

RED LETTERS: U.S. PRINT MEDIA COVERAGE OF ANTI-COMMUNISM
IN THE EARLY 1950s

by

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The early 1950s were a period of great strife as a variety of political forces battled over the proper method to fight communism, often sacrificing civil liberties in the process. By studying the media coverage of anti-communism during the era using a theory that explains continuing patterns in news texts, we can examine the ideological role the media played at the time and the risk that such events might be repeated.

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INTRODUCTION

During the appeals process for Julius and Ethel Rosenberg, their attorney argued that media coverage of the couple adversely affected the jury. It was one of the earliest of such claims, and it raised an important issue: Was the media of that extremely turbulent time, the early 1950s, ideologically tainted, and to what extent?

The question is an important one, and the best way to answer it is through a careful consideration of media texts from the era. However, merely explaining how and why the media covered anti-communism the way they did is not sufficient. Any theory that can explain the unique characteristics of coverage from the early 1950s should also be able to deal with all media content.

The reason for this is clear: for all the ideological fervor of the McCarthy era, it is not an isolated incident in America's history. "Subversive" groups continue to be marginalized, and many theorists argue this is due in part to the way the media cover issues surrounding those groups. Because it is a particularly intense example of an ongoing problem, the early 1950s provide an idea base for a comprehensive theoretical approach to media studies.

That approach should explain the three significant aspects of a text: factual content, story format and word choice. I have selected a small number of events and newspapers from the early 1950s to examine — those events are described in detail in Chapter Two and the coverage is evaluated in Chapter Three. However, the main focus of this paper is in establishing a theory that can explain not only the coverage of the early 1950s, but patterns that emerge in all media.

In Chapter One, I explain the approach and theory I have developed for dealing with media texts. This theory relies upon the ideas of a number of scholars, including Chomsky and Herman, Tuchman, Fowler and van Dijk. Typically, these scholars are divided between sociological and linguistic camps, but the combination of the two approaches provides a more comprehensive and thorough explanation of media content.

A composite explanation relies upon two fundamental claims. The first is that media content is constrained by two forces: ease and economy. Ease refers to the ability of a reporter to write a story quickly and completely; reporters rely upon a routine set of sources and practices in order to streamline their work process. Economy alludes to the capitalist nature of the news business; newspapers are intended to produce profits and news gathering and reporting practices that would impede upon a paper's ability to make money are frowned upon.

My second claim is that news stories tend to fall into a certain narrative pattern. That pattern is typically a dichotomous one; news stories tend to divide issues into two sides and exclude or distort those views that violate that pattern. Additionally, stories are often grouped into "types" in order to make the process of writing and story telling easier.

The effect of both of these patterns is to produce news coverage that mirrors the ideology of elite newsmakers. Many alternate views, such as those of Communists, are excluded while other views, including those of Joe McCarthy, are given a stage simply because they adhere to the needs of journalists. This should clearly be a concern for all members of society. Average citizens who rely upon the media for an explanation of current affairs are given an incomplete and slanted understanding of reality. Reporters, who supposedly strive for objectivity and completeness in their stories, are in fact failing to deliver either. And theorists who strive to explain a number of patterns in news coverage should consider the possibility that a few simple and intuitive factors are responsible for a dramatic and alarming shaping of news texts.

Very few people want to see a return to the McCarthy era. Unfortunately, if the media helped produce that event and continue the practices that brought it about, the risk continues to exist. This paper is a study of the 1950s and the media, but it is also a study of the way extreme ideologies and fervent hatreds can become an accepted and prevalent part of the national discourse. By looking at three critical events in McCarthy's history, as well as the Rosenberg verdict and the Internal Security Act's passage, I also look at the way in which the media may shape American society. By considering *Time* magazine, *The New York Times*, *The Eugene Register-Guard*, the *Washington Post* and *The Oregonian* I am also looking at the way stories were and are told by those in power in this nation.

CHAPTER ONE — THEORETICAL ISSUES

Approaches to mass communications research range from lengthy narratives on the history of a publication or field to computer-aided counts of specific words within a narrowly focused set of articles. Scholars attempt to find how articles impact the reader and how they impact the creator. Conservatives and liberals alike accuse the media of bias and develop theories to demonstrate how that bias comes about.

Clearly no comprehensive description of those theories could be attempted in this format. My concerns are limited; I hope to explain the observable characteristics of media content from the early 1950s. This means excluding a number of other approaches, particularly those dealing with audiences, and the reasons for doing so are discussed in the first section of this chapter.

After reviewing a representative (but hardly exhaustive) sample of theoretical literature dealing with the content concerns I hope to address, I have devised by own theory about the factors that influence media texts. This theory is divided into two parts, largely because of the clear distinctions between the literature that helped shape each idea.

My first claim is that media content is dictated by two constraints that act upon the media: ease and economy. The former would suggest that journalists, writing on deadline, are forced to compose story in a way that maximizes their resources as researchers. The latter constraint implies that advertiser and owner pressure compel reporters to write stories that don't risk their personal economic security or the financial well-being of the publication.

Both of these claims are closely related to arguments made by a large number of media theorists, many of them with close connections to sociology. These theorists include Gaye Tuchman, Ben Bagdikian, Noam Chomsky and Edward Herman. In the second section of this chapter I will consider what each of these authors claim, along with the beliefs of some other writers in the field. Through this examination of the literature it should become apparent how I arrived at my own theory, which I will explain in greater depth at the end of the section.

My second theoretical claim is that media texts tend to fall into certain structural patterns. At all levels of the text, from the individual word to the overall format of the story, journalists tend to write in a way that replicates the ideology of powerful elements of society and of other journalists. Moreover, my most fundamental claim is that media texts tend to be structured as dichotomous narratives: The news event is presented as a conflict between two opposing parties.

As is the case with the theory of constraints, my notion of dichotomous narratives emerges from a number of theorists, including Teun van Dijk and Roger Fowler. These theorists tend to be associated with the field of linguistics, and their primary focus is on the language of news texts and the notion that news operates as a sort of self-contained discourse. The third section of this chapter examines some of their works and the way my notion of dichotomy emerges from those works.

Approaches to media theory

Theoretical approaches to the media have tended to view them as a system or set of systems operating within society. According to Rowland Lorimer's introduction to *Mass Communication*, "Harold Innis and Marshall McLuhan were the first modern scholars to study the connection between the means of communication available to people and the ways in which their means of communication contribute to shaping the character and scope of society..." (1). This view of mass communication as a "mediated" form of communication is useful, but it relies heavily upon broad comparisons between the characteristics of the media and other forms of communication. Such comparisons make specific analysis of media content from a given period, such as the early 1950s, difficult.

Moreover, as Lorimer notes, this approach tends to place the technology ahead of its social context (18-19). The technique of disseminating information to a mass audience can occur regardless of the specific technology used. While the mere ability to communicate at a mass level is important to shaping society, more crucial is the degree to which the content of that mass communication contributes to and reflects the shape of that society. Therefore, system-based approaches to media theory are not particularly useful for explaining content and do not contribute anything to my theoretical approach.

More specific studies of content typically consider either the factors that influence content creation or the way content influence the audience. Many of the most common questions in media theory — violence on television, pornography's effect on women, the value of educational television — concern the affect upon audiences. Nevertheless, I intend

to deal not with audiences but with those who create what audiences receive: the mass media. This too is a distinct and well-practiced theoretical approach: “From one point of view content, as distinct from carriage, and encompassing both what is expressed and how it is expressed, is at the heart of the study of communication” (Lorimer, 185).

Some theorists object to considerations of content that ignore audiences. While their criticisms are legitimate, the intent of my paper renders most of these objections irrelevant. Nevertheless, it is important to address these concerns. For example, many sociologists fear that content-only analysis is too quick to assume that “biased” journalism has a direct and strongly influential effect on audiences. According to sociologist Joel Smith, such assumptions often suit the political purposes of the scholar and create a shallow analytical framework. Worse, Smith worries, such unwarranted conclusions can lead to unneeded governmental and social interference in the free functioning of the media. Censorship of the media is anathema to many media scholars and news workers of all political slants.

Of course, Smith does not reject consideration of influences on content. In fact, his argument is that creation and effect must be considered part of a larger whole; instead of viewing the media as an independent system, he wants to consider them an element of the system that is society. He rejects “scholars [who] still frame their questions in terms of the influence of the media *on* society rather than their role *in* society” (10, his emphasis). Clearly, the sort of approach Smith rejects — treating audiences as test subjects to be injected with a variety of media texts — is troublesome. More significantly, such an approach is useless for study of literature from over 40 years ago; there is no effective way to create a model audience from the ’50s and see how the articles in my sample influence the audience. Consideration of audiences is thus difficult for practical reasons.

Theoretical justifications for ignoring audiences also exist. While Smith is correct in arguing that policy decisions should not be based upon research that fails to prove causal effects, the purpose of an academic investigation need not be policy creation. If scholars were to prove content affected an audience, it would still be necessary to explain how bias appeared within media texts. Moreover, media production operates largely independent of any effects content has upon the audience. Journalists typically assume their product provides factual information. Their writing is not generally influenced by concerns about the effect the text will have on the audience; journalists don't anticipate it having an ideological effect. Thus, audience effects do not shape content.

This does not mean the media operate in a vacuum, of course. Feedback does exist, but “very low feedback is the rule in mass communication...” (Smith, 69). While subscription cancellations and newsstand sales do provide a sense of the public reaction to the press, such actions are not perceived as stemming from ideological content or effects and generally don't influence the individual reporter. After all, it is difficult to trace a long-term decline in market share to the way a single reporter covered a city council meeting.

Thus, my concern is not with what happens after a story was written. My study will focus on the actual text. While I believe texts are shaped by numerous factors — political, professional and social — I have not extensively researched the practices of the newsroom or the public relations offices during the 1950s. My methodology is even more carefully focused on the text itself, which I think reveals much about the way in which it was created. In particular, I will look at three aspects of a text: factual content, specific language and general narrative approach. The first of these is used primarily by the more sociological researchers I will consider and is a way to test my theory of media constraints. The other two

issues deal heavily with language and tie into my notion of dichotomous discourse. These ideas I will reserve for the third section of the chapter; questions of factual content are addressed in the following section.

Sociological approaches to the media

According to Doris Graber, there are four models under which the media are posited to operate: “the mirror model, the professional model, the organizational model and the political model” (24). While most theorists combine aspects from more than one model, this division is a useful one for considering the different influences on my own theory. In considering sociological theory, therefore, I have grouped researchers under one of these four areas. Herbert Gans falls under the professional model, Ben Bagdikian and Gaye Tuchman within the organizational model and Noam Chomsky and Edward Herman into the political model.

Graber describes the mirror model as the contention “that news is and should be a reflection of reality” (25). Such a claim would suggest that readers would find most, if not all, events and sources included within a story. In short, all the facts would be there. As Graber points out, even in the absence of political bias, “this conception of news making is unrealistic” (25). Journalists must, by the nature of their craft, select certain facts and exclude others — the majority of potential news items in a given day do not even receive a preliminary phone call. The remaining models, therefore, attempt to explain how journalists select some news items over others.

Theorists often argue that the selection of news items is flawed and leads to distortion. As theorist Herbert Gans puts it: “Many questions can be asked about the actors and activities

which now appear in, or are omitted from, the news. Consequently, news can be considered distorted for asking questions which a standard setter considers to be wrong or for using the wrong concepts to frame correct questions, or for employing the wrong methods” (Cohen, 192). Gans proposes to solve distortion by using more perspectives in creating the news.

The proposal is a simple one — Gans would have the media give more sides to a story. Because he acknowledges the difficulties of briefly synthesizing the vast and contradictory perspectives of parties involved in the news, Gans would like to see an increase in the number of news outlets and in the variety of stories they tell. The implication is that much media bias stems from a failure of journalists to seek an adequate number of sources.

By suggesting journalists, acting professionally, can largely solve the problem of bias independently, Gans is subscribing to a variation of the professional model described by Graber. Her explanation of the model is more general: “In the professional model, news making is viewed as an endeavor of highly skilled professionals who put together an interesting collage of events selected for importance, attractiveness to media audiences and balance among the various elements of the news offering” (Graber, 25). In Gans’ view, this is closer to the ideal than the reality. Nevertheless, he believes that, given the space and incentive, journalists could provide a modicum of balance by presenting more perspectives — thus providing an “interesting collage” of important events that are attractive to news audiences.

The fundamental problem with this view is that it puts the onus of content bias upon reporters who are often constrained by outside forces and therefore are unable to provide the sort of balanced and broad coverage Gans calls for. Therefore, while I concur with Gans that

the omission of certain perspectives is a significant issue in content, it is necessary to look to other theorists to understand why those perspectives are not included.

Some constraints on content come from the complexities of the media. This is described by Graber's organizational model, which contends the following: "Determination of what items will become news emerges from the pressures inherent in organizational processes and goals. Pressures springing from interpersonal relations and professional norms within the news organization are important, as are constraints arising from technical news production processes, cost-benefit considerations, profit orientations and legal regulations" (25-26).

One obvious limit on the number of perspectives journalists can provide is the for-profit nature of the industry. The cost of production limits space, of course, but concerns about offending those who pay the bills also constrain reporters. Ben Bagdikian considers many of the monetary constraints caused by the media in his well-known work on the subject: "The Media Monopoly." Bagdikian's is worried about the growing influence of corporate ownership of the media — the concentration of most media outlets into the hands of a few massive owners. Such concentrated ownership is certainly troublesome, but it was not a significant factor in media coverage during the 1950s, when most cities still had more than one newspaper and the bulk of such papers were family-owned operations.

