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**“A Critic Friendly to McCarthy”: How William F. Buckley, Jr. Brought Senator Joseph R.
McCarthy into the American Conservative Movement between 1951 and 1959**

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Abstract

William F. Buckley, Jr. has been revered among American conservatives, and even some scholars of the field, for fathering what would come to be known as movement conservatism through his *National Review*. Senator Joseph R. McCarthy, a Republican from Wisconsin, has not been so fondly remembered; he was best known for his paranoid style of politics and eventual censure in the Senate. While Buckley and McCarthy's worlds clearly overlapped in the fervent anticommunist conservatism of the 1950s, few historians have recognized the extent to which McCarthy was a part of Buckley's conservative movement, if it is to be acknowledged as such. A closer examination of the historical record, through Buckley's published and private writings, reveals that Buckley considered McCarthy a friend, a political ally, and a singular, enlightened figure in American history.

Although Buckley's legacy generally centers around his ideas and intellectual prowess, Buckley was a deft political strategist. In the early 1950s, after McCarthy had burst onto the national stage but before Buckley rose to prominence, Buckley tethered his fortunes to McCarthy, defending the senator publicly and working for him personally. McCarthy, however, earned a rare rebuke from his colleagues in December 1954 for continuing to attack the Eisenhower administration and, in particular, the Army. Shortly afterwards, a now-famous Buckley would found the *National Review*, and while he would remain a McCarthy devotee, Buckley understood that McCarthy was polarizing at best, and that lavishing praise on the senator would not help Buckley's fledgling publication. Only after McCarthy's death would Buckley and his *National Review* pivot toward a rehabilitative stance, even in the face of warnings from fellow conservatives. Ultimately, Buckley saw himself as a friendly critic, but even this much has been largely unexplored by historians. A fuller, more nuanced understanding

of Buckley's relationship to McCarthy, especially through the turbulent 1950s, sheds light on Buckley himself and the nature of American conservatism, in the postwar era and beyond.

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“I am extremely anxious to bring to your attention the single most important journalistic project I know of. That is Bill Buckley’s weekly journal of opinion, National Weekly, which you may have heard something about.”¹

Preface

So extolled a pitch for William F. Buckley, Jr.’s fledgling *National Weekly*. The letter continued: “It becomes increasingly evident that those of us who dissent from the appeasement that is being shown currently toward the Communists and the socialists by the [Eisenhower] administration are getting no attention whatever in the national press.” Enter a rising Buckley and his obscure magazine. Not only would *National Weekly* “force our position on the attention of the thinking public,” the letter argued, but it would “engage the attention of students who have not yet committed themselves to the Liberals, and who might be prompted to give our position a chance before going over to the New Dealers.”² In the anticommunist conservatism of the postwar era, education was a battleground, and Buckley was already recognized as a warrior.

Buckley and *National Weekly*—which would become the standard-bearer for conservative publications in the second half of the twentieth century, *National Review*—occupied a conspicuous niche for anticommunist conservatives in the 1950s and beyond. Conservative “stalwarts,” such as Whittaker Chambers and James Burnham, were slated to write for the publication, so it would surely be “a sensational intellectual, literary, and political success.” Further, “it will be a commercial success,” the letter’s author predicted, “and I am myself investing a token amount as evidence of my faith in it.”³ Both historians and self-

¹ Joseph R. McCarthy, *Draft Letter*, 18 August 1955, Box 1, William F. Buckley, Jr. Papers (MS 576), Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

identified conservatives have praised Buckley for consolidating the right under *National Review*, but Buckley's and his magazine's success were not guaranteed in the way that this letter predicted. The letter itself suggests why: This was no form letter; it was signed Joseph R. McCarthy, who would become a contentious figure not only between the right and left, but within the right as well.

By his August 1955 writing, McCarthy had already become infamous for his virulent anticommunism, his tactics earning him a rare censure from his colleagues in the Senate less than a year earlier. In his letter, McCarthy went on to praise Brent Bozell, McCarthy's "top assistant here in Washington" as well as Buckley's brother-in-law and collaborator, who would be *National Review's* Washington editor. In McCarthy's words, this "guarantee[d] the best conceivable Washington coverage for the magazine."⁴ Whether McCarthy used "best" to mean most thorough or most favorable, one can only speculate. McCarthy's enthusiastic support for Buckley, his team, and his publication, however, is clear. McCarthy's backing of Buckley may seem surprising, in hindsight, given Buckley's reputation as an intellectual, above the dirty politics of the 1950s—and McCarthy's, for embodying this very fray.

Introduction

McCarthy's admiration for Buckley was mostly reciprocal, particularly before the senator's censure and immediately after his death. Buckley's relationship with McCarthy and later his legacy had a long history, beginning shortly after the senator's rise to prominence and continuing long after his death. Even before Buckley's first book, *God and Man at Yale*, made him a conservative icon, he wrote in support of McCarthy in *The Freeman*, the conservative

⁴ Joseph R. McCarthy, *Draft Letter*, 18 August 1955, Box 1, William F. Buckley, Jr. Papers.

journal that *National Review* would later supplant. Buckley's second book, *McCarthy and His Enemies: The Record and Its Meaning*, published in 1954, was a defense of McCarthy, an embrace of the man and his ideas. After censure, during the rest of a weakened McCarthy's tenure in the Senate, Buckley did not waver in his support. Even after McCarthy's death, Buckley's published and private writings make clear, he continued to aggressively support the late senator's legacy, though this support became less dogmatic over time.

Scholarship on the role of a growing conservatism after the Second World War is abundant, but work on the nature of conservatism's rise remains relatively sparse. The period between the 1990s and early 2010s, for example, saw an outgrowth of literature investigating the influence of conservatism on American politics in the postwar period and beyond. At the same time, however, conservative activists put forward works that put postwar conservatism in a more favorable light; on the topic, historian Kim Phillips-Fein, wrote that these were "generally heroic narratives of committed activists and farsighted intellectuals overcoming overwhelming odds in a struggle against liberal consensus."⁵ And while scholars such as Ellen Schrecker have recognized that postwar anticommunist conservatism encompassed more than McCarthy, and that these outside forces enabled the senator, Buckley has largely been left out of this story beyond *McCarthy and His Enemies*.⁶

George Nash, in particular, looms large in the field of postwar conservatism. Originally published in 1976, Nash's *The Conservative Intellectual Movement in America since 1945* has

⁵ Kim Phillips-Fein, "Conservatism: A State of the Field," *The Journal of American History*, Vol. 98, No. 3 (December 2011), JSTOR, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41510116>, 724.

⁶ For more on Buckley as an intellectual above and apart from McCarthy, see Michael J. Lee, "WFB" in *Creating Conservatism: Postwar Words that Made an American Movement* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2014). Lee cited George Nash's *The Conservative Intellectual Movement in America since 1945* and *Reappraising the Right*, suggesting an enduring legacy of even Nash's older work. Nevertheless, Nash's publisher in 2006 published Jeffrey Hart's *Making of the American Conservative Mind: National Review and Its Times* (Wilmington: ISI Books, 2006), which more clearly tied Buckley's *National Review* to McCarthy—at least as a strategic issue.

emerged as the definitive monograph on postwar conservatism. Nash's synthesis is indeed a work of serious scholarship, but Nash, particularly in his later writings, illustrated the tendency to characterize Buckley as the perfect embodiment of the "farsighted intellectual." Phillips-Fein contended that, to Nash, only through Buckley's intellectual leadership were the postwar forces constituting a disjointed conservatism united.⁷ Although Nash expressed a degree of admiration for Buckley in *The Conservative Intellectual Movement in America since 1945*, his 2009 volume, *Reappraising the Right*, further demonstrate the extent to which Nash viewed Buckley as a farsighted intellectual. He wrote how Buckley's "daily writing has occurred in the midst of myriad grueling responsibilities," for example, and that "Buckley's works are destined to endure because their enduring subject is people and because their author is a person of singular joie de vivre."⁸ It is unsurprising, then, that in Nash's histories, McCarthy was a minor figure in Buckley's life and work; years later, few others have noted how Buckley engaged with the senator.

So how was Buckley able to cultivate and maintain an image as the intellectual architect of modern conservatism, above and separate from the rough-and-tumble of McCarthy's style of politics, when he was so clearly involved with the man seen as responsible for one of the nastiest moments in modern American political history? Archival records complicate Nash's notion of Buckley. In part, Buckley followed two tracks after McCarthy's death. Buckley remained personally close to those who had been in McCarthy's inner circle—including Bozell; McCarthy's widow, Jean; and his attorney, Roy Cohn—while carefully straddling the line between rigidly celebrating and carefully defending McCarthy in public, both through *National*

⁷ Phillips-Fein, "Conservatism: A State of the Field," 729.

⁸ George H. Nash, *Reappraising the Right: The Past and Future of American Conservatism* (Wilmington: Intercollegiate Studies Institute, 2009), 149-151.

Review and other published works. As time passed, Buckley's attitude toward the senator became more complicated, reflecting a strategic method. Buckley's maneuvering between full-throated avowals of McCarthy, more tacit, privately-expressed acceptances, and even concessions about the senator's failings demonstrate that Buckley was not making editorial decisions in a vacuum, but was clearly influenced by the need to maintain *National Review's* credibility in the face of tensions from within and without.

Putting Buckley's actions in context, and viewing him as a political strategist, is necessary to understand his contributions to the foundations of a modern conservative movement. What did it mean to take a stand on McCarthy at various points, particularly during Buckley's rise and McCarthy's peak; during the infancy of *National Review*, after McCarthy's repudiation; and once Buckley has become a foundational figure in American conservatism, after McCarthy's death and regarding his legacy? Would celebrating McCarthy make Buckley a provocateur, or would it widen the conservative intellectual spectrum? If Buckley has been remembered as an intellectual who, through the force of his ideas, changed conservative history, his treatment of McCarthy, and the strategic considerations underlining the choices he made, raise questions about the nature of postwar anticommunist conservatism in the United States.

McCarthy's Reign and Buckley's Rise: February 1950 to December 1954

By 1950, the United States was ripe for McCarthy. After years of conflict with Joseph Stalin and the Soviet Union, the nation had already built the anticommunist infrastructure that McCarthy would come to take advantage of. Whittaker Chambers, a former communist and editor of *Time*, was critical to establishing the paranoid, anticommunist mood of the early 1950s. In August 1948, Chambers appeared before the House Un-American Activities Committee and

named Alger Hiss—a young but influential, East Coast bred State Department official—as a communist. As Nash argued, Chambers’ testimony and the ensuing trial of Alger Hiss for lying to the Committee captured American attention and fueled the burgeoning anticommunist conservatism.⁹ Hiss was sentenced to five years in prison for perjury on January 25, 1950, and just two weeks later, on February 9, 1950, McCarthy gave his Wheeling, West Virginia speech.¹⁰ This speech would inspire and mobilize a new generation of anticommunist conservatives, including recent Yale College graduate William F. Buckley, Jr.

In his speech to a group of Republican women from Wheeling, West Virginia, McCarthy at once identified real or perceived disloyalty in the State Department and tapped into a populist, anti-establishment sentiment which Chambers incited and Buckley would soon afterwards emulate. Despite the anticommunist policies of the 1940s that should have purged the government of communists, McCarthy claimed to have in his hand the names of fifty-seven “individuals who would appear to be either card-carrying members or certainly loyal to the Communist Party, but who nevertheless are still helping to shape our foreign policy.”¹¹ McCarthy further argued that United States found itself “in a position of impotency” because “those who have had all the benefits that the wealthiest nation on earth has had to offer – the finest homes, the finest college education, and the finest jobs in government we can give,” the State Department bureaucrats “born with silver spoons in their mouths are the ones who have

⁹ George H. Nash, *The Conservative Intellectual Movement in America since 1945* (Wilmington: Intercollegiate Studies Institute, 1996), 88.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 95.

¹¹ Joseph R. McCarthy, “Enemies from Within,” (speech, Wheeling, W.V., February 9, 1950), Digital History Project, University of Houston, http://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/disp_textbook.cfm?smtID=3&psid=3633. The exact number of individuals McCarthy accused of being communists has been disputed—in other sources, it is as great as 205—but McCarthy reported the figure as fifty-seven in a telegram to Harry S. Truman. Joseph R. McCarthy, *Telegram from Senator Joseph McCarthy to President Harry S. Truman*, February 11, 1950, U.S. National Archives, <https://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/mccarthy-telegram>.

been the worst.”¹² McCarthy’s assault on the State Department was glaringly anti-elite, a strand of argumentation Buckley would adopt with his early defenses of McCarthy as well as his first book.

