Wives, Mothers, and the Red Menace

Brennan, Mary

Published by University Press of Colorado

Brennan, Mary.
Wives, Mothers, and the Red Menace: Conservative Women and the Crusade against Communism.

For additional information about this book
https://muse.jhu.edu/book/64046
Gendered images underlay much anticommunist rhetoric, reinforcing the idealized social structure advocated by conservatives and providing potent language for attacking their opposition. A strong man supporting and protecting his family and the little woman contentedly caring for her children and home represented a social order most Americans found desirable. Anticommunists, however, imbued those images with political meaning. In their scenario, the happy family members symbolized perfection of the American way of life and proved the superiority of democratic, capitalistic, Christian Americans over the communistic, totalitarian, atheistic Soviets and Chinese. At the same time that they reflected all that was good about America, they also served as a bulwark protecting Americans from the evil in the world. As a result, these images not only had to
be recognized as the ideal, but they had to be reinforced continually to preserve the American system. If any part of these safeguards weakened, anticommunists warned, the communists would have an opening through which to poison the rest of America.

Gendered images could also serve as an effective method of attacking anticommunists’ domestic political opponents. Although Democrats also utilized gendered symbols to undercut their enemies, conservative Republican anticommunists perfected the art. For these right-wingers, gendered language was a natural by-product of their political ideology. Traditionalist conservatives had always emphasized the importance of a stable family in which women were submissive to their husbands, free enterprise advocates desired a limited federal government that stayed out of local affairs and family matters, and anticommunists warned that free love instead of marriage would follow a communist takeover of society. Consequently, anticommunist activists moved easily from using gendered imagery and language in their battle against communism to utilizing the same tactics against their Democratic adversaries.

The shifting realities of the postwar world provided anticommunists with fertile ground to plant the seeds of their concerns. Various historians have pointed out that the trauma of the Depression and World War II undermined traditional familial and gender relationships, creating anxiety as people adjusted to their new roles. At war’s end, a tremendous desire to reverse the changes of the previous decades encouraged an emphasis on domesticity among both men and women. Not surprisingly, although men and women worked hard to maintain the illusion that they were living up to these domestic images, they violated the rules at every turn. Many men found their new jobs boring and resented the pressure to conform. Women, even middle-class women, joined the workforce or occupied themselves outside the home with volunteer work.¹

The apparent sexualization of U.S. society further upset the middle class. Suddenly, it seemed sex was everywhere: in the movies (Marilyn Monroe’s sex kitten characters), in books (Peyton Place, for example), in music (Elvis Presley’s gyrating hips). And it was not just “normal” sex. The government’s attempt to purge gays and lesbians from holding office had the unintended consequence of causing people to talk about homosexuality in the open. Alfred Kinsey’s reports on human sexuality, published in 1948 (Sexual Behavior in the Human Male) and 1953 (Sexual Behavior in the Human Female), exposed the truth that
Americans were sexually active and adventurous. Refusing to accept the reality of a transformed social order, many people emphasized the importance of the heterosexual, nuclear family. A lack of conformity to that ideal, anticommunists warned, could lead to all sorts of problematic behaviors, including experimenting with radical ideas.\(^2\)

Confusing the situation further, some experts argued that too much domesticity could also be bad. In particular, some “authorities” followed the lead of Philip Wylie, who in his book *Generation of Vipers* blamed society’s problems on what he termed “momism.” Although the book was originally published in the early 1940s, the shifting gender roles of the postwar years gave Wylie’s theories new validity. Wylie and his cohorts argued that mothers were smothering their sons, raising boys to be weak physically and mentally. This would explain why there were so many homosexuals and why American men seemed so weak and willing to conform. In anticommunists’ view this constituted a real danger, since such men would easily succumb to the temptation of communism.\(^3\)

An emphasis on the right balance of domestic ideals and social conformity, combined with the fear that both homosexuals and communists seemed to be increasing in numbers and influence, created what historian K.A. Cuordileone called a “crisis in American masculinity.” The image of the rugged American male conquering the frontier single-handedly had given way to “the man in the gray flannel suit” doing the bidding of his wife and boss. Reinforcing this concern about weakening masculinity, Alfred Kinsey’s *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* reported that one in three men acknowledged having had at least one homosexual encounter. The confusion resulting from the mixed messages men (and women) received about their true role in society intensified the fear that America was under attack from all manner of perversion.\(^4\) Anticommunists eagerly exploited this fear to build support for their struggle against communist infiltration by emphasizing that “real” men knew their place in the world and were determined to fight to preserve it.

Women continually heard the message that their place in the home was vitally important not just for their families but for all of society. Even as men challenged women to participate in the political system, they reemphasized the importance of women staying in their proper role as homemakers. The men failed to recognize that by inviting women to join the anticommunist cause, they were undermining the very vision of American life they were desperately trying to protect.
FBI director J. Edgar Hoover stressed the role women as homemakers and mothers—a very important career—should play in fighting communism. In 1956 he told attendees at the annual convention of the National Council of Catholic Women that women constituted “the basic source for pressures for peace and security” in America. He encouraged them to “make their contribution by raising their voices to preserve the American way of life.” Similar to the Republican Mothers of the early republic, women, some men argued, could best serve their country by teaching and supporting their husbands and sons.

Much of their ability to play such a role, some male anticommunists explained, resulted from the fact that women were guided by their emotions rather than their intellect. Writer and philosopher Russell Kirk stated the problem for women explicitly. Women, he wrote in *The Intelligent Women’s Guide to Conservatism*, were naturally conservative in part because they knew society was “a spiritual thing, founded upon love.” He hoped his book would help conservative women “defend with their minds what they already sense through their hearts.” In other words, women should use their dedication to tradition, morality, and family to improve humanity as a whole. To that end, he had written his book as “simply” as he could so women could understand and use the information. Once again, the image conservative anticommunists presented was one of a woman who was not as smart as a man but whose natural affinity for home and family could and should be used to work against the evil that existed in society.

Other anticommunists emphasized the threat communism posed to the important relationship among women, the home, and the American way of life. The Reverend Billy Graham warned in a 1948 sermon that communists wanted to “destroy the American home.” Since “a nation is only as strong as her homes,” that would spell the end of the United States. Maine senator Owen Brewster agreed that women had to do whatever was necessary to protect their homes and their way of life. The authors of *Good Citizen*, a pamphlet designed to accompany the Freedom Train—a mobile exhibit of U.S. political artifacts aimed at promoting patriotism—obviously thought so. They depicted “the home as [the] cradle of Republican virtue” and placed women squarely in the middle of it. American women, the authors reassured readers, would not be tempted by such dangerous ideas as abandoning home and family for a career, as communist women had
done. The housewife contentedly surrounded by the latest gadgets became a powerful symbol of America’s superiority.  

Richard Nixon’s performance in Moscow in 1959 epitomized the use of the housewife as Cold War weapon. During a debate with Nixon in a model kitchen, Soviet premier Nikita Khrushchev proclaimed the superiority of the Soviet system by comparing U.S. and Russian homes. Mocking the American claim that families could buy a new home every twenty years, Khrushchev boasted that Russians did not need to change dwellings because they constructed their homes to last: “We build for our children and grandchildren.” Nixon, the anticomunist, could see no better existence for women than keeping a perfect house and pointed out the different appliances available to aid the American housewife by lessening her workload. Khrushchev, the communist, convinced that women should not be accomplices in creating successful consumer industries based on free enterprise, dismissed him with the remark, “We don’t think of women in terms of capitalism. We think better of them.” The rest of the argument developed along similar lines, with the two men trying to confine their competition to the family home rather than broadening it to include the nuclear arms race. 

