"Politics in an Age of Anxiety": Cold War Political Culture and the Crisis in American Masculinity, 1949–1960

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In a 1955 essay on the "radical right" as a force in American politics, the sociologist Daniel Bell complained about the "polarization of images" to which much political discourse had succumbed. "In these strange times," he wrote, "new polar terms have been introduced into political discourse, but surely none so strange as the division into 'hard' and 'soft.'" As Bell explained, "presumably one is 'soft' if one insists that the danger from domestic Communists is small," while one is "hard" if one holds that "no distinction can be made between international and domestic Communism." Objecting to such stark dichotomies, Bell stressed that liberals had long affirmed an anticommunist politics and were taking conservative positions on traditional economic issues. In the end, however, he could only lament that "an amorphous, ideological issue," rather than an "interest-group issue," had become "a major dividing line in the political community." "The only issue is whether one is 'hard' or 'soft.'"[1]

In retrospect it appears that Bell was speaking to a striking feature of the political culture of his time: the reduction of political positions to dualistic images—images that often superseded a policy-oriented politics and obscured the extent of the political consensus that was emerging. Yet the rhetorical polarities he pointed to had entered Cold War political discourse long before the radical right made its mark on the political scene in the early fifties, charging liberal Democrats with softness on Communism. The hard/soft dichotomy structured Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr.'s classic 1949 statement of liberal anticommunism, *The Vital Center,* a seminal book whose language and imagery, in the words of Garry Wills, "set up the desired contrasts for a decade."[2]

[1] Daniel Bell, "Interpretations of American Politics," in *The Radical Right,* ed. Daniel Bell (1955; New York, 1964), 67–70.

[2] Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr., *The Vital Center: Our Purposes and Perils on the Tightrope of American Liberalism* (1949; Boston, 1962). For a caustic commentary on Schlesinger's professorial tough talk, see Garry Wills, *Nixon Agonistes: The Crisis of the Self-Made Man* (New York, 1969), 518–23, esp. 521.

If Bell failed to appreciate how much liberals had indulged in—perhaps even initiated—the "polarization of images" he found characteristic of right-wing rhetoric, he also left precisely what was "strange" about such imagery unexamined. An emotionally driven "symbolic" politics had supplanted a politics based on "normal intramural interest conflicts," he stressed. Yet Bell, a pioneer of the symbolist approach to the study of political life, had no inclination to pursue—nor any real category for analyzing—a phenomenon whose sources and meanings may transcend the "status anxieties" or "status politics" that he and others attributed to the radical right.[3]

This article is concerned with what Bell had difficulty identifying: an excessive preoccupation with—and anxiety about—masculinity in early Cold War American politics. The "polarization of images" he pointed to reflects a political culture that put a new premium on hard masculine toughness and rendered anything less than that soft and feminine and, as such, a real or potential threat to the security of the nation. The power of the hard/soft opposition in political discourse lay here, in the gendered symbolic baggage that gave such imagery meaning and resonance. And in the tense climate of Cold War politics, that discourse grew increasingly shrill, at times bizarre. The strange rhetoric that often supplanted substantive debate in the political arena did indeed involve "an amorphous, ideological issue"—Communism. What remains unexplored are the sources of the hard/soft preoccupation and the *kind* of symbolic politics born of it. A closer analysis reveals a politics that relied on a complex of sexually-charged dualisms; for cultural as well as political reasons, those dualisms imprisoned the discourse of the era and as a result impoverished its politics. By exploring the nexus between cultural and political life in the 1940s and 1950s, we can begin to understand why and how an exaggerated cult of masculine toughness and virility surfaced in American political culture, at least until events and upheavals in the 1960s helped defuse its worst excesses and reconfigure the political landscape.