Some of Bagdikian's other concerns are more relevant to my theoretical work. Whether they are owned by large companies or small families, newspapers and other media outlets are hierarchically structured and a business owner or manager always sits at the top of the ladder. If that owner's politics contradict the angle of a particular story, the author of the story is likely to suffer, according to Bagdikian. "Every year," he writes, "there is a distressing list of reporters and editors of newspapers or magazines who are fired or demoted because they

stumbled on the private politics of their owner...” (36). During the 1950s, newspapers and magazines were shaped by men such as William Randolph Hearst and Henry Luce whose conservative politics were no secret to their staffs.

Ownership can influence media content even more directly than through its chilling effect on staff freedom. Bagdikian documents an effort by Hearst and Luce to place Billy Graham in a public spotlight. According to the author, the two publishers chose the reverend to become a “powerful voice preaching doctrines they approved of” (43). By using their money to send Graham around the country and their media to place him in the spotlight, Hearst and Luce created a powerful and popular spokesman for their anti-communist crusade.

By punishing reporters for inappropriate content and by creating and forcing coverage of appropriate content, media owners have the capacity to change the nature of media texts. Because owners are typically wealthy men with a stake in the continuation of a pro-business status quo, Bagdikian says: “The result of the overwhelming power of relatively narrow corporate ideologies has been the creation of widely established political and economic illusions in the United States with little visible contradiction in the media to which a majority of the population is exclusively exposed. The illusions sustained by the media corporations are not minor ones. They often go to the heart of crucial public policy” (44).

Beyond the personal interests of the owner, Bagdikian argues, the press also protect the interest of a larger group of corporate elites: “The standard media — mainstream newspapers, magazines and broadcasters — had always been reliable promoters of the corporate ethic” (52). As a whole, corporations and the ideas they support (deregulation, low business taxes, “free enterprise”) receive favorable coverage, according to Bagdikian and

other scholars. While there are many reasons for this, “Media Monopoly” emphasizes two: direct pressure and advertising.

The former is similar to the pressure that comes from the publisher over personal concerns. Publishers are usually members of the business community; they have a close relationship with corporate leaders in the area and in the nation. Additionally, because all are subject to many of the same regulations and taxes, they share many political interests. If publishers themselves don’t exert pressure in a pro-business fashion, their associates from other companies probably will, either upon the publisher or upon the newspaper’s editors. Those editors are likely to listen to the demands of individuals with power and influence and a close connection to the boss.

Editors are even more likely to listen because of the second reason: advertising. Bagdikian gives particular emphasis to this influence, and for good reason. Editors are unlikely to print a story that would offend a valued advertiser because of the potential financial impact. Moreover, they are almost as unlikely to print a story that offends corporations or corporate practices as a whole because there is a chance many advertisers will take the tone of the piece as threatening their viability. Finally, an editor is even prone toward running news on subjects that attract the readership of a wealthy, powerful demographic, for these are the sorts of people who generate beneficial ad accounts.

Bagdikian’s arguments support some of the constraints I theorize exist. For the most part, the role of publishers and advertisers is tied to my notion of economy: Newspapers can’t afford to offend advertisers, and reporters cannot afford to give up their paycheck by offending publishers and editors. Therefore, content ought to reflect those issues and ideas that the business-owning class deems important. Bagdikian provides numerous empirical

examples of this influence, and I suspect the content of my sample will also reveal a pro-business slant.

According to Graber, other organizational constraints also influence content. All of them are structural aspects of the media that directly influence reporters. Another important theoretical base for my paper is Gaye Tuchman, who studied journalistic behavior and the way reporters, in her words, “construct reality.”

Tuchman explains her theoretical intent as follows: “This book is the product of my attempt, over the past eleven years, to learn about news as the social construction of reality. It is a study of the constraints of newswork and of the resources available to newswriters. It is a study of newswriters as professionals and of newspapers and television newsrooms as complex organizations. And it is a study of methods of inquiry — how newswriters determine facts and frame events and debates pertinent to our shared civic life” (ix).

The metaphor of framing is well suited to describing a number of media theories. Again using Tuchman’s words: “News is a window on the world. Through its frame, Americans learn of themselves and others. . . . But, like any frame that delineates a world, the news frame may be considered problematic” (1). The reason, as Tuchman notes, is that any frame must exclude more the world than it shows. Like Gans’ concern with providing a multitude of perspectives, Tuchman’s interest lies with what isn’t included in the media. Also like Gans, she feels the actions of reporters play a significant role in this inclusion.

In her study, Tuchman observed a number of newsrooms to attempt to discover how information found its way into the newspaper. In her investigation of how the frame was built, she came upon another metaphorical concept: the information net. This news net, according to Tuchman, is the method by which news organizations gather the stories they use

to fill their pages (or minutes) each day. The net inevitably has holes, as the reality behind the metaphor requires a complex chain of reporters, wire services, “stringers” and other information seekers assigned to specific locations, people or topics. As Tuchman says, “The spatial anchoring of the news net at centralized institutional sites is one element of the frame delineating strips of everyday reality as news” (23).

Inevitably, anchoring the “net” in this way has several effects. Most significantly, of course, it means those areas deemed worthy of coverage are more likely to receive regular coverage because they are most accessible to information gatherers. Additional weight is given to standard news sources, moreover, because the more “important” assignments are often taken by senior reporters whose work is more likely to appear in the news, thus reinforcing the notion of those sites as being the primary origins of news.

Because media coverage is drawn from a select number of sources on the news net, organizational practices also lead to what Tuchman calls the web of facticity. According to Tuchman, each reporter has a web of sources from which he or she draws factual material, analogous to the news net from which the media draw events. This web is necessary because of the crucial role factual material plays in news stories — reporters assume reliance on facts will make their stories objective and therefore need ready sources of factual material. Just the media find the ideas for stories in the news net, they locate the facts with which those stories are built within a web of primarily institutional sources.

Tuchman believes this web has important effects on news content. News stories rely heavily upon the viewpoints of “agenda setters,” the people who also announce to reporters what the news of the day is and give the institutional spin on that news. Additionally

Tuchman argues that the need for a news net necessitates legitimizing institutional structures and certain underlying assumptions about society.

Not every fact can be verified; some information, by its very existence, must be assumed. For example, challenging the validity of government information keepers would challenge the validity of the information used to test claims. Within an institutionalized news web, the accuracy of that web itself cannot be easily tested. In order for journalists to have an easy source of information, they have to assume that source is valid. As Tuchman puts it: “Challenging the legitimacy of offices holding centralized information dismantles the news net. If all of officialdom is corrupt, all its facts and occurrences must be viewed as alleged facts and alleged occurrences.... In sum, amassing mutually self-validating facts simultaneously accomplishes the doing of newswork and reconstitutes the everyday world of offices and factories, of politics and bureaucrats, of bus schedules and class rosters as historically given” (87).

Tuchman’s argument does not imply journalists can or should be excessively skeptical of the official sources upon which they rely. Rather, it merely illustrates the point of the organizational model — the process of news gathering and the expectations of the craft, which are imposed by tradition and the structure of media sources, help shape the content of the media. Bagdikian’s analysis of ownership and corporate influence showed how the media tend to uphold capitalism and corporations. Tuchman’s investigation of journalistic practice shows how the media also frequently rely upon and highlight the validity and importance of hierarchical structures and government institutions.

Similarly, Tuchman’s theory provides an explanation of my second constraint on content: ease. Her explanation of content assumes that time, space and professional factors force

reporters to rely heavily upon a limited set of institutional sources. To go outside of those sources requires a significant amount of extra work. In the interest of ease, therefore, journalists tend to work within the ideological confines Tuchman presents. My analysis of content will therefore look to see if news texts use the sorts of sources that make of the information web.

Those sources have an ideological interest in maintaining their important role in society and therefore their important role in the news web. Their survival depends upon the survival of the ideological assumptions upon which the capitalist state is built. Graber's fourth model, the political, deals with ideological concerns. In her description, the model "rests on the assumption that news everywhere is a product of the ideological biases of individual newspeople, as well as of the pressures of the political environment in which the news organization operates" (26).

The work of Tuchman and Bagdikian obviously relies upon this model as well as the organizational one. The integration of multiple models makes a great deal of sense, as a variety of factors are clearly at work in determining media content. Moreover, the interaction of these models is clear — as Tuchman points out, for example, the promulgation of the dominant ideology is carried about in part by taking advantage of the inherent constraints of media practice and structure.

Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky put forth another theory that deals extensively with the propensity of the media to replicate the dominant ideology. They argue that five filters control what does and does not appear in news publications: "(1) The size, concentrated ownership, owner wealth, and profit orientation of the dominant mass-media firms; (2) advertising as the primary income source of the mass media; (3) the reliance of the media on

information provided by government, business and ‘experts’ funded and approved by these primary sources and agents of power; (4) ‘flak’ as a means of disciplining the media; and (5) ‘anti-communism’ as a national religion and control mechanism.” These filters are conceptually similar to my notion of constraints; that similarity is one way in which I rely upon the theoretical ground laid by Chomsky and Herman.

Both the first and second filters are drawn from Bagdikian’s work, and therefore they both fall under my category of economy. Similarly, the third filter is connected to the notion of a news web proposed by Tuchman, and thus it falls under my category of ease. Chomsky and Herman make some interesting observations about the extent to which the government sets the news agenda, though. According to the two men, the integral role institutional sources play in the news net is facilitated by those sources: “In effect, the large bureaucracies of the powerful subsidize the mass media and gain special access by their contribution to reducing the media’s costs of acquiring the raw materials of, and producing, news. The large entities that provide this subsidy become “routine” news sources and have privileged access to the gates” (22).

The fourth filter, flak, is also related to questions of ease. The authors’ definition of “flak” is: “Negative responses to a media statement or program. It may take the form of letters, telegrams, phone calls, petitions, lawsuits, speeches and bills before Congress, and other modes of complain, threat, and punitive action” (26). While this may sound as though it is simply audience feedback, something unrelated to my research, it is key to realize when flak becomes harmful to the media. “The ability to produce flak, and especially flak that is costly and threatening, is related to power” (Chomsky and Herman, 26). In other words,

when the feedback comes from those same institutional sources upon which the media rely for information, negative feedback can make a writing a story difficult or impossible.

At its most extreme level, flak can impede upon the economic functioning of a media organization — take for example advertiser boycotts and restrictive legislation. For the most part, however, refusal to cooperate by a source or group of sources simply makes things difficult for the individual journalist. Unable to rely upon typical channels, a journalist may have to step outside the ease of the information web, which in turn can bring about more flak and further risk to the paper and especially the reporter's job security. Ironically, flak often comes, according to Chomsky and Herman, when a reporter steps outside the authoritative web in the first place, turning to an anti-institutional source who challenges the validity and base of those with power and the ability to wield flak. The elites don't appreciate seeing their public relations machine wasted.

Chomsky and Herman's fifth category, anti-communism, also fits within the general categories of ease and economy. To the extent that the interests of businesses and current government rulers run contrary to communism, the other filters or constraints would seem capable of explaining why anti-communism makes a consistent appearance in the media. Admittedly, however, the strenuous reaction against communism by both the media and the elites goes beyond any legitimate fear of property loss, something Chomsky and Herman accurately point out (29).

Since Chomsky and Herman's book was published in 1988, anti-communism has ceased to be of particular importance to elites. New dogmas have taken over. The United States has consistently had some kind of enemy, however. This suggests that anti-communist rhetoric served a political role by creating an enemy necessary for the ideological functioning of the

state. Therefore, whether for economic or political reasons, the strenuous anti-communism of the media was the result of constraints that compel the media to reflect the interests of the institutions of power rather than a separate filter acting upon media content.

Overall, the combination of the various theories discussed thus far leads to my own theory: Economy and ease are the two key constraints acting upon media content.

Professional, organizational and political factors all help create and shape these constraints.

As mentioned in the opening of this chapter, my theory has a second element. I also believe that news stories tend to follow a certain linguistic structure. The theoretical concerns at the core of that idea are the subject of the next section.

Linguistic theories of media content

According to Lorimer, “When we study content, we study the manner in which ideas and images are expressed or represented” (185). On face, this definition makes sense, but it differs considerably from much of the work done by the critics discussed thus far. Most of those studies dealt primarily with the raw number of ideas expressed, rather than the manner in which they appeared. For example, much of Chomsky and Herman’s book consists of inch counts and comparisons between the number of times news about different atrocities appears. There must be more to analyzing content than simply counting facts.

While qualitative analysis is not unique to linguists, some of the most interesting and recent work in journalism has dealt with media texts as forms of discourse. These theorists address both the specific language used in the media and also the general format news texts

take. I consider three of these theorists, Allan Bell, Roger Fowler and Teun van Dijk, as representative of the field of critical linguistics.

Bell, a journalist and scholar, argues that the language of a story is important because it reflects an underlying ideology and helps shape the discourse of society: “In the news are carried the stories and images of our day. News is determined by values, and the kind of language in which that news is told reflects and expresses those values. Audiences feel that the way in which language is used must affect the content of what we receive from the media” (2).

As Bell argues in his work, the language of the media is constructed from several sources. Some word choices are certainly made by individual reporters, but unlike ordinary conversation, most media discourse is assembled almost by committee. This occurs in two ways, according to Bell. Material from other sources helps form media content; earlier stories, quoted material, press releases and speeches all form key components of content (Bell, 41). This means that much of the specific wording of a story is borrowed from the way institutional sources talk about a subject — the language of the media is often the language of government and business, and the ideological implications of that language come along for the ride.

