits to the Soviet Union, China, and the Middle East. She feared that Americans had not learned from their earlier mistakes and would allow communism to take advantage of crises around the world. In her Preface to Will the Middle East Go West, she explained that although she “did not presume to know all of the answers,” she did “hope” the “tentative suggestions” she made in the course of the book would “help to build a wise United States policy, serving the interests of both America and the free world.” She feared that Americans would foolishly let the Middle East slip under Soviet control, as they had with Europe when they ignored her earlier warnings. Almost ten years earlier she had expressed a similar sentiment at the end of her book on Germany. She was “convinced” that “once the American people are made aware of the facts [concerning the treatment of
postwar Germany] which have for so long been withheld from them,” facts she exposed in her book, they would “impel a radical change in United States policy.”

Determined to expose the errors she found in U.S. foreign policy, Utley dedicated herself to anticommunist work. In addition to her books, she wrote speeches for Joe McCarthy and worked briefly for the Office of Strategic Services and later for the McCarren Subcommittee on Investigations. She recognized that in doing so, she was giving up the “material interests” she could have gained from her “brains, knowledge and literary ability.” Convinced of her high intelligence and powerful analytical skills, she believed wholeheartedly in her cause and never questioned her right to engage in a traditionally male preserve. Moreover, her books were written for both the male and female public, although she particularly hoped to influence the men in power. No evidence indicates that Utley in any way considered her gender a limiting factor in her work. She appeared to assume that she could engage the male foreign policy establishment as an equal and even influence the decisions that emerged from this elite group.

In contrast, Elizabeth Churchill Brown approached the situation from a completely different set of circumstances, and her work directly addressed gender issues. Two factors in particular worked against Brown’s efforts to publish the same basic message Utley preached: the changed status of the Cold War both at home and abroad, and Brown’s personal background. Because of these difficulties, Brown found herself in need of a tool to pry open a space for herself in the anticommunist world. She used her gender as a crowbar.

Brown began work on her book on U.S. foreign policy in 1954 just as the Cold War entered a new phase. The Republican Dwight Eisenhower was elected president in 1952, Joseph Stalin died in 1953, and the war in Korea was over. After the tensions of the early 1950s, the American public gladly put itself and its foreign policy in Ike’s hands. There were crises, certainly. But when the Soviets demolished the Hungarian rebels or the Chinese bombed the Nationalist-held islands of Quemoy and Matsu, public alarm was momentary. There were too many other things to distract them: the booming economy, the plethora of consumer goods, rising racial tensions. The Cold War became something Americans learned to live with.

Additionally, the mid-1950s witnessed the birth of modern conservatism. Fueled by lingering resentment over twelve years of New Deal politics, conservatives, especially within the Republican Party,
pushed for greater access to political power. Anticommunism helped those economic conservatives find common ground with tradition- 
alists who feared all the social and cultural changes of the postwar 
years. Seeing the opportunity to bring these groups together, William 
F. Buckley Jr. and others such as writer/philosophers Willi Schlamm 
and Frank Meyer created a new publication, the *National Review*, to 
give voice to all varieties of what they considered legitimate conser-
vatism. They wanted to rid conservatism of its more lunatic elements 
to justify the Right’s demands for national power. In particular, they 
moved away from anti-Semitism and conspiracy theories.47 

Caught up in her own anticommunist work, Brown did not recog-
nize that the public’s attitudes had changed anymore than she could 
see how her personal situation limited her potential as an author. As 
noted in Chapter 2, Brown’s journalistic training had been limited to 
the society pages. Only her marriage to journalist Constantine Brown 
brought her into contact with the movers and shakers in Washington, 
DC. She lacked not only Utley’s academic credentials but the former 
communist’s experiences as well. Brown might have been well trav- 
elled, but she had not lived through Stalin’s purges or been in Asia 
during the war. Even critics who might disagree with Utley’s conclu-
sions could not overlook the reality of her firsthand knowledge. Brown 
started with no such advantage. 