Nixon continued the same theme that evening in the address that opened the first U.S. Exhibition to be held in Moscow. Hoping to capture the hearts and minds or at least the eyes of the Russian masses, as well as the votes of Americans tuning in to the broadcast, Nixon bragged about the number of U.S. families who owned their own homes, televisions, and radios. He went on and on about the amount of goods the “average American family” could buy in a year. Obviously, these facts indicated, at least to Nixon and the listening American audience, that capitalism—which provided families with such an abundance of goods—was vastly superior to communism, which did not. What the Soviet audience, much less the Soviet masses, thought about such a claim was not recorded. Americans, however, clearly understood that as long as women could stay at home, caring for their families and using all the new equipment available to them, the American way of life was secure. Any change in that routine would undermine the entire structure of the country.

This image of domestic—and fully equipped—bliss contrasted sharply with the anticomunist version of life under communism. In a world under Red control, Americans would be forced to adopt a type of cooperative lifestyle that upset Americans committed to
individualism. For example, in one issue of The Spirit, the “women’s magazine men read,” the editors reviewed a book by Charles Seely, who had, according to the editors, “impressive qualifications to speak to and for the Defenders of Liberty.” A retired naval commander and American Legion member, Seely wrote Russia and the Battle of Liberation to describe the “new Russian system” in which husband and wife share the housework or have someone else do it: “Meals may be obtained from the central kitchen, or may be prepared in the family apartment, but patronage of the central kitchen is encouraged.” The editors sarcastically interjected comments about the “new way of describing communal living.” Even Seely’s description of mothers having paid time off to nurse their infants at their jobs warranted a mocking “[t]hat’s nice” from the editors.11

Another anticommunist newsletter reported on the Congress of American Women (CAW), a left-wing organization, and warned that it threatened to disrupt women’s lives. The group noted with horror CAW’s call to set up cooperative units to “‘free the housewife from isolation,’ [and] to set up cooperative child care committees, cooperative sewing, and canning committees on a neighborhood basis.” At a time when American society treasured the image of a doting mother giving her all to her children and husband, this group activity reeked of laziness, boded ill for the children, and raised questions about what women were doing in their spare time.12

Anticommunists warned that communism would lure women away from their husbands, children, and domestic responsibilities and into the working world of men. A pamphlet prepared by the U.S.-backed International Confederation of Free Trade Unions explained that Soviet women were labeled “selfish,” “unproductive,” and lazy if they chose to stay home and care for their children.13 Francesca Rhee, wife of President Syngman Rhee of South Korea, had one explanation for why this was the case: women had to work because all the men were in the army. Others, however, saw more devious motives. The women had chosen careers over motherhood, an idea shocking in itself. Worse, however, was the notion that the Soviet and Chinese governments forced women to assume jobs traditionally labeled “man’s work.” The communists deceptively called this equality and freedom for women. Catherine Caradja, an exiled Romanian princess, patiently explained to her American audience that “[t]he equality for women in a Russian controlled state is an absolute equality. . . . [T]he women . . . do not have any protection customarily reserved for the
female sex by nature or by any of the gallant traditions.” The Minute Women of the USA used plainer images: “Does anyone think for a minute that the Russian women under Soviet Rule want to dig ditches and work on the railroad? Could the separation from family and the indignities and hardships of communal living in Red China be by choice on the part of the women?” Obviously, the Minute Women thought they could not. Making things worse was the knowledge that the Soviets forced these women to work to increase their chances of successfully taking over the world.14

Communists’ emphasis on working women shocked American women for a number of reasons and attracted new adherents to the anticommunist cause. The idea of women being compelled to join the workforce appalled white middle-class men and women, who cherished women’s “freedom” from the world of paid labor. Anticommunists argued that although communists said they were giving women equality with men and freeing them from enslavement to their husbands, the truth was far different. Desperate for workers after the devastating losses during World War II, the Soviet government had called upon women “to fill the gap” in achieving industrial and agricultural recovery. In short, anticommunists liked to explain, “Soviet women have been freed from ‘slavery’ to husbands, but they have been plunged . . . into a slavery to the state.” The organization of Business and Professional Women, in particular, pointed out that “this emancipation” had resulted in only a few female “minor executives.” Most women laborers performed more menial and back-breaking tasks such as “bricklaying, hod carrying [sic], and street sweeping.”15

Second, anticommunists emphasized the kind of work communist women were supposedly forced to perform. They usually described women engaged in hard, physical, monotonous drudgery such as digging ditches, cleaning streets, or working in factories or on farms. In the United States, immigrants, minorities, and working-class men and women took care of these tasks. Even the possibility that middle-class white women might be thrust into the gutters to pick up trash or driven onto the assembly line was enough to give many U.S. women nightmares. In other words, it was less the notion of women working than the kinds of jobs communist women supposedly held that horrified Americans.

When all else failed, anticommunists appealed to women’s vanity. If societal and economic arguments did not convince their audiences
that communism was harmful for women, some anticommunists fell back on traditional gender stereotypes. One newsletter produced under the auspices of Business and Professional Women explained that the “real expose of the communist attitude toward women’s equality . . . comes in the field of fashion.” The authors detailed that Russian women were so busy tending their families, their jobs, and party responsibilities that they did not have time to make themselves look feminine. In fact, the party discouraged “excessive grooming,” since it might take time away from women’s other duties. “The result,” the newsletter concluded in dismay, was “that styles are designed more to prepare women for masculine work than to make them attractive.” In fact, anticommunists emphasized, communist women risked losing whatever true femininity they had left. One historian noted the way *U.S. News and World Report* described women living under Soviet rule. Moscow, the author claimed, was a “city of women—hardworking women who show few of the physical charms of women in the West. Most couples stroll together in the parks after dark, but you see many more young women [stride] along the streets purposefully, as though marching to a Communist Party meeting.” Usually portrayed as ugly and mannish, communist women seemed always to be working in a dismal factory job.16

Having emphasized how de-feminizing communism could be, anticommunists pointed to the example of Ana Pauker, the foreign minister of Rumania and, according to *Time*’s editors, the “most powerful woman alive.” The magazine’s cover portrait of Pauker reinforced the masculine nature of communist women. Stout and stern, with steely eyes and a firm chin, she appeared angry, uncompromising, and cold.17 Stories about her past spread through anticommunist circles. The most infamous rumor was that this “brazen Communist turned her husband up to the dreaded Communist secret police and laughed as she watched him put to a cruel death.” Other anticommunists focused on her ambition and greed. After she gained office in Rumania, the story went, she allowed her people to starve while she indulged her own appetites. The antithesis of a maternal figure, Pauker became for anticommunists the example they needed to show how communism destroyed women and thus the family. Everything a woman was supposed to be, Pauker was not. She was cruel rather than kind, she was greedy rather than giving, and she had assumed a position of political power that was obviously beyond her abilities. Her true nature was fully exposed when the author revealed that she
had “followed the Russian armies into Rumania during the second World War.” After all, what kind of women were camp followers?  

Ironically, anticommunists could have used the reality of Pauker’s life (rather than rumor and innuendo) to emphasize their vision of communism’s impact on women. Pauker did have many characteristics Americans associated with masculinity. She was intelligent, fiercely loyal to her beliefs, and ambitious. She left her children in a state-run home while she pursued her party duties. Imprisoned on numerous occasions for her political work, she was shot while trying to escape. In fact, contrary to persistent rumors, she was in prison when the Soviets rounded up her husband and exterminated him. Upon learning of his supposedly “traitorous activities,” she was stunned. Rather than collapse in grief and dismay, as Americans would have expected, however, Pauker took it like a man and continued working with the party that had murdered her husband. Her loyalty paid off, as she worked her way up the bureaucratic ladder until, in 1947, she became the most powerful woman in Rumania.  

The New York Times called her “the intellectual leader of the Rumanian Communist party and a key strategist in the government campaign to fix Rumania’s place in the Russian orbit.” Like many of her comrades, however, her reign of power was short-lived. By 1952 she had been arrested, imprisoned, and ostracized. She adamantly maintained her innocence against charges of “deviationism” until her death in 1960.  