Typically read as an attempt to restore to the liberal tradition an integrity and "tough-mindedness" that had been lost in the facile Popular Front politics of the 1930s, *The Vital Center* is habitually cited as a turning point for American liberalism, an unequivocal rejection of extremist politics and an articulation of a new liberal anticommunist political realism. The occasion for a reevaluation of liberalism is suggested in the book's first chapter title, "Politics in an Age of Anxiety." Schlesinger stressed the "global change-of-life" brought by the rise of industry and technology, which left civilization "consumed by anxiety and fear" and rendered modern man ever more vulnerable to utopian totalitarian promises. The ghastly events surrounding World War II—by-products of modernity's "reign of insecurity"—demanded that liberals admit the human potential for evil and corruption and discard their old assumptions about the perfectibility and rationality of man. Schlesinger's manifesto

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[3] For a critique of the symbolist approach of Daniel Bell and others, see Michael Rogin, *Ronald Reagan, the Movie and Other Episodes in Political Demonology* (Berkeley, 1987), 272–300.

promised deliverance from the naïve ideological orthodoxies of the past and refashioned the liberal tradition in accordance with the lessons of the appeasement of Adolf Hitler at Munich and the imperatives of the Cold War.[4]

Schlesinger, a Harvard University historian, Democratic party activist, and during World War II an officer in the Office of Strategic Services (OSS) and Office of War Information (OWI), wrote *The Vital Center* while charges of Communist subversion mounted against the liberal Alger Hiss, a context reflected in the book's pervasive defensiveness. Distancing liberalism from Communism was crucial, not least for liberals such as Schlesinger, who assumed that Communism had "draped itself so carefully in the cast-off clothes of a liberalism grown fat and complacent." Schlesinger's purpose was to restore order and meaning to a shifting political terrain where the terminology of Left and Right had become unstable. Hence the replacement of the old left-to-right linear ideological spectrum with a circular model where Communism and fascism, now collapsed under the rubric of totalitarianism, would "meet at last on the murky grounds of tyranny and terror" at the bottom of the circle, and the "vital center"—where liberalism and conservatism meet and achieve consensus—would stand directly opposite its totalitarian enemy, at the top of the circle. It was a problematic reconfiguration of a metaphor, for only if plotted linearly would this point seem to be at the absolute center.[5]

Lest the differences between the vital center liberal and his competitors to the right and left remain ambiguous, Schlesinger adopted the rhetoric and imagery that makes his book an extraordinary testimony to the "age of anxiety" he lamented. Schlesinger's defense of the vital center began with a historical exposé of the right wing's cumulative weaknesses. Tracing "the failure of the right" back to the inadequacies of businessmen, who had "rescued society from the feudal warrior, only to hand it over to the accountant," Schlesinger concluded that "the result was to emasculate the political energies of the ruling class." The author's plotting of the conservative tradition in the United States is likewise a narrative of emasculation: The Federalists were men of "robustness" who did not "shrink from" social conflict; their parvenu successors degenerated into "terrified," hysteria-prone capitalists who developed "*delirium tremens*" at the prospect of even moderate social reform and hid in the "womblike comfort" of tariffs and monopolies. Like their "impotent" plutocratic counterparts in Neville Chamberlain's England, who dreaded physical combat and rationalized "middle class cowardice," American conservatives lacked the heroic instincts of a "tougher breed" of ruler, such as Winston Churchill. Schlesinger's model of manhood is an older, patrician one, best embodied in the United States by Teddy Roosevelt, who proved he had the "juices" that other conservatives lacked.

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[4] Schlesinger, *Vital Center,* 1–4. On postwar liberalism, see Richard H. Pells, *The Liberal Mind in a Conservative Age: American Intellectuals in the 1940s and 1950s* (New York, 1985); Alonzo L. Hamby, *Beyond the New Deal: Harry S Truman and American Liberalism* (New York, 1973); Mary McAullife, *Crisis on the Left: Cold War Politics and American Liberals, 1947–1954* (Amherst, 1978); and Steven Gillon, *Politics and Vision: The ADA and American Liberalism, 1947–1985* (New York, 1987).

[5] Schlesinger, *Vital Center,* xxiii–xxiv, 144–45, 163. On the semantic confusion of the time, see Wills, *Nixon Agonistes,* 506–22.