The other key aspect of story construction, according to Bell, is the editing process (41). Because stories go through a number of revisions before publication, content and style that diverts from the organizational expectations of the media outlet are removed. This has two effects: language written by the reporter that doesn’t fit within expected parameters is often removed, and reporters themselves try to use language that will fit within normal parameters to avoid being heavily edited. Very often what constitutes “acceptable” language is based

upon an interest in consistency — the right way of talking about something is to describe it as it has been described before. This causes journalists to rely even more upon existing media texts when framing and crafting a story.

Linguist Roger Fowler takes Bell's analysis further, looking beyond the way language finds its way into the press to ask about the specific nature of the language used. Fowler does what many of the "agenda-setting" theorists mentioned earlier do not; he examines the way in which something is placed upon the public agenda instead of merely asking whether it appears at all. The language of news is important, according to Fowler: "Because language is a semiotic code, it imposes a structure of values, social and economic in origin, on whatever is represented; and so inevitably news, like every discourse, constructively patterns that of which it speaks. News is a representation in this sense of construction; it is not a value-free reflection of 'facts.' The final theoretical point to make here is that I assume as a working principle that each particular form of linguistic expression in a text — wording, syntactic option, etc. — has its reason. There are always different ways of saying the same thing and they are not random, accidental alternatives" (4).

Fowler's analysis is critical to my own theory in two ways. It suggests that the constraints upon the media will affect word choice as well as factual content, and it reminds us that any effective analysis of content will focus on the specific language of the text being considered. Language can be a way of masking bias within supposedly objective reporting. A journalist subscribing to Gans' theory of multiperspectival news could interview a number of traditionally marginalized groups while writing a story about the impact of a government policy. Unfortunately, if the language used to describe those groups reinforces their marginalized status or denigrates them or their views, then any reduction in bias stemming

from the addition of more perspectives will likely be offset by the ideological implications of the way those perspectives are presented.

Journalists don't necessarily intentionally insert ideologically slanted language into their stories. Language, according to Fowler, automatically carries with it ideological meaning. Words have connotative meanings that are associated with their context and use. Therefore, word choice is affected by the constraints placed upon content and by the self-perpetuating nature of media texts described by Bell.

Discursive patterns are evident in media texts at a structural level as well. Consideration of media content at this level is often done using a technique called "discourse analysis," which "points to media patterns and conventions and their success in being taken for granted..." (Lorimer, 195). As van Dijk argues, "Discourse is no longer just an 'intervening variable' between media institutions or journalists on the one hand, and an audience on the other hand, but also studied in its own right, and as a central and manifest cultural and social production in and through which meanings and ideologies are expressed or (re-)produced" (5).

Van Dijk has been among those at the forefront of using discourse analysis to evaluate the media. Like Bell, van Dijk sees the importance of considering the process by which news events are converted into media texts: "It has not sufficiently been realized that most news items are not directly based upon personal observations or experiences of journalists, but rather the result of a series of textual transformations of various forms of antecedent discourses.... In other words, most news production is a form of text processing. We should investigate which linguistic, cognitive and social factors impinge on this process" (6).

Linguistic and social factors are accounted for in the notion of content constraints and the repetitive nature of media discourse. Cognitive factors are closely tied to the way journalists and readers think about the inherent structure of a news item. Structure is perhaps the most frequent area of exploration for discourse analysts. All authors agree that news texts are a form of narrative story. Some scholars go on to argue that journalists represent the primary storytellers of the modern era. If this is true, then most news stories probably fall into some form of generic pattern. Bell proposes an origin for this pattern: “Our analysis makes it plain that we cannot discuss the structure of news stories independently of their function. We cannot separate news form and news content. The values of news drive the way in which news is presented. We may account for the way news stories are structured only with reference to the values by which one ‘fact’ is judged more newsworthy than another. News values can be identified through a variety of means such as analyzing textbooks which teach news skills or by deduction from what actually appears in the media” (155).

Most theoretical work that considers structures attempts to diagram and trace complex patterns in media discourse. I am primarily concerned with one far simpler pattern; news stories almost inevitably frame the news as a conflict between two parties. This notion of a dichotomous narrative framework forms the other major component of my theoretical approach to the media.

Bell gives a fundamental reason for dichotomous coverage: function. Journalists are trained to seek out news stories involving conflict and to attempt to seek “both sides” of that conflict, a practice that leads to a natural tendency to structure the story as a battle between two sides. This emphasizes the newsworthy aspect of the story — conflict — as well as the narrative and dramatic quality of the story. It also allows journalists to feel they have met the

professional obligation to objectivity; by finding and opposing two sides, journalists can argue they have provided the important views on an issue in a fair manner. Finally, because most narrative forms in Western culture are framed around the idea of hierarchy and conflict, it is a natural and easily understood model from which to shape the journalistic discourse.

Dichotomous coverage also emerges because of the theoretical constraints on content. Because the institutions from which the media draw news are often involved in dichotomous conflicts, the texts about those institutions tend to reflect the conflicts. Additionally, the news net provides a framework in which key players quickly identify one crucial opponent for the journalist to draw information from. Going outside of that net to unexpected opponents is likely to bring about flak. Moreover, it would require more work than the typical journalist can comfortably handle.

This dichotomy influences content in several ways. By selecting sides the media automatically exclude potential sources. This goes beyond mere availability; journalists may well avoid using certain pieces of information or potential leads because those things would contradict the intended format of the news item. After all, one of the primary goals of journalism, preached in every text, is to tell a good story. Additionally, story telling techniques and dichotomies that suggest a “good guy” or “bad guy” most likely help shape the linguistic choices of the writer. The idea of conflict must be upheld by the language used, and the language of conflict is often propagandistic.

Methodology for testing constraint theory

Having considered the various theories from which my model of media behavior is drawn, we can now consider the manner by which this theory will be tested in the analysis conducted in this paper. I have selected five historical events, which I will explain in the next chapter. For each of these events, I have found any mention from five publications: *The New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, *The (Portland) Oregonian*, the *Eugene Register-Guard* and *Time* magazine. My reasons for selecting these publications are also contained in Chapter Two.

Because my scope is fairly narrow, this produces a collection of roughly 25 articles. I will analyze these articles for three things: 1) Factual content, 2) Language choice and 3) Narrative structure. Each of these areas covers numerous aspects of content.

Factual material includes the inclusion or exclusion of known historical events. What significant events are omitted (significant events are those which play prominently in the historical literature described in Chapter Two) and which are emphasized? Who is quoted, and who is ignored? What details are used, and where do they appear in the story? How much historical background is given about an issue, and on what does that background focus? Are there any factual errors?

Language choice deals with the connotative and denotative meanings of the words used in the story. Are adjectives ideologically laden? Are non-institutional sources described differently than institutional ones? What sorts of verbs are used, and do they imply a metaphor of conflict? Are words inaccurately associated with parties involved in the news (for example, does the word traitor appear in stories about the Rosenbergs)? Is the language used casual or formal?

Narrative structure concerns the way in which factual and linguistic elements are composed to make a story. Is the story presented as a conflict? If so, is that conflict a dichotomy between two parties or does it include numerous perspectives? What are the conflicting parties? Does the structure imply a winner and a loser? Are loosely related parties connected for the sake of narrative clarity? Does the author use a typical “inverted pyramid” approach to story-telling or is another approach used?

In analyzing news articles, I will ask all these questions and more. Where patterns emerge or anomalous item selection has occurred, I will note it. Additionally, I will attempt to describe the narrative structure of the story and the linguistic and factual components that most clearly form that structure. I will not record every factual and linguistic choice made in composing a story. Instead, I will emphasize those that appear to be of particular interest or importance and those that are most clearly necessary for the story’s structure.

I will then compare these observations to the expectations created by my theory of news coverage. I imagine news stories will have a dichotomous structure similar to the one described earlier in this chapter. I also imagine the structure and content of the stories will not fall outside of the constraints of economy and ease. For example, stories that suggest government should hire Communists are not likely to appear.

Conclusions

This chapter began by presenting a clear theory of media content. Media texts are shaped by two constraints: ease and economy. Ease reflects the ability of a reporter to quickly and efficiently compose a news story. As argued in the remainder of the chapter, ease includes

relying upon certain existing texts, commonly practiced narrative structures and reliable sources of information within the news web. Economy concerns the potential cost of certain content to publications and professionals. Stories that offend advertisers or employers are improbable.

Additionally, I proposed that most news stories, because of these constraints, fall into a narrative pattern of dichotomous conflict. Texts tend to include only two interested parties, and those parties are presented as being in intense conflict. Viewpoints that challenge the dichotomy used are excluded. This practice and the two constraints both limit news coverage to repetition of an elite ideology. Whether the audience adopts that ideology is a focus of other research. My methodological approach will simply be to look for signs of its existence in a collection of roughly 25 news texts.

CHAPTER TWO — HISTORICAL ISSUES

It's difficult to summarize the early 1950s in a few paragraphs or pages. The height of fervent anti-communism in the United States, the era has become irrevocably associated with the actions of its most vocal demagogue, Senator Joseph McCarthy. Additionally, many consider the time an atypical example of the worst a generally good country has to offer. Descriptions of it often verge on hyperbole: "For many the McCarthy era stands as the grimmest time in recent memory" (Fried, 3).

The era was certainly troublesome. Anti-communist paranoia placed only a few members of the government on the stand to face McCarthy's charges, but it forced millions of workers to sign loyalty oaths or lose their jobs. It removed dozens of writers, actors and directors from regular work in Hollywood because of the blacklists. It drove educators from their positions and neutral history from the curriculum in public schools and universities across the nation. And it helped reinforce attitudes that economic ideology was more important than personal liberties or control over military spending.

Nevertheless, the politics of the early 1950s cannot be viewed as isolated from the beliefs advocated throughout American history. Nor can the fervent anti-communism of the era be attributed exclusively to the actions of McCarthy and his backers in the media and the government. Other historical factors helped create the political climate of the time. For example, historian Richard Fried argues that to understand the 1950s, “we must first examine the 1930s, the energetic left of that decade and its real and imagined legacies” (10). Other authors trace the anti-communist trend much farther back, looking to the first red scare that took place slightly before and during the early 1920s.

A variety of political factors also contributed to the mentality of the era. In discussing the left of the era, historian and media scholar Todd Gitlin notes that certain ideals were shared by all those entrenched in political power. He explains that, “This last point was the key to the mood of postwar liberalism: increasingly, before all else, at least in leading pronouncements, it was increasingly anti-communist. All its other passions were nestled in this obligatory one. It outlasted McCarthyism by agreeing that America was besieged; the difference was that liberalism thought the principal menace lurked *outside*” (61-62, his emphasis).

Gitlin’s argument is an important one: Liberals and conservatives alike agreed that communism represented a threat to the nation’s character. The ideological basis for anti-communist fervor came from the left of the 1940s as much as the right of the 1950s. After all, it was President Truman who signed into place the federal loyalty act that would serve as the basis for extensive persecution of alleged communists in government. According to Gitlin, mainstream liberalism’s adoption of anti-communist rhetoric and beliefs split the left: “[The liberal leadership] collaborated with their opposite numbers in the fellow traveling left to draw

a line in the dirt: Either one was anti-communist (in which case one supported the main lines of American foreign policy) or one subscribed to the Popular Front (in which case one either wholeheartedly subscribed to Soviet foreign policy or, in the name of unity on the left, refused to say that one did not)” (Gitlin, 62). When the nation’s politics shifted to the right, partly because of this fragmentation, Gitlin reports that the radical left was driven underground. He writes that, “In battle after battle, the postwar liberals crushed the progressives” (Gitlin, 63).

This is significant for more than political reasons. Of course the lack of a successful, organized socialist left made it almost impossible for communist sympathizers to gain any sort of political credence. But for the media, the ideological impact was more important. As noted in Chapter One, the media are largely forced to draw upon established sources of information. When the media sought quotes and feedback about anti-communist policy, they were faced with a choice between anti-communists on the left and anti-communists on the right. The two sides might differ about the methods, but neither would challenge the goals of laws designed to criminalize communist behavior and membership.

In Chapter One I argued that journalists tend to structure stories as dichotomous conflicts between opposing parties. If that claim is true, the absence of a pro-communist left had another significant effect upon media content. When the media sought to locate the “other side” of certain anti-communist issues, the liberal anti-communists could ill afford to be seen as taking a stance against conservative anti-communists. Unless the frame of the debate could be shifted from communism to some other issue, such as civil liberties or the personal behavior of the anti-communist crusader it was politically suicidal to stand up in support of “communists.”

It would be impossible to consider all media texts dealing with anti-communism during even one year of the 1950s. Therefore, I have selected five historical events based upon their significance and the visible role the media played in them. These events are: 1) Passage of the Internal Security Act, 2) The conviction of the Rosenbergs for conspiracy to commit atomic espionage, 3) Senator McCarthy's speech on the floor of the Senate in which he accused the State Department of harboring Communists and sympathizers, 4) Edward Murrow's television broadcast attacking McCarthy and 5) the Senate's vote to censure McCarthy for improper conduct. In the next five sections I will consider each of these events, the reasons they are considered historically significant and the role the media played in each.

The Internal Security Act

Passed in September 1950, the Internal Security, or McCarran, Act was designed to combat domestic Communism and Communist sympathy. According to Fariello, the act "set forth as its thesis a Communist conspiracy to establish a 'totalitarian dictatorship in the countries throughout the world.' Title II established concentration camps for use in national emergencies. Set up Subversive Activities Control Board" (18). According to the same historian, the board's "sole purpose was to determine which organizations would be required to register as 'communist-action,' 'communist-front,' or 'communist-infiltrated'" (Fariello, 17).