Importantly, conservatives—or for that matter the Republican Party—were by no stretch of the imagination unified behind McCarthy in 1950. Just months after McCarthy’s Wheeling speech, on June 1, 1950, Margaret Chase Smith, a Republican senator from Maine, spoke out on the floor of the Senate. Although she never mentioned him by name, Smith decried McCarthy’s paranoid politics and the resulting hysteria as “a national feeling of fear and frustration that could result in national suicide and the end of everything that we Americans hold dear,” rejecting the hijacking of the Senate for “selfish political gain at the sacrifice of individual reputations and national unity.”¹³ Although Smith’s speech stood in stark contrast to McCarthy and his growing mass of support, the speech also demonstrated that, if there was any consensus during this period, it centered around an ethos of national security and rejected communism.

In indirectly denouncing McCarthy, Smith made no room for communism in the United States. Conceding that “there have been enough proved cases,” noting the Hiss case, “to cause nationwide distrust and strong suspicion that there may be something to the unproved, sensational accusations,” Smith made clear that she scorned “a Democratic administration ‘whitewash’ or ‘coverup’” as much as she rejected “a Republican smear or witch hunt.” As she said, “I condemn a Republican Fascist just as much as I condemn a Democrat Communist. I condemn a Democrat Fascist just as much as I condemn a Republican Communist. They are equally dangerous to you and me and to our country.”¹⁴ But while Smith’s Senate speech

¹² Joseph R. McCarthy, *Telegram from Senator Joseph McCarthy to President Harry S. Truman*, February 11, 1950.

¹³ Margaret Chase Smith, “Declaration of Conscience,” (speech, Washington, D.C., June 1, 1950), United States Senate Historical Office, <https://www.senate.gov/artandhistory/history/resources/pdf/SmithDeclaration.pdf>.

¹⁴ Smith, “Declaration of Conscience” (June 1, 1950).

provides one example of a middle-road Republican denunciation of both communism and McCarthyism, Buckley would follow a more staunchly pro-McCarthy tack in this early part of his career.

On May 21, 1951, the conservative magazine *The Freeman* published Buckley's first public defense of McCarthy, "Senator McCarthy's Model?" The column bridged the gap between McCarthy's Wheeling speech and Buckley's *God and Man at Yale*, published later in 1951, by justifying and promoting an anti-elite politics. Buckley began with an assessment of the politically involved, writing that "the American public is divided roughly into two groups, on the basis of intelligence, learning, shrewdness and curiosity ... the 'university' crowd, and the 'non-university' crowd."¹⁵ This bifurcation led to his validation of McCarthy's tactics: "the politician must select language and an approach that will appeal to one or the other of the groups we have recognized. This, like our other propositions, is non-controversial", Buckley wrote; McCarthy, reasonably chose the more numerous "'non-university' crowd."¹⁶ In framing his justifications for McCarthy's norm-shattering methods as reasonable and even necessarily democratic, Buckley marginalized opposition, such as Smith's, that might have approved of McCarthy's aims but not his means.

Buckley, in "Senator McCarthy's Model?" minimized reasonable disagreement. "Let us leave in abeyance the matter of motive," he wrote. "It is not relevant to our argument. At least we can agree that he desired a thorough airing of the loyalty qualifications" of State Department employees; "On this point, both his detractors and his champions must agree."¹⁷ Even Smith had recognized the need for loyalty. Buckley then imagined that McCarthy might have grown up

¹⁵ William F. Buckley, Jr. "Senator McCarthy's Model?" *The Freeman*, May 21, 1951, 531.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

hearing about the Teapot Dome scandal, that as he came of age he “must have studied the technique of Franklin Roosevelt—his unequivocal appeals to the ‘non-university’ crowd, his categorization of all his enemies as ‘economic royalists,’ ‘greedy and selfish interests’; and Joe McCarthy, as a sensitive young man, must have taken heed of what it is that makes for a successful politician.”¹⁸ Buckley normalized McCarthy in the context of the Smith’s consensus arguments for loyalty, compared him with what he described as even more corrupt or imperial politicians, and subtly dug at the shocked elite for not even considering the thoughts of the “‘non-university’ crowd” in dismissing the senator.

Buckley finally compared McCarthy’s imprecision to President Harry S. Truman, lowering legitimate objections to the senator’s methods to simple and, in his formulation, hypocritical, partisan differences, reflecting Buckley’s partisan strategizing. Invoking Truman’s 1948 campaign, Buckley wrote, “He must have read carefully Mr. Truman’s speeches in the fall of that year, and learned from them. ... On October 30, in a final blast, Mr. Truman stated that ‘Powerful forces, like those that created European Fascists, are working through the Republican Party’ to ‘undermine’ American democracy.” Certainly, Buckley argued, pols like Roosevelt and Truman wanted to win and consolidate power with the help of “non-university” Americans; “there are no qualitative differences between the techniques and consequences of Truman in 1948, and the techniques and consequences of McCarthy in 1950.”¹⁹ The thrust of Buckley’s argument was that the risks of communism in the federal government were far too great to disavow McCarthy, whose tactics actually fit within recent norms of politics.

The willingness to engage, at length and in public, with national electoral politics differentiates young Buckley and “Senator McCarthy’s Model?” from the Nash’s older

¹⁸ Buckley, “Senator McCarthy’s Model?” *The Freeman*, May 21, 1951, 531.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 532.

intellectual. As Buckley wrote, suggesting a desperation in the struggle against communism, “if we want to be useful political agents, our approach must become more realistic ... we must search out today only the general aims we find congenial and the men who seek to realize them.” He continued his strawman: “It can not deter us that Truman’s predominant motive might be his own re-election rather than the welfare of his country ... [so] we must support Senator McCarthy, despite some of his crass inconsistencies.”²⁰ If, as Republicans seemed to agree, communism was a threat to U.S. interests, and if, as Buckley suggested, Democrats were either too imperial or dishonest to worry about communism, his message was clear: Republicans must unite behind McCarthy, no matter his crassness. The young Buckley saw McCarthy’s usefulness, and framed his defense of the senator in starkly partisan terms, which would be relatively uncommon in later years.

That Buckley would later suggest working around what was merely McCarthy’s vulgarity, however, is not surprising given his arguments in 1951. Buckley ended “Senator McCarthy’s Model?” with a plea for his fellow Republicans to support the senator, writing: “we must support McCarthy if we want to probe the loyalty of State Department employees. We have no alternative. The issue at stake is not McCarthy’s manners. It is treason in the State Department.”²¹ If Smith had recognized the need to think “patriotically as Americans about national security based on individual freedom,” Buckley argued McCarthy meant no more harm to individual freedom than Roosevelt or Truman in promoting national security.²² Buckley’s first published defense of McCarthy demonstrated not only the early disagreements over what to do

²⁰ Buckley, “Senator McCarthy’s Model?” *The Freeman*, May 21, 1951, 533.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² Smith, “Declaration of Conscience” (June 1, 1950).

with the senator and his methods, but also Buckley's willingness to engage in electoral matters and excuse McCarthy as a necessary Republican in the face of encroaching communism.

More prominent in Buckley's 1951 bibliography than his work in *The Freeman* is his first book, *God and Man at Yale*. While it never addressed the senator directly, the book was consistent with the McCarthy's earlier work in pointing out the deficiencies of the Eastern establishment and similarly railed against communism. In Nash's conception, *God and Man at Yale* was an attempt to balance the scales between left and right by criticizing liberals' outsized influence on American universities—including, of course, Yale.²³ This assessment is partly true, but it risks losing sight of the fact that Buckley also put forward a clear anticommunist program in the book. Considering the nomination of Robert Ten Broeck Stevens to the Yale Corporation, for example, Buckley lamented that there seemed to be no understanding of whether Stevens “[believed] Communists on the faculty ought to be fired,” and that this was the case for “most American universities”—they were not demanding vigorous anticommunism from their leaders in the way that Buckley and, to be sure, McCarthy assumed they should have.²⁴

Buckley argued, however, that even Yale had expressed that communists were unwelcome there; it should merely enforce this expectation. In contrast to Stevens, Buckley noted, Yale President Charles Seymour made clear in his 1949 address to Yale graduates that he would not “knowingly hire a Communist to the teaching faculty.”²⁵ Seymour's assertion suggested that the spirit of anticommunism was widespread in the United States by the time McCarthy reached the national stage, and, more important to Buckley, that there are limits within

²³ Nash, *The Conservative Intellectual Movement in America since 1945*, 127.

²⁴ William F. Buckley, Jr. *God and Man at Yale: The Superstitions of 'Academic Freedom'* (Chicago: Regnery, 1951), 120.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 151.

which faculty members must keep their opinions to be “tolerated.”²⁶ In writing *God and Man at Yale*, then, Buckley claimed that his task was “not so much to argue that limits [of orthodoxy] should be *imposed*, but that existing limits should be *narrowed*,” in order to further marginalize communists and leftists at Yale and other American universities.

At the same time as the what might be dubbed the “‘university’ crowd’s” stinging responses to *God and Man at Yale*, McCarthy was gaining an even larger following. Although *God and Man at Yale* catapulted him to conservative stardom, Buckley and his family were essentially shunned and attacked by the establishment because of it.²⁷ Among conservative voices, at least one was resoundingly behind Buckley: McCarthy. In 1952, he published a manifesto, *McCarthyism: The Fight for America*, defending his record and methods. Of course, *McCarthyism* echoed Buckley’s “Senator McCarthy’s Model?” in its vigorous defense of the senator’s means, given the magnitude of the communist threat.²⁸ But further, like Buckley in his first book, McCarthy identified education as critical to the fight against communism, writing, “We cannot win ... if Communist-minded professors are teaching your children.”²⁹ By 1952, Buckley and McCarthy were expressing some of the same thoughts, defining the ideological kinship foundational to Buckley’s defenses of the senator.³⁰

The pair’s political similarities developed into a personal relationship. In early 1953, McCarthy asked Buckley to write him a speech denouncing the nomination of Harvard President

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Carl T. Bogus, *Buckley: William F. Buckley, Jr. and the Rise of American Conservatism* (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2011), 98.

²⁸ Joseph R. McCarthy, *McCarthyism: The Fight for America: Documented Answers to Questions Asked by Friend and Foe* (New York: Devin-Adair, 1952), 7.

²⁹ Ibid., 101.

³⁰ A friend of Buckley’s noted, for example, that, for the few years after *God and Man at Yale*, Buckley “was an acolyte of Joe McCarthy,” but pivoted away from the senator after his political downfall; see Richard Brookhiser, *Right Time, Right Place: Coming of Age with William F. Buckley Jr. and the Conservative Movement* (New York: Basic Books, 2009), 15.

James Bryant Conant to serve as the United States High Commissioner in Germany.³¹ By this time, McCarthy had attracted significant support among conservatives and the Republican Party, as his work continued to hurt mainly liberals and Democrats.³² Noteworthy first for the fact that this was Buckley's only speechwriting job for someone else, the Conant speech demonstrated the young, more overtly political Buckley's readiness to get involved in partisan, populist politics.³³ If Buckley would himself be remembered as an intellectual, this speech sheds light on an earlier, more explicit engagement with McCarthy during the height of the senator's influence.

Although, Buckley, in the speech, did not go so far as to accuse Conant of being a communist, he assailed the university president as incompetent to take on the existential challenges of the Cold War.³⁴ He lamented Conant's support for the Morgenthau Plan, which provided for the "emasculating of Germany," ignoring "the threat of a strong and clearly aggressive Soviet Union."³⁵ Scratching a note on the back of a typed sheet, Buckley described the Morgenthau Plan as "the dream of bringing reality into overnight compliance with a readymade blue-print cooked up by scheming intellectuals." And Conant, despite his redeeming qualities, was "a highbrow ideologue, a social manipulator, wholly out of touch with American realities."³⁶ The use of gendered language in addressing the threat of the Soviet Union, as well as the idea of communism as an existential threat, was consistent with Buckley's earlier work, as

³¹ Although Buckley's records do not seem to contain any of the details surrounding this event, Roy Cohn explained in his 1968 biography of the senator that McCarthy specifically asked Buckley to write the speech. Roy Cohn, *McCarthy* (New York: The New American Library, 1968), 52.