Thus, based on the reality of her atypically powerful position, the word of disgruntled Rumanian exiles, and the investigations of at least one congressional committee, anticommunists turned Ana Pauker into a prime example of communism’s effects on women. Pauker was a mannish-looking woman who, according to American standards, seemed to display none of the “normal” feminine virtues of kindness, humility, and softness. Both an exiled general and a former princess toured the anticommunist speech circuit, continually reinforcing Pauker’s image as a dangerous leader. Her party affiliation, anticommunists explained, had stripped her of whatever femininity she had once possessed and turned her into just another communist dictator. For anticommunists, Pauker represented a prime example of the evils communism visited upon women: it had destroyed her womanly virtues and turned her into a ruthless communist robot.  

Just as dangerous, anticommunists argued, were American women who allowed themselves to be tricked into believing Red lies. Anticommunists feared that unless women understood the dangers
of communism, they could be taken in by the slick lies and seductive tones of communist manipulators. Particularly vulnerable, they believed, was the “jaded society woman . . . looking for something different.” Enticed by the novelty, she had no real political and ideological motives for joining the party, and next year she would move on to something else. In the meantime, however, she would have “parted with a heap of folding money” that could be used for evil purposes.22

Muriel Draper was a fine example of such a case. According to the National Republic Lettergram, an anticommunist newsletter, this American woman, “well known in artistic circles as a pianist, a lecturer of sorts, and . . . at times . . . as a ‘patron of the arts,’ ” had become “bored and disgruntled” when her family lost some of its money. “Suddenly deprived of opportunities for the satisfaction of ego, condemned to the ‘relative barrenness of life’ in the United States—shorn of her position, her importance, and significantly of her audience, artistic cliques—she turned elsewhere for an outlet—to the pro-Soviet artistic circles in New York City.” The implication is clear: Draper was a weak woman, obviously without a husband or children to care for. All of her needs would have been fulfilled if she had just stayed in her proper place. Perhaps, they seemed to be saying, if she had been a real American woman, one who knew the meaning of housework, one who had a family of her own, she would not have fallen prey to the communists, who were using her for “their own shrewdly calculated, conspiratorial purposes.”23

As with Pauker, the truth of Draper’s life differed significantly from part of the anticommunists’ version. She did come from money, and she and her husband were “patrons of the arts” during their years in London. That lifestyle ended abruptly, however, because of her husband’s gambling and alcohol problems. Taking matters into her own hands, Draper divorced her husband and moved back to the United States. Forced to support her children, she found work as an interior designer and freelance writer. She returned to her interest in the arts as soon as she was financially able. She also became increasingly politically active. Although she never joined the Communist Party, she greatly admired the Soviet experiment during its early years. During World War II, she served as chair of the woman’s division of the National Council of American-Soviet Friendship. As such, she helped organize exchanges of information on women’s hygiene, child care, and maternal health. Following the war, she participated in the Women’s International Democratic Federation (WIDF) meeting
in 1945. Subsequently, she helped found the Congress of American Women (CAW), the American branch of WIDF. Far from the lazy, rich woman playing at politics as described by anticommunists, Draper was a serious, hardworking single mother who fought for women all over the world. Her real story, however, played less well to middle-class and working women than the version in which her work with WIDF and CAW paved the way for communism to take over America.24

If, according to anticommunists, communism turned women such as Pauker and Draper into manly, unfeminine women, the Red disease would also, they warned, transform their male counterparts into “girly men.” In other words, men also had to meet certain gendered expectations. Prominent anticommunists such as Senator Joe McCarthy frequently characterized male communists in very feminine terms and described themselves as ultra-masculine. For example, McCarthy and his cohort accused Secretary of State Dean Acheson, a favorite target, of fighting the communists by sending them “perfumed notes in a perfumed Harvard accent.” Such “powder puff diplomacy” would not begin to defeat the enemy. McCarthy explained to a Texas American Legion branch that “you can’t fight Communism with a silk handkerchief, in a delicate fashion.”25 McCarthy almost always mentioned an article of Acheson’s clothing whenever he talked about him. By referring to the secretary’s “striped pants” or “silk handkerchief,” McCarthy treated Acheson the way the media treated women.26 (No matter how prominent the woman, the press always commented on her clothing before stating anything else.) Democratic presidential candidate Adlai Stevenson was another favorite target. Anticommunists frequently used gendered characteristics to undermine Stevenson’s legitimacy with the American public. According to historian Cuordileone, conservative anticommunists mocked Stevenson’s name (calling him Adelaide), his vocabulary (he used “teacup words”), and his voice (at various times they said he “trilled” or “giggled”). Such insinuations did not help Stevenson in his presidential ambitions.27

These gendered characterizations took on added force because anticommunists increasingly equated homosexuality with communism. The merging of homosexuality with ideological radicalism resulted from the convergence of several factors. Defined as perverted and diseased, even by professionals, homosexuals spent much of their time hiding their true identities from their families and co-workers. The public assumed this double life made them especially vulnerable
to blackmail by communists looking for pawns. In addition, homosexuals’ ability to blend into heterosexual society made them seem even more capable of deceit; they were already fooling most of the people in their lives. Most important, according to scholar Barbara Epstein’s study of the scandal magazines of the time, Americans equated homosexuality with communism because both were “spread through seduction.” Both groups played on innocence, particularly that of young men, and lured their victims into their web of perversion. Once he had tasted the forbidden nectar, a young man “lost the will to resist.” Thus, both communists and homosexuals preyed on the weak and innocent to spread their message covertly throughout an unsuspecting society.

Numerous groups and individuals reinforced the connection between sexual and ideological radicalism. Leading the way, the Senate issued a report in December 1950 warning of the danger of homosexual civil servants who lacked the moral backbone to stand up for American values. Others jumped on the bandwagon. According to GOP chair Guy Gabrielson, “sexual perverts . . . have infiltrated our government.” Senator Kenneth Wherry of Nebraska told one journalist that homosexuals and communists were practically the same. J. Edgar Hoover characterized those who joined the Communist Party as “maladjusted” and “neurotic” seekers of sexual pleasure. The Lavender Scare, the government purge of homosexuals from federal offices, succeeded in ways the Red Scare never did. Although the FBI found few actual Soviet spies, it was able to force hundreds of men out of government service on suspicion of homosexual behavior. Because these dismissals were usually listed as “security risks,” it validated the anticommunists’ claim that Washington was riddled with evil and that they were successfully eliminating the problem. It did not matter to them if the evil was Red or Lavender. Moreover, for politicians, equating homosexuality with communism provided the added bonus of expanding their base of support. Even those uninterested in foreign policy or who refused to worry about domestic spies might be outraged at the thought of sexual “perverts” running the government.

On the surface, utilizing gendered images suited anticommunists’ purposes perfectly. It allowed them to build support for their cause, to question the Democrats’ motives and actions, and to set themselves up as saviors of American values. In particular, it gave anticomunist women, portraying themselves as defenders of home and family, firm
ground on which to address international, national, and local affairs since few people questioned a woman’s right to be involved in such matters. Nevertheless, the use of gendered language posed complications for anticommunist conservatives. Reliance on dedicated female political workers might provide political candidates and politicians with reliable, intelligent, and committed assistants while undercutting the anticommunist ideological adherence to the women’s place in the domestic sphere. Female anticommunists could be particularly vulnerable to male counterparts who used gendered language to denigrate women’s political positions or contributions. Finally, the political opposition, specifically individual members of the Democratic Party, could call on these gendered images to attack their conservative, anticommunist, and Republican opponents.

Three case studies demonstrate the use of gendered images and language in specific incidents relating to the anticommunist political campaign. The first concerns Joe McCarthy, his wife, Jean, and the controversy associated with the Maryland senatorial campaign in 1950; the second details Margaret Chase Smith’s Declaration of Conscience and the resulting firestorm; the last revolves around a brief statement by Doloris Bridges during the 1960 presidential campaign. Each case involved an important political challenge to committed anticommunist crusaders and the use of gendered language in either the attack or the defense of the anticommunist position. In each case the individual woman became almost incidental to the creation of the properly gendered images that clearly defined the result of the battle.