Passage of such strict language didn't end up creating a very powerful law. According to Fried, a series of court challenges and political delays doomed the law to failure. Political squabbling delayed confirmation of Truman nominees to the control board; lengthy trials

were required to even prove the Communist Party would be required to register; and the Supreme Court declined to consider a U.S. Court of Appeals ruling that, because the government “had found no Party official who could register without thereby laying himself open to prosecution under the Smith Act,” the act was unconstitutional (Fried, 117-118).

At the time of passage, the unusual political circumstances surrounding the bill would have been noteworthy. While the eventual veto and subsequent congressional override by Congress fit in with expected political roles, Fried reports that early debate over the bill was more atypical. Senator McCarran, one of the bill’s sponsors, was in fact a democrat, and “seven liberal democratic Senators offered a more potent measure” authorizing concentration camps (Fried, 116). Fried goes on to label the battle on the Senate floor and various committees “one of the era’s most pathetic charades, as liberals sought to dose the right with its own anti-communist medicine” (116). The eventual law combined McCarran’s provisions requiring registration with the internment camp proposal.

Only seven senators voted against the bill. Worse, the Congressional Record notes that only one of those senators was up for reelection in the 1950 election. The vast majority of senators clearly bowed to political pressure to “do something” about communism. This political pressure is one of the reasons the bill’s passage is historically significant. Truman’s veto of a popular measure depleted his political capital. Moreover, the extreme nature of the measure is both alarming and memorable, even if the provisions of the law were never effectively enforced.

The Congressional Record suggests the importance of the media in the debate. They were certainly not capable of shaping policy, but they were used by others to attempt to shape it. In

a speech on the Senate floor at least one act opponent cited several newspaper editorials against the bill as reasons to reject the proposal.

Conviction of the Rosenbergs

The second historical event, the conviction of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg for conspiracy to commit espionage, has received extensive scholarly attention. For example, John Neville has written a comprehensive examination of the Rosenberg case and the media coverage that surrounded it. According to Neville, “The Rosenberg case presents a rare convergence of cold-war politics, ideology and fear magnified by the powerful prism of agenda setting, the news media process that strongly influence what people think about” (7). As Neville notes on numerous occasions, the media were sufficiently important to be the basis for an appeal; Rosenberg attorney Emanuel Bloch complained that extensive media coverage of the case had biased the jury against the accused couple.

It’s not surprising that media attention to the Rosenberg case was intense. According to Fariello the atomic “secret” was revealed when Americans dropped two bombs on Japan, thus demonstrating to the world that the careful application of physics and modern atomic theory could create a previously unheard of weapon. Nevertheless, many Americans were still shocked when the Soviet Union tested a bomb of its own. Looking for someone to blame, a number of people stumbled upon an alleged spy ring. Fariello notes that, “According to FBI publicity, the trail to the Rosenbergs began with Klaus Fuchs, who had worked at the secret Los Alamos facility during the war” (178).

Fuchs had confessed, as did David Greenglass, who was indirectly connected to the scientist and who promptly turned in his sister Ethel Rosenberg and her husband Julius as atomic spies. Or, rather, atomic conspirators. As Neville is careful to note, the Rosenbergs were only convicted of planning to sell secrets, something he says newspaper stories on the couple frequently ignored. Sentenced to death for their actions, the Rosenbergs were executed in 1953 despite a series of legal appeals that claimed the government had withheld evidence, ignored new evidence (including a mysterious console table) and even tried the Rosenbergs under the wrong law — in addition to the media saturation complaint.

The trial would eventually achieve worldwide fame, as liberals in America and particularly in European nations like France rallied behind the Rosenberg cause and claimed that executing the “spies” was unreasonably harsh and that the couple was possibly innocent. But, according to Neville, at the time of the trial the pair received almost no coverage in the publications of the left — both socialist and liberal. Instead, the group paying the most attention to the two was the FBI, which wished to extract a confession from the couple. Scholars point to Ethel’s arrest in particular as an FBI tactic: “Her arrest, prosecution and death sentence were designed to pry a confession from Julius. This bloody gambit failed” (Fried, 115).

Questions remain about the guilt of the couple. Neville declines to pass judgement. He does note that numerous questions about the conduct of the justice system have been raised. Other scholars confirm this report. For example, Fried claims “the FBI, Justice Department and Judge Irving Kaufman were guilty of misconduct that beclouded the trial” (115).

Similarly, Morton Sobell, who was tried along with the Rosenbergs for conspiracy to trade navel secrets (as opposed to the atomic ones the Rosenbergs allegedly planned to give

away) and sentenced to 30 years in prison, argued that a number of factors suggested a government conspiracy. Of course Sobell, whose essay is contained in Fariello's book, had a lot to gain from claiming innocence and conspiracy. Nevertheless, other scholars support many of his claims. Sobell insists his lawyers were largely incompetent. Additionally, he believes the FBI arranged the trial to attempt to extract confessions and names. Finally, he details what he said was a prejudicial prosecution: "During the trial, the judge and the prosecutor both kept yelling, 'Treason! Treason!' Now, treason is the only crime defined in the Constitution and for one very good reason. Historically, anybody that wants to come down on dissenters redefines treason to suit that purpose. For treason you need two witnesses to the same overt act. Of course, there were no two witnesses. But the trial had all the overtones of a treason trial" (184).

Sobell suggests the media bias the Rosenbergs decried in their appeal may have originated from the judge and not the press. Other reports certainly fit this claim; Fried is not the only one to highlight unusual behavior by Judge Kaufman. Most noteworthy is probably the speech made by Kaufman during sentencing, where he assigned death sentences to both Rosenbergs for a crime he labeled "worse than murder" (Fariello, 179). Neville suggests another reason for press distortion during reporting on the trial: careful agenda setting by prosecutor Irving Saypol (37). The author goes on to note that the press expected to receive stories framed as good versus evil, and that reporters were most likely to give attention to stories that came packaged appropriately. According to Neville, Saypol was a master at just such packaging.

The conviction itself, certainly one of the most significant events of a trial editors frequently pushed onto the front pages, came on March 30, 1951. Kaufman handed down his

sentences on April 5. The Rosenbergs were sentenced to leave their two children as orphans. Clearly the importance of the media for prosecution agenda-setters and defense concerns about bias warrants looking closely at this case. No single event in the course of the trial is more important than the conviction, where ideological assumptions about guilt or innocence are upheld or shattered.

McCarthy's Senate speech

The next event concerns another person who, like Saypool, was skilled at finding his way into the media. Joseph McCarthy, by many accounts, was eminently skilled at selecting the right words to say in order to get front pages. Unfortunately for McCarthy, those pages would eventually turn against him and his rampant abuse of power. But in the beginning, the media helped grant McCarthy the power of notoriety, a power he needed to carry out his anti-communist quest.

According to historian Joel Kovel, "McCarthyism was not really a populist movement, in the sense of a grassroots phenomenon, but a strategy engineered by right-wing groups which played on deep cultural myths and fears" (112). In Kovel's view, McCarthy was a careful creation of political forces who sought to tap into a certain deep-rooted hatred in America that had been fed in large part by mainstream anti-communists who validated the ideology. Those mainstream communists hated McCarthy, however. The liberals feared him because he attacked them for not going far enough and branded as "Red" anyone who violated his worldview. And conservative anti-communists who operated within the higher levels of

Washington disliked him because he threatened, in Kovel's words, "the integration sought by elite anti-communism" (112).

The pattern of McCarthy's fame certainly suggests Kovel's claim is true. McCarthy rose with backing from other "traditional conservatives" and from "middle America" and fell when he attacked the government's own anti-communist objectives one too many times. Author Jim Tuck says McCarthy was heavily backed by the Hearst press, but Kovel reports the senator was strongly opposed by men like *Time* editor Henry Luce, who viewed anti-communism not as a method of imposing domestic terror and control but as an effective and easily understood approach to foreign policy.

But Kovel sees something more in McCarthyism than an attempt by fervent anti-communists to commandeer the political prizes obtainable through Red Scare tactics. He views McCarthyism as something of a return to the witch hunts and inquisitions that earlier haunted American history, and he sees in both of these things a pattern of fear and hatred that is a fundamental part of the American character. According to this claim, McCarthy spoke to a certain need of the American people to have an adequate enemy to loathe with all the ignorance and hatred our culture can muster.

Kovel compares the fervent anti-communist of elites and populists alike to a state-sponsored religion, one that the people inevitably buy into more because of its pervasiveness than its apparent truth. Like all religions, this one had its inquisition: the loyalty boards, House Un-American Activities Committee and Joseph McCarthy, for example. These were tied to anti-communism as a whole. Kovel says, "Thus the state religion and the inquisition, each necessary for the other, grew together" (134). Of course, the church only tolerates its investigative bodies as long as they serve a useful function. Having created the fear upon

which McCarthyism fed, the elites eventually lashed back when McCarthy's techniques began to make the principle of anti-communism appear flawed and when his attacks began to fall upon the individuals, such as a general of the U.S. Army, who were fighting the real battles of the ideological war.

Of course, when McCarthy first started, he wasn't widely viewed as representing such an unstable threat. At the time, McCarthy's aimed his attacks at a group of liberal Democrats in the State Department left over from Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal and internationalist foreign policy. Luce and others blamed those men for losing in China. Patricia Neils cites the defeat of Nationalist China as a driving force behind Luce's anti-communism, and Luce certainly wasn't alone in his view. McCarthy's origins are numerous, but he suddenly appeared on the national stage as a fervent opponent of communism after he gave his famous Wheeling, West Virginia, speech in which he announced he had a list of communist sympathizers.

Richard Powers argues that McCarthy's February 9, 1950, speech in Wheeling was "the greatest disaster in the disastrous history of American anti-communism" (235). Disaster or not, the speech was a calculated political move, according to some historians. For example, Fried says that McCarthy filled a needed role in the anti-communist crusade as a "politician ready to commit himself with reckless, career-dominating totality to the communist issue" (120). According to Fried's analysis, McCarthy was searching for a political tool by which he could advance his fortunes. That tool proved to be anti-communism. Right wing politicians and the Hearst newspapers helped McCarthy use that tool by providing him with a few of the names he claimed to hold.

By the time McCarthy repeated his Wheeling claim — that he had a list of known State Department communists — on the Senate floor, the list's length had shrunk from over 200 to around 75. Even that claim was fraudulent, however: “McCarthy did not have the actual names of anyone since in the loyalty reports [from which he had drawn his list] they were identified only by case numbers, and even their original accusers had simply named them as suspects, not known communists or fellow-travelers. McCarthy did not have the vaguest notion what he was talking about” (Preston, 239). That speech is significant because it marks the first time McCarthy's claims appeared in an institutional forum. Not only did the media extensively report on this speech, but they may also have helped cause it. Preston reports that McCarthy had been fishing for an issue and selected anti-communism because it received extensive media attention.

Murrow's broadcast

The media helped propel McCarthy into a position as an elite newsmaker — over the next few years, anything the demagogue declared would warrant media attention, approving or not. Thus McCarthy was able to set a slice of the news agenda. At that point, it was necessary for liberal anti-communists to engage in discussion of the McCarthy claims, thus validating them. Fried describes this counterproductive dance: “Mostly it was the artillery of the press, not swelling legions of followers, that sustained his campaign. What if the Democrats had ignored him — never danced the two-step of charge and denial? Unfortunately, that scenario would require the unlikely premise that the media also ignore McCarthy. Press coverage constricted the Democrat's choices” (124).

Ultimately, however, this intense media coverage would adversely affect McCarthy. Two events in 1954 mark significant points in the downturn of McCarthy's fortunes. One was a direct attack leveled by the media themselves; well-known CBS reporter Edward Murrow (who became both famous and trusted because of his radio reports during World War Two) devoted an entire episode of his "See It Now" show to an unashamedly one-sided critique of McCarthy's methods.

Stanley Cloud and Lynne Olson report that, among Murrow's friends and colleagues, the critical story on McCarthy was considered overdue. The show never touched on the issue until the airing of an October, 1953, story on an air force lieutenant forced to resign for the alleged political sympathies of his relatives. Then, on March 9, 1954, Murrow rolled out a "See It Now" episode dedicated to exposing McCarthy for the evil Murrow thought he was. Cloud and Olson call the show "perhaps the most powerful documentary in the history of television" (307). Interestingly, the Murrow broadcast, widely renowned as one of the bravest moments in journalism, was anything but a typical news text. Cloud and Olson report that it actually rejected typical notions of objectivity: "Not balanced in the accepted sense of the word, it tested the outer limits of advocacy journalism. McCarthy wasn't interviewed, and there was no attempt to present the other side" (307). Although Murrow was not the first reporter to attack McCarthy, his broadcast came at a time when McCarthy was battling CBS to receive airtime for a response to a speech by Adlai Stevenson. Moreover, Murrow was a highly respected journalist. His political stance thus received unusual media and academic attention.

McCarthy's censure

While Murrow's broadcast suggested the end was near for McCarthy, the second event of 1954 came close to proving the end was imminent. On December 2, McCarthy was censured by a vote of the full Senate. While he managed to attract many supporters, the vote wasn't especially close — all of the Democrats and half of the Republicans voted for censure. The reason for the overwhelming defeat may stem from the success of McCarthy's foes in shifting the battlefield from one over Communism to one over proper behavior. Many of the Wisconsin senator's foes actually claimed McCarthy was hurting the anti-communist cause by making it look bad in the eyes of the public. Regardless, the censure of McCarthy came as punishment for violating the norms of elite behavior, not for attacking civil liberties or communism.

The charges against McCarthy and the way they were handled reveal this focus on McCarthy's behavior. Republican Senator Arthur Watkins chaired the Select Committee to Study Censure Charges Against the Senator from Wisconsin. Watkins, in a book on the censure process, is careful to indict McCarthy for violating the norms of proper behavior in the Senate and, by association, for violating the U.S. Constitution. The rhetoric used by Watkins is remarkably similar — if very toned down — to that used by McCarthy himself against alleged pro-communists.