While Roosevelt offered an alternative to the "greed and timidity of commercial life," the Right unwisely rejected Roosevelt's "strenuous life," yielded all too often to its "dark impulses" and its "capitalist libido," stood by while the "dynamism" went "trickling out" of capitalism, and thus doomed itself to "political sterility."[6]

If the conservative has all too often embodied an exhausted, spent masculine potency, the left-progressive never had sufficient masculinity. In Schlesinger's narrative, the "Doughface" is as pliable as his name suggests; he is hopelessly and irrevocably feminine; hence the "failure of the left." The problem with the Doughface (the progressive)—the left-wing ideologue personified by Henry Wallace and the fellow-traveling Left—is that he engages in a willful repression of the *real.* Since he cannot face the "cruel complexities of life," he treats political life as a "soap opera"—his "defining" quality is his "sentimentality." He is "soft, not hard" because, unlike the Communist, the progressive "believes himself genuinely concerned with the welfare of individuals" and, unlike the "radical democrat" (the liberal), he has "cut himself off" from "useable traditions . . . the pragmatic tradition of the men who, from the Jacksonians to the New Dealers, learned the facts of life through the exercise of power." A "wailer," not a "doer," the Doughface fears the world of real men and takes refuge in the "broad maternal expanse of the masses."[7]

Schlesinger took the progressive's politics as evidence of emotional maladjustment, what the postwar intelligentsia so frequently and indiscriminately called "neurosis." For Schlesinger, the progressive uses politics as "an outlet for private grievances and frustrations." Proof of his neurosis is the "fantasy" world he occupies in which "dreams . . . are better than facts." But like most dreams, his are "notable for the distortion of facts by desire." *Desire* is the operative word here, for the Doughface's attraction to working-class politics displays his "feminine fascination with the rude and muscular power of the proletariat." His is a frustrated, immature kind of desire, however: Compensating for his fear of real power, the Doughface indulges in self-gratifying rhetorical and symbolic political gestures, titillated by the "subtle sensations of the perfect syllogism," enjoying the occasional "emotional orgasm of passing resolutions against Franco." Thus does liberalism become a "mass expiatory ritual by which the individual relieves himself of responsibility for his government's behavior," evidencing the "self-love which transforms radicalism from an instrument of action into an expression of neurosis." Given that his liberal imposter has a "soft and shallow" idea of human nature and is "endowed" only with "fatal weaknesses," it is no wonder that he is "softened up" for "Communist permeation and conquest."[8]

Desire—intractable, unwieldy, mature, immature, normal, perverse—underlies all political behavior in *The Vital Center.* For Schlesinger, totalitarianism had proven

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[6] Schlesinger, *Vital Center,* 11–34, esp. 11, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 21, 24, 26, 28, 30.

[7] *Ibid.,* 35–50, 159–61, esp. 35, 36, 46, 159, 160. Schlesinger's substitution of "radical democrat" for "liberal" speaks to the perceived disreputable connotations of the label "liberal" as well as to Cold War liberals' appropriation of the hard-boiled style of ex-Marxists recruited into the liberal camp in the 1940s and 1950s. On the influence of ex-radicals such as Reinhold Niebuhr on Cold War liberalism, see Christopher Lasch, *The New Radicalism in America, 1889–1963: The Intellectual as a Social Type* (New York, 1965), 286–349.

[8] Schlesinger, *Vital Center,* 35–50, 159–70, esp. 37, 40, 41, 42, 46, 159, 160, 170.

the centrality of man's deeper, "darker passions." The Doughface who merely flirts with Communism seems to invite permeation and conquest; the *real* Communist longs for it: "even America has its quota of lonely and frustrated people, craving social, intellectual and even sexual fulfillment they cannot obtain in existing society. For these people, [Communist] party discipline is no obstacle; it is an attraction. The great majority of members in America, as in Europe, *want* to be disciplined." Indeed, totalitarians "*enjoy* the discipline."[9]