In many ways, she had more in common with the newsletter 
editors than she did with Utley. Like them, she was a housewife who 
engaged in political work between household chores. She took her 
commitment to anticommunism as seriously as they did. Similar to 
women like Florence Fowler Lyons, she put in many hours doing 
research from government reports, published memoirs, and congres-
sional hearings. As discussed in more depth in Chapter 4, she devoted 
much time and effort to encouraging other women to get involved in 
the fight against communism. 

In 1954, Brown tried to combine her research with her desire to 
increase women’s participation in the movement. She sent conserva-
tive publisher Henry Regnery a manuscript proposal for what she 
thought would be a unique and important contribution to anticommu-
nist literature. As she explained in her letter, in her view, intelli-
gent women interested in important issues had no time to learn about 
them because of household responsibilities. Cooking, cleaning, and 
caring for their families were important, but these jobs left little time 
to expand their knowledge of the threat of communism. They had
“time only for the headlines,” not for editorials or detailed analyses. Assuming that most of the women she was writing to were mothers, she recognized that their foremost concern was that their sons might be called upon to fight and die in another war. They wanted to know what was going on in the world but dreaded men’s condescending attitude if they asked too many questions. In Brown’s view, women needed to discuss these issues with other women who would treat them with respect.48

Brown promised to tell other women “the truth” about politics because she was one of them. Explaining that she had not paid attention to politics until she started reading her new husband’s newspaper columns, she put herself on the same level as her readers. She might live in Washington, DC, and be married to a famous journalist, but inside, she told them, she was as ignorant of events as they were. For example, she had questions concerning the U.S. government’s actions during and after World War II. Despite the men who “maligned” her curiosity and encouraged her to let “the menfolks take care of running the world,” she sought answers. Even then, she refused to play the men’s game. Since she was not a “military strategist” but a woman, she “look[ed] at things like women do.” She asked “questions no intelligent man would ask.” Although her husband thought her suspicions about the Roosevelt administration resulted from her “being emotional, ‘just like a woman,’” she persisted in pursuing them.49

Brown carried this attitude into The Enemy at His Back, published in 1955. The first paragraph of her Introduction set the tone for the book: “This book is the result of a woman’s curiosity. It is not the work of a student of history nor even the work of a student. Neither is it written for students but rather for ordinary people like myself who would like to know ‘who killed Cock Robin?’”50 She then proceeded to lay out her argument in a straightforward manner that would have been easy for anyone for follow. Rather than rely on academic or diplomatic jargon, Brown quoted herself, wondering, “Why do we have to kiss [the Soviets] on the mouth?” Her colloquial language and inclusion of personal narrative echoed the style of the newsletters of various women’s groups.51

Her argument, however, followed much the same line as Utley’s. In the book, she examined the actions and words of key American leaders involved in decision making in the Pacific theater during and after World War II. She concluded that General George Marshall and President Franklin Roosevelt had deliberately prolonged the
war against Japan because it suited Soviet purposes. Without actually calling them communist agents, she questioned their reliance on advisers of doubtful loyalty. According to her analysis, these same advisers rushed America into demobilization, leaving the rest of the world defenseless against encroaching communist forces. She also concluded that these same men had prevented General MacArthur from winning the war in Korea by unduly restraining his actions. The American people, in her view, had been betrayed.52

Brown’s book and her interactions with various editors exposed much about her way of dealing with her position as an anticommu-

nist woman. On the one hand, she accepted certain stereotypes about women: they were “different” from men, they were housewives, their connections to world affairs were related to their family interest. On the other hand, she used those assumptions to justify her book: she could talk to other women in ways men could not. She also turned her assumptions against men: she could see things men could not because she looked at the situation from a different angle. Flashes of defiance appeared in her cutting remarks about “menfolks” running the world. Most important, she insisted, her book told the “story that ought to be told to other women” and was not a fluffy, watered-down version of world affairs. It was a hard-core indictment of American policy makers. Despite her emphasis on writing a book for women, her conclusions were very similar to those of most right-wing men.