³² Ellen Schrecker, *Many Are the Crimes: McCarthyism in America* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1998), 244.

³³ As Buckley's later assistant at *National Review*, Linda Bridges, noted, "This speech is a rarity: a serious speech written by WFB for someone else—in this case, Senator Joseph McCarthy. In later decades he sometimes scripted light-hearted remarks for the MC at a *National Review* anniversary dinner, but to the best of my knowledge this is his only substantive speechwriting job." Linda Bridges, *File Memo*, 3 September 2012, Folder 4, Box 1, William F. Buckley, Jr. Papers.

³⁴ William F. Buckley, Jr. *Draft: Speech for McCarthy Opposing Conant's Nomination*, undated, Folder 4, Box 1, William F. Buckley, Jr. Papers.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ *Ibid.*

well as anticommunist conservatism at the time. Conant embodied McCarthy's and Buckley's earlier suspicions about the "university crowd."

The speech is clearly in line with the arguments found in *God and Man at Yale*, as well as McCarthy's fearmongering. Buckley described Conant as disqualified because of a report Conant provided to the Harvard Corporation "not nine years ago, but nine days ago," in which Conant wrote that, while he didn't believe there to be communists on the faculty, "the damage that would be done to the spirit of this academic community by an investigation by the University aimed at finding a crypto-communist would be far greater than any conceivable harm such a person might do." If Harvard really did not employ any secret communists, it would have "a charmed life," Buckley wrote, arguing that secret communists had been discovered even in the fortified Central Intelligence Agency. Buckley turned Conant's argument about communists at Harvard on its head: Would the presence of just a few communists "do more damage to the 'spirit' of the State Department than 'any conceivable harm such a person might do?'"³⁷ To Buckley and McCarthy, it was clear that even the possibility of one communist in the American Embassy in Germany, or the whole State Department, was one too many.

By 1953, then, Buckley had publicly supported McCarthy for years. But as Buckley's star was rising in conservative circles, thanks in large part to the success of *God and Man at Yale*, McCarthy was not quite as fortunate.³⁸ That year twenty-eight conservatives, for example, wrote to seven-hundred newspapers that they had been covering McCarthy unfairly.³⁹ But despite maintaining some staunch support, McCarthy began to lose standing among even committed anticommunists beginning in 1953. Federal Bureau of Investigation Director J. Edgar Hoover,

³⁷ William F. Buckley, Jr. *Draft: Speech for McCarthy Opposing Conant's Nomination*, undated, Folder 4, Box 1, William F. Buckley, Jr. Papers.

³⁸ Nash, *The Conservative Intellectual Movement in America since 1945*, 98.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 100.

for example, who had previously fed McCarthy information from the FBI's files, stopped the flow that summer after growing increasingly concerned about McCarthy's recklessness. In addition to McCarthy's rashness, Hoover's calculus hinged on what seemed to be a looming showdown between the senator and President (and fellow Republican) Dwight Eisenhower.⁴⁰ Buckley was rising, while McCarthy was plateauing, if not yet falling; nevertheless, Buckley's support did not wane.

Conservative conflicts regarding McCarthy came to a head in 1954. After investigations into leftist influence in a U.S. Army laboratory at Fort Monmouth, New Jersey fizzled in December 1953, McCarthy was undaunted. In early 1954, McCarthy turned his invective, and the resources of the Government Oversight Committee, toward the Army's promotion of Irving Peress, a New Yorker who had avoided answering the Army's loyalty questionnaire by invoking the Fifth Amendment. Through February and March 1954, McCarthy continued to harass the Army; Eisenhower and the Army, meanwhile, authorized the release of records demonstrating that McCarthy had sought preferential treatment for Cohn's friend, Private First Class G. David Schine.⁴¹ Commenting on the dramatics to fellow conservative writer Ralph de Toledano, Whittaker Chambers wrote on March 15, 1954, "Senator McCarthy seems to be in trouble. What a honking and hooting."⁴² The same month, journalist Edward R. Murrow launched a documentary exposing what he saw as McCarthy's crimes. Although the walls seemed to be closing in around McCarthy, Buckley maintained his support for the senator.

March 1954 was a critical juncture for Buckley and McCarthy's relationship; Buckley dug in as the senator came under fire. That month, Buckley and his brother-in-law, L. Brent

⁴⁰ Schrecker, *Many Are the Crimes*, 260.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 261.

⁴² Whittaker Chambers, *Letter from Whittaker Chambers to Ralph de Toledano*, 15 March 1954, Box 4, Folder 8, William F. Buckley, Jr. Papers.

Bozell, published what Nash described as “the most systematic—in fact, the only significant—effort to defend McCarthy,” *McCarthy and His Enemies: The Record and Its Meaning*.⁴³ Those attempting to minimize Buckley’s defenses of McCarthy have similarly minimized this work’s importance, as well as the extent to which Buckley and Bozell came to McCarthy’s defense through it.⁴⁴ In 1954, Buckley was not alone in his support for McCarthy; fellow conservative writer Willmoore Kendall, for example, helped Buckley and Bozell write *McCarthy and His Enemies*.⁴⁵ But the book was a clear vindication of McCarthy’s means and ends. Reminiscent of his earlier explanations of the senator’s appeal to the “‘non-university’ crowd,” Buckley framed McCarthy’s method as “get[ing] by our disintegrated ruling elite, which had no stomach for battle, and get[ing] down to the business of fighting the enemy in our midst.”⁴⁶ To Buckley, McCarthy was one of “a handful of prophets—an American Resistance—[who] tried to alert the nation to the Communist threat; and fought a lonely and costly fight.”⁴⁷ If his 1951 column and 1953 work for McCarthy did not make his loyalties clear enough, *McCarthy and His Enemies* solidly aligned Buckley with the senator and his style.

Those who have attributed a critical tinge to Buckley’s arguments in *McCarthy and His Enemies* have seemed to ignore how McCarthy himself responded. Buckley and Bozell, who by their writing had already established relationships with the senator, sought to gain his approval before publishing, though he seemed somewhat disinterested at the time. Still, Buckley and

⁴³ Nash, *The Conservative Intellectual Movement in America since 1945*, 98.

⁴⁴ For example, former Buckley assistant Linda Bridges and conservative writer John R. Coyne, Jr. in their *Strictly Right*, wrote of *McCarthy and His Enemies* that “it by no means concluded that the senator was always right.” Linda Bridges and John R. Coyne, Jr., *Strictly Right: William F. Buckley Jr. and the American Conservative Movement* (Hoboken: John Wiley and Sons, 2007), 31.

⁴⁵ Daniel McCarthy, “Willmore Kendall, Man of the People,” in *The Dilemmas of American Conservatism*, ed. Kenneth Deutsch (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2010), 181.

⁴⁶ William F. Buckley, Jr. and L. Brent Bozell, *McCarthy and His Enemies: The Record and Its Meaning* (Washington: Regnery, 1995), 4.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 245.

Bozell were given access to files and information.⁴⁸ While McCarthy's wife, Jean, thought the book to be too critical, the senator himself seemed not to share this concern.⁴⁹ On the day of the book's publication, for example, McCarthy and Roy Cohn attended the authors' reception in New York City.⁵⁰ McCarthy even referred back to *McCarthy and His Enemies* as proof of Bozell's credentials in leading *National Review's* Washington division.⁵¹ Although it is conceivable that the book was, in fact, "too intellectual" for McCarthy, as John Judis wrote, the senator more likely recognized it for what it was: A full-throated endorsement of his anticommunist program.

McCarthy and His Enemies was only part of Buckley's services to the senator in 1954. After airing his documentary about McCarthy's crimes, Edward R. Murrow offered equal airtime to the senator, who offered the opportunity to respond to Buckley. Buckley accepted McCarthy's offer to serve as a surrogate, but Murrow responded that he would only have McCarthy himself respond.⁵² Akin to his speechwriting work for the senator, the fact that Buckley was willing to appear on what would surely be a widely-viewed television program representing McCarthy suggests that he was willing to involve himself with partisan politics in a way that would not square with historians' later characterizations of Buckley the intellectual. Later works in defense of the senator contain echoes of Buckley's positioning himself so close to McCarthy during the trying times of 1954.

⁴⁸ Buckley biographer John B. Judis reported that McCarthy, who by December 1953 had already been "operating in an alcoholic daze," told his wife, "I don't understand the book. It is too intellectual for me." John B. Judis, *William F. Buckley, Jr.: Patron Saint of the Conservatives* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1988), 108.

⁴⁹ Arthur Herman, *Joseph McCarthy: Reexamining the Life and Legacy of America's Most Hated Senator* (New York: The Free Press, 2000), 261.

⁵⁰ Nash, *The Conservative Intellectual Movement in America since 1945*, 99.

⁵¹ Joseph R. McCarthy, *Draft Letter*, 18 August 1955, Box 1, William F. Buckley, Jr. Papers.

⁵² Edwin R. Bayley, *Joe McCarthy and the Press* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1981), 197.

But following McCarthy's swift fall in the second half of 1954, Buckley's engagement with McCarthy became much less public. After it was revealed that McCarthy, while publicly attacking the Army for harboring, or even advancing, communists, had attempted to garner favorable treatment for his staffer's friend—as well as four years of the enduring the senator's reckless anticommunist fervor—the Republican Party, and much of the American public dropped their support for McCarthy. In a June 9, 1954 session of the Army-McCarthy hearings, McCarthy attacked a member of the Army's legal team's firm, Fred Fischer, who had years prior been involved with a communist-adjacent organization.⁵³ Joseph Welch, the Army attorney answering questions at the hearing, pleaded with McCarthy: "Let us not assassinate this lad further, Senator. You have done enough. Have you no sense of decency, sir, at long last? Have you left no sense of decency?"⁵⁴ Following this episode, McCarthy lost both popular and establishment Republican support. After months of considering the resolution, McCarthy's colleagues in the Senate voted to censure him on December 2, 1954.⁵⁵ Buckley's support of the senator, therefore, continued at his own political risk, and therefore became more private.

Interlude: Post-Censure and *National Review*, December 1954 to May 1957

If McCarthy was relegated to the political wilderness between his December 1954 censure and his death in May 1957, also scarce during this time was any public embrace of the senator by Buckley. *God and Man at Yale* had already garnered a chilly reception among the liberal Eastern establishment, and Buckley's second book, *McCarthy and His Enemies*, made Buckley a pariah among this crowd.⁵⁶ But after 1954, the disdain for McCarthy extended far

⁵³ Schrecker, *Many Are the Crimes*, 263.

⁵⁴ Quoted at *ibid.*, 264.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ Judis, *William F. Buckley, Jr.*, 111.

beyond Democrats and the “‘university’ crowd”; the senator’s Gallup approval rating in fell from fifty percent in January 1954 to thirty-four percent in June of the same year, and plummeted after his censure.⁵⁷ Displaying a political acumen that had endeared him to McCarthy in the first place, therefore, Buckley’s support for McCarthy took on a more personal and vastly less public nature during this time.

Buckley’s writings to the senator and his wife, Jean, demonstrate the more private nature of his support following censure. Though the bulk of Buckley’s correspondence with those closest to McCarthy appears to have taken place after the senator’s death, the first preserved writings between Buckley and the McCarthys are from the period immediately following his censure. On December 29, 1954, just weeks after the vote, Buckley wrote to McCarthy’s secretary, alerting the senator that a friend, Merwin K. Hart, who had “written numerous articles—and effective ones—upholding the views of the Senator,” and had, like McCarthy, “been highly smeared throughout the years,” had sought to meet with him.⁵⁸ Dispensing some political advice to a weakened senator, however, Buckley suggested that, due to controversy surrounding Hart, if the two were to meet, they do so “in secrecy.”⁵⁹ Similarly, on January 21, 1955, Buckley forwarded to the McCarthys an anti-McCarthy pamphlet he had seen, suggesting, “it’s a good idea for you all to keep posted on the tactics these people are using.”⁶⁰ Taken together, these two letters, alongside a dearth of published writings around the same time, suggest that Buckley sought to support a weakened McCarthy without damaging his own standing during the immediate post-censure period.