For Schlesinger, the central lesson of the wartime encounter with totalitarianism was how effectively ideology and propaganda mobilized the anxieties and emotions of beleaguered *mass* man. The former oss and owi officer responded to the challenge in kind (lest democracy continue "paying the price" for its "cultivation of the peaceful and rational virtues" and its comparative lack of "the profounder emotional resources"). Hence the most lurid imagery in the text: while totalitarian enemy leaders are surely hard (shrewd political realists with no aversion to the use of power or violence), the totalitarian masses appear not just soft or emasculated, but downright sexually perverse in their "totalitarian psychosis," their desire for "violent gratification," their "losing of self in masochism or sadism," their "masochistic delight in accepting correction." "No one should be surprised," Schlesinger insisted, "at the eagerness for personal humiliation," for "the whole thrust of totalitarian indoctrination . . . is to destroy the boundaries of individual personality." Quotidian totalitarian man assumes the feminine, submissive role in *The Vital Center,* yielding repeatedly to the "thrust" of totalitarianism, its "deep and driving faith," its "half-concealed exercises in penetration and manipulation." The concentration camp is "the culmination of . . . sadism and of masochism; it is the climax of the system of tension which keeps totalitarianism taut and triumphant." If the reader has yet to grasp the essential point about Communism: it "perverts politics into something secret, sweaty and furtive like nothing so much, in the phrase of one wise observer of modern Russia, as homosexuality in a boys' school; many practicing it, but all those caught to be caned by the headmaster." And here we come to the complete demasculinization and perversity—homosexuality—that sits directly opposite the "vital center" in Schlesinger's revamped circular model.[10]

Whatever else the language of *The Vital Center* may suggest about the sexual contours of the age of anxiety—a subject to which we will return—the text offers a remarkable case study of the way erotic imagery and gendered dualisms can structure a historical narrative, delineate otherwise fuzzy ideological boundaries for partisan political purposes, and, in this case, reinvent the liberal according to the manly exigencies of Cold War politics. Gender organizes *The Vital Center;* sexual and bodily metaphors—passions, climaxes, desires, ecstasies, tears, thrusts, gashes, outlets, tissues, fluids, wombs—animate its pages. Out of this admixture of eroticized imagery

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[9] *Ibid.,* 40, 54, 104. Schlesinger echoes Erich Fromm's argument that underlying the appeal of fascism were *psychological* strivings for submission and domination akin to sadomasochistic sexual impulses. What Fromm theorized as a psychological predisposition to fascism is here enlisted in the cause of a new liberal machismo. Erich Fromm, *Escape from Freedom* (New York, 1941).

[10] Schlesinger, *Vital Center,* 51–91, esp. 53, 54, 65, 83–85, 88, 126, 151, 245–46.

This illustration by Bertrand Zadig in the *New York Times Magazine* accompanied a 1948
article by Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr. entitled "Not Left, Not Right, but a Vital
Center." The enormous clenched fist with its mighty torch rising
above and between the masses on the political left and
right suggests the virility of the vital center
and its promise of deliverance from
anxiety and disorder.
Reprinted from the New York Times Magazine, *April 4, 1948.*

emerges the "tough-minded" radical democrat, the "doer" who displays a healthy, mature "appetite for decision and responsibility" and gains his "fulfillment" from the exercise of power and responsibility. The conflict between the "doer and the wailer"—"a conflict within each of us"—has been resolved by the now-obvious defects of political extremism. "The failure of nerve is over," Schlesinger dramatically proclaimed. Postwar leaders bring a "new virility into public life, a virility compact of humanity and not of ruthlessness." The vital center emerges in the book as the home not only of a reinvigorated liberalism, whose leaders demonstrate the "restoration of radical nerve," but also of a secure and restored American masculinity.[11]

Schlesinger's effort to masculinize the liberal reform tradition and the radical democrats who rightly stood to inherit it did not prevent liberals (including Schlesinger himself) from being accused of softness. In ensuing years, Democrats were on the defensive, charged by the right wing with a host of offenses in a dubious guilt-by-association rationale. The obvious challenge came from Joe McCarthy,

[11] *Ibid.,* 131–88, esp. 131, 147, 156, 159, 160, 161.