Further, Brown did not approach publication as a retiring “lady.” She had been working on the manuscript for over a year, corre-

sponding with Henry Regnery, who was both a personal friend of
the family and one of the nation’s leading conservative publishers. By early 1955 she had sent Regnery the manuscript. After three and a half months, he returned it with a polite refusal. He did not think her book would “lend itself to” distribution in bookstores. He thought she should turn the manuscript into a series of pamphlets that would be useful to the new organizations “springing up around the country.” As a businessman, Regnery based his decisions on the need to make a profit; obviously, he did not believe Brown’s book would be a commer-

cial success.53

Since the book did go on to sell a reasonable number of copies, Regnery’s stated reason for not publishing it seems disingenuous. In particular, his suggestion that she publish the material in pamphlet form rather than reorganize it (which her next publisher required) indicated that Regnery saw Brown as the wife of an author rather than
an author herself. Regnery proposed that an organization such as the Minute Women might provide a market for such a pamphlet series.

Brown did not let Regnery’s decision discourage her. She sent the book to Devin Garrity at Devin-Adair, who made favorable comments and helpful suggestions. By August 1955 she had not only a publisher but also a distributor. Interestingly, Liz did not blame Regnery for his actions even though she told him he had been “mean” to her. His cruel rejection of her manuscript, she explained to him and to another friend, was not his fault. She did not think anyone at Regnery’s press had actually read her manuscript. Consistently conspiratorial, she believed “Henry has some one in his outfit who does him no good.” Like the political leaders in her book, Regnery was the victim of bad advisers who could not spot valuable material (i.e., her manuscript) when they read it.

The Enemy at His Back received good, if not outstanding, reviews from the conservative press, and Liz earned congratulations from fellow right-wingers. The New York Herald Tribune’s reviewer thought she had done a “creditable” job of proving her point. One Chicago paper’s reviewer thought she had raised interesting and important questions that needed answering. Arizona senator Barry Goldwater had a favorable review of the book read into the Congressional Record.

Even after she had finished the book and found a publisher, Brown remained very much involved in its distribution and publicity. She took control of the situation after publication to make certain reviewers and influential people received copies of the book. She personally sent copies to 100 “very wealthy men,” expecting them to send her the purchase price, and then she had to scramble to receive payment from them. Checking to see if reviewers received their copies consumed much of her time and that of her assistant. Her efforts in this regard showed how knowledgeable she was about political influence and publishing; she knew the book would be worthless if not properly reviewed and publicized. More revealing, however, was her complete faith that the book would receive favorable reviews. Unlike many writers, she appeared to have no doubts as to the value and importance of her work.

Unquestionably, however, Brown had to work much harder than Utley to promote her views. By the mid-1950s, the story Brown told was familiar to the conservative faithful. She did not provide her readers with any new material, even though her language might have
held more appeal to a female readership. As previously mentioned, much of the American public had become less obsessed with the topics she discussed. The *New York Times* did not review Brown’s book. In fact, it was only reviewed in conservative publications. In contrast, Utley’s later book repeated a similar message but focused on the Middle East, a new player in the Cold War game, and was reviewed by the *Times.*

Dedicated anticommunists like Brown became even more frustrated as the public’s attitude continued to mellow. Communism had not ceased to be an enemy ideology for most Americans, but they had learned to live with that enemy as long as there was no immediate threat. Concerns about Fidel Castro in Cuba and of nuclear fallout forced the abstract image of Soviet or Chinese soldiers invading American soil to the background. Politicians continued to call up the Red menace in campaign speeches and Red-baited their opponents if they thought it would help their campaigns, but the frequency and intensity of those accusations had changed. Voters and the public in general seemed more worried about race riots and right-wing extremism than about the communist threat.