Joe and Jean McCarthy epitomized the gendered images anticommunists preached. As a former boxer and Marine, McCarthy emphasized that it might take “lumberjack tactics” to rid the world of communism, and he, for one, was not afraid to use such tactics. Anticommunist women helped reinforce McCarthy’s provocative image. Although they sometimes mentioned his weaknesses or flaws in his approach to fighting communism, they more often described him in very flattering terms. Sometimes, the description fit the romanticized picture McCarthy’s people tried to create for him. Doloris Bridges emphasized that he was a “Marine who was decorated for heroism in World War II,” yet he was “soft-spoken . . . and respected by his colleagues.” She could be describing most women’s dream lover. Elizabeth Churchill Brown saw him in more maternal terms; he was, she wrote in an unpublished book, “as friendly and awkward as a
St. Bernard puppy.” In other words, he was someone who saved the lost and was no threat to the innocent. Both women admitted that he might be a little overzealous in his quest to root out communism, but they did not believe that diminished the good work he did. These characterizations, however, did nothing to disturb the 1950s order of gender relations. Whether regarded as a lover or a friendly puppy, Joe McCarthy was still very much in charge, while Bridges and Brown dutifully played supporting roles. Thus, the women around McCarthy protected his reputation as a vigorous, heterosexual male.

Interestingly, Joe needed their support. The man who freely questioned his opponents’ sexuality faced gossip concerning his own. As he became more prominent, the rumors about his sexuality intensified. Journalist Drew Pearson, a bitter McCarthy foe, kept a file of accusations and names of McCarthy’s supposed homosexual partners. People all over the country sent Pearson leads on alleged witnesses and incidents. Although Pearson never published the list himself, he occasionally showed it to people who would leak word to the press. At one point Hank Greenspan, another journalist and McCarthy hater, used the material to write an article for The Las Vegas Sun. Implying that the senator’s bachelor ways were merely “window dressing,” Greenspan stated outright that “Sen. Joe McCarthy has often engaged in homosexual activities.”

McCarthy’s association with Roy Cohn and David Schine added credibility to the accusations. Cohn and Schine traveled all over Europe together, supposedly investigating U.S. embassy libraries but also generating numerous rumors about the exact nature of their relationship. Their rude behavior and extravagant bills scandalized both Europeans and Americans. The relationship between the two helped lead to the Army-McCarthy hearings. When McCarthy attacked the army for harboring communists, the military establishment countered with accusations that Cohn had requested special favors for Schine, an army private. Connecticut senator William Benton, who led a “Stop-Joe” movement in Wisconsin, wrote an associate that “these Cohn-Schine-McCarthy rumors are everywhere.” McCarthy never considered dropping his association with the two, despite all the problems they caused.

McCarthy and his associates did what they could to counteract the gossip and the presumed harm Joe’s alleged homosexuality would do to his carefully crafted image as a powerful male senator. He pointedly referred to the “crackpots” who spread lies about him. He told the
American Society of Newspaper Editors that “the Reds, their minions and the egg-sucking phony liberals” were responsible for the personal vilification he had suffered. His speeches almost always included allusions to his masculinity, especially highlighting his military experience and his brief boxing career. Friends from Wisconsin and supporters in Washington pointedly characterized Joe as a swinging bachelor who always had a pretty woman on his arm.

Increasingly in the early 1950s, that pretty woman was Jean Fraser Kerr, who worked in his office. They dated off and on after they met in 1947. Although they came from different backgrounds, they shared a love of politics and a devotion to the anticommunist cause. From all indications, their relationship was stormy; both were opinionated, strong-willed, and ambitious. Stories about their pursuit of one another at various times, as well as their arguments and breakups, achieved legendary proportions around the McCarthy office. Although there were rumors that Joe saw other women, he always came back to Jean. After five years of this pattern, friends, aides, and the press wondered why the two did not marry, especially since they appeared to be in love with one another. McCarthy also had compelling reasons for getting married. Aside from the obvious political benefit of having a wife, a wedding would end, once and for all, rumors of Joe’s homosexuality—or at least McCarthyites hoped it would.

Jean did more than shield her husband from gossip and innuendo. Like many other anticommunist women, Jean straddled the line between political activism and being a “normal” wife and mother. Throughout her relationship with Joe, she worked as hard as he did for the cause of anticommunism. She justified her participation, however, not just in terms of the imminent danger communism posed but more immediately in terms of helping her husband. In many ways, Jean personified the anticommunist woman who broke the stereotypical rules of feminine behavior, all the while maintaining the facade of a traditional wifely role. She even used her position as McCarthy’s wife to retain her place in the movement after his death. In fact, it became her second career.

Jean’s willingness to assume a subordinate role and to help Joe maintain the gendered image anticommunists attached to men echoed the efforts of many anticommunist women of the time and reinforced those existing stereotypes. Such “normalcy” brought comfort to people frightened by the changes around them. Her actions seemed to prove that women who participated in the anticommunist crusade
were still women, despite their political activity. Just as her marriage to Joe quashed rumors of his homosexuality, so her acceptance of a behind-the-scenes role made her political work seem normal.  

Gender issues in McCarthy’s case, however, extended beyond the nature of his sexuality. Joe seemed to prefer utilizing committed, anticommunist females as political operatives when it suited his purposes. Of course, these women should have been at home tending to the needs of their families, but, as we have seen, dedicated anticommunist women were frequently in the public sphere defending America from the threat of communism. In one instance, the 1950 Senate election in Maryland, McCarthy’s use of women was particularly effective in bringing about the defeat of a perceived weak link in the fight against the communist menace. However, in the investigation of McCarthy’s tactics following the election, the Senate investigators’ attitude and demeanor toward these women and McCarthy’s defense of them demonstrated the various ways gendered language could be utilized in pursuing a political goal.

McCarthy’s interest in the 1950 Maryland senatorial campaign originated from his antipathy for Millard Tydings, the Democratic incumbent in the race. Tydings had chaired the committee that had investigated McCarthy’s earliest accusations that communists had infiltrated the federal government. The committee ultimately rejected McCarthy’s indictments, leading the Wisconsin senator to claim that a Democratic whitewash had taken place and revealing Tydings to be less than a staunch anticommunist. McCarthy was determined to unseat Tydings in November. Caught between the pre- and postwar worlds, Tydings faced an uphill battle for reelection. Internal divisions within the state Democratic Party, lingering resentment about a recently imposed sales tax that threatened consumers’ newfound prosperity, and a “blacklash” against Tydings’s typical southern white responses to civil rights legislation put him in a difficult spot that was only made worse by the continuing hostilities in Korea. Tydings’s opponent in the race was the newcomer John Marshall Butler, a McCarthy protégé.

Numerous women played critical roles in McCarthy’s battle to assure Tydings’s defeat. One of Joe’s Maryland contacts, a rich Republican woman, suggested Butler as a potential, viable opponent. From there, McCarthy consulted Ruth McCormick Miller, editor of the Washington Times-Herald, who, through the auspices of another woman, Bertha Adkins of the Republican National Committee, intro-
duced Butler to Jon M. Jonkel, a public relations expert. Jonkel ended up serving as Butler’s campaign manager and chief speechwriter. Facilitating these arrangements was Ruth Miller. Her office served as the original meeting place for many of the participants in the plan to unseat Tydings. Additionally, Miller raised considerable funds for Butler and personally contributed money during both the primary and general campaigns.

Miller’s most controversial efforts for the campaign were centered around the much-discussed tabloid *From the Record*. At McCarthy’s request, Miller allowed her presses to be used to publish this four-page newsletter quickly and relatively cheaply. Her staff worked on it, and her future husband, Garvin Tankersley, put together the infamous composite picture that showed Tydings apparently in intimate conversation with Communist Party chief Earl Browder. Although Miller claimed to have had no direct part in composing or creating the tabloid, she was crucial to its eventual publication and distribution.