⁵⁷ Schrecker, *Many Are the Crimes*, 264.

⁵⁸ William F. Buckley, Jr. *Letter from William F. Buckley, Jr. to Mary Driscoll*, 29 December 1954, Box 3, William F. Buckley, Jr. Papers.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ William F. Buckley, Jr. *Letter from William F. Buckley, Jr. to Jean McCarthy*, 21 January 1955, Box 3, William F. Buckley, Jr. Papers.

It must have been particularly important to Buckley that he maintained some respect in the conservative community during 1955, as he had planned to launch a conservative weekly that year. *The Freeman*, for which Buckley had previously written “Senator McCarthy’s Model?” underwent a series of crises between 1952 and 1954 surrounding, among other things, too large a focus on personalities—including McCarthy’s—rather than ideas. And, Buckley recognized, *The Freeman* published too infrequently; in fact, while liberals published eight weekly opinion journals, conservatives had none.⁶¹ Therefore, to historians of American conservatism—based on Nash’s assessment—Buckley simply corralled the competing strands of postwar conservatism and united them under the banner of a new conservative weekly, *National Review*.⁶² As Nash put it, “Buckley’s journal was not destined to be a mere replica of *The Freeman*,” but to “consolidate the Right.”⁶³ Given Buckley’s previous support for McCarthy, and the senator’s quick fall, that *National Review* was destined for anything was not certain. But, it was clear, the new magazine would be virulently anticommunist, if it managed to launch at all.

The success of Buckley’s weekly was far from guaranteed before it launched, and a March 1955 squabble between Buckley and Roy Cohn suggests as much. “I was, to speak quite frankly, disturbed to hear, through the grapevine, that you had expressed yourself as skeptical of the utility of National Weekly” (as it was then to be called), Buckley wrote to Cohn. “I hope by the time the word got to me it was substantially distorted. For I do feel confident,” he continued, “... that you yearn to see an important magazine pounding down hard on certain anti-Communist maxims that are generally neglected.”⁶⁴ Responding, Cohn suggested that while he had doubts

⁶¹ Nash, *The Conservative Intellectual Movement in America since 1945*, 134.

⁶² Phillips-Fein, “Conservatism: A State of the Field,” 729.

⁶³ Nash, *The Conservative Intellectual Movement in America since 1945*, 135.

⁶⁴ William F. Buckley, Jr. *Letter from William F. Buckley, Jr. to Roy Cohn*, 1 March 1955, Box 1, William F. Buckley, Jr. Papers.

about the future magazine's solvency, he thought "that it would serve an important purpose, particularly under [Buckley's] able guidance," and that he had "never let financial consideration govern the 'Anti-Communist' side of [his] existence."⁶⁵ While McCarthy himself did not figure into the exchange between Buckley and Cohn, Buckley continued to engage with those in McCarthy's inner circle, and continued to make clear his commitment to the anticommunist cause he and McCarthy shared. The exchange demonstrated the tenuousness of getting *National Review* off the ground, as well as Buckley's commitment to making it an emphatically anticommunist publication, even if supporting McCarthy himself was unfashionable.

Buckley's scarce correspondence regarding McCarthy to those in the senator's inner circle, during this time, demonstrates the extent to which Buckley moved to the periphery while focusing on organizing *National Review*. On May 5, 1955, Buckley wrote to Bozell, who had become an aide to McCarthy in the Senate after his censure, asking, "Would you be good enough to ask Joe to send one of his pictures, signed" to a Pennsylvania high school student who had been "tantalized and otherwise harassed as the result of his faith in McCarthy."⁶⁶ Jeffrey Hart, however, noted that senior *National Review* staffers generally continued to support McCarthy through 1955, but that the "fierce partisan nature of the [McCarthy] controversy" caused the publication to become more circumspect regarding the senator.⁶⁷ Of course, Buckley still personally supported McCarthy, and would continue to believe that the senator had been unfairly smeared over the course 1954, but drew back from publicly celebrating him or his methods in 1955.

⁶⁵ Roy Cohn. *Letter from Roy Cohn to William F. Buckley, Jr.*, 15 March 1955, Box 1, William F. Buckley, Jr. Papers.

⁶⁶ William F. Buckley, Jr. *Letter from William F. Buckley, Jr. to Brent Bozell*, 5 May 1955, Box 1, William F. Buckley, Jr. Papers.

⁶⁷ Hart, *Making of the American Conservative Mind*, 88-89.

McCarthy's alcoholism, particularly after his censure, has been well documented, but a 1955 letter from Buckley to McCarthy on the topic of the senator's health suggests that the two men were no longer as close as they had seemed during the early 1950s. On August 9, 1955, Buckley wrote to McCarthy that Bozell had told him that Herman Welker, a Republican senator from Idaho, "had read you the crank letter alluding to your health and to an alleged line of intelligence from me to the writer of the letter." Buckley made clear that he knew nothing of the alleged letter's author nor of its claims' veracity: "I have heard the following rumors in the last few months about you: 1) You have cancer and intend to resign from the Senate," among other conspiracies. Reminding McCarthy of his loyalty, Buckley wrote, "When I hear such rumors, I respond to them as I always have to rumors about you—I merely dismiss them as further manifestations of the national Liberal psychosis one runs into whenever your name is mentioned."⁶⁸ This letter evokes themes of Buckley's earlier work defending McCarthy, that hysterical leftists unduly tarnished the senator's character, while indicating how far removed from McCarthy Buckley was in 1955.

Buckley clearly seemed not to understand that it was severe alcoholism and complications thereof that kept McCarthy away from the Senate. Another rumor Buckley heard, he wrote, "is that your sickness keeps you in bed many hours a day, and this is the reason you are so seldom in the Senate (Richard Rovere, you may have read in the *New Yorker*, commented on your frequent absence from the floor and committee hearings)." So diminished was McCarthy's influence, Rovere had written, "No significant body of public opinion at present opposes [Eisenhower's] leadership in foreign affairs ... Senator McCarthy's following appears to have

⁶⁸ William F. Buckley, Jr. *Letter from William F. Buckley, Jr. to Joseph R. McCarthy*, 9 August 1955, Box 3, William F. Buckley, Jr. Papers.

taken to the hills.”⁶⁹ Buckley was “so concerned” by the rumors flying about that he called Bozell specifically to ask about McCarthy’s health; Bozell simply told him that an unknown ailment was causing the senator to sleep more than normal. “We continue to be, as in the past, your well-wishers, and hope and pray that you will ignore the carpers, and continue to feel better and to fight hard,” Buckley concluded.⁷⁰ By summer 1955, McCarthy had been physically and politically diminished, and Buckley’s support therefore took the form of private letters, rather than public avowals.

The relationship, however, did remain reciprocal, even if neither Buckley nor McCarthy remained so boisterous in their antics. As the draft August 18, 1955 letter from McCarthy suggests, the senator used what clout he had left to boost the fledgling *National Review*. But McCarthy recognized that he was weakened after his censure. Conservatives needed a new weekly because, the senator wrote, “I can work months now over an anti-Communist talk which, if it gets any mention at all” in the New York papers, “gets ignored.”⁷¹ In urging his friend Ginny to see Bozell, his aide and *National Review*’s future Washington editor, and to consider investing in the magazine, McCarthy conveyed exigency: “the matter is urgent and I feel we have got to move this project along in time for it to do some good next year,” presumably referring to the 1956 elections.⁷² From its founding, then, *National Review* highlighted Buckley’s connection to McCarthy, and was eminently involved in brass-tacks politics, even while Buckley seemed to publicly avoid the senator as a survival strategy.

⁶⁹ Richard Rovere, “Letter from Washington: July 7,” *The New Yorker*, 16 July 1955, 68.

⁷⁰ William F. Buckley, Jr. *Letter from William F. Buckley, Jr. to Joseph R. McCarthy*, 9 August 1955, Box 3, William F. Buckley, Jr. Papers.

⁷¹ Joseph R. McCarthy, *Draft Letter*, 18 August 1955, Box 1, William F. Buckley, Jr. Papers.

⁷² *Ibid.* In addition, Lisa McGirr’s writing on postwar conservatism suggests that such pleas might have been necessary; as she wrote, conservative Republican power had basically evaporated after McCarthy’s fall. Lisa McGirr, *Suburban Warriors: The Origins of the New American Right* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 66-67.

National Review finally launched on November 19, 1955. Despite already having the backing of the conservative establishment, Buckley framed the magazine as already the underdog in his famed publisher's statement: "It stands athwart history yelling Stop, at a time when no one is inclined to do so, or to have much patience with those who so urge it." Harkening back to his "'non-university' crowd" discourse, Buckley proclaimed that the "ideologues, having won over the intellectual class," seemed to run everything, and that this is why it was the time for *National Review*.⁷³ Besides a few brief mentions throughout the issue, including one regarding a role in a conservative Republican primary challenge to Eisenhower, McCarthy occupied a space on the periphery of the pages of first issue of *National Review*.⁷⁴ Despite the absence of a larger-than-life McCarthy, the opening issue made one at least one thing clear: *National Review* would be a political publication, and would seek to bolster what Buckley considered conservative Republicans' waning power.

Just as McCarthy had promoted the magazine, so the magazine actively promoted McCarthy—when it was politically safe to do so. Nash wrote, inaptly passively, that *National Review* was "open to" McCarthy, citing a book review McCarthy was allowed to write for it, as well as occasional defenses of McCarthyism and responses to its critics.⁷⁵ As censure faded further into the future, however, the magazine would become not just open to the senator, but

⁷³ William F. Buckley, Jr. "Publisher's Note," *National Review*, Vol. 1, No. 1, 19 November 1955, 5. Further, Nicole Hemmer has written on *National Review*'s founding as a springboard for big-tent conservatism as well as polemicists, goals that would come into conflict as McCarthy became increasingly toxic; Nicole Hemmer, *Messengers of the Right: Conservative Media and the Transformation of American Politics* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), 43-44.

⁷⁴ In Bozell's column, he made reference to the fact that conservative Republicans, including McCarthy, might have a resurgent role in the 1956 presidential contest, as McCarthy had previously alluded to in a letter. "Last summer," he wrote, "this group was finished as a political force—and knew it," but Eisenhower's perceived failing health, alongside increased right-wing organization and mobilization left an opening for Senator William Knowland of California to mount a primary challenge to the president. McCarthy, Bozell wrote, would be in charge of marshaling support in Wisconsin, Nebraska, New Jersey, and possibly Massachusetts, where the right apparently believed he maintained a following. L. Brent Bozell, "National Trends," *National Review*, Vol. 1, No. 1, 19 November 1955, 12.

⁷⁵ Nash, *The Conservative Intellectual Movement in America since 1945*, 136.

demonstrably pro-McCarthy. McCarthy's sole essay in *National Review*, published as the headlining book review in the magazine's sixth issue, was a reproach of a Democrat, former Secretary of State Dean Acheson's memoir, *A Democrat Looks at His Party*. "Acheson Looks at Acheson" began with a sarcastic assessment of the Democratic Party as appealing to "one who has brains," before calling Acheson's treatment of global communism "a complete and disastrous failure."⁷⁶ McCarthy ended his broadside by proclaiming Acheson's book a "pathetic gesture by a discredited statesman who wants to prove he is still around, and still using those brains of his."⁷⁷ Buckley lauded the review in a telegram to McCarthy, writing, "We all think it's sensational."⁷⁸ In attacking a Democrat, McCarthy's review both promoted the idea of Buckley's consolidation, while beginning the rehabilitation of conservative Republicans' own discredited statesman.

While Buckley's and *National Review*'s pro-McCarthy slant would come into focus more clearly after his death, the senator appeared little in the magazine's pages between 1956 and May 2, 1957. If Buckley and McCarthy wrote during this period, there is scant surviving evidence of such correspondence. Buckley apparently wrote to McCarthy asking about his ancestry in February 1956, and McCarthy responded that he had never bothered to track down his family tree.⁷⁹ Still, Buckley did think of McCarthy; he kept a June 1956 article highlighting McCarthy's continuing battle for the soul of the Party, as fellow Wisconsin Republican Alexander Wiley "accused his colleague of conspiring with Wisconsin GOP 'kingmakers' to 'arrange' his defeat," the paper wrote—conjuring the 1956 conservative Republican takeover suggested in *National*

⁷⁶ Joseph R. McCarthy, "Acheson Looks at Acheson," *National Review*, Vol. 1, No. 6, 28 December 1955, 26-27.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 28.