whose targets were so often the "dilettante diplomats" working under Democratic administrations who "cringed," "whined," and "whimpered" in the face of Communism, "prancing mimics of the Moscow party line." Beginning with his 1950 speech to the Ohio County Republican Women's Club in Wheeling, West Virginia, he blamed America's "position of impotency" on eastern establishment liberals, the "bright young men . . . born with silver spoons in their mouths" who were so patently privileged and sissified. Dean Acheson became a favorite target, and McCarthy rarely missed an opportunity to highlight the prissy demeanor of the "Red Dean of Fashion," that "pompous diplomat in striped pants, with a phony British accent" who spoke out effetely against Communism with "a lace handkerchief, a silk glove, and with a Harvard accent." In venues where vulgarity gave less offense, McCarthy assailed the "pitiful squealing" of "egg-sucking phony liberals," the men who would "hold sacrosanct those Communists and queers" in the State Department who sold China into "atheistic slavery." The lines were thus drawn, and in a cruder version of the choice between being a soft wailer or a manly anti-communist doer, McCarthy posed his own dualistic ultimatum to a handful of reporters: "If you want to be against McCarthy, boys, you've got to be either a Communist or a cocksucker."[12]

Even when spared the rude insinuations of a McCarthy, liberals were still the object of criticism that stressed their psychological and intellectual timidity and failure of moral nerve. Richard M. Weaver, an English professor at the University of Chicago, argued in the *National Review* in 1957 that the liberal's "altruism" and his "idealization of comfort" show a "definite antagonism toward all strenuous ideals of life." Thus his "inordinate fear" of such men as Sen. Robert Taft and Gen. Douglas MacArthur, who reject "cant, sniveling and double-talk." Afflicted with a "moral and intellectual flabbiness" and a sentimental, relativistic mentality that leaves him incapable of "rigid exclusion" in his thought processes, the modern liberal ultimately displays his complacency—the very attribute he denounces in the conservative. "It is not an unknown thing to have the very vices one is denouncing slip up on one from the rear in some pleasing disguise. This the liberal has done by not being truly circumspect, and by giving in to certain weaknesses which disqualify him for leadership."[13]

The attack on soft liberals who gave in to weaknesses was part of the oft-noted, heightened anti-intellectual temper of the time. In some quarters the liberal became virtually synonymous with the "egghead," a carping intellectual weakling who was, according to the writer Louis Bromfield, "over-emotional and feminine in reactions to any problem . . . surfeited with conceit and contempt for the experience of more sound and able men. . . . A self-conscious prig. . . . An anemic bleeding heart." Inspiring much of the derision of intellect in the 1950s was a singular suspicion of

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[12] For Joseph McCarthy's statements, see Eric F. Goldman, *The Crucial Decade—and After: America, 1945–1960* (New York, 1960), 142; Lawrence S. Wittner, *Cold War America: From Hiroshima to Watergate* (New York, 1974), 95–99; Thomas C. Reeves, *The Life and Times of Joe McCarthy: A Biography* (New York, 1982), 299; and David Halberstam, *The Fifties* (New York, 1993), 54.

[13] Richard M. Weaver, "The Roots of Liberal Complacency," *National Review,* June 8, 1957, in *Anthology of Conservative Writing in the United States: 1932–1960,* ed. A. J. Heinsohn Jr. (Chicago, 1962), 54–58.

the *left* intelligentsia. E. Merrill Root, an English professor at Wheaton College, insisted that the greatest danger facing the United States was "inward cultural subversion." Through their influence in education and control of information, liberal intellectuals "render us impotent" and "soften us up for the easy kill" by presenting the United States "exactly as the Communists want us to see it." If, by "sentimentaliz[ing] collectivism," the liberal had "perverted" the original meaning of the term *liberal*, as Root assumed, it was in part because modern liberalism now appeared so hopelessly soft, so perversely contrary to the rugged, hard, individualistic values that had once defined the term in its classical sense. Like Schlesinger's Doughface, the liberal was—in much right-wing rhetoric—feminine in principle, effeminate in embodiment, and emasculating in effect.[14]

The inflated manly bravado, the hard/soft dualisms, the excessive scorn for the feminine, and the language of perversion and penetration in so much political discourse of the early Cold War era reflects more than old-fashioned masculine posturing—common in political life, especially in times of war. It reveals more than the fears of an affluent and increasingly complacent American citizenry, or even the horrible anxieties about national security.[15] And while the sexually charged invective was surely a vehicle for the expression of festering class antagonisms—the ultraright resentful of old-moneyed eastern establishment liberals and exacting a price for nearly twenty years of postdepression Republican powerlessness, the liberal elite defensive of the status that men of education and culture had won in the thirties, disdainful of the crude right-wing upstarts who now threatened that status (and driven by not a little secret self-contempt)—those underlying class or status anxieties became enmeshed with anxieties of a different sort.