Playing an even more critical role in the senator’s scheme was Jean Kerr, McCarthy’s administrative assistant, speechwriter, and future wife. In many ways, Jean’s role in the campaign sparked the most controversy, both because of her attitude and because it tied Joe so intimately to the Butler camp. Jean, by her own admission, worked very hard for Butler’s election. She provided his staff with an endless source of anti-Tydings material; she wrote a campaign biography of Butler; she carried money from McCarthy’s office and facilitated raising funds from his supporters; she worked on the tabloid, perhaps even writing some of the copy; and she helped orchestrate a postcard campaign to contact voters right before the election.

In addition to these more prominent women, countless others were involved in key areas of the race. Running the office with Jonkel was Catherine Van Dyke, who began as a volunteer and ended up virtually second in command at Butler headquarters. Although, like Jonkel, she had no previous political experience, she learned so quickly and so well that she received job offers both before and after election day. Wilma Lee similarly volunteered and learned her job as she went along. The wife of an associate of Joe McCarthy’s, Lee accepted responsibility for running the postcard campaign after her husband suggested her for the job. Her responsibilities included assembling a large number of volunteers, organizing their efforts, providing them with supplies, and gathering their finished products. Since Butler headquarters thought this was an important project, they devoted
a significant amount of money and effort to it. Thus, hundreds of women participated in the Butler campaign and shared the credit for his ultimate victory.46

When Tydings lost the election, he complained to the Senate that McCarthy had unethically, if not illegally, caused his defeat through his unwarranted intervention in the campaign. The Senate Subcommittee on Privileges and Elections, controlled by the Democratic majority, began an investigation and called many of the key participants in the election to testify. Interestingly, the men on the subcommittee as well as McCarthy’s supporters reacted to the women’s participation in much the same way. Primarily and most pervasively, they ignored evidence of the women’s valuable political skills and activities and acted as if they were simply employed in “typical” female roles. For example, almost all witnesses referred to Kerr and Van Dyke as secretaries, when neither had ever served in that capacity. Van Dyke could not even type.47

Equally enlightening were the committee’s responses to the testimony of Van Dyke and Kerr. Tremendously loyal to their bosses and their cause, both women approached the committee with a certain animosity. Committee members, who as Democrats were less ideologically wedded to the gendered images held by anticommunists, nevertheless treated the women with a level of restraint, courtesy, and tolerance that facilitated their ability to hide behind the facade of traditional female behavior. For example, after opening her testimony with a rather lengthy statement, Van Dyke chided committee counsel Edward McDermott for asking questions she claimed she had already answered. He pointed out that nothing in her remarks addressed his particular point. He continued, “I do not wish to quarrel with you. Let’s just visit back and forth about this matter.” Furthermore, McDermott did not challenge Van Dyke when she denied allegations made by other witnesses that she had knowingly violated election laws by failing to record contributions. Rather, he merely accepted that she thought the record was “incorrect” and went on to something else.48

Van Dyke denied involvement in the alleged crimes and challenged the committee’s political authority. Nevertheless, she had stayed within accepted parameters of female behavior, and the committee responded in traditional ways. Van Dyke played the retired school marm, chiding the sheriff, and McDermott responded by shushing her. All in all, he was very gentle with her. As a male Senate staffer, he did not want to affront Van Dyke’s female sensibilities with confronta-
tional challenges when all that was necessary from a relatively unim-
portant female political operative was a “visit.”

The committee was less tolerant of Kerr. A dedicated believer in
the evils of communism in general and of Tydings in particular, Kerr
used her time before the committee to mount an offense as well as a
defense. She attacked Tydings’s record, repeatedly insinuating that he
was “pink around the edges.” Questioned about the validity of the
tabl oid From the Record and the authenticity of the composite picture
of Tydings and Browder, Kerr vigorously defended both. She claimed
they could have shown “much more damaging” evidence of Tydings’s
treachery. She challenged Oklahoma senator A. S. “Mike” Monroney’s
description of the tabloid as a “fabrication” and argued strenuously
with Missouri senator Thomas C. Hennings about the “truth” shown
in the picture. She even mocked Hennings’s own reelection campaign,
stating that he and his opponent “pretty much complimented each
other up and down the State.” Hennings’s frustration and dismay with
her responses was obvious. When Jean argued that the tabloid could
have painted a much more sinister picture, Hennings asked her who
was the “sissy in this crowd who did not want the whole story [about
Tydings] told”? Hennings’s comment both reinforced the stereotype
of tough guy anticommunists and tried to strip Jean of her femininity,
since she obviously was not the “sissy.”

From an anticommunist woman’s perspective, Jean was doing
what she had to do to fight evil. While committee members saw a
woman who did not fit their stereotypical image of females, confronting
male senators as peers, Jean saw herself as continuing in her normal
pattern of fighting communism. Just as the editors of the American
Woman’s Party newsletter and Elizabeth Churchill Brown had chided
men for shirking their responsibilities, Jean chastised members of the
committee for questioning her actions in the name of standing up to
communism. Just as Brown and Schlafly willingly employed harsh
language usually reserved for men, Jean adopted a belligerent atti-
dtude toward both Tydings and the committee.

Her performance, however, had mangled the gendered image of
anticommunist women, even publicly active female anticommunists
such as Catherine Van Dyke. She was not acting like a proper lady. She
argued, she fought, she mocked, she refused to back down. Perhaps
most shocking, she proudly supported what the senators perceived to
be unethical, if not illegal, behavior. In fact, she boldly stated that she
had wanted harsher treatment of Tydings. When Hennings pushed,
she pushed back. He got angry with her but did not seem to know what to do when she not would retreat from her stance or appear apologetic. Ultimately, he had met his match, and he stopped questioning her. It was left to Margaret Chase Smith, the only woman on the committee, to calm the situation by returning Jean to her proper feminine role. Reminding everyone that Jean had an injured hip and would need to be protected from the press as she left the room, Smith restored Jean’s feminine vulnerability and reinforced her status as a “good little woman.” Nevertheless, the senators on the committee had clearly failed either to bully Jean into submission or denigrate her responses to irrelevancy.

The committee members used Jean’s involvement to tie Joe to the Butler campaign. In their final report, they stated that in participating in the Maryland race, she had “acted at his request.” This statement contradicted Kerr’s testimony. She had stated that she “was very, very much interested in the Maryland campaign and . . . had given the Butler headquarters research material that . . . [she] had assumed he would be using in speeches.” McCarthy might have approved and encouraged her, but Kerr acted of her own volition. That fact negated one crucial piece of evidence in the war against McCarthy. It was far better to assume that Jean, both as a woman and as an assistant in Joe’s office, could not and would not have acted except under his direct order.51

Jean’s actions in the campaign, her testimony before the committee, and the reactions of both her supporters and her detractors exemplified the complexity of the situation surrounding anticommu-

nist women. From all indications, Jean was an avid anticommunist and a willing participant in the Butler campaign. Although Joe might have instigated the involvement of those in his office, her zealou-

ness in working for Tydings’s defeat went beyond routine duty. Jean wanted to take action. As an anticommunist woman, she felt she had not only the right but also the responsibility to defeat Tydings. Her behavior before the committee reinforced this version of her actions. She was proud of what she had done to further the anticommunist cause. In the end, Jean Kerr had destroyed the stereotypical image of the female political operative and even the gendered image anticom-

munist women preferred in defense of America’s greatest opponent of the communist menace: Joe McCarthy.

The language of male committee members reflected their basic assumptions about women. Throughout the hearings, men on both
sides of the table referred to women, no matter how old or capable, as “girls.” This language, while demeaning of women’s role in the campaign, was not always used with political purpose, as it often reflected both colloquial usage and general stereotypes of female employees. Sometimes, this choice of nouns made the women seem less like young females and more like pieces of office equipment. McCarthy aide Don Surine dictated his statement to “the girl”; he then instructed “the girl” to make photostats of the statement, and then “the girl” got Butler’s address—all this despite the fact that he proved in his later testimony that he knew the names of all the women stenographers in the office. Surine appeared almost enlightened, however, compared to Jon Jonkel, the campaign manager. When questioned about the paid staff in his office, he admitted that he had trouble with the part-time stenographer’s name (he could not remember the exact pronunciation or spelling of her last name). The campaign later hired a second stenographer. He could not remember her name either, so he simply called her “cupcake.” Jonkel also could not figure out the responsibilities of his staff: he said Catherine Van Dyke, the woman who was his second in command, was a “taker-carer of almost anything that required any follow-through.” Playing down her political influence, he turned her into a glorified secretary.