After contemplating the charges against McCarthy two complaints that formed grounds for censure were handed over to the full Senate. According to Watkins, those charges were based on "Incidents of Contempt of the Senate or a Senatorial Committee" and an "Incident relating to Ralph Zwicker, a general officer of the Army of the United States" (79). The

Senate would eventually decline to vote on the Zwicker charge but would add a charge for mistreatment of the committee and its chairman, Watkins.

This decision verifies the idea that McCarthy was censured for upsetting his fellow elites. The original charges were clearly directed at behavior that violated the social norms of the Senate and potentially made the office look bad. The Zwicker charge stemmed from an incident that happened behind closed doors during the famed Army-McCarthy hearings earlier in the year. McCarthy had been attempting to prove communist influence in the armed forces, and he insisted General Zwicker had information vital to proving such influence. McCarthy subjected Zwicker to his typical grilling. The other charges dealt with the way McCarthy had mistreated other members of the Senate, and it was for verbally abusing his colleagues (rather than dozens of innocent people) that McCarthy was eventually humiliated with a vote of condemnation.

The way the media and institutional elites dealt with McCarthy is revealing and upholds the notion of dichotomous news coverage. Once those elites found ways to disassociate McCarthy's behavior from anti-communism, the potential existed to fight the senator without fighting his anti-communist cause. The media followed the lead and reported on this ideologically safe battle. The key was the ability to frame the debate as something other than McCarthy vs. Communism.

Conclusions

There are unique aspects to the ideology of the early 1950s. Nevertheless it is important to consider the historical events as part of an ongoing pattern of domination continually

present in America's past. As Gitlin accurately noted, the anti-communism of the '50s emerged largely from the posturing of liberals in the 1940s. The roots can be traced farther back to the late 1910s and early 1920s and the first red scare. And the anti-communist trend continues into the 1980s with Ronald Regan's verbal assault on the "evil empire."

Even limiting the pattern to anti-communism is incorrect, however. Oppression of those who think in ways contradictory to established norms, be it on issues of race, politics, economics or gender, did not begin or end with the 1950s and McCarthy. The biggest difference is that the hatred became so virulent in the era that even mainstream historians and journalists found it acceptable to criticize some of the practices.

The existence of such criticism is one of the reasons the anti-communist era is worth consideration. As a test for a model of media constraints, the events studied in the next chapter actually represent a considerable challenge. Despite what one might expect, the narrative story of the 1950s is not simply Red-hunters versus Reds. The canonical belief that communism must be stopped at all cost, once propagated by the elites, became difficult to control. Effectively managing the more virulent foes of anti-communism required finding a new way to frame the debate.

Because the conflicts that form the core of the discourse of the media in the early 1950s are complex — battles both between those in power and out of it and between different powerful groups — the stories themselves are worth consideration. The news stories of the 1950s are neither a perfect example of media coverage nor a perfect example of atypical media excess. Like in other eras, the news coverage of the early 1950s both captures and misses the complexities of the debates. Because the issues of the era are closely tied to the fundamental concerns of those imposing the constraints suggested by my model of media

content formation, I have selected the era and the particular events described above for examination.

Understanding the mainstream media coverage of the era requires looking at a range of common media publications. I have chosen *The New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, *The Oregonian*, the *Register-Guard* and *Time* magazine. These publications offer the opportunity for a number of limited comparisons. Each newspaper clearly represents a local constituency, while *Time* claims to speak to a national audience. Some publications, such as *Time* (led by Henry Luce), are clearly more influenced by their owner. Some of the publications are reporting on events that took place within their local area (as the Rosenberg trial did in New York or the McCarthy censure in Washington) while others are selecting and editing wire copy about distant stories. Perhaps most interestingly, some of the publications, especially *The New York Times*, are widely recognized as agenda setters — other newspapers turned to the Times to determine what the news of the day was (and is), according to Herman and Chomsky. Thus, the flow of information from a national newspaper like the Times to a local paper like the Register-Guard should prove interesting.

The way those particular publications dealt with the events I have just outlined is the subject of the next chapter. In that chapter I hope to test the theory I have outlined in Chapter One by using the methodology already presented. While certainly a revealing history lesson, my real hope is that this test will provide some illumination about the nature of ongoing media processes.

CHAPTER THREE — TEXTUAL ANALYSIS

In this chapter I combine the theoretical and methodological ideas of Chapter One with the historical events covered in Chapter Two. I will consider articles from my five sample publications: 1) *The New York Times*, 2) the *Washington Post*, 3) *The Oregonian*, 4) the *Register-Guard* and 5) *Time* magazine. I have chosen any news articles (as opposed to opinion pieces) that directly pertain to my five events: 1) McCarthy's initial speech on the Senate floor, 2) passage of the Internal Security Act, 3) the conviction of the Rosenbergs, 4) Edward Murrow's anti-McCarthy broadcast and 5) McCarthy's censure. For each event, I will explain my findings for all the publications and present some preliminary conclusions based upon those findings.

McCarthy's initial Senate speech

Observations: *The New York Times* covered McCarthy's Feb. 20 speech, in which he accused the State Department of harboring Communists, the following day in a fairly short

piece on page 13. The *Times* did not provide any background on McCarthy or his earlier speeches, thereby missing an opportunity to compare McCarthy's Senate claims to earlier accusations made while touring the country. Nor did it provide a response from the State Department or the administration, despite their being the obvious targets of McCarthy's speech. In fact, the only sources of information are McCarthy, whose speech is quoted extensively, and two other senators who participated in the floor debate.

The presence of those other senators is significant. Aside from a procedural issue raised during the speech (about the presence of a quorum during the evening presentation) and dealt with roughly halfway into the story, the senators exist to provide contrast to McCarthy's statements. This is questionable news judgment, as the clearest contradiction to McCarthy's remarks would have been to find someone who disagreed with his interpretation of "facts." However, it is difficult to blame the reporter — in this case, time constraints probably prevented the journalist from gathering news sources other than those present for the speech.

As constructed, the beginning of the piece emphasizes one of McCarthy's claims — a high-ranking State Department official had committed espionage. While attributed to McCarthy, the account fills four paragraphs and is presented as fact: "This individual at the important European listening post was shadowed, he continued, and was seen to speak to a Soviet agent. The agent was followed in turn until he entered the Soviet Embassy."^{*}

The story implies a conflict, not between the accused spy and his accuser, but between McCarthy and his political foes: "Mr. McCarthy gave details of this and several others of the eighty-one cases he said he had unearthed but refused to give any names. Senator Scott W.

^{*} Because I quote frequently from the media texts, I have not referenced them with citations. The articles are listed in the order considered in a separate section of the bibliography.

Lucas ... said several times that the Wisconsin Senator owed it to the Senate and the public to make known the names of the men against whom he was making such grave charges.”

In addition to the accused spy, the article reports that McCarthy’s other charges included a woman who “was known to be a ‘pink’ and a member of the United Public Workers of America” and another “was described as a member of the Young Communist League.” Here the article relies upon the sort of language frequently used by anti-communist crusaders, in which association often implies guilt.

Like the *Times*, the *Washington Post* chose to play up the conflict between senators and to leave out the administration. Presumably, this was due to similar constraints as those affecting the New York paper. Unlike the *Times*, however, the *Post* did not emphasize the charges made by McCarthy. This most likely stems from the Washington orientation of the publication; the decision to break with Senate traditions and compel a quorum was of more interest for the audience.

The stories clearly differ in their leads and factual presentations. There are similarities, however. Both papers neglect to solicit responses from the administration, and both provide little or no background information on earlier McCarthy claims. Unlike the *Times*, which gave a large number of inches to McCarthy’s charges without allowing for a response, the *Post* did provide quotes from another senator late in the story that directly refute the facts of McCarthy’s assertions. While McCarthy’s claim that, “If we can get rid of the Big Three [State Department Communists] we will have done something to break the back of the espionage system” ran on the front page, the response from Senator Brian McMahon appeared inside near the end of the story. McMahon did challenge the accuracy of McCarthy’s claims, however, saying “the Wisconsin Republican had failed to produce

anything but derogatory information allegedly in the State Department files and [McMahon] suggested the complete file might contradict McCarthy's other data."

Despite this, the *Post* also sets up a political conflict by which to frame the story. The second paragraph labels the events of the evening as "night session antics" and proceeds to describe a typical "party-line skirmish." Like the *Times*, the *Post* writer presents this skirmish as a conflict between McCarthy and Lucas, although this story suggests the debate over identifying suspects was merely the opening blast in a display of "parliamentary fireworks."

The Oregonian opted not to run a story on Feb 21, the day following the speech. This could have been due to space constraints and the lateness of the story — if the speech didn't end until well past 8 p.m., a wire story would not have reached the West Coast until 6 or 7 p.m. Pacific Time. While that would be before a paper's deadline, it would not be convenient to insert a story at that time.

On Feb. 22 the newspaper ran a story closely related to the events surrounding McCarthy's speech. While technically not a comparable text, the story is illuminating. The piece is an Associated Press story about Democratic responses to the McCarthy claims. Like the earlier stories, this one also presents the speech as a political battle between the two parties. Once again, official statements that come as part of a speech and are made by "leaders" tend to be the sort of information that gets quoted. This piece primarily looked at a statement by Secretary of State Dean Acheson denying the claim that Communists worked within the department. The article also gave background on the McCarthy claims, unlike the earlier stories that did not give background on McCarthy's other speeches.

The remaining newspaper in my sample, another West Coast daily, did run a short wire story on the original speech. Because the *Register-Guard* archives stored the afternoon

edition during the 1950s, the story has a slightly different angle to it. By this time, plans for an investigation of McCarthy's charges had been made, and Lucas' actions in that regard received prominent play that was not an option in the East Coast publications. Nevertheless, the *Guard's* wire story presents a similar conflict to that discussed in *The New York Times'* story. Once again, the focus is on the "running word battle" that took place between Lucas and McCarthy. This battle, as before, is described as being about McCarthy's refusal to disclose names. In this particular article, Lucas and McCarthy are the only parties shown participating in the debate.

Time did not contain an article about the speech.

Conclusions: *The New York Times* piece sets up a conflict that excludes or shapes information within the story. As noted, the article only discusses political figures. The *Washington Post* piece takes a similar approach to the conflict with similar results. In both, statements from alternative viewpoints are left out. Additionally, by emphasizing the political conflict and using violence-laden descriptions, the authors suggest the two parties mark clear ends of a very heated battle. In fact, as I explained in Chapter Two, both parties were united in a hatred of communism.

Within the *Post* article, the complaint by McMahon about the validity of McCarthy's claims becomes lost in the rhetoric of this battle. Clearly all Democratic responses to McCarthy, in the rhetoric of the *Post* journalist, are little more than partisan attempts to win the "battle" on the floor of the Senate. The legitimacy of the claims themselves or broader questions about their significance are not examined. In fact, by discussing the events as being so heavily contested, the *Post* story adds legitimacy and importance to McCarthy's claims.

After all, if the Senate broke with tradition and squabbled into the late evening, something important must have been said.

The same implications are true for the structures set up in *The Oregonian* and *Register-Guard* articles. Both pieces have additional aspects that are of interest, though. For example, *The Oregonian* piece did include background information. That background is unique, given the lack of contextual information in the actual stories of McCarthy's speech. The reason is that in the AP story the background functions to provide contrast and thereby conflict, in this case the classic battle between charges and denials. In the other stories, even contradictory statements from earlier McCarthy speeches would only have muddled the party-line conflict portrayed in news stories.

Just as *The Oregonian* was unique for its inclusion of background information, the *Guard's* story is interesting because it focuses so exclusively on Lucas and McCarthy. When the political battle between Lucas and McCarthy is emphasized to the point the two men are the only ones mentioned in the story, the actions of Lucas to look into McCarthy's claims are placed in a deceptive light. While it is certainly true that by investigating the charges Lucas is lending credence to McCarthy's claims, the failure of the paper to note the likelihood that the investigation is intended to prove McCarthy wrong adds to that credence.

Playing up the battle between Lucas and McCarthy also eliminates the possibility of using the story as a chance to illustrate the excesses of anti-communism. Only those parties involved in the battle can be included in the story. Thus, the amount of political squabbling and conflict over the charges that takes place without challenging the premise of a "big three" spy ring in the State Department validates the idea that such a thing is even worthy of concern. Further excess was demonstrated when Congress passed the McCarran Act.

Passage of the Internal Security Act

Observations: All of the publications ran stories on the act, most of them granting it front-page coverage. One of the longest stories ran in *The New York Times*. In it, the bill is seen as being the key in a battle between Truman, who threatened a veto, and Congress. The story emphasizes the political battle rather than the potential social ramifications of a bill that required registration of Communists and created provisions for internment camps for those registered, should a national emergency arise.

The anti-communist issue is seen as a primarily political one, being fought between two anti-communist parties and not including other groups: “Anti-communist legislation had become a major political issue.” According to the *Times*, “The principal issue was whether, in combating communism through the concededly severest measures yet carried to a voting showdown, the liberties guaranteed by the Constitution were being protected.” Despite the mention of civil liberties made at that point in the article, the quoted material and general structure suggest that the debate was in fact waged over the potential for the bill to be effective.

The author brings up claims from opponents that the bill could cause “false registrations of patriotic innocents” and that requirements banning Communists from working in defense plants, while not in themselves a concern, could lead to lists of important military installations being compiled. That, it was argued, would be a national security risk. Once again, the morality and legality of “concentration camps” was not questioned.