Cold War political rhetoric also reveals a growing concern about the masculinity of American men, a concern that Schlesinger himself voiced in a 1958 article in *Esquire* magazine, "The Crisis of American Masculinity." Here Schlesinger addressed a multifaceted discussion about American men that had surfaced in popular books and publications in the 1940s and 1950s. By the time *Look* magazine announced "The Decline of the American Male" in a 1958 series, reprinted in book form the same year, the concern had crystallized into a recognizable refrain: American males had become the victims of a smothering, overpowering, suspiciously collectivist mass society—a society that had smashed the once-autonomous male self, elevated

[14] Louis Bromfield, "The Triumph of the Egghead," *Freeman,* Dec. 1, 1952, pp. 155–58; E. Merrill Root, "The Quicksands of the Mind," in *Anthology of Conservative Writing in the United States,* ed. Heinsohn, 283–85.
[15] A more extensive treatment of the relationship between sexual anxieties and Cold War political thought and rhetoric will appear in my forthcoming book, K. A. Cuordileone, *"Politics in an Age of Anxiety": Manhood and American Political Culture in the Cold War* (Routledge). On the sexually laden rhetoric of a Cold War era statesman, see Frank Costigliola, "'Unceasing Pressure for Penetration': Gender, Pathology, and Emotion in George Kennan's Formation of the Cold War," *Journal of American History,* 83 (March 1997), 1309–39. On the fear of an affluent, soft America in the 1950s, see Barbara Ehrenreich, *Fear of Falling: The Inner Life of the Middle Class* (New York, 1989), 29–34. The relevance of the national security issue is discussed below.

women to a position of power in the home, and doomed men to a slavish conformity not wholly unlike that experienced by men living under Communist rule.[16]

There were variations on these themes and differences in emphasis and explanation, but the dread that American men had grown soft was voiced in widely read and often best-selling publications. Whether they were "organization men" softened by the "group ethos" (William H. Whyte), "other-directed" men made conformist and self-less by an affluent mass society (David Riesman), men left sexually distorted by puritanical norms that constrain healthy heterosexual relations and ultimately encourage male sexual "inversion" (Robert Lindner), weak men and helpless boys victimized by parasitic women and/or overbearing mothers (Philip Wylie, Edward Strecker), or men who fell prey to some admixture of the above forces (*Look* writers), American males were now the subject of unprecedented scrutiny. And the language of soft/hard was in vogue: Whyte's organization man succumbed to the "softminded" ethos of "togetherness"; Riesman's other-directed personality type was "soft" and "limp," unlike the "hard," inner-directed type of yesteryear.[17]

To be sure, such writers as Whyte and Riesman must be distinguished from the peevish Wylie, who ranted about "destroying mothers" who emasculated their husbands and sissified their sons. Riesman and Whyte did not address gender overtly. Riesman's *The Lonely Crowd* tended to speak in general, gender-neutral terms about major shifts in American character: the rise of the "other-directed" personality type who deferred to the other out of fear of disapproval and hence loneliness and the corresponding decline of the "inner-directed" personality type of the nineteenth century whose strong inner drive and sense of self permitted him to forge ahead boldly without concern for peer approval. But the conformity debate was always about *men,* and one need only look at Riesman's awkward, alternating use of gendered and gender-neutral pronouns to see the difficulty these broad character sketches presented to an author whose models were inescapably male. Inner direction would have been difficult to reconcile with nineteenth-century ideals of womanhood. And, as Barbara Ehrenreich has suggested, drawing a character portrait of an other-directed woman would have been unthinkable, even clumsy and redundant, for "other-directedness was built into the female social role as wives and mothers." Indeed, "Riesman's sweeping characterological transformation looked like nothing so much as the feminization of American men."[18]

The conformity and masculinity crises were never far apart, and Schlesinger's

[16] For the 1958 article, see Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr., *The Politics of Hope* (Cambridge, Mass., 1962), 237–46. For *Look*'s 1958 series, see *Look, The Decline of the American Male* (New York, 1958). For a biting commentary on the male conformity crisis, see Barbara Ehrenreich, *The Hearts of Men: American Dreams and the Flight from Commitment* (New York, 1983), 14–51.