In contrast, McCarthy, who had encouraged his female supporters in their actions on his behalf, employed with clear political purpose the same gendered language as his opponents to undermine the committee. McCarthy used the committee’s treatment of Kerr as an excuse to go after its members. “What I resent most in this report is the reference to a little girl who works in my office [emphasis added],” he ranted. “There are a lot of small, evil-minded people in this town, who are trying [to] smear this girl just because she works for me.” In the tradition of 1950s westerns, Joe turned himself into Gary Cooper protecting Grace Kelly from the evil gunslingers. How could anyone believe this “child,” in his words, was capable of doing the things they insinuated she had done?

McCarthy was probably unaware of the ideological contradictions embedded in the Tydings affair. Like many anticommunist men, Joe accepted the support of his female compatriots. He willingly allowed them—in fact, encouraged them—to do the grunt work that needed to be done to achieve what he saw as the higher purpose—defeating Tydings. In many ways, however, he treated his female associates just like Surine and Jonkel did. His “girls” were one more piece of
equipment to be used in the crusade. He was clever enough to realize that he could employ the gendered language so integral to the anticommunist message to pursue his own agenda. However, it was only a small step from gendered language to actually turning Jean into the child he had portrayed as threatened by the committee. He seemed not to recognize that his words diminished her as an anticommunist crusader, at the very time she was proving to be an admirable defender of him and his cause.

The response to Margaret Chase Smith’s Declaration of Conscience offers another example of the complex relationship between anticommunism and the language and image of gender. Although Smith tended to be more moderate than many of her fellow anticommunists, like most of her colleagues on the Hill she believed communism was evil and “must be rooted out.” She worried that the Democratic administration was not doing enough about the problem. She explained to one constituent that she was “disturbed with the smug complacency that exists towards the growing threat of communism.” To counter that apparent indifference, she recommended that various steps be taken to mount an offensive against the enemy. At one point, for example, she “proposed the creation of a non-partisan commission to investigate communism in government.” She also introduced legislation to outlaw the Communist Party in March 1953; opposition from the Eisenhower administration, however, killed her bill in committee. When a colleague introduced a new internal security bill, Smith helped attach and steer through the floor debate an amendment outlawing the Communist Party. Recognizing the controversial nature of such an action, Smith defended her position in letters to her constituents and through her newspaper column. “Why talk about the evils of communism,” she asked, “if we are not willing to outlaw its sponsors?” The Communist Party, she argued, was not just a political party that deserved constitutional protection. It was instead an organization that sought “to overthrow our government by the use of violence and force and certainly by subversion.” She considered the danger very real.

Smith’s dedication to anticommunism involved a brief verbal altercation with Khrushchev himself. In response to her perception of President John F. Kennedy’s attempts to slow the growth of the nuclear arsenal, Smith gave a rare speech on the Senate floor castigating the Kennedy administration for downgrading the U.S. nuclear deterrent. She accused the president of doing exactly what the Soviets wanted, since the Reds could possibly win a conventional war with
the United States. Questioning his courage, she condensed his move into simple terms: “In short, we have the nuclear capability, but not the nuclear credibility.”57 As reported in *Time* magazine, Nikita Khrushchev responded “shrilly’ to Smith:

> Who can remain calm and indifferent to such provocative statements made in the United States senate by this woman, blinded by savage hatred toward the community of Socialist countries? . . . It is hard to believe how a woman, if she is not the devil in disguise, can make such a malicious man-hating appeal. She should understand that in the fire of nuclear war millions of people would perish, including her own children, if she has any. Even the wildest of animals, a tigress even, worries about her cubs, licks and pities them.

*Time* commented, “Back home in Maine, Senator Smith, a childless widow, shrugged off the blast.”58

Smith’s steadfast anticommunism did not blind her to the way some abused the issue for personal and political purposes. Concerned that investigations into anticommunist activities should be conducted as impartially and fairly as possible, she suggested that former President Herbert Hoover lead a new nonpolitical commission. She advocated letting the Constitution be the guiding principle in the investigation, lest the “American concept that a man is innocent until proven guilty” be “perverted” into its opposite.59 In particular, she was increasingly appalled by McCarthy’s behavior. Initially shocked by his accusations, she waited and waited for proof of his charges. She was disappointed that it never arrived. When his statements increased in number and his aim spread widely across the political spectrum, she waited for someone to do something to stop him. Knowing she was just a freshman senator and a woman, she felt certain that someone with more experience and power should and would challenge him. Democrats waited for the Republicans to rein him in; Republicans relished his attacks on the Truman administration and looked the other way at his abuses of his position.60

Smith finally decided something had to be done.61 After consulting with a select group of senators she felt she could trust, she wrote her “Declaration of Conscience,” which she read on the Senate floor on 1 June 1950. Announcing that she wanted to speak about a “serious national condition,” she articulated her concern that America was headed for “national suicide and the end of everything that we Americans hold dear.” She spoke, she explained, as a Republican, a woman, a senator, and an American. Chastising legislators for abusing their
privileges and ignoring their responsibilities to the Constitution and
the American people, she called on her colleagues to “do some soul-
searching” and examine their behavior. Smith bluntly addressed what
she saw as the heart of the matter.

Those of us who shout the loudest about Americanism in making
cracter assassinations are all too frequently those who, by
our own words and acts, ignore some of the basic principles of
Americanism:

The right to criticize;
The right to hold unpopular beliefs;
The right to protest;
The right to independent thought.

She worried that if people feared to “speak their minds” lest they
be “politically smeared as ‘Communists’ or ‘Fascists,’” Americans’
freedom of speech would be destroyed.

She mostly blamed the Democrats for the situation. The Demo-
cratic administration had “failed pitifully to provide leadership” and
thus had left Americans confused and fearful. Knowledge about cases
of real spies frightened the public and left citizens with valid ques-
tions for the administration. When Truman and associates did not
provide answers and seemed “complacen[t] to the threat of commu-
nism at home,” Americans became suspicious and paranoid. This
attitude left them vulnerable to those who would use the real danger
of communism for political and personal gain. She feared the nation
would “continue to suffer as long as it [was] governed by the present
ineffective Democratic Administration.”

The Republican Party, despite its own flaws, should, she stated,
provide the necessary leadership to save America and American free-
doms. Drawing on images from Civil War days, Smith called on her
colleagues to reunite the country as it had in the past. She wanted a
Republican victory, but not at the cost of “political integrity and intel-
lectual honesty.” There were enough real issues on which to attack the
Democrats, she cautioned, without resorting to innuendo and false
accusations. Resorting to smear tactics would ultimately lead to the
end of the two-party system and the American way of life. “Shocked
at the way Republicans and Democrats alike” had played into “the
Communist design of ‘confuse, divide and conquer,’” she longed to
see Americans “recapture” their strength and unity. They needed, she
explained, to fight the enemy, not one another.
Interestingly for a woman who rarely mentioned her gender in her role as politician, Smith directly addressed the women of America: “As a woman, I wonder how the mothers, wives, sisters, and daughters feel about the way in which members of their families have been politically mangled in Senate debate—and I use the word ‘debate’ advisedly.” She obviously hoped to draw women into the debate by making them feel they were part of the situation. Her word choices, however, presented them as outsiders. Despite the fact that numerous women had been directly confronted by both McCarthy and other congressional investigatory bodies, she spoke only to women in their traditional role as homemakers who created a support system for men, the true political actors.