The *Washington Post* also framed the fight over the bill as being a political one. The *Post* piece emphasized the ongoing battle over passage, using President Truman’s threatened veto

as a key peg for the story. Throughout the text opponents of the legislation are quoted extensively, including not only Truman associates but also Congressional opponents.

Once again the text implies the primary objection to the bill is its workability. While the article does emphasize the “rigid” nature of the proposal it is careful to present Truman’s objections to the legislation as being based upon fears “some provisions of the measure will serve as a virtual handbook for the Communists.” Additionally, the article is careful to note that not all of the bill is troublesome. Even when aspects of the bill are challenged, the author does not explain precisely why. In fact, the author writes a summary of the bill “in a nutshell,” implying that the planks listed do exactly what they are described as. Among these planks is included mention of “conspiracies ‘substantially contributing’ to setting up a foreign controlled government in the United States.” While the measure’s opponents are cited as saying such conspiracies cannot be stopped by the bill’s proposals, there is no challenge to the basic premise that the potential for such conspiracies exists.

Although the article quotes bill supporters responding to attacks upon the lack of protection for civil liberties in the bill, and although such arguments were made by both sides during the floor debate, the author is careful to frame this particular conflict as being over the effectiveness of the bill. One opponent “stressed that the bill would promote rather than hinder Communist intrigue,” while another is quoted as saying the bill would “do more to advance the cause of Communists in this country than any other single thing we, or even Moscow, can do.”

The Oregonian printed a piece that mentioned the legislation, but only in passing. While the approach used in the Associated Press story run by the newspaper makes finding a dichotomous narrative more complex, the pattern is still present. The story includes the bill

as part of an overview of end-of-session actions by Congress (the bill was passed shortly before the fall recess, and Congress actually delayed departure to ensure its members would be present to override a presidential veto). Within the context of the session, however, the discussion of the bill took up the second through eighth paragraphs of the story.

Because it is so short, the story doesn't quote extensively from any involved groups. The implied conflict, however, is between Congress and a potential veto; the Senate majority leader is quoted as saying that the recess depends upon Truman's action. The possible reasons Truman might veto the bill were left out. Because the story is brief, it simply summarizes the legislation as "a Communist-control bill." The need for such legislation is ignored, as are the specific and potentially troubling aspects of how it would be implemented. What description is given of the proposal mentions the bill would "authorize the mass round-up and detention of Communists, spies and saboteurs in time of war and national emergency." Another paragraph mentions the registration of "Communists and Red-front organizations."

In the *Register-Guard* article, printed a day earlier, only the House had passed the legislation, but the article assumed both passage by the Senate and the potential for a veto. Like most of the other stories, this article constructed the battle as being between the president and Congress, with both the bill and the recess as points of contention. Unlike other stories, this one focused primarily upon the complaints of opponents dealing with civil liberties, although the reasons the legislation would hurt liberties are largely missing.

The only explanation of why the bill might violate civil rights comes from Truman, who is quoted as saying he will veto any bill "which threatens constitutional liberties." The reporter describes the bill not as threatening liberties, however, but as "one of the most

stringent measures ever considered to control Communists and subversives.” The story goes on to refer to the possibility of internment camps as being a provision for the “round-up of all Communists and subversives.”

Time took a somewhat different approach to the story, although it includes many of the same facts about and descriptions of the bill itself. Some of those differences may be due to the way *Time* positions itself as a publication. *Time*, more than any of the other of the publications studied, strives to create a narrative feel to its writing. The stories are not told in the conclusion-first style of a typical news text; each article is something of a self-contained bedtime story for middle-class Americans who don’t have time to read and analyze a newspaper every day. *Time* condensed and analyzed news for the reader, a marketing technique that Luce had intentionally used.

Time portrays the efforts to pass the bill as a battle between two proposals, both of which were intended to solve “a problem the U.S. had never squarely met.” Unlike the other stories, the author of the *Time* piece has chosen to frame his story as being about “a debate over two specific ways of holding the danger in check.”

The author uses very deliberate metaphors to describe the bill’s passage. For example, the McCarran portion of the final bill is described as “a clumsy looking vehicle.” The image of legislation as being a forward progressing item operating independently from its founders and its ideological intent is an interesting one, and it fits well with the popular notion of the law as being somehow above the politics of those who draft it.

This legislative vehicle ran headlong into another proposal, according to the author. At this point, “over the constitutionality and effectiveness of those two measures, the debate wore on.” Interestingly, while the issue of constitutionality is raised here, it vanishes later in

the article once the two bills are combined — despite claims each bill might be flawed, it apparently never occurred to the reporter that both bills might be that much more flawed. Instead, the author boldly accepts claims regarding the bill's effectiveness: "The McCarran Bill, despite the objections leveled against it, would certainly intimidate the Reds in peacetime. The Kilgore bill was designed for wartime emergency."

Conclusions: While *Time* was unique in proposing the debate was between the backers of different components of the final measure, it was not unique in assuming the bill addressed an important issue. For example, the Times story mentions the provisions of the bill are the "concededly severest yet." That statement implies that severe measures are called for, as the extremity of the bill is not a point in favor of its opponents but rather one they must concede.

Instead of lamenting the bill's severity, opponents in the *New York Times* and *Washington Post* stories are described as fighting over the effectiveness of the measure. Both articles use quotes that argue the bill would assist communists. The implication of this framing is clear. It would be politically suicidal to claim the bill would stop Communists yet was reprehensible for the restrictions it placed upon civil liberties. Instead, it was necessary for opponents and the journalists associated with them to provide a conflict only over the effectiveness of the measure. Lost in the discussion are any concerns about some of the more restrictive aspects of the measure, such as the internment camps.

Time's unique approach has a more restrictive effect than many of the framing devices. By excluding even the president from the field of debate, the author suggests that the combination of the two bills represents an effective compromise. If both sides of a conflict are happy, the resolution must be an effective one. This approach provides unequivocal support for the bill, which isn't surprising given Luce's politics.

Language choices are also important in these articles. For example, *The Oregonian* clumped together Communists, spies and saboteurs as well as Communists and subversives. Both of these phrases imply that the items contained within are interchangeable, thus perpetuating the view of Communists as dangers. Additionally, when *The Oregonian* proclaims the purpose of the bill is to round up these various undesirables, it implies such an action is possible. Similarly, when the *Guard* story uses the word “stringent,” rather than harsh or extreme, and calls the legislation a measure to control rather than one that *might* control, the author implies the measure is viable.

One article also makes reference to “Red-front” groups, a language choice that has other implications. The notion of “Red-front” groups is one that appears frequently in news texts and is particularly troublesome. Like the State Department official associated with a “pink” union in *The New York Times* story on McCarthy’s speech, the front groups mentioned bring with them an unfortunate connotation. Identifying such groups, even skeptically, implies their definite existence, their association with the “threat” of communism and the ability of government to track them.

In the *Times* article and elsewhere, the debate has been framed as one over effectiveness. Three of the stories present the conflict as being primarily about the feasibility of the bill, while the other two, briefer pieces suggest it is a debate about civil liberties without clearly explaining why. No article detailed the potential civil liberties violations, and only two detailed the other claims of opponents. While the “spin” put on the bill varied, undoubtedly due in part to the politics of the author and publication, all articles demonstrated the importance of the narrative technique. Those stories that framed it as a battle over effective anti-communism were generally more supportive of the bill than those that suggested it was a

battle between civil libertarians and anti-communists. Clearly the division of ground in the latter format was unevenly balanced, given the word choice and omissions of authors.

Of course, it should also be noted that political battles, either between parties or branches of government, are the most common approach used by journalists in telling political stories. The sources are available, the narrative technique practiced and the outcome of a sort unlikely to offend elites. After all, a discourse that proposes all-important decisions are made by battling groups of elites is a beneficial one for the maintenance of certain myths about the political system. A different discourse is necessary when one of the players in the media's instinctive story of conflict is by definition outside of primary institutions, as is the case during a trial.

The Rosenberg verdict

Observations: *The New York Times* provided lengthy front-page coverage of the trial and the verdict, primarily because the trial involved three New Yorkers and took place in the city. Despite the length of the piece, however, the reporter dedicated only one paragraph to the Rosenberg's attorney, who insisted on the couple's innocence, while giving over almost ten paragraphs to statements by the judge and prosecuting attorney, both of whom made it clear they agreed strongly with the verdict. Despite the paucity of the defendants' "side," the story still framed the story around the conflict between accused and accuser.

Almost all the quoted material comes from the prosecutorial system, of which the judge is implicitly made a part when he makes statements such as "the thought that citizens of our country would lend themselves to the destruction of their own country by the most

destructive weapon known to man is so shocking that I can't find words to describe this loathsome offense." A similar imbalance is displayed in the description of the trial, which focuses on testimony by government witnesses and mentions defense claims only to state the Rosenbergs frequently declined to answer questions using the Fifth Amendment as a shield while on the stand.

While *The New York Times* finds plenty of room for harsh comments from the judge, the story leaves out several facts about the Rosenbergs and the trial. It neglects to mention the possibility of judicial bias raised by Sobell. It ignores the fact the Rosenbergs have two young children. And it inaccurately labels the couple as spies rather than conspirators.

The *Washington Post* story on the subject contains the most information about the Rosenberg's defense strategy. The article is careful to mention that "the Rosenbergs denied the charges in their entirety." It mentions the claim that Greenglass' testimony against the couple was designed "to try to win favor from the government and thus get a lighter sentence for his own admitted crime." While the *Post* story provides the most information about the defense side of the conflict, it also uses the harshest rhetoric in dealing with the Rosenbergs.

Like the *Times* story, the *Post* piece neglects to mention the actual charges against the couple and Sobell. Instead the three are labeled as "traitors to their country" in the lead and are frequently referred to as "spies." Additionally, the article calls the verdict "another long stride in the Government's crackdown on an international atom spy ring in the service of the Russians." The story ends with the claim from the prosecutor that "other traitors ... are still free because the Rosenbergs refused to name them." By contrasting this rhetoric to the Rosenberg's claims of innocence, the *Post* author, like the *Times* writer, is setting up a dichotomy between the justice system and the accused couple.

The wire story run on the front page of *The Oregonian* includes several facts omitted from *The New York Times* story. It notes that the charge was conspiracy and states early in the story that “The Rosenbergs are the parents of two young children.” Additionally, the piece emphasizes the human aspects of the Rosenbergs. Unlike the *Times* story, which didn’t include reaction from the defendants and provided supplementary biography in a clinical fashion, *The Oregonian*’s piece described the reaction of the couple and Sobell.

Nevertheless, the story maintains the fundamental frame of prosecutor/state versus defendant. Although there is a more balanced presentation due to the emphasis on the family life and personal reaction of the defendants, there is still little attempt to provide quotes of claims from their attorneys or to provide any doubt about the government’s claims. Unlike *The New York Times*, *The Oregonian* neglects to mention that the Rosenbergs continued to insist they were innocent.

The Register-Guard did not run a story on the couple. This is likely due to the previously mentioned oddity of the paper being an afternoon edition on the West Coast, meaning news like the verdict comes too late for inclusion in that day’s paper and far too early to be news the following day.

Like the *Post* story, the article in *Time* uses less than subtle rhetoric to denigrate the couple. As usual, the charge of conspiracy goes unmentioned. And, as usual, the article fails to mention that the Rosenbergs were unquestionably not responsible for the Russians having the bomb. In fact, the piece clearly implies they are primarily to blame, having been “found guilty of transmitting their country’s most precious wartime secrets, including the key to the A-bomb, to Soviet Russia.”

Because the story neglects to mention the judge or the prosecutor, the effect of the piece is to imply the conflict was not between the defendants and the state, but between the defendants and the whole of America. Clearly, this bias — found in a lesser extent in all the articles — is reflected in the way the Rosenbergs and Sobell are described. *Time* relies upon negative terms to refer to all three, such as the description of Ethel as “a short, plump woman.” Additional manipulation of the facts occurs when the magazine claims Sobell chose to “flee the U.S.,” when most historical indications suggest he was attempting no such thing and the government certainly never proved he was.

Conclusions: For the most part, the stories are framed as being a conflict between the defendants and the justice system. Of the events covered in this paper, however, the Rosenberg verdict most clearly demonstrates significant favoritism for one of the parties involved in a conflict. All of the articles are guilty of some degree of factual omission and most, especially the *Times* piece, rely more heavily upon material taken from the prosecutor and judge.

The reason is almost certainly because actively pursuing information that would provide for a defense of two probable communists is a practice outside the accepted realm of mainstream news gathering. There is no well-maintained channel for such information; defense attorneys tend to have access to the media only to respond to the agenda carefully set by the prosecutor. Additionally, such research would potentially suggest an affinity for Communists, something sure to offend easily upset sources (remember the concept of flak). After all, the *Times* reporter is careful to emphasize the Communist ties of the Rosenbergs and Sobell, spending more time discussing evidence relating to that than evidence relating to the actual espionage.

Factual material is not the only way the stories are slanted against the couple, however. Several of the stories use language that demonstrates a bias against the accused. In particular, many examples from the *Washington Post* use inflammatory rhetoric despite the fact the paper contained more coverage of defense claims than the other publications. This proves that mere evaluation of facts is insufficient to analyze a news text. Care must be taken to consider the sort of language used to present the facts.

The *Washington Post* takes a somewhat unique approach to the structure of the story in addition to relying upon inflammatory rhetoric. The article mentions the Rosenbergs in the context of a spy ring and paraphrases the prosecutor's claim that the Rosenberg's failure to confess will aid other spies in hiding from the law. The mention of the spy ring implies the existence and proof of such an elaborate "ring," when in fact none existed. It also serves to seriously undermine any claims of innocence raised later in the story. Similarly, by ending with the prosecutor's claim, the failure of the couple to confess is added to their list of crimes. Moreover, the need for a continued battle against treachery is demonstrated — in theory — by the existence of more traitors. The possibility no other spies were named because none exist is never raised.