⁷⁸ William F. Buckley, Jr., *Telegram from William F. Buckley to Joseph R. McCarthy*, 12 December 1955, Box 3, William F. Buckley, Jr. Papers.

⁷⁹ Joseph R. McCarthy, *Letter from Joseph R. McCarthy to William F. Buckley, Jr.*, 1 March 1956, Box 3, William F. Buckley, Jr. Papers.

Review's first issue, and McCarthy's letter boosting the magazine's potential usefulness.⁸⁰

Otherwise, Buckley's only preserved interactions with McCarthy or his wife before his death was a December 1956 telegram inviting the ailing senator to Connecticut. "Didn't know you were sick," Buckley wrote to McCarthy at the Bethesda Naval Hospital. "Why don't you and Jeanie recuperate in Stamford?"⁸¹ McCarthy would die at the hospital on May 2, 1957.

Making a Legacy: May 1957 to 1959

Before McCarthy's death, Buckley's support for the senator and his ideals were apparent, if not always painfully obvious. Political and personal circumstance affected how Buckley engaged with McCarthy. Before McCarthy's censure, Buckley was a rising star in conservative circles, and he published openly in defense of McCarthy. Buckley also developed a relationship with the senator during this period, undertaking the sole speechwriting job of his career for McCarthy, gaining access to the senator and his files while writing *McCarthy and His Enemies*, and offering to fill in for him in response to Murrow's reporting. After McCarthy's December 2, 1954 censure, Buckley drew back; he had already written an entire book about the senator, and in 1955 was focusing much of his attention on launching *National Review*. At the same time, it cannot be ignored that McCarthy was immensely unpopular with even parts of his former base after his censure. If *National Review* was an intellectual model of conservative unity, as some have argued, its treatment of McCarthy's legacy after his death was polarizing, even among conservatives, and demonstrated the extent to which Buckley was loyal to the senator and his insurgent, conservative Republican politics.

⁸⁰ Warren Duffee, "Wiley Clashes With McCarthy," *The Washington Post and Times Herald*, 5 June 1956, in *ibid.*

⁸¹ William F. Buckley, Jr. *Telegram from William F. Buckley, Jr. to Joseph R. McCarthy*, 20 December 1956, in *ibid.*

While many conservatives allied themselves with McCarthy during his lifetime, particularly before his censure, how they handled McCarthy's legacy was more complicated. Nash wrote that the postwar conservative intellectual movement, of which Buckley was both part and architect, was "substantially" shaped by McCarthy.⁸² But while Nash's treatment mentioned that Buckley had some appreciation for McCarthy during the senator's lifetime, Nash mostly left the question of McCarthy's legacy out of his history of Buckley and postwar conservatism.⁸³ To Buckley, McCarthy's death signaled that either enough time had passed since censure to begin a thorough rehabilitation effort, or that the death was shocking enough to at least temporarily put political considerations aside.

McCarthy's legacy was contentious among the right, even among those committed conservatives intimately involved with *National Review*. Less than two weeks after McCarthy's death, Whittaker Chambers wrote to Buckley to express his surprise at hearing of the senator's death, and to warn Buckley against inflating McCarthy's honor and accomplishments in memorializing him. Chambers, whose role in the Alger Hiss case and later memoir were integral to the cultural renaissance of anticommunism in the late 1940s and early 1950s, noted that Buckley's "saying that Brent Bozell had written a warm and generous piece about [McCarthy] shook me, at least to the extent of making me look hard at all this again." He was reevaluating McCarthy and McCarthyism; as he wrote, "I never rejected the man as a suffering human soul, but only the man as he affected a cause, as I must hold, adversely." Chambers described the post-censure McCarthy, at their last meeting, "a crushed man" who nevertheless could not be

⁸² Nash, *The Conservative Intellectual Movement in America since 1945*, 97.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 136.

persuaded to temper his tactics.⁸⁴ In his extremism, Chambers implied, McCarthy hurt the movement; Buckley would have to avoid the same fate.

Chambers offered advice on how Buckley should treat McCarthy in *National Review*: Be careful not to unduly lionize the late senator. “It is seemly and right,” he wrote, “that NR should pay him a last tribute where those who truly liked the Senator can pay tribute.” But, Chambers cautioned, “I think it would be a mistake to perpetuate a myth of McCarthy as something he really was not For the Left will rally, perhaps in a matter of weeks, to maul the corpse; and it will have no trouble in shredding a myth that does not stand on reality.” McCarthy was, Chambers suggested, a complicated figure—one who injected anticommunism into the public consciousness while forcing conservatives to answer difficult questions about process and methods. “Give this man, as a fighter, his due and more than his due” Chambers concluded; “let the Right also know where and when to stop; what is at stake, and for the sake of it.”⁸⁵ Clearly, Chambers thought that Buckley was highly influential by this point, that Buckley would be inclined to glorify McCarthy, and that this was a bad idea for conservatives.

Indeed, Buckley would exert what control he had over the right via the May 18, 1956 issue of *National Review*, which featured three laudatory columns dedicated to the recently deceased McCarthy. Buckley’s editorial, “The End of McCarthy,” opened with a condemnation of recent characterizations of McCarthy as, for example, “the world’s most hated man.”⁸⁶ Buckley continued, denouncing previous responses to McCarthy: “America—we speak of her leaders, and her intellectual elite—a) refused to understand the man McCarthy or the phenomenon McCarthyism, and b) acted brutally toward him, and unreasoningly toward it.”

⁸⁴ Whittaker Chambers, *Letter from Whittaker Chambers to William F. Buckley, Jr.*, 11? May 1957, Box 4, Folder 9, William F. Buckley, Jr. Papers.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ William F. Buckley, Jr., “The End of McCarthy,” *National Review*, Vol. 3, No. 20, 18 May 1957, 462.

Flipping Chambers' warning of inflating the legend of McCarthy on the right, Buckley ended his column by denouncing the left's fabrications, arguing that "as long as those myths survive, our country's record is unclean, and dirty nations deserve dirty ends."⁸⁷ If Buckley's column reflected his own admiration and respect for McCarthy, Buckley's publishing Bozell's and William Schlam's demonstrated his capacity to steer conservative sentiment in favor of an outsize legacy for the man McCarthy and the phenomenon McCarthyism.

Bozell issued a forceful tribute. Although he wrote that he did not know McCarthy well during his lifetime, Bozell recounted how he grew to admire the senator, an admiration manifest in his column. "Before censure I studied his work, and helped write a book about it," referring to *McCarthy and His Enemies*; "and in the course of professional interviews, caught glimpses of the buoyancy, the strength of will, the awesome singlemindedness, the gentleness." Recalling how he went to work for McCarthy in the weeks after his censure, Bozell explained how he noticed that, despite the dejection, "[an] intellect, still keen and absorbent and discriminating ... [and] a vivid moral sense was left."⁸⁸ Bozell wrote of McCarthy with deep reverence, as though he was awestruck even remembering the senator: "He once had more of this thing, this fuel, than any man in public life. Now," after the censure, "it was gone. And he knew that, too."⁸⁹ Like Buckley, Bozell contributed to McCarthy the myth, particularly through his idolizing the senator, almost making a caricature of his exceptionalism..

Bozell characterized McCarthy as a tortured fighter, someone righteous; his McCarthy seemed to be without fault. "An afflicted body, tormented by a hundred ailments, remained,"

⁸⁷ Ibid., 463.

⁸⁸ As Buckley would later reflect to Chambers, Bozell returned to Washington, after a move to San Francisco, "and became the critical figure in the McCarthy entourage at a moment, alas, when it had become too late to salvage the movement, if it was salvageable." William F. Buckley, Jr. *Letter from William F. Buckley, Jr. to Whittaker Chambers*, 29 September 1959, Box 125, William F. Buckley, Jr. Papers.

⁸⁹ L. Brent Bozell, "This Was a Man," *National Review*, Vol. 3, No. 20, 18 May 1957, 468.

Bozell mused. “Yet this is the kind of body, I am told, that he had had for years. ... The mind, the will, the spirit, all consciously alive – striving, straining forward,” he continued. In the face of opposition from liberals and those within his own party, McCarthy “was a boxer, driven to his knees, terribly hurt, wanting to rise and fight again, trying to rise, planning his strategy for the next exchange, wondering why nothing happened, determined to rise, and even smiling a little to prove it.” Up to the censure, Buckley fought, but that “monstrous, personal injustice” committed by his peers, and the institution of the Senate, was fatal. “[The] Senate turned on him, and that ruined him. God was merciful to stop his heart,” Bozell concluded.⁹⁰ Bozell would have agreed with Chambers’ assessment of McCarthy as a warrior, but Bozell’s McCarthy was beyond reproach.

And while Bozell’s homage to McCarthy was striking, it was not even the most energetic vindication of the senator within the May 18, 1957 issue of *National Review*. William Schlamm, another of the magazine’s more prominent writers, began the issue’s third tribute to McCarthy by criticizing Democrat Dean Acheson for saying “de mortuis nil nisi bonum” at McCarthy’s wake, which, Schlamm wrote, “is a certified gentleman’s and Harvard overseer’s way of saying that the deceased was a son of a bitch.” Schlamm’s column was on its face political, once more pitting Democrat versus Republican, and what Buckley had years before described the “university” and “non-university” crowds against each other in the struggle for McCarthy’s legacy. In addition to Acheson’s perceived slight, “McCarthy was tarred and feathered by genteel Ivy Leaguers, by gracious ladies of Women Voters Clubs and by noble princes of the press,” Schlamm wrote. He decried the “post-graduate school of relativism” which McCarthy had been subjected to,” the ills of “Progressive Education,” the “Liberal intelligentsia,” and the “professional’s prudent

⁹⁰ Ibid.

opportunism” that had made a generation of elite, East Coast men blind to McCarthy’s truths.⁹¹ In his praise, Schlamm provided the model for *National Review*’s attitude toward McCarthy and his legacy in the immediate aftermath of the senator’s death—not an assessment but a wholehearted embrace.

If Buckley had read Chambers’ admonishing letter by the time of the May 18 issue’s going to print, Schlamm’s column is the clearest sign that Buckley did not heed his advice. Schlamm’s McCarthy approached saintly: He was a good man, fighting the good fight for the right reasons, then died, for some reason hated by all who should have adored him. “A man had died in bed,” Schlamm wrote, “but the country felt that he had been stoned unto death.” As Schlamm explained at the end of his memorial, “An Anti-McCarthyite is a person who, for the sake of godlessness, puts the genteel rules of a vulgar game above life itself, above life and verities which, to an Anti-McCarthyite, are only figments of a superstitious imagination.” By contrast, to the true believers, he proclaimed, “We, too, have seen the gargoyles stare and sneer at us. We, too, are reaching out to crush them. We mean it. We are McCarthyites.”⁹² At the bottom of the page, a notice read, “Reprints of this article are available at 15 cents each, 100 for \$10.00,” with the address of *National Review*.⁹³ Buckley’s words on McCarthy might have come at the beginning of the issue, but Schlamm’s, the most aggressive, defined what McCarthy’s legacy meant to Buckley and his magazine.

Buckley remained a “McCarthyite” both in public and private following the senator’s death. He and McCarthy’s widow, Jean, for example, grew closer, writing each other more after McCarthy’s death and planning ways to rehabilitate the senator’s image and honor his legacy. In

⁹¹ William S. Schlamm, “Across McCarthy’s Grave,” *National Review*, Vol. 3, No. 20, 18 May 1957, 469.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 470.

⁹³ *Ibid.*

a letter written one month after the McCarthy issue of *National Review*, Jean told Buckley that Schlamm's column was having its desired effect. "Dick Andrade tells me he has ordered 100 reprints of Schlamm's article on Joe to send to friends," she wrote. Additionally, this letter provides the first hint at plans of an memorial organization to honor McCarthy: "I am fully aware of the difficulty of financing the project," Jean wrote, "but I do feel that it is worth a try." She continued, admitting that she had "not yet talked with the Director," referring to J. Edgar Hoover, but suggested that Buckley outline his thoughts about the need for an institution centralizing information about her late husband's fight against communism, so that she could bring it to a meeting with Hoover to gain his backing.⁹⁴ Given Buckley's clear desire to memorialize McCarthy through *National Review*, Buckley was a useful partner for the senator's widow during the period shortly after his death.