Smith’s speech posed a problem for anticommunist women. Although her speech attacked communism’s greatest opponent, McCarthy, there could be little doubt about Smith’s own anticommunist credentials. The speech itself reinforced the importance of fighting communism. In particular, she encouraged women—as wives and mothers—to join the battle to defeat the enemy. She was doing what anticommunist women were supposed to do: take a firm stand against the spread of communistic ideas abroad and at home. If they criticized her for giving the speech, they would seem to undermine the very role they had chosen for themselves.

McCarthy, clearly the target of the speech even though his name was never mentioned, had listened in silence and left as soon as it was over. However, he soon made clear in gendered language that Smith’s speech was without value. According to one Maine newspaper, he refused to comment on the “spanking” he had received from Smith. “I don’t fight with women senators,” he sneered. At another point he labeled Smith and her co-signers “Snow White and the Six Dwarves.” In typical McCarthy fashion, he said one thing but acted in an entirely different manner. His condescending and sarcastic remarks about Smith’s speech were typical of his usual response to criticism. His restraint implied that her declaration was not worth commenting on and barely caused him a moment’s pause. She was a woman, after all, his words implied; what do you expect? In fact, however, his revenge, taken months later, proved that he was very angry at Smith. He had her removed from his Investigations Subcommittee without the courtesy usually accorded fellow party members and senators. The GOP, responding to pressure from McCarthyites, also tinkered with her committee assignments; in essence, she was demoted and exiled to “minor” committees.
Some of Smith’s constituents, as well as interested parties across the country, responded to the declaration in gender-neutral language. *Newsweek* editors noted that the senator’s colleagues “disapproved of her action on strategic grounds.” One constituent warned that Smith’s anti-McCarthy stance might force voters to retire her to a “nice warm corner next to the hearth.” Others were even more blunt. “Moscow must be very proud of you,” wrote constituent James H. Carroll. “No doubt,” he continued, “you will be disappointed if a citation is not forthcoming from the Kremlin.” An article in the *Saturday Evening Post* characterized her as part of the “Soft Underbelly of the Republican Party.” All these comments could as easily have been made about a male politician.

Most commentators, however, could not separate Smith’s actions from her gender. Her speech, according to constituent W. M. Jeffers, had obviously been written by a “schoolmam [sic] who used too much language.” How else, he seemed to imply, could she have said what she did? Carl T. Smith, another constituent, also seemed shocked that “a nice lady” like Senator Smith could be caught up in such a “dirty mess.” Journalist Elizabeth Churchill Brown, a friend of McCarthy’s as well as a fervent anticommunist, wrote condescendingly of “the little lady from Maine” who spoke “her piece” and “delighted” anti-McCarthyites. In a book she drafted but never completed, Brown continued her scornful treatment of Smith. “No one ever knew,” she wrote, “precisely how . . . or exactly why” Smith gave the speech, since she was “unquestionably anti-Communist.” Referring to Smith as “Senator Maggie,” Brown turned her from a duly elected federal representative into a caricature. Brown further undermined Smith’s credibility by stating that she was “sensitive to attack—even sometimes anticipating an attack when none was intended.” Thus, Brown described Smith as a flighty, irresponsible woman who did not deserve the respect accorded “real” senators. Constituent Margaret Smith agreed with Brown. She found Senator Smith “too flighty—too gabby—too showofish [sic]” to represent Maine. Constituent Smith wondered who the senator was “trying to cover for” and thought she was “a complete flop as a senator.” In a letter to *Newsweek* in response to its story on Smith, Paul Clement likewise emphasized the senator’s feminine weaknesses. He accused Smith of thinking “that the business of the Republicans is to drink tea and play Pollyanna.”

Other critical commentators made Smith representative of all women. Viola Blumenstock, head of the Women’s Republican Club of
Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, scolded the senator for “acting like a spoiled child” and, in the process, “hurting all Republican women.” Because Smith reacted badly when she was feeling “dejected by what some man” had done to her, Blumenstock argued, she was making it more difficult for other women to win election to office. As Blumenstock explained, Smith was “Republican womanhood personified in Congress.” In other words, Blumenstock implied, Smith should expect this kind of treatment from men and ignore it, as most women did. Clara Aiken Speer, a member of the Federated Women’s Republican Clubs of Missouri, also felt Smith was setting a poor example. Claiming she had “always been an advocate of more women in government,” Speer found herself “grieved that you [Smith] represent your sex, your party, your state, and your American heritage so poorly.”

Male co-signers of the declaration found their manhood questioned. An article in the Saturday Evening Post labeled the signers “sensitive” souls who were looking for something “to get mad about.” The author suggested that they do something more constructive with their anger than attack McCarthy. A pro-McCarthy pamphlet took a similar approach. The author, Kenneth Colegrove, called the declaration a “curious [display] of self-righteousness” and an “act of affectation.” He postulated that the male signers had acted “at the behest of a lady Senator” and would soon regret their endorsement of her speech. Further impugning their masculinity, Colegrove described the participants as “too nice-minded” to “attack the problem” as a man would.

The voices in support of Smith’s speech were almost as numerous as those in opposition. According to her biographer, Janann Sherman, Herman Wouk summed up the opinion of many when he wrote, “by one act of political courage, you have justified a lifetime in politics.” Many others were equally enthusiastic. The Chicago Sun-Times wrote her into the lexicon of American heroes, comparing her courage to that of the men who fought at Lexington and Concord. Margaret Frakes, in the Christian Century, claimed that if Smith “had done nothing in the Senate” but give her speech, “her claim on the gratitude of the American people would be secure.” Some constituents also wrote in support. Jim Glover congratulated her on saying “what a lot of people have been thinking.”

Like Smith’s opponents, many supporters could not separate her words from her gender. Time titled its article about the declaration
“A Woman’s Conscience” rather than “A Senator’s Conscience,” as Frakes had done in *Christian Century*. *Newsweek* followed the same pattern, titling its article “The Lady from Maine.” In the article the author continually referred to Smith as “a woman” or “the diminutive lady” rather than as senator or simply “Smith,” as might have been done in discussing a man. Moreover, the author compared her rhetoric to “a broom sweeping out a mess,” further emphasizing her femininity. Both publications supported Smith’s speech, but their words indicated to readers that her actions should be viewed in terms of her gender rather than her political principles. Years later, *Time* referred back to the declaration as “Maggie’s most righteous indignation (and her finest hour in public life).” Even after she was nominated for president in 1964, the national newsmagazine still treated her in a condescending manner.71

Other supporters simply acknowledged her gender in offering congratulations. Elizabeth Cushing wrote that “women all over the United States . . . are proud of the fine record you are making in the Senate [and] . . . particularly proud of you since last Thursday when you had the courage to speak out” against McCarthyism. Taking his cue from her own characterizations in the declaration, Will Beale mentioned all her labels: woman, Republican, senator, American. He thought it was a “brave, precarious,” and important speech that brought “uplift and re-encouragement” to people looking for leadership. In typical Yankee fashion, Maine resident Roland McDonald put the matter simply: “I think you are a god fearing honest woman.”72 These letters, and many others like them, mentioned her gender but did not emphasize her feminine characteristics.

Some people could not help but recognize that Senator Smith had done what no man had been willing to do. Maine constituent Jack Cottrell wrote to “congratulate” her on the declaration. He also wondered, “[W]hy do some of these things that wear trousers have to be so timid for so long?” He seemed to assume that a man should have been the one to take the principled stand. Former Roosevelt aide Harold Ickes similarly recognized that while men had “caviled and equivocated and slandered,” a woman had led “the way back to the homely and decent Americanism we used to take . . . for granted.” Smith’s speech, he announced, “fully justified” women’s participation in politics. Ickes’s article, which appeared in *The New Republic*, certainly praised Smith. The need to justify women’s political participation thirty years after passage of the Nineteenth Amendment,
however, reinforced the fact that women were still outsiders in politics. Financier Bernard Baruch acknowledged this outright when he commented that if Smith had been a man and had made that speech, she would have been touted as the next presidential candidate.73

Smith’s speech sparked a variety of contradictory gendered responses. On the one hand, some people, including McCarthy, used her gender as an excuse to ignore her declaration publicly. Others used gender stereotypes to undermine the significance and importance of the address. Many anticommunist women searched for a way to disagree with the speech without undermining Smith’s duty, as an anticommunist woman, to act. They found the answer by concentrating on Smith as a particular kind of woman. She was weak, flighty, and too emotional. She did not have what it took to be a real anticommunist. On the other hand, men such as Connecticut senator William Benton, who had also spoken out against McCarthy, were ignored. Smith’s declaration at least received a national hearing, perhaps because she was a woman, the only woman in the Senate at the time. In a sense, the popular image of women as morally superior to men also gave her a credence a man might not have had. If McCarthy was a macho fighter, Smith was a stern mother. Above all, the episode illustrates the role of gender, gendered images, and gendered language in the political language of the early Cold War era.