Elizabeth Churchill Brown found this nonchalance about communism absurd and dangerous. She predicted to her publisher friend Henry Regnery in October 1963 that “within the next two or three years, the ring will be visibly closing around us. . . . Our military will be disaffected, demoralized, and torn within themselves. We’ll be disarmed and old Uncle Nikita will be calling the shots.” A month later, after President John F. Kennedy was assassinated, Brown again saw the Soviets’ hand at work. According to her rather convoluted logic, Castro had ordered Lee Harvey Oswald to kill JFK, and Soviets had then killed Oswald to protect the conspiracy. Now, she explained to Francesca Rhee, the culprits feared that if Americans learned that communists were behind the murder, everyone would become anti-communist, which would undermine peaceful coexistence and world peace. She believed some “infiltrated red in the ranks of conservatives” might do something drastic to distract America from the truth.

Brown’s zealousness better suited the nation’s paranoid mood of the McCarthy era of the early 1950s. By the early to mid-1960s the nation, while still anticomunist, was less convinced of the reality of conspiracies against American freedoms.

Brown was not alone in her frustration with the American public or in her continuing efforts to fight communism. In fact, by the early
1960s, even as Americans returned the Democrats to the White House, a grassroots movement was gathering momentum to move the country to the right. Utilizing Republican women’s clubs and other local organizations, a small band of conservative Republicans was plotting to win the GOP presidential nomination for one of its own: Arizona senator Barry Goldwater. More moderate Republicans underestimated the determination, ability, and numbers of right-wingers and so were caught off guard. Their last-minute efforts to deprive Goldwater of the nomination backfired, and the Right had its candidate. 60

Playing a key supporting role in Goldwater’s early campaign was longtime activist Phyllis Schlafly. A dedicated anticommunist, Schlafly liked Goldwater’s demand for a stronger defense against the Soviets and for less socialism at home. She had voiced similar complaints throughout the 1950s, during her unsuccessful campaign for Congress in 1952 and in her work with the DAR and the Federation of Republican Women’s Clubs. Like Brown and Utley, she refused to give up on her mission to educate the American public about the dangerous state of the world. She saw Goldwater’s 1964 campaign as an opportunity to reinvigorate the fight against communism. Schlafly signed on. 61

She did much more than ring doorbells, however. As historian Donald Critchlow pointed out in his recent biography, Schlafly had always believed in the importance of translating “the ideas of intellectuals and anticommunist authors” for grassroots consumption. One of her continuing projects over the years was developing “A Reading List for Americans,” which included congressional reports as well as intellectual tomes and popular nonfiction, such as Whitaker Chambers’s Witness. 62 Consequently, when Schlafly joined the Goldwater campaign, she decided that she could be most useful by writing a book that would explain to the public the obstacles conservatives had faced within their own party. 63

The result was A Choice Not an Echo, which she wrote and privately published in 1964. The book focused on exposing “the kingmakers” who, she claimed, ran the GOP and prevented conservatives from having any input. These men had been undermining the party and America for much of the twentieth century. She devoted one of her longest chapters to an analysis of U.S. foreign policy. Entitled “Who’s Looney Now?” the chapter listed “Defeats around the World,” including Vietnam—which was, she wrote, “slipping fast into Communist clutches”—as well as “Communist Agents in the State Department and the CIA.” She pulled few punches, named names,
and accused President Lyndon Johnson and his aides of ignoring America’s anticommunist friends and “lavish[ing] millions of dollars . . . and every possible hospitality” on pro-communists.64

Written in a colloquial, simple style reminiscent of Brown’s book and the various newsletters, A Choice Not an Echo became a sensation. Schlafly had chosen to publish the book privately to speed up production and allow her to control distribution. Using her own mailing lists, compiled over the years from her associations with various right-wing organizations, Schlafly promoted the book widely. She offered bulk discounts and sold close to 2 million copies in the first six months of publication. By November, she had sold 3.5 million copies.65 According to a New York Times review, the book was “in such demand that copies could not be obtained in many places along the East Coast.”66 The book was particularly important during the California primary. The margin separating Goldwater from his main rival, New York governor Nelson Rockefeller, was extremely narrow. Targeting districts where Rockefeller was strong, Goldwater workers distributed hundreds of copies of Choice. When Goldwater won the primary, his staff gave Schlafly’s book much of the credit.67