The idea of some sort of memorial organization would become an emphasis of communications between Jean and Buckley. In July 1957, just two months after McCarthy's death, this "institute" was relatively shapeless, and Jean recalled that its status as independent or university-affiliated would depend on its financing. Fundraising was paramount for this venture to exist whatsoever, but its focus on education was also of the utmost importance to Jean, echoing earlier appeals to remove the leftist bias in education. Those with whom Jean had discussed the institute had been "very enthused at the possibility of an institution that would research [McCarthy's influence on anticommunism in the United States] and make such research available to Congressmen, writers, students, etc.," and even "writing textbooks and providing

⁹⁴ Jean McCarthy, *Letter from Jean McCarthy to William F. Buckley, Jr.*, 18 June 1957, Box 3, William F. Buckley, Jr. Papers.

⁹⁵ Clarifying that "the Director" meant Hoover, in a follow-up letter, responding to Buckley's asking whether she still needed an outline from him, Jean wrote, "In answer to your wire – no, I do not need the memorandum for the purpose of showing to Mr. Hoover; yes, I have [already] seen Edgar." Jean McCarthy, *Letter from Jean McCarthy to William F. Buckley, Jr.*, 10 July 1957, in *ibid.*

lecture courses and seminars.” Hoover, ever the anticommunist, was “greatly enthused with the idea of the institute,” Jean wrote to Buckley; “he cited to me more instances of its usefulness than I to him.”⁹⁶ Although Hoover, for example, had previously withdrawn his unusual support for McCarthy during 1954, the fact that he, too, was willing to participate in this organization demonstrates the singleness of conservative anticommunist unity following McCarthy’s death.

Jean and Buckley were close not just as potential partners in the memorial, but also as friends. And Jean, who had been one of her late husband’s staunchest supporters during his lifetime, worried profoundly about the senator’s legacy.⁹⁷ On July 11, 1957, for example, Jean wrote to Buckley in a letter marked “PERSONAL” to ask about Buckley’s column from that week’s edition of *National Review*.⁹⁸ In the column, another example of *National Review*’s keeping McCarthy’s memory alive, Buckley had stated that “West Coast Liberals are plotting an elaborate posthumous attack on Senator Joseph McCarthy,” in the forms of either a satirical book or play, and then a movie.⁹⁹ “I am most anxious,” Jean wrote, “to know if this falls in the category of fairly good rumor or whether it is a fact.” Ultimately, Jean hoped Buckley would reveal his source, noting that she had “good reasons for asking this” of him.¹⁰⁰ Buckley instead invited Jean to Connecticut to relax; “Don’t for Heaven’s sake overwork or overstrain,” he told her.¹⁰¹ Buckley’s role in assuaging Jean’s fears, therefore, suggests that because the two were close, this was another way for him to continue to support the late senator, without compromising *National Review*’s integrity.

⁹⁶ Jean McCarthy, *Letter from Jean McCarthy to William F. Buckley, Jr.*, 10 July 1957, in *ibid.*

⁹⁷ David M. Oshinsky, *A Conspiracy So Immense: The World of Joe McCarthy* (New York: The Free Press, 1983), 506.

⁹⁸ Jean McCarthy, *Letter from Jean McCarthy to William F. Buckley, Jr.*, 11 July 1957, Box 3, William F. Buckley, Jr. Papers.

⁹⁹ William F. Buckley, Jr., “For the Record,” *National Review*, Vol. 4, No. 3, 13 July 1957, 50.

¹⁰⁰ Jean McCarthy, *Letter from Jean McCarthy to William F. Buckley, Jr.*, 11 July 1957.

¹⁰¹ William F. Buckley, Jr., *Letter from William F. Buckley, Jr. to Jean McCarthy*, 15 July 1957, Box 3, William F. Buckley, Jr. Papers.

Still, the memorial remained an important part of Buckley and Jean's post-McCarthy relationship. In the same letter urging Jean to relax, Buckley suggested that she write a prospectus for the organization and offered to review it.¹⁰² On August 2, 1957, Jean wrote with the prospectus for what she called the Joseph R. McCarthy Research Institute. "It is proposed to establish a research institute, dedicated to the proposition that Communism and Socialism can most effectively be fought by the facts," Jean wrote; the Institute would "supply any man in public life, any writer, student, individual, organization, or university with the correct, documented information needed (1) to expose the propaganda efforts of the liberal intelligentsia," borrowing a favorite term of Buckley and the *National Review*, "and the anti-anti-Communists who have done much to confuse the American people, and (2) to expose the methods of that hard core of Communist dedicated to overthrow our American way of life." It would collect academic, government, and private documents related to the fight against communism, including McCarthy's, catalogue them, and make them available to "students and scholars" and the general public, again reflecting an emphasis on refuting the common, liberal education and setting the record straight.¹⁰³

Beyond echoes of his ideas about anticommunism and education, Buckley, in Jean's formulation, would have a central role in the creation and governance of the Institute. "The prospectus lacks a write up on the role which this institute would play and the contribution it will make to American life," Jean told Buckley; "You are the man to write this – if you can find the time." Recalling Buckley's arguments for launching *National Review* two years earlier, Jean emphasized in her request of Buckley that while liberals had several prominent research centers,

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Jean McCarthy, *Letter from Jean McCarthy to William F. Buckley, Jr.*, 2 August 1957, Box 3, William F. Buckley, Jr. Papers.

there was not one “concentrating solely on the central issue of our time,” anticommunism. In this “selling job,” as she described it, Jean hoped Buckley would “particularly stress the fact that Communism seeks to destroy free nations by wrecking the economy of the country.” Jean would further use this prospectus to pitch the Institute, and the idea of serving as a trustee, to her friends and allies. Finally, Jean wrote, “this Institute would not be complete without William F. Buckley, Jr. as a member of the Board of Trustees,” recognizing his centrality in preserving her late husband’s legacy; indeed, Buckley was the first person Jean had asked to serve on the board.¹⁰⁴

Despite *National Review*’s eminently favorable tributes to McCarthy in May 1957, however, both Jean and Buckley recognized what would be the complicated nature of handling the senator’s legacy moving forward. As Jean conceded, she remained undecided about how and “whether or not to weave in Joe’s unique role in Congress – digging for and exposing the facts on various issues, and the fact that he has been since proven right in every case.”¹⁰⁵ In his response, Buckley again embraced McCarthy wholeheartedly, writing, “I would deem it an honor to serve as a trustee in the foundation you mention, the more so if it takes the name of your husband.”¹⁰⁶ Jean, however, would put plans for the Institute on hold later in August.¹⁰⁷ But Buckley remained committed to honoring McCarthy, writing in December, “I hoped to be some help in planning the Foundation you had in mind, but when you dropped the proposal I was left without anything to do. I am asking in a rather clumsy way; is there anything I can do?”¹⁰⁸ Jean responded that it was “a great help just to know you are there and that I may be feel free to call

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ William F. Buckley, Jr., *Letter from William F. Buckley, Jr. to Jean McCarthy*, 20 August 1957, Box 3, William F. Buckley, Jr. Papers.

¹⁰⁷ She mentioned, for example, a “new thought” for a memorial organization, and suggested, “we should go no further in doing any work on either idea” until she had time to sort her ideas out. Jean McCarthy, *Letter from Jean McCarthy to William F. Buckley, Jr.*, 26 August 1957, in *ibid.*

¹⁰⁸ William F. Buckley, Jr., *Letter from William F. Buckley, Jr. to Jean McCarthy*, 27 December 1957, in *ibid.*

on you.”¹⁰⁹ While the Institute would not yet come to be, then, this episode demonstrates that Buckley eagerly engaged with McCarthy’s legacy in public and private.

With the hold on the foundation, Buckley was once again left to determine how best to honor McCarthy’s legacy, and continued to do so via *National Review*. While Jean and Buckley’s surviving correspondence from 1958 is limited, the magazine reveals that Buckley continued to defend the late senator. William Schlam’s explosive tribute to McCarthy in May 1957 had decried Dean Acheson’s distasteful comments about McCarthy’s death, “de mortuis nil nisi veritatem”; Buckley inverted their implication a year on, with a column bearing that title. In the May 10, 1958 issue, Buckley expressed hope that, “[McCarthy’s] enemies, secure in their position, might some day soon, out of a respect for truth, grudgingly concede that the ‘menace’ of McCarthyism, which they exploited so shamelessly, was a phony from the start.” It was not conservatives’ image of McCarthy that was “mythical,” but rather liberals’ continued distortion of McCarthy’s supposed “Reign of Terror,” Buckley wrote. He asked, rhetorically, “where is the will of the truth-mongers, who tell us they seek the truth and will endure the consequences, to set the record straight?”¹¹⁰ The trope of correcting the history, as demonstrated by *National Review*’s earlier columns and Buckley and Jean’s plans for an Institute, was indeed a consistent theme in the attempted rehabilitation of McCarthy.

The year after McCarthy’s death saw numerous renewed tussles with former foes, including Richard Rovere, who would become a prominent liberal force in litigating the senator’s legacy. In the August 1, 1958 issue of *Esquire*, Rovere wrote a biting assessment of what he considered McCarthy’s swift and total fall. After censure, “he was through, and

¹⁰⁹ Jean McCarthy, *Letter from Jean McCarthy to William F. Buckley, Jr.*, 15 January 1958, Box 6, William F. Buckley, Jr. Papers.

¹¹⁰ William F. Buckley, Jr., “De Mortuis Nil Nisi Veritatem,” *National Review*, Vol. 5, No. 19, 10 May 1958, 438.

everyone knew it,” Rovere wrote. “Far more important,” Rovere continued, “McCarthy had lost his nerve” as a result of the incident, and had afterwards personally spun out of control—a characterization that stood in stark contrast to *National Review*’s celebrations of the senator after December 1954 as superhuman.¹¹¹ More seriously than mere political differences, however, Rovere publicly contended that McCarthy’s mysterious ailments were the result of his alcoholism, a rumor that close allies had tried to diminish.¹¹² Rovere paid the late senator backhanded compliments, writing that he was “not only the ablest demagogue of his time but the most gifted ever bred on these shores,” appealing with his trickery to Americans’ basest fears and desires.¹¹³ But, to Rovere, as the “leader of a fanatical movement,” McCarthy was a “frivolous” character, self-serving, ineffective over the long term, and therefore consigned to the dustbin of history.¹¹⁴ Rovere’s characterizations of McCarthy ran directly against the ideas Buckley had put forward, fulfilling Chambers’ warning about liberals’ ease in tearing down conservatives’ untenable myths.

Buckley responded in force, ripping Rovere’s August 1, 1958 publication by name in the next day’s issue of *National Review* and recognizing that the magazine was, in fact, engaged in a struggle for McCarthy’s legacy. Buckley denounced *Esquire*’s publisher’s “lavishly publicizing” Rovere’s piece as a “Revealing, Explosive Document!,” writing, “The beginning of knowledge in the struggle to understand the McCarthy era is to recognize that nothing McCarthy had to say could, *eo ipso*, qualify, in the Liberal community, as ‘revealing’ or ‘explosive.’” Liberals, Buckley implied, were so taken by the idea of McCarthy as black mark that Rovere could not possibly offer anything new on the topic. “The real point in Mr. Rovere’s piece,” Buckley

¹¹¹ Richard Rovere, “The Last Days of Joe McCarthy,” *Esquire*, 1 August 1958, 29.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 30.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 32.

¹¹⁴ Rovere, “The Last Days of Joe McCarthy,” *Esquire*, 1 August 1958, 33-34.

emphasized, was “*that there was nothing there for McCarthy (or anyone else) to believe*”; the left was soft on communism, and still did not believe in the Soviet threat. McCarthy “saw what Richard Rovere, for all his experience with Communism, has yet to see. ... He is, unfortunately, survived mostly by men who struggle—some, like Rovere, mightily—to keep others blind.”¹¹⁵ Buckley, a year on from McCarthy’s death, dug into the conservative legend which he himself helped to create: McCarthy as prophet.