Because the story repeatedly mentions the context of a broader spy ring and continued treachery, it clearly attaches the Rosenbergs to a larger group of "traitors" and thus frames the story not as a conflict between the state and the defendants but between the justice system and a group of conspiring Communists. As the story still relies upon a dichotomy, the Rosenbergs have to be clumped into that latter group, thus eliminating any potential claims of innocence on their part.

A similar problem exists in *The Oregonian*'s story. Even as the article raises sympathy with a human portrait of the couple, the last section of the story has the opposite effect, helping to reinforce the assumption of guilt. In the concluding paragraphs, the reporter lays out the government explanation of the trail leading to the Rosenbergs. The matter-of-fact retelling of the "ties" between the couple, Sobell and Fuchs, the scientist who confessed to transferring secrets, suggests there are no controversial aspects to the connections. In fact, many scholars find the willingness of David Greenglass, who confessed to conspiracy himself, to testify against his brother-in-law and then later his sister odd. Additionally, the narrative features a list of confessed "spies," and then ends with the Rosenbergs and Sobell, at least implying that they fall into the same category.

As a whole, the trial stories present a dichotomy not between accused and accuser but between accused and state. This practice is undoubtedly reinforced by the hundreds of court stories written every year. A more unusual news event provides different challenges for reporters.

Murrow's story on McCarthy

Observations: Edward Murrow's broadcast presented a dilemma for reporters. Not only was it odd to report on a fellow journalist as being part of a conflict, but at the time newspaper coverage of specific television content was rare. Nevertheless, the *Washington Post* and *The New York Times* did attempt to tell a story about the broadcast. The *Times*' coverage came two days after the show aired. In it, the primary emphasis was on the audience reaction to the program. This does not imply the audience is a party in the conflict

of the text or that the dichotomous model has been abandoned, however. Instead, the tally is treated almost as the results of an election. If the audience is analogous to the voting public, then Murrow and McCarthy must be the closest thing to candidates this metaphor will allow.

The way telephone calls and letters are reported strengthens the comparison to an election. The reporter notes the exact number of calls logged by CBS, lists comments from “a survey of stations” (much as one might poll different states in a presidential election) and gives a ratio of the opinions, in this case listed as 15 to 1 in favor of Murrow. Oddly enough, the media are presenting a battle between one of their own and a political figure. At one point, the reporter quotes a radio personality who invited McCarthy onto his show to counter “Edward R. Murrow’s distorted and slanted tirade against [McCarthy].” Frequent mention is made in all the stories of Murrow’s offer of time for McCarthy to respond, an emphasis that further demonstrates the story is being framed as Murrow versus McCarthy.

Interestingly, the *Times* article fails to detail any aspects of the Murrow program. In other words, the results of the battle are being told, but not the nature of the fight. The *Washington Post*’s coverage, which consisted of two articles, also emphasized viewer response but included large portions of Murrow’s argumentation.

The basic frame used by the *Post* story is the same as that from *The New York Times*. Murrow and McCarthy are portrayed as adversaries and the public response is carefully measured to see who won. The clear implication is that support of the broadcast necessarily indicated opposition to the Senator — the article even includes mention of a Murrow call for “opponents — and supporters — to speak up.” While Murrow was speaking of the political realm, the combination of that quote with information about heavy viewer support for the

program makes the clear implication that telephone calls and letters in favor of Murrow represent a form of political protest against McCarthy.

The way the papers used Murrow's arguments is interesting. Most of Murrow's claims were factual in nature; for example, he pointed out that groups McCarthy claimed had been on a list of subversive organizations were in fact in the clear. Despite this, the *Post* author is careful to repeatedly mention Murrow and attribute any such claims to the journalist, casting the anti-McCarthy statements as part of a broadcast rather than as a fact taken from a source. This technique of extensive citation continued in the second *Post* article from the following day, which focused more heavily on the "battle" between the two men.

This story too led with the public reaction, and like the *Times* article from the same day clearly implied Murrow had won the fight for public favor. One of the reasons may have been a poor job of public relations being done by the McCarthy camp. The senator declined to comment about the broadcast, leaving the *Post* to dedicate more than half the article to recitation of Murrow's claims without any response from McCarthy (as there was none).

Both *The Oregonian* and *Time* failed to provide any coverage of Murrow's broadcast. This is probably because of the difficulties in finding a frame for the story that I described earlier.

The *Register-Guard* did run a story on the broadcast. The front-page wire story presented the broadcast as part of a larger controversy over whether McCarthy should be granted free airtime to respond to attacks by Adlai Stevenson against the Republican party. After briefly mentioning the Murrow broadcast, the article goes on to point out that, "The commentator, who is also a member of the CBS board of directors, made his remarks in the midst of a fight by McCarthy to force CBS and NBC to give him free air time...."

Conclusions: The most interesting observation is probably the difficulty the publications had in finding a way to frame the story. The decision by the *Post* and the *Times* to structure the story in a manner similar to the way elections are covered suggests that a finite number of dichotomous patterns are available for news reporters. Given that structures for news discourse are often drawn from existing sources, as Bell argues, it makes sense that news stories about relatively new phenomenon would have to look for existing patterns to copy. It should be noted that the stories still treat the issue as a two-sided conflict.

That conflict is not necessarily presented fairly, however. *The New York Times* story declined to rehash Murrow's arguments. In a way, this prevents readers from weighing out the issues in their own minds; the majority, according to the reporter, has already spoken. Because the story clearly indicates that majority sided with Murrow, the article acts as an indictment of McCarthy even without repeating the charges against him.

The *Post* goes further to attack McCarthy, however. It presents Murrow's charges in detail despite being unable to solicit a response from the senator, who had yet to even read a transcript of the program. One reason is probably that the *Post* is taking advantage of Murrow's actions to vent some of its own dislike for the senator. This doesn't mean the newspaper is somehow liberal or non-elite; as I mentioned in the previous chapter, McCarthy was widely viewed by many anti-communists, Democrat and Republican, as being a hindrance to the cause by 1954.

The *Register-Guard* piece, because it includes the Murrow story as part of another larger conflict, presents a different issue. The journalistic practice of inserting side issues into a big conflict is an understandable one. By fitting a news item into the frame of an existing story, more information can be presented without recasting the piece or creating a new story.

Unfortunately, this has a troublesome side effect. Because the bulk of the story is about a conflict between Republicans over whether McCarthy speaks for the party, Murrow is by implication associated with those Republicans opposed to letting McCarthy have a forum. In fact, Murrow's opposition to the man operates at a fundamentally different level, and his attacks on McCarthy came with an offer of time for a response. The two attacks, coupled with two forums (one offered and one denied), make for a confusing news story when combined. Any attempt to ease that confusion only results in a clouding of the truth, as takes place in the *Guard* article.

McCarthy's censure

Observations: Unlike the Murrow story, journalists seemed to have little difficulty finding a structural frame for the two-day vote to censure McCarthy for his treatment of fellow senators. *The New York Times* coverage included two front-page stories on both days following votes, as well as supplemental material (transcripts, resolution wording and the like) inside. The two stories on the first day tell about two very different conflicts. One story describes the censure as a battle between opposing forces within the Senate. While Republicans split on the eventual censure vote (all Democrats supported it) the article nonetheless makes frequent comparison between the parties, emphasizing the support of GOP leader William Knowland for McCarthy and the work of minority leader Lyndon Johnson to push the censure measure through.

The article sets up a series of battles fought over a series of legislative proposals. Two measures that would have overturned the censure efforts were voted down handily, and the

article presents these as something of a prelude to the actual vote. Even an attempt by McCarthy to level charges of forgery against an investigative committee is dismissed by the author as an “eleventh-hour action” and therefore part of the larger censure debate rather than an autonomous issue. Once again tangentially related matters are pressed into the narrative discourse being used by the reporter.

The other story from the first day deals with another strictly political battle, this one between Knowland and the Eisenhower administration. The conflict in question is between members of the GOP, rather than between the two parties on the Senate floor. From the opening of the story, the author clearly draws a line between the president’s backers and “the non-Eisenhower right wing of the Republican party,” which is “caught up in internal crisis.”

Like the story from the first day, the main *New York Times* story on the actual, final censure vote emphasized the occasionally petty battle over the censure resolution. Once again, party loyalty is made an issue, with the majority of anti-McCarthy quotes coming from Democrats and the entirety of pro-McCarthy material coming from Republicans. The author writes that McCarthy himself “expressed his disappointment that the Democrats had voted ‘straight down the party line....’” Of course, the reporter noted, McCarthy had earlier called the Democrats the “party of treason.” The implication, of course, remains that this was a political battle rather than one with any ramification on the issues McCarthy stood for. As before, practically no mention of the specific charges for which he was censured is made.

Even the parliamentary details of the vote are made part of the political conflict in the story. A debate over the lack of the word “censure” in the resolution became a source of “general laughter” for McCarthy backers. Debates such as this and the eventual dropping of

the motion to condemn McCarthy for his treatment of an army general are presented as being part of a larger political game rather than as having substantive merit.

The remaining article clearly makes the argument that the battle was a political one and that the conflict was particularly intense — one that “will divide the Senate and the country for a long time to come.” According to the author, the political fight brought the forces battling over McCarthy into the open: “It was never entirely clear who was for [McCarthy] and who was against him. This doubt has now been removed.” Historical evidence does suggest critics of the senator were reluctant to speak up, but newspapers also frequently ignored those critics when they did speak.

Following the lead of casting the debate as a political battle, the *Washington Post* story from the first day is remarkably similar to the *Times* piece. The two sides are clearly McCarthy’s foes and backers. The various votes are seen as rehearsals for a political fight. There is less emphasis put on the partisan, far-right association of McCarthy’s backers, but some of the same divisions are drawn. Most significantly, the forgery charge by the Wisconsin senator is dismissed even more forcefully. The author labels it as a “surprise counter-offensive which could conceivably turn into an ‘unforeseen’ event to delay or otherwise affect the censure vote.”

It should be noted that censure is a relatively ineffective punishment. It carries no weight beyond the force of humiliation. That didn’t stop the author of the second day’s *Post* story from labeling censure as the Senate’s “strongest rebuke short of expulsion.” That may be true, but it doesn’t make it a strong action. Overall, the second day story follows closely both the pattern of the first day and of *The New York Times*. Once again the partisan bickering is played up while the exact details of the resolution are left out.

The *Post* story did go into more detail about the dropping of the censure charge based on McCarthy's mistreatment of a general than the *Times*. Nevertheless, this is still placed in the context of a debate that "rolled forward on the same tense, emotional level which made the unusual session one of the most turbulent in modern times." Despite this turbulence, the fighting is consistently portrayed as being between a far-right wing of the GOP and the rest of the government.

The two Associated Press stories run in *The Oregonian* follow a similar pattern. For the most part, the same incidents are highlighted in these stories as in the others: the absence of the motion concerning the general, McCarthy's joke that "it wasn't a vote of confidence," the questions about the absence of the word "censure" in the final resolution, the intense, partisan nature of the fight.

As is typical, the *Register-Guard's* coverage is slightly off schedule. Because the vote came sufficiently early, the entire censure action was contained in a single article. For the most part, this piece follows the same pattern as the previously analyzed stories. In fact, as a whole no set of texts was more similar than those covering this event — it may have been an "unusual session" but the media all seemed in concurrence on how to cover it.

One of the few distinguishing characteristics of the *Guard's* story was the inclusion of a paragraph that specified the relative weakness of a censure motion. As the author noted, "[censure] amounts simply to an expression of his colleague's views on the way he has conducted himself." An unfriendly note from Miss Manners, in other words.

Overall, though, the story simply rehashes the same debate. Like all the others, it gives little attention to the nature of the charges and makes no attempt to seek sources outside of

the Senate. All the articles offer surprisingly little context; there are no quotes from scholars, the administration or the general who was so important to the issue in the first place.

Understandably, the coverage in *Time* differs somewhat from this. As a whole the series of brief pieces about McCarthy is framed as a description of a battle between the senator and the world. McCarthy was someone who practiced anti-communism “recklessly and even lazily.” Like the other publications, it is made clear he was not censured for anti-communism, but for poor behavior that hurt the anti-communist cause. Within each smaller piece, a different impediment to stopping McCarthy is presented. The eventual effect is to present a dichotomy between the forces capable of stopping McCarthy and all the factors keeping the senator in power, rather than between Joe and Congress. To a considerable degree, McCarthy’s power is explained as merely stemming from those factors which kept him in power: “He was, no doubt, duped by his own headlines.”

In the view of the *Time* writer, the men capable of stopping McCarthy were “five of the most conservative men in the U.S. senate,” men who sat on the censure committee. Thus, from *Time*’s very partisan standpoint, it took conservatives to stop McCarthy, who was in fact propped up by liberals who perpetuated the “myth of McCarthy’s prowess.”

This trend continues in the second section. Discussing the floor debate, the author quotes almost exclusively from Republicans on both sides. Unlike the Democratic liberals, the slant of the Republicans is never mentioned; Knowland, for example, is ridiculed for giving “one of the strangest performances of last or any other week,” but his far-right orientation is not mentioned. It is clear, however, that Knowland has been abandoned by the elites; an accompanying side bar profiling the man criticizes his recent votes, which have “veered

farther and farther away [from the administration] on foreign policy” and says Knowland will “simply continue as the Republican non-leader in the Senate.”