[17] For expressions of concern about the state of the male self in the 1940s and 1950s, see William H. Whyte Jr., *The Organization Man* (New York, 1956); David Riesman with Nathan Glazer and Reuel Denney, *The Lonely Crowd: A Study of the Changing American Character* (New Haven, 1950); Robert Lindner, *Must You Conform?* (New York, 1956); Philip Wylie, *Generation of Vipers* (New York, 1942); Philip Wylie, "The Abdicating Male and How the Gray Flannel Mind Exploits Him through His Women," *Playboy,* 3 (Nov. 1956), 23–24, 50, 79; and Edward Strecker, *Their Mothers' Sons: The Psychiatrist Examines an American Problem* (Philadelphia, 1946).

[18] Ehrenreich, *Hearts of Men,* 34.

Esquire article demonstrates their convergence. Trying to stand above the fray, Schlesinger attributed the masculinity crisis that so many men were experiencing—evidenced by a growing male self-doubt and hysteria and by novelists' depictions of the male hero as "increasingly preoccupied with proving his virility" (a curious observation, coming from the author of *The Vital Center*)—to a conformist mass society and the sexual ambiguity it bred. "For a long time, [the American male] seemed utterly confident in his manhood . . . easy and definite in his sense of sexual identity," but by midcentury there were "multiplying signs . . . that something ha[d] gone badly wrong with [his] conception of himself." Echoing the conformity critics, Schlesinger blamed the "unmanning of American men" on mass society's "sinister" doctrine of "*togetherness,*" which compelled men to yield to an all-consuming group whose effect was to crush men's sense of self and thus to obliterate their manhood. In fact, mass society threatened all gender differences: "How can masculinity, femininity, or anything else survive in a homogenized society, which seeks steadily and benignly to eradicate all differences between the individuals who compose it?" If the self and the gender distinctions it establishes are undermined by mass society, man's only recourse is to "visualize" himself apart from the group. "The key to the recovery of masculinity lies . . . in the problem of identity. When a person begins to find out *who* he is, he is likely to find out rather soon what sex he is."[19]

While some male writers fretted about the insidious matriarchy responsible for men's undoing, Schlesinger cautioned restraint. Critics who blamed women for the unmanning of American men were hopelessly immature, hysterical, and just plain silly. "Masculine supremacy, like white supremacy, was the neurosis of an immature society," Schlesinger reminded his readers in the psychologizing language so characteristic of the time. Those "amiable prophets of an impending matriarchy . . . are too pessimistic." Women have made significant but uneven gains, he suggested, and the unseemly tendency to blame men's decline on female aggressiveness was tantamount to an admission that "the female was bound to win." For Schlesinger, the feminine and feminizing enemy was always "the group," which deceptively lures men into its "womblike security" yet is ultimately "aggressive, imperialistic, even vengeful, forever developing new weapons with which to overwhelm and crush the recalcitrant individual."[20]

In "The Crisis of American Masculinity" of 1958 Schlesinger returned to themes he first articulated years earlier in *The Vital Center*. As he had said in 1949, man is "tense, uncertain, adrift," growing in "forlornness, impotence and fear" as "organization towers higher and higher above him," ever more prone to "surrender [his] individuality to some massive, external authority" (the group, party, organization, collective, womb) rather than cope with the difficult business of being free (or its equivalent, being masculine). The womb metaphor looms large in both works; it is the place to which anxious man retreats in his "flight from anxiety." When, in the name of the new liberalism, *The Vital Center* declared boldly that the "campaign

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[19] Schlesinger, *Politics of Hope,* 237–46.
[20] *Ibid.,* 241–44.