Friendly Criticism

If Buckley between 1957 and 1958 recommitted himself to elevating McCarthy’s legacy, this commitment would be tested in 1959, and Buckley would respond more temperately. In 1959, for example, Rovere’s published a critical biography, *Senator Joe McCarthy*, which dominated the conversation surrounding the late senator. While Buckley in his *Up from Liberalism*, originally published in the same year, offered some positive words for McCarthy, his stance in *National Review* was markedly more defensive. After two years’ worth of impossibly heroic tributes, Chambers’ vision of the left’s toppling of a larger-than-life McCarthy materialized, with Rovere’s biography and the panic that ensued among those close to the late senator’s legacy. While the immediacy of McCarthy’s death had provided Buckley with some leeway in inflating the late senator’s personality and accomplishments, this honeymoon period’s expiration would make such hyperboles increasingly difficult in 1959.

Even the Joseph R. McCarthy Research Institute lost its standing. The activist, staunchly anticommunist Institute that Jean and Buckley had imagined in 1957 had, by January 1959 been moderated and thereby demoted. In its place would be the Joseph R. McCarthy Memorial

¹¹⁵ William F. Buckley, Jr., “Esquire’s World and Joe McCarthy’s,” *National Review*, Vol. 5, No. 5, 2 August 1958, 102.

Foundation, whose purpose was merely “to give recognition annually to two people who, in the opinion of the Board of Directors of the Foundation,” which included Buckley, “have made an outstanding contribution to the preservation of the American way of life.” Complementing the two awards, the Foundation’s main activity would be to throw an annual subscription dinner in Washington. Jean’s description of this event presents an image of conservatives under fire: “I think the yearly dinner will have the healthy effect of bringing conservatives from all over the country together and of presenting to the public a united and constructive picture.”¹¹⁶¹¹⁷ As Nash described it, *National Review* in its early years learned the challenges of big-tent conservatism.¹¹⁸ Moderating in order to present a unified picture, then, was a necessary endeavor, despite Buckley’s remaining personal enthusiasm for McCarthy.

Rovere’s biography challenged any potential unification. In *Senator Joe McCarthy*, he drew heavily on the arguments from his 1958 *Esquire* column, but in attacking McCarthy (and even Buckley) so directly, in a longer and more publicized fashion, the book caused a great deal of consternation. He criticized, by name, Buckley as part of a group of “intellectual and intellectuals *manque*” for legitimizing McCarthy and helping the senator attract followers.¹¹⁹ And while “fools and the non-fools,” Buckley included, might have been true believers, McCarthy had not: “In the mirror, McCarthy must have seen and recognized a fraud,” Rovere

¹¹⁶ Jean McCarthy, *Letter from Jean McCarthy to William F. Buckley, Jr.*, 21 January 1959, Box 8, William F. Buckley, Jr. Papers.

¹¹⁷ Buckley may even have missed what could have been the Foundation’s first dinner. Concerning An April 28, 1959 event, Buckley wrote to Jean, “I wish we could be with you to participate in these ceremonies on behalf of the great man you are gathered to honor,” referring to her late husband. William F. Buckley, Jr., *Letter from William F. Buckley, Jr. to Jean McCarthy*, 28 April 1959, in *ibid.*

¹¹⁸ Nash, *The Conservative Intellectual Movement in America since 1945*, 142.

¹¹⁹ Rovere wrote that Buckley, for example, “linked the worlds of money and intellect; his father was in oil, and he was in writing, and in a book that makes an interesting souvenir of the period, *McCarthy and His Enemies*, ... he and his co-author made the breath-taking assertion that ‘McCarthyism ... is a movement around which men of good will and stern morality can close ranks.’” Richard Rovere, *Senator Joe McCarthy* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, 1959), 22.

wrote.¹²⁰ Assailing conservatives' defense of the senator as the light and the truth, Rovere argued that McCarthy clearly had no regard for facts, and should not be celebrated.¹²¹ Once again, conjuring Chambers' prediction, Rovere provided another example of the left's knocking down a McCarthy lionized by conservatives.

Buckley's responses to Rovere's book reflect how the need to avoid becoming a fringe figure overshadowed his and Jean's personal zeal for preserving the heroic image of McCarthy. His writings with Jean, for example, demonstrate distance in the face of her panic; attaching advance copies of his editorial and Bozell's review denouncing the book, Buckley wrote that he thought of her "with profound sorrow and admiration."¹²² When published, Buckley's editorial would read that Rovere was "incapable of exercising a balanced judgment when the subject of Senator McCarthy comes up," writing "in the service of a mania with which he is much possessed."¹²³ Bozell was more assertive, writing, "As political history, this book is, simply, trash," later accusing Rovere of fabricating evidence, and summarizing the book as assuming "in the reader an advanced case of McCarthyphobia and pour[ing] adrenalin in the hate glands."¹²⁴ Clearly, Buckley and Bozell yielded no ground in condemning Rovere as a poor historian, but compared to their earlier celebrations of McCarthy, their 1959 columns had been remarkably pacified.

By contrast, Jean appealed to Buckley as though Rovere's book meant Armageddon. "It seems that it would be physically and mentally impossible, to me," she wrote, "for anyone to lie so much and so cruelly." In the same letter, Jean suggested to Buckley that he circulate among

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 72.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 168-170.

¹²² William F. Buckley, Jr., *Letter from William F. Buckley, Jr. to Jean McCarthy*, 30 June 1959, Box 8, William F. Buckley, Jr. Papers.

¹²³ William F. Buckley, Jr., "The Fantasy of Richard Rovere," *National Review*, Vol. 7, No. 12, 4 July 1959, 169-170.

¹²⁴ L. Brent Bozell, "Smear and Unsupported Charges," *National Review*, Vol. 7, No. 12, 4 July 1959, 183-184.

friends a separate essay she had included, addressed to newspapers, in which she wrote that she would have liked to sue Rovere for libel, but that Rovere knowingly avoided naming her in order to avoid such a suit. Jean also pointed to then-Democratic Senator from Massachusetts John F. Kennedy's favorable review of *Senator Joe McCarthy*, needling Buckley to respond in *National Review*: "It seems to me worth letting the rest of the nation know Jack Kennedy for what he is," she wrote, "and not restrict it to only the Washington Post readers."¹²⁵ Buckley seems not to have assented to either proposal. Later the same month, however, after Jean noted that "Joe's family is beyond belief at the Rovere book," Buckley obliged to send her copies of his and Bozell's responses.¹²⁶ Kennedy had described those still applauding McCarthy as a "still-vibrant cult of McCarthy admirers."¹²⁷ In agreeing only to Jean's modest requests, Buckley, by 1959, seemed none too eager to be seen as the leader of such a cult.

Even Buckley's 1959 book, *Up from Liberalism*, brought McCarthy back down to human proportions. Buckley's assessment was still undeniably favorable, but less heroizing than his previous work, writing, for example, "Whatever else Senator McCarthy did, he brought liberalism to a boil. Everything he did that was good, everything he did that was bad, added together, do not have the same residual sociological significance for our time of what his enemies were revealed as seeing fit to do in opposing him."¹²⁸ Harkening back to his earliest writings on McCarthy, Buckley identified the "intellectual elite" for refusing to understand

¹²⁵ Jean McCarthy, *Letter from Jean McCarthy to William F. Buckley, Jr.*, 7 July 1959, Box 8, William F. Buckley, Jr. Papers. Kennedy, in his review, recognized that Rovere's book was "factual, thorough and analytical" but ultimately "unfavorable" to McCarthy. Therefore, Kennedy wrote, "Mr. Rovere can expect the usual stream of abusive, venomous letters from the still-vibrant cult of McCarthy admirers." John F. Kennedy, "McCarthy 'Fall-Out' Still Affects Atmosphere," *The Washington Post and Times Herald*, 28 June 1959, E6.

¹²⁶ Jean McCarthy, *Letter from Jean McCarthy to William F. Buckley, Jr.*, 21 July 1959, Box 8, William F. Buckley, Jr. Papers; William F. Buckley, Jr. *Letter from William F. Buckley, Jr. to Jean McCarthy*, 24 July 1959, in *ibid.*

¹²⁷ Kennedy, "McCarthy 'Fall-Out' Still Affects Atmosphere," *The Washington Post and Times Herald*, 28 June 1959, E6.

¹²⁸ William F. Buckley, *Up from Liberalism: 25th Anniversary Edition* (New York: Stein and Day, 1984), 39.

McCarthy or McCarthyism, concerning themselves more with process than results.¹²⁹ Buckley seemed to imply, in *Up from Liberalism*, that McCarthy should be remembered more for whipping liberals into an unsustainable frenzy that showed their true colors than for his perceived courageous acts of exposing communism. Although the book was a far cry from a balanced assessment of McCarthy's life and work, *Up from Liberalism* represented a condemnation of liberals' myths, rather than another step toward conservatives'.

Most revealing, Buckley defined what he saw as his role in contesting McCarthy's legacy in a series of letters with Roy Cohn regarding an editorial dispute in 1959. Cohn questioned *National Review's* publishing work by Noel E. Parmentel, Jr., whose "personal remarks concerning Jean McCarthy must be as offensive to you as they are to me," he wrote to Buckley. "You bring no credit to your friends and supporters," Cohn concluded, "by using our money to sustain an individual of this type."¹³⁰ Buckley skirted the question of Parmentel's language toward Jean, but was firm that nobody's investment in *National Review* would "earn you the right to treat me as your piper."¹³¹ Cohn capitulated: "There are too few people left who are joined together in active participation in the fight for our country," he wrote. "They should not quarrel amongst themselves."¹³² Buckley, by late 1959, had evolved from an early activist, providing material aid to McCarthy and urging conservative Republican electoral success, to the manager of a successful weekly publication; he knew that this meant adapting his posture toward the senator's legacy.

¹²⁹ Ibid., 52-53.

¹³⁰ Roy Cohn, *Letter from Roy Cohn to William F. Buckley, Jr.*, 23 November 1959, Box 7, William F. Buckley, Jr. Papers.

¹³¹ William F. Buckley, Jr., *Letter from William F. Buckley, Jr. to Roy Cohn*, 24 November 1959, in *ibid.*

¹³² Roy Cohn, *Letter from Roy Cohn to William F. Buckley, Jr.*, 3 December 1959, in *ibid.*

Epilogue and Conclusion: 1960 and beyond

In a final response to Cohn, on the issue of *National Review*'s editorial independence, Buckley defined himself as “a critic friendly to McCarthy”; Cohn’s by contrast, was “that of a front-line fighter.” Although both classes of men would be involved in what Cohn had described as “the fight for our country,” Buckley wrote, they were fundamentally different: “A front-line fighter looks to his companions for total assistance, total support, unquestioned loyalty,” and Buckley, as a critic with a need for credibility, could not afford unquestioned loyalty. Buckley continued: “Joe McCarthy, who was my friend, never publicly endorsed [*McCarthy and His Enemies*] – for it contained criticisms of him,” but “knew we spoke out of a deep sympathy for his cause, and him.” Indeed, this was a political calculation, Buckley admitted, writing, “I am right in saying what I did, given the job I set out, as a critic friendly to McCarthy to do: and by behaving as I did, I think I influenced more people.”¹³³¹³⁴ Although Buckley’s earlier work melded the roles of front-line fighter and friendly critic, he would clearly settle into the latter role, explaining his relative restraint in 1959. In both cases, however, his actions proved Ellen Schrecker’s contention that more people than simply McCarthy were responsible for the intrigues of McCarthyism.

Buckley’s consciously adopting the mantle of friendly critic obviously did not mean that McCarthy would disappear from Buckley’s work in 1960 and beyond; his history with the senator shows that their relationship was more complicated. Unlike Nash has suggested, for example, in both his 1976 *The Conservative Intellectual Tradition in America since 1945* (or, for

¹³³ William F. Buckley, Jr., *Letter from William F. Buckley, Jr. to Roy Cohn*, 7 December 1959, in *ibid.*

¹³⁴ Buckley displayed a similar awareness of the politics surrounding his commentary in 1964, writing to McCarthy’s widow (now, remarried, Jean Minetti), “God knows! Another book must be written about Joe. But it is not yet exactly the right time. Let’s keep our ears to the ground.” William F. Buckley, Jr. *Letter from William F. Buckley, Jr. to Jean Minetti*, 3 June 1964, Box 31, William F. Buckley, Jr. Papers.

that matter, the 1996 rerelease) or his 2009 *Reappraising the Right*, Buckley continued to honor McCarthy and keep his legacy alive, albeit in ways that ensured he could still reach as broad a group as possible. Partially, this meant behind-the-scenes maneuvering, and partially this meant continuing to publish. In September 1967, for example, Buckley wrote to Cohn, offering feedback on Cohn's forthcoming biography of McCarthy: Expand the theoretical assessment of McCarthy "with perhaps some reference (though not explicit) to the thesis elaborated by Bozell and myself" in the 1954 *McCarthy and His Enemies*.¹³⁵ Buckley reviewed Cohn's book favorably in *National Review* for offering a complex argument about McCarthy as "a complex man whose movements were frequently disorganized" who was "up to something of considerable national significance," criticizing liberals' mere "over-reaction to McCarthyism."¹³⁶ Clearly, this was a far cry from Buckley's militant celebrations of McCarthy, the man and the legacy, of the mid-1950s.