Overall, the *Time* author has clearly positioned Eisenhower and his Republican followers as representing the appropriate way to engage in anti-communism. Others are not criticized for taking that position to extremes (as McCarthy in reality did) but for mishandling the attack. By avoiding representing the battle as a purely political one, the conflict can be framed as something other than a rejection of far-right principles.

Conclusions: As in the other articles, the way in which the authors of the stories about McCarthy’s censure frame the debate is important. For example, the *Times* reporter is careful to frame the debate as being between McCarthy’s supporters and opponents. The issues at the core of the conflict are exclusively presented as being about behavior. At one point, the author compares the claims of the sides, noting that the committee members who recommended censure argued the issue was one of obstruction rather than “abuse.” While mention is made of McCarthy’s claim that he is being punished by Communist sympathizers, the author lends little validity to this claim by carefully avoiding further mention of the issue of Communism. McCarthy is never identified in connection with the anti-communist campaigns he led. By doing this, the author clearly indicates behavior, rather than anti-communist beliefs, are on trial.

The New York Times was also careful to separate the story about internal strife within the GOP from the story about the censure battle itself. Two different dichotomies are being drawn, and they could not be supported within the same story.

Like the *Times*, the *Washington Post* author is careful to emphasize the degree of conflict involved. For example, one story uses the phrase “counter-offensive,” which further indicates

the degree to which text authors tried to create the sense of a hard-fought, intense battle in this exclusively political event.

By granting such significance to the proceeding through playing up the conflict, the reporter implies that the outcome is particularly influential. The New York Times reporter writing about impending political strife was doing something similar; both men were creating the impression that the event had inherent ramifications that in reality did not necessarily have to exist and might not have existed if the media hadn't accepted claims by a limited group of senators that "censure" was in fact a politically meaningful event.

The way in which the censure motion is rendered meaningful is also emphasized by the miniscule amount of attention the actual charges received in all the stories. Clearly, the fight over the charges is better copy than the nature of the charges themselves.

When those charges are mentioned, all authors carefully point out that they related to Senate behavior. Additionally, only Senate sources were used to compose the articles. Journalists clearly viewed the story as being self-contained within the Senate, which made it particularly easy to cover (and therefore most likely increased its perceived news value). Because they all solicited the same sources and used the same approach (probably caused by having the same sources) the articles all sound remarkably similar.

Time's slightly different structure arises in part because the magazine's approach tends to follow a more traditional story-telling approach instead of the inverted pyramid style of most news stories. This approach tends to still contain the same sort of dichotomy, however, indicating that the underlying structure of the text remains similar and that the same constraints that push newspaper reporters into using those techniques also operate on

magazine writers. At time, however, there is an additional constraint — the consistently partisan politics of the publisher and therefore the writers.

Those partisan politics are reflected in the way the two sides are redrawn in the articles. By the time the author is done with the first piece, which proposes that liberal Democrats and Truman are to blame for McCarthyism, it is clear why the battle is between conservatives capable of stopping the senator and an assortment of forces standing in the way. When the author rejects the temptation to cast it as a battle between the mainstream and the far right, he avoids suggesting that McCarthy represents the extreme of conservative politics. To do otherwise would be to challenge the political base from which McCarthy operated, which included many men *Time* virulently backed.

For the most part, however, the *Time* approach is not fundamentally different than the other publications. All consider the Senate action as isolated within the vacuum that is Congress. All are careful to point out that McCarthy was censured for his behavior toward centrist and conservative politicians, rather than for his treatment of accused communists. The only mention made of McCarthy's anti-communist practices is in the *Time* piece, and it only presents them as having been ineffective. While *Time* is careful to explain McCarthy's origins in such a way as to not critique other conservative anti-communists, the other publications simply avoid the question.

Conclusions

There are some interesting patterns (and lack of) that run throughout the sample. One of them concerns the flow of news. It is noteworthy that while *The Oregonian* and *Guard* relied entirely on wire stories for all the events, and the *Post* used some wire stories, none of them were the same, even when drawn from the same service. Clearly the news perceptions of the editor responsible for selecting wire affect the way stories are edited, chosen and placed, something Bell argues at length.

A related issue concerns news emphasis. Which stories did the papers deem important? For the most part, all publications exercised similar news judgement — certain events, for whatever reason, were given more play. For example, the McCarthy censure received extensive coverage in every paper, while Murrow's piece was given infrequent mention. The biggest variation was on coverage of McCarthy's first speech and the Rosenberg verdict. As noted, *The New York Times* gave front page space to the verdict, which occurred in New York, while the *Post* gave similar space to the speech. Each newspaper ran the non-local story inside. Such choices are probably less likely to occur these days, when each paper positions itself as appealing to more of a national audience.

Overall, then, the differences between the publications are surprisingly insignificant. All five publications focus on the same events and use the same fundamental techniques to tell stories about those events. While *Time* does contain a more chronological narrative style and clearly biased approach, even it opted to give roughly the same weight to the "important" stories of the day. All the papers emphasized their local audience, but not to the extent that they ignored or downplayed stories of national significance.

Because the publications showed primarily similarities in their coverage, many patterns emerge. By comparing these patterns to the expectations about coverage implied by the constraint theory developed in Chapter One, I can test the validity of that theory and make some important observations about the fundamental nature of media coverage, both then and now.

CONCLUSION — EVALUATING THE THEORY OF CONSTRAINTS

In Chapter One, I made two separate claims about the nature of news. The first was that two constraints act upon news coverage: ease and economy. If this is true, then we should expect certain types of stories, facts and linguistic approaches to appear more often. It should be noted, however, that simply finding a prevalence of those approaches does not indicate the theory is necessarily true. I will address those constraints a bit later in this conclusion.

The second claim I made was that, because of those constraints, news stories tend to fall into a certain narrative pattern, a pattern that has an ideological implication independent of any content or language concerns. That pattern, I argued, was one of dichotomous conflict: News stories tend to be framed as a battle between two parties. Because that battle necessarily excludes other sides or distorts them to fit within the dichotomous framework, it leaves out many perspectives concerning any news event. This idea, that news stories are composed as a dichotomous narrative, can be confirmed by observation. Therefore, I would like to begin this conclusion by discussing the degree to which the articles I examined fall into that framework.

As was demonstrated in the previous chapter, this theory appears to hold true. Every story I read has a readily identifiable dichotomy. The notion of conflict is an integral one to news stories, and the reporters who composed the articles I considered certainly wrote stories with that idea of conflict in mind. Moreover, certain patterns in the way conflicts are framed also emerged.

In the first set of stories, about McCarthy's initial speech, the dichotomy was varied. As a whole, however, it was easy to locate two sides to the issue as presented within the article. It was also noteworthy that neither of those sides was pro-Communist, thus suggesting the ideological exclusion that can emerge from a dichotomous framework. I believe the reason no clear dichotomy had come forth was that the era of McCarthyism was just beginning, and therefore reporters had few practiced techniques or routine sources from which to draw patterns for covering the speech or the concept.

Conversely, the stories dealing with the second event, passage of the McCarran Act, generally followed the same dichotomy. Truman and Congressional opponents of the bill were pitted against its backers. The exception, *Time* magazine, almost certainly told the story it did because of the propagandistic effect of presenting the bill as a compromise between the two "sides" of the debate. This, I think, clearly indicates the ideological potential the dichotomous framework has because of its ability to warp the viewpoints shown as involved in the discussion. For the rest of the sample, however, there are still ideological implications to the coverage. As noted in Chapter Three, it was largely assumed that the goal of both sides was anti-communist and that the debate was about the effectiveness of the measures rather than about the civil liberties involved or the need for anti-communism at all.

In the third group of stories, the dichotomy is obvious. Court stories are usually split between the two involved parties, and coverage of the Rosenberg verdict was no exception. Those stories also tended to be biased against the defendants, which helps prove both my and Neville's claims about the way in which agenda setting operated concerning the accused "spies." While the blatant media bias is probably a result of the intense anti-communism of the era, the basic idea that the media would favor the prosecution is universal and stems from the claim that elite sources tend to dictate the news. Moreover, upholding the strength and accuracy of claims pressed by the U.S. Department of Justice clearly validates elite structures, further confirming my assumptions about elite influence over the media.

The fourth group of stories, concerning the Murrow broadcast, is more troublesome. While, as I argued in Chapter Three, the articles tend to follow the dichotomous pattern established by election stories, the reporters were clearly struggling with the idea of how to cover the media. This is not surprising; the emergence of television as a dominating cultural influence was yet to occur, and therefore media coverage of the phenomenon was also yet to be created. Nevertheless, the articles are striving to divide the issue into some kind of debate. As a whole, they do position McCarthy against Murrow, despite having a lack of quotes from McCarthy to use in presenting his side.

The final group of stories most clearly demonstrated the dichotomous pattern. In this case the issue, McCarthy's censure, was cleanly contained within the Senate (in the minds of the media at least). Therefore, however unusual the notion of censuring a senator might be, the concept of a political battle was a familiar one that fell into frequent narrative patterns. The willingness of the press to impose a partisan framework on the issue despite many factual reasons not to simply proves how strong the need to follow dichotomous patterns is.

Clearly, all five events demonstrate clear patterns of dichotomy. While this certainly doesn't prove my theory is correct — after all, communism was a particularly conflict-ridden issue — it does nothing to disprove it either. I admit that not all news stories follow this pattern, but I think that the vast majority, including all those in my sample, does. The bigger issue is what this means.

Most significantly, the consistency with which journalists use the approach suggests that certain constraints do affect the way they tell stories. There are other possible approaches to all of the stories I considered; some of those approaches are suggested in my analysis. The constraints are not necessarily those I consider in Chapter One, but economy and ease would certainly explain why reporters follow the narrative framework they do. It's easier to only find two sides to an issue, usually the two sides defined by the involved parties. And it's certainly less offensive to all manner of elites, including owners and advertisers, to present a conflict that doesn't include groups outside of the usual discourse presented within the institutions that manage this country. Because they rely upon information from those institutions, moreover, the media have become irrevocably bound to them.

All this brings me to the other assumption I made in Chapter One — two constraints dictate media coverage. There is, as I said, no real way to prove this. What can be demonstrated is a lack of evidence to disprove it. This certainly exists within the sample I examined. No effort was made to grant a voice to communism or other radical left sources. The persistent assumption was that anti-communism was beneficial and that government programs designed to root out Communists were, as a whole, worthwhile and needed. The media consistently assumed that the potential for a national security threat from Communist

subversives did exist, and they created stories that reflected that assumption. My two theoretical constraints could explain all those patterns.

While not conclusive evidence, my observations strongly suggest that media coverage in the 1950s did a good job of upholding the elite ideologies. The articles didn't provide any content that would challenge the notion that certain constraints do operate upon the media and largely (but not entirely) prevent them from providing coverage that would challenge the elite viewpoint. In this case, that viewpoint was one of anti-communism — as Gitlin argued, both liberals and conservatives agreed on the need to combat the “Red menace.” Moreover, the elites consistently uphold the need for existing institutions in some form, the importance of capitalism and business and the danger of listening to marginal groups, right or left in political orientation. Nothing in the articles challenged any of those values.

There are many possible implications to this. The most important is that, because the media limit the range of debate, many views are not considered legitimate by the public. While I suspect this is true, this paper doesn't argue for the validity of that claim. As I said in Chapter One, my intention was not to evaluate the effect of media distortion on the audience. Nevertheless, the very clear risk that limitations on media content might prevent dramatic social change does warrant concern regarding media constraints.

As I stated in the introduction, these patterns and the constraints that likely form them should be of concern to more than historians. In the 1950s, men like McCarthy and the ideologies they upheld were perpetuated in large part by the media, even though many reporters were opposed to McCarthyism. A similar risk continues to exist so long as the media are still shaped by the same constraints.

Current media coverage certainly appears to follow some of the same patterns. Consider, for example, the ongoing story of President Clinton and his possible ethics violations. The media have, almost without exception, portrayed this as a dichotomous battle between Clinton and special prosecutor Kenneth Starr and his right-wing backers. While this coverage won't bring about another era of anti-communism, it does imply that the media continue to rely upon dichotomies defined by elite agenda setters.

We should all be concerned. Our interests do not necessarily coincide with those of the elites. In the 1950s, for example, civil liberties were not a concern for elite anti-communists. In reflecting the view of those elites, the media were also not champions of personal liberties. Perhaps the media are the fourth branch of the government, but like the other three they seem more concerned with defending the interests of the few than reflecting the concerns of the many. If the average citizen relies upon the press to tell his or her story, that citizen is likely to be disappointed.

What is the solution? It certainly isn't as simple as the multiperspectivalism advocated by Gans. While an admirable goal, any theory that expects individual reporters to break free of systematic constraints is flawed. Reporters need to be trained to rely upon non-traditional sources, certainly, but they also need to emphasize something other than simple story telling. Some very well-composed journalism is still ideologically flawed. Perhaps reporters should strive to give more context to stories; had reporters done a better job of comparing McCarthy's past statements to his Senate speech, for example, they might have been able to remove some of the credence extensive, "objective" coverage gave him. Instead, they waited until other elite sources made the comparisons and provided the context useful for their points of view.

Such reforms are beyond the scope of this paper. Future studies of other conflict-laden areas could prove illuminating. Additionally, studies that further compare the theoretical claims of my “constraint theory” to the realities of the newsroom would be highly informative. Nevertheless, what this paper does show is that a very broad, universally applicable theory can explain the content of media texts in that supposedly unique time, the early 1950s. Anyone interested in preventing the sort of egregious behaviors that took place during that time should look carefully at the patterns that continue to emerge in media content and wonder what might be done to prevent significant ideological distortions.

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