Later that same year, Schlafly repeated the pattern with a book written with Retired Rear Admiral Chester Ward. The Gravediggers brought Utley and Brown’s message up to the present day. According to Schlafly and Ward, Roosevelt and his aides had set the dangerous precedent of handing the Soviets everything they needed to conquer the world. Their successors had continued in the same vein. Khrushchev, the authors explained, promised to “bury” the West, and “American gravediggers” were shoveling the dirt. Echoing her predecessors, Schlafly did not claim these Americans were communists. Instead, they were “card-carrying liberals.”68 She accused the Johnson administration of undermining America’s defense by encouraging disarmament and leaving America vulnerable. She also went after Hollywood for producing movies such as On the Beach and Fail-Safe that presented falsehoods as facts, serving only to frighten the public.69

Although Schlafly mentioned communism’s impact on the family, she did not directly address women in her books. Rather, like Utley, she appeared to assume that women would be as interested and as knowledgeable as men but would not need or want “special handling.” Again, like Utley, she did not refer directly to her gender, further proof that anticommunist women did not allow their gender to inhibit their right to participate in the foreign policy dialogue of the era.
None of the activists could entirely escape the prejudices of their times, however. Despite the obvious knowledge of international events exhibited by these anticommunist women, the vast majority of the public still believed foreign affairs and anticommunism were primarily issues for male consideration. Talk of missile strength, combat strategies, and weaponry seemed to fit more naturally into a man’s sphere. For women, it was an uphill battle to be accepted in such a world. Freda Utley, who had written extensively about Russia and China, complained to editor Clare Boothe Luce that she had more difficulty getting her material published than John Hershey, a better-known male author who wrote about similar subjects. During Schlafly’s 1952 congressional campaign, her opponent suggested she go back home and take care of her children. Brown, of course, recognized that women might need some remedial education on foreign policy, but she did not let that fact deter her efforts to publish her book.

The world might still accept the stereotype that foreign policy was a man’s game, but women anticommunists knew better. Female anticommunists during this period focused on many of the same issues and used many of the same images utilized by their male colleagues to describe the communist threat. Like anticommunist men, women who spoke out against communism tended to use dramatic phrases designed to shock and frighten their audiences.

Women activists played a significant role in defining the relationship of U.S. foreign policy to the threat of communism. At least two such women took it upon themselves to translate foreign affairs issues for all Americans, male and female alike. Freda Utley was convinced that as a former communist, her experiences abroad, especially in Russia and China, qualified her to write authoritatively about the dangers these communist states posed to the United States. Phyllis Schlafly, less cosmopolitan than Utley but supremely confident of her ability to write in a style that could reach the masses, published with the goal of informing her fellow citizens about U.S. foreign policy and the necessity of putting Goldwater in the White House. Most women, however, undertook the task of alerting other women—their neighbors and friends—through newsletters, speeches, and books about the nature of the communist threat overseas and the effect it would have on their lives at home.

Liz Brown stands out from this large group of anticommunist women because of her conviction that she could write in a manner
that would allow busy American housewives and mothers to learn about the implications of U.S. foreign policy in the battle against communism. Nevertheless, other women, although perhaps lacking Liz’s connections in the world of publishing, undertook the same role in their clubs and organizations or by writing newsletters and pamphlets. No matter the method of communication utilized or the level of fame achieved, all of these women were convinced that American foreign policy must be designed to halt the Red menace and that only by arousing the housewives and mothers of America could such a policy be developed.

The work of these women, in effect, transformed the male preserve of foreign affairs into an arena in which both sexes were expected to participate. Anticommunist women did not view their actions as unprecedented or irregular. Their hatred of communism blinded them to the larger implications of their actions, namely that they were stepping out of the role of the little homemaker into the rough-and-tumble arena of foreign policy debate. Concerned that not all Americans, especially women, seemed to understand the seriousness of the situation in foreign affairs, they were committed to sounding the alert and educating the population. By undertaking this task, they were fulfilling their patriotic duty to help defend the United States from its communist enemies worldwide; at the same time they were helping to transform an element of the female population into ideologically motivated political activists.