Buckley's published work on the topic of McCarthy from 1959 and on, and particularly that of the 1960s and 1970s, took on the character of defending the late senator against liberals' unreasonable assaults, rather than adding to an unsustainable myth. In a 1970 column, for example, Buckley wrote that McCarthy had become a "hobgoblin" for the left, conceding that that "McCarthy did scare a few dozen or a few hundred government officials, and he did often act recklessly," and in this way he became a useful caricature.¹³⁷ Later in the decade, in response to a 1977 television special, Buckley wrote in an editorial that McCarthy just as easily could have "died of drink, cheated on his taxes, lied in his election campaigns, malingered in the Marines," as he might have had a significant, positive impact on the fight against communism;

¹³⁵ William F. Buckley, Jr., *Letter from William F. Buckley, Jr. to Roy Cohn*, 7 September 1967, Box 42, William F. Buckley, Jr. Papers.

¹³⁶ William F. Buckley, Jr., "Roy Cohn's Book," *National Review*, Vol. 20, No. 36, 10 September 1968, 925.

¹³⁷ William F. Buckley, Jr., "McCarthy to the Rescue," *National Review*, Vol. 22, No. 29, 28 July 1970, 804-805.

he simply urged that liberals might recognize this possibility.¹³⁸ Nash was correct, then, despite overlooking in his writing key details on Buckley's relationship with McCarthy.

As conservatives moved on from McCarthy and pivoted to the more pressing concerns of the day, Buckley evolved his public position toward the senator, rather than clinging to a vestige of the Cold War 1950s, and in doing so likely helped to consolidate and build consensus among conservatives. By no means is this a complete account of Buckley on McCarthy, or how Buckley privately responded to the senator's actions or questions of his legacy. Archival collections from the years examined above are incomplete, and columns dedicated to the senator appeared at least twice, for example, in the *National Review* of the 1990s.¹³⁹ Buckley would even publish a second book about the senator, *The Redhunter: A Novel Based on the Life of Senator Joe McCarthy*, in 1998.¹⁴⁰ Further work might include, for example, an examination of these later works as well as how McCarthy figured into Buckley's television program, *Firing Line*, and whether his appearances therein were meant to appeal to a different audience from *National Review*'s. What is ultimately clear, however, is that McCarthy's role in Buckley's work is greater than previously acknowledged, and that Buckley's complicated, changing approaches to the senator and his legacy demonstrate calculations on his part that transcended merely the intellectual. Understandings of the nature of conservatism, and particularly that of the postwar fusionism typically attributed to Buckley, must therefore be more nuanced.

¹³⁸ William F. Buckley, Jr., "Tail Gunner Joe," *National Review*, Vol. 29, No. 10, 18 March 1977, 350.

¹³⁹ William F. Buckley, Jr., "Ed Murrow vs. Joe McCarthy," *National Review*, Vol. 46, No. 13, 11 July 1994, 70; David Frum, "Our S.O.B.," *National Review*, Vol. 51, No. 24, 20 December 1999, 54.

¹⁴⁰ Charles McCarry wrote of *The Redhunter*, "There is no polemic here, no apologia. No anger. Only faint, sad resignation as if Buckley has given up trying to understand why McCarthy was driven to wretched excess and finally to his grave (he drank himself to death at 48) by people who merely exasperated more sensible fellows with their willingness to lie to the world and lie to themselves, and feel good about it, in righteous defense of one of the most appalling tyrannies in history." Charles McCarry, "Right Conduct," *New York Times*, 4 July 1999, 202. Similarly, Joseph Shattan wrote for *The American Spectator* that "Buckley's McCarthy has a serious problem—he's not very bright—and this, along with his growing fondness for booze, eventually undoes him." Joseph Shattan, "William F. Buckley, Jr. Redeems Joe McCarthy," *The American Spectator*, Vol. 32, No. 10, October 1999, 69.

12,281 words.

Bibliographic Essay

I have studied U.S. political history at Yale in order to better understand the United States today. I grew up in a part of the country where many people's understanding of politics comes from Fox News and talk radio; Michael Savage, Rush Limbaugh, and Bill O'Reilly were the focal points of discussions when I visited my grandparents—and in my high school U.S. history course, where my teacher cited the Drudge Report each day. While I may not have grown up with a sound understanding of U.S. history or politics, then, at the very least I had a deep appreciation for the ways in which conservatives have been deftly able to shape perceptions of the news. Even in my youth, I sensed that conservatives' political infrastructure was nothing new. And, of course, the conservative commentariat had real effects on public opinion and the politics of the day—and vice versa.

As a high school student, I had never heard about William F. Buckley, Jr. Beyond the typical U.S. public high school treatment of the Cold War and Red Scare, I didn't hear much about Joseph McCarthy, either (except one presentation about rhetoric in an English class, in which my classmate consistently referred to him as "Senator McCartney"). Even over my first two years at Yale, while I'd heard rumblings about the Buckley Program and knew that it had something to do with campus conservatism, my knowledge about the history of modern American conservatism remained narrow. But I thought back to my upbringing in Western New York, particularly after spending time in San Francisco, and after my home county had voted solidly for Donald Trump in the 2016 presidential election. After spending two summers in San Francisco, where the political spectrum ranges from moderate Democrat to ultra-progressive Democratic Socialist, I wanted to learn more about conservatism in the United States to understand the different political landscapes I had experienced.

My senior essay is an attempt to do just that. I recognized that our two-party system did not always align neatly to a liberal/conservative binary, and, during the fall 2017 semester, I applied for a history seminar, *American Conservatism: The Conservative Intellectual Tradition since 1880*, with Andrina Tran. The primary textbook for that course was George Nash's landmark *The Conservative Intellectual Movement in America since 1945*, the central work I respond to in this essay. In fall 2017, I recognized the themes that would motivate my focus on the relationship between Buckley and McCarthy and how Buckley dealt with this relationship in his work: McCarthy has essentially been written out of the histories of modern American conservatism, whereas Buckley has been described as its patron saint, though clearly the two were not as far apart as imagined.

Left out of many of the descriptions of mid-century conservatism was the fact that Buckley and McCarthy did not—at least, not really—occupy separate spheres of politics. As I saw, the most glaring counterpoint to this fiction was Buckley's second book, *McCarthy and His Enemies: The Record and Its Meaning*, published 1954, the year before Buckley would launch *National Review*. Between Buckley's defense of McCarthy and McCarthy's own premeditated defense of his tactics, *McCarthyism: The Fight for America* (1952), there were glaring similarities enough. I thought this was curious, and looked for secondary literature linking the men. I found little. For my final *American Conservatism* assignment, I highlighted this gap in the literature, in the context of Buckley's and McCarthy's similar treatments of gays in the federal government in their published works, but I knew there was more to examine. While historians such as Nash characterized Buckley as an intellectual and McCarthy as an aberration (like today's "swamp monsters"), I noticed that the pair were in reality closer than their reputations.

My second opportunity to take a closer look at Buckley and McCarthy's relationship came in Professor Beverly Gage's spring 2018 seminar, *Communism and Anticommunism in the 20th-Century United States*. As in *American Conservatism*, in Professor Gage's course we read Ellen Schrecker's *Many Are the Crimes: McCarthyism in America*, which painted the McCarthyist moment as one of large-scale, state-sanctioned repression. I appreciated that Schrecker argued that McCarthyism was greater than McCarthy, for I had already seen that it encompassed Buckley. Still, having previously looked into the similarities between Buckley's and McCarthy's work, I knew that Buckley fit into this story in a way that historians seemed to overlook. For my final paper for that course, then, I looked at more intimate correspondence, via the William F. Buckley, Jr. Papers at Manuscripts and Archives.

In pivoting to the senior essay, I knew that I had to both expand on my previous work and go deeper into the archives. The Buckley Papers confirmed what I'd suspected (and had seen in less detail) the previous semester: Buckley and McCarthy did have a personal relationship, and Buckley's personal writings shed light on his published works. I noticed while taking Professor Gage's seminar, for example, that Buckley wrote back and forth with McCarthy's widow, Jean, but I had not then noticed that Buckley's public work and his private writings revealed interesting tensions about McCarthy's legacy. In 1959, for example, Buckley and Jean write to each other to condemn Richard Rovere's new McCarthy biography. In 1964, Buckley writes to Jean that he, too, wishes another (sympathetic) book about Joe could be written—but that it wasn't the right time. Buckley's political calculus in these letters demonstrates that, indeed, he was not so far removed from McCarthy as secondary literature has tended to suggest.

The archives also showed that Buckley corresponded not just with McCarthy's widow after the senator's death, but other members of his inner circle as well, including former attorney

and adviser Roy Cohn; and former aide, Buckley's brother-in-law and *McCarthy and His Enemies* coauthor, Brent Bozell. Taken together, Buckley's writing with McCarthy's inner circle reveals his deep and enduring personal appreciation for McCarthy and his work, and an apparent calculus as to how to best communicate this appreciation without infringing upon the credibility of *National Review*.

Still, as my previous work on the matter related to Buckley's and McCarthy's use of stereotypes and the language of national security threats to bar gays from federal service, and, later, illuminating Buckley and McCarthy's personal relationship, it became clear that for my senior essay I would focus on how these similarities and relationships would have an effect on Buckley's work—and what that meant about the postwar anticommunist conservatism. The Buckley Papers were instrumental in centering my senior essay around Buckley, but, of course, Buckley was more than his personal correspondence, clippings, and musings. If Buckley, as many historians have described, was a lion of an intellectual, the architect of modern conservatism, I needed to understand how his personal views and private correspondence related to his published work. I knew, for example, that *McCarthy and His Enemies* and the later *Up from Liberalism* reflected some of Buckley's views on McCarthy, but that I would need to examine the publication that made Buckley most famous: *National Review*.

Thankfully, Yale University Library also (and entirely online) makes available the *National Review* archives, from as early as its first issue. I extend my thanks especially to James Kessenides for helping me to access and sift through these archives. As I would find, many letters to or from Buckley referenced in great detail, or even identified by name, *National Review* columns or editorials, and I was able to locate these online through the Library. Connecting these private letters to Buckley's published writings, either his own editorials or the columns he

approved and endorsed as editor, shed light not just on Buckley's relationship with and thoughts on McCarthy, but how and when he thought it appropriate to integrate or reintegrate McCarthy into the growing conservative mainstream.

For this project, then, primary sources have proven the most abundant and easily accessible, while appropriate secondary literature has been scarce. As the point I'm making is not necessarily a refutation but one that adds nuance to a relatively bare history of the nature of American conservatism, there are few historians to necessarily respond to. One such author, as I mentioned, is Nash, whose characterization of Buckley as an intellectual above the political fray is but a partial understanding. Certainly, some surveys of conservative political history have also been useful in situating my argument, such as Kim Phillips-Fein's "Conservatism: A State of the Field," which Professor Gage pointed out to me. Ultimately, because of the nature of my argument (that Buckley's position in American conservatism is more complex than previously considered), and "the state of the field" (that, as Phillips-Fein argues, a more robust understanding of conservative ideologies' relationships to the state is still needed), I have had to position my senior essay in the context of secondary materials that do not necessarily get it wrong, but have it as yet incomplete.

What has allowed me to see a fuller picture, have been access to the Buckley Papers combined with access to Buckley's published work. It is these primary sources that illuminate a more complicated history for Buckley: one that calls into question what it means to be an intellectual actor in politics, and one that suggests—even for Buckley—that the personal was political.

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