One last example of the relationship between gendered language and anticommunist politics involves Doloris Bridges, the wife of Senator Styles Bridges. During the 1960 presidential campaign, Doloris Bridges chastised John F. Kennedy for his stand on communism. She did not say he was a communist; in fact, she thought that was an “absurd” notion. Instead, using his record as evidence, she cited his lack of intense feeling on the subject to condemn him. Comparing him unfavorably with Republican candidate Richard Nixon, who had “distinguished himself as an outstanding anti-Communist,” Bridges set out to prove that JFK was “very soft on Communism.” “Even when the issue was hot,” she explained, “Kennedy was absent and apparently uninterested when sound anti-Communist legislation reached the [Senate] Floor.”74 Senator Henry Jackson quickly accused Nixon of orchestrating the attack on his opponent. According to Jackson’s tortured logic, Mrs. Bridges would not have made the comment without clearing it with her husband; since her husband was one of Nixon’s top strategists, the accusation must really have come from the candidate himself, using his friend’s wife as a decoy.
Jackson’s reaction to Mrs. Bridges’s speech was immediate and again reflected the difficult position in which anticommunist women found themselves. She had said nothing she and numerous other anticommunist women had not said before. She was speaking to a group of women, making a typical argument. JFK and his staff ignored the situation. Her disapproval hardly constituted a threat to JFK’s candidacy.

Both Democratic national chair Senator Henry Jackson and Democratic state chair J. Murray Devine ignored Doloris and instead used the incident to indictment Nixon and accuse him of weakness. Devine saw “tactics of desperation” in the speech; Styles Bridges did not dare make such “wild, reckless charges” himself, so he had his wife do it for him. Jackson was astounded that the Republicans had resorted to “hiding behind a woman’s skirts to launch the most vicious underhanded attack imaginable.” Neither man gave Doloris a role in the act; she was simply the unthinking mouthpiece for her husband and his colleague. Both assumed that she, merely the wife of a senator, could not possibly have made the accusation on her own. According to their way of thinking, the men were using her to do their dirty work. Since the Democrats, as gentlemen, would not dare attack a lady as they would a male political opponent, Nixon could make the accusation public without negative political consequences.

Most ingeniously, the Democrats had been able to insert their own use of gendered language, so frequently associated with their anticommunist opponents, into the affair by using Bridges’s statement to denigrate the GOP candidate’s masculinity. Both men insinuated that Nixon was too frightened or weak to do his own fighting. The Republicans, Jackson and Devine charged, hid behind their women to win the campaign. By taking this approach, the Democrats attempted to turn Doloris Bridges’s charge of softness back onto the Republicans. Ironically, some of Doloris’s supporters took the same approach. Using Senator Jackson’s remarks as further proof of Democrats’ “softness,” William Loeb of the Manchester Union Leader castigated the senator for “fighting with women.” The “viciousness” of his statement, Loeb felt, indicated just how worried Democrats were by the truth. The way Loeb worded his editorial, however, inferred more than just agreement with Bridges’s statement. Loeb seemed to imply that Jackson was less than a real man because he was attacking a woman rather than waging war against the truly dangerous enemy.

An editorial in the Washington Evening Star took Loeb’s insinuations a step further. The author offered one reason for Jackson’s “irra-
tional reasoning”: he was a bachelor. Implying that most “normal” men had wives, the editor hinted that Jackson was somehow less than healthy. Perhaps, he suggested, the senator’s statements might also have resulted from the “fevered imagination of a man who has no first-hand knowledge of married life.” The editorial not only called Jackson’s manhood into doubt but also, by implication, his dedication to the fight against communism.

Thus, conservative journalists who supported Mrs. Bridges’s actions employed gendered language to make their point even if that language also belittled her and women in general. The Star editorial assumed that everyone would know that wives cannot be controlled by their husbands; the joke was that wives, and women in general, said whatever they wanted to and men had to put up with it. Loeb, however, went beyond gender stereotypes by praising her for having the courage to expose JFK’s “horrible voting record” when Nixon had been “tip-toeing” around the issue. Hinting that Nixon had been too easy on Kennedy, Loeb used Bridges’s statement to attack Nixon from the Right. “The tragedy” of the campaign was that Nixon had not directly confronted JFK on what Loeb thought was the truly important issue: the presence of communism in the United States and around the world. Instead, “it remained for Mrs. Bridges to point to the [voting] record.” Echoing Jackson’s remarks, Loeb implied that Nixon had not been “man enough to fight his own battles.”

Male reactions to Bridges’s statements revealed much about the gendered nature of the political system. The Democrats, represented by Jackson and Devine, fell back on the traditional relationship between men and women as well as the accepted role of women in election campaigns. Assuming she could not or would not have spoken her own mind, Jackson and Devine attributed her remarks to her husband and his associate. This assumption gave them a way to shift attention from her characterization of their candidate to the character of their political opponent. From their perspective, Nixon looked weak; he had a woman fighting his battles for him. Because this view conformed to the standard interpretation of gender characteristics—Doloris as unwitting mouthpiece—it was easy to portray and accept. Regardless of whether they actually believed Doloris was merely her husband’s puppet, that image suited their purpose of undermining Nixon.

Republicans relied on traditional gender images as well in their counterattack, using the incident to their political advantage as much as
possible. To that end, they also utilized accepted gender stereotypes to attack Jackson and Devine. In questioning the Democrats’ masculinity and chivalry, Republicans assigned everyone traditional gender roles: real men fought only other men. Republicans could thus undercut the attack on their candidate by deflecting criticism back onto the Democrats. Conservatives like Loeb used the same strategy to prod Nixon into a more forceful stance: if a woman had bravely stated a “truth” about Kennedy, surely Nixon should be “man enough” to do so.

Both sides ignored Doloris as an active anticommunist woman. She made the decision to make the comment; she wrote and delivered the speech to a group of like-minded activist women. All of that was lost as the men with power used her efforts to their own advantage. Doloris, like Jean Kerr and numerous other anticommunist women, overlooked the insult and concentrated on the larger picture of advancing the anticommunist movement.

Jean, Margaret, Doloris, and countless other women like them across the country willingly accepted and even helped create the gendered images so important to anticommunism. Like their male counterparts, they saw them as an essential ingredient in the fight against communist forces. The image of the strong man with the helpful woman at his side reassured an American public confused and frightened by the changes around them. In the midst of a world gone mad, at least family remained the same. Referring to this ideal family was a way of encouraging others to join the anticommunist crusade and validating the importance of the fight.

For anticommunist women, however, the situation was complicated by their desire to participate actively in the movement. They believed in both the images and the cause. Much of the time, they could convince themselves and many others that no contradiction existed between the two. Their male compatriots seemed to agree. The limitations of that agreement and the shallowness of the men’s respect for women’s efforts quickly became apparent in the men’s willingness, through their language or their actions, to undermine women as political actors if it served their political goals. Anticommunist women thus often found their work diminished and their position in the movement relegated to caricature. They accepted this because to them the movement was more important than any other consideration, but gendered images and language—however ideologically useful they might be—continued to be a two-edged sword for female anticommunists.