against social anxiety has just begun," that campaign and the anxiety it sought to relieve had an extrapolitical meaning.[21]

Concerns about male softness are surely as old as man himself, expressions of a "crisis" in masculinity a recurrent feature of modernity. In particular, the late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century American society saw a surge of anxiety about manhood, as bureaucratization, urbanization, commercialization, and social reform undermined older sources of masculine identity. Critics worried that professional men were living a pampered life of ease; that the expanding, impersonal bureau-cracy doomed too many men to sedentary, unambitious lives of paper pushing; that urban boys lived a namby-pamby existence, enveloped by female influence. Luxury and idleness had long been scorned as emasculating. But the fear that males were internalizing feminine values provoked a new dread as critics decried the "overcivili-zation" of the nation by moralizing women and aggressive female reformers who attacked saloons and brothels. As the separate-spheres doctrine waned and the fron-tier closed, many turn-of-the-century men responded by redrawing gender lines and turning what were once necessary male attributes in need of restraint—aggression, passion, combativeness, strength—into male virtues in need of cultivation; hence the vogue of martial arts, competitive athletics, and the warrior ethic. The assertion of manliness had heavy ideological import: Roosevelt presented his ideal of the "strenuous life" as a solution to the pervasive "sissiness" that threatened the vitality and future of the nation. The Rough Rider president (whom Schlesinger so admired) reinvented the Progressive reformer as a man and a redeemer of manly vir-tues, and he justified imperialism and war as a means of masculine regeneration, playing on extant anxieties about manhood and helping shape them.[22]

If not a crisis in masculinity, at least a preoccupation with male regeneration was well underway by the turn of the century. And after the Bull Moose virility impulse had run its course, the problem of male identity was taken up in the 1920s and 1930s by experts and professionals who sought to foster proper sex-role socialization within the family. The problem of absent or distant fathers, excessive maternal influ-ence, and the "overfeminization" of boys became standard themes in academic and popular discourse, especially as external events, the Great Depression, World War II, posed new problems and burdens for American males.[23]

What was new, then, about male concerns in the 1940s and the 1950s? Certainly many themes in turn-of-the-century male discourse—the dangers of leisure, afflu-ence, corporatization, feminine influence, the decline of rugged rural life—resurface with new twists in postwar expressions of a masculinity crisis. The bureaucracy (now the organization) had grown in a way previously unimaginable; the issue became less

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[21] Schlesinger, *Vital Center,* 1, 53, 58, 171.

[22] On American masculinity, see E. Anthony Rotundo, *American Manhood: Transformations in Masculinity from the Revolution to the Modern Era* (New York, 1993); Michael Kimmel, *Manhood in America: A Cultural His-tory* (New York, 1996); Elizabeth Pleck and Joseph Pleck, eds., *The American Man* (Englewood Cliffs, 1980); Peter Filene, *Him/Her/Self: Sex Roles in Modern America* (Baltimore, 1975); and Joe L. Dubbert, *A Man's Place: Masculinity in Transition* (Englewood Cliffs, 1979). See Arnaldo Testi, "The Gender of Reform Politics: Theodore Roosevelt and the Culture of Masculinity," *Journal of American History,* 81 (March 1995), 1509–33.

[23] Robert L. Griswold, *Fatherhood in America: A History* (New York, 1993), esp. 94–118.

the impersonality of the workplace and more the *personality* it demanded of men—likable, groupist, and false. The middle class had expanded thanks to the postwar boom, and so too did suburban life and narrow gender-role ideals, which appeared to undermine male autonomy by dictating the well-adjusted man's role as successful husband-father-breadwinner. Mass culture proffered universalized images and norms, often experienced as banal and feminine as well as coercive. And unequaled consumption and white-collar work generated concerns about male physical fitness and vigor.[24]

Yet while turn-of-the-century men had focused on the twin problems of physical and characterological flabbiness—bolstering the body would help discipline the character—the problem for midcentury males could not be so readily addressed by the cultivation of outward physical manliness; at issue now was a wholesale *loss of self.* As critics and experts turned their attention to the male psyche, the American male, his psyche malleable and fragmented, became a victim as never before, prisoner of a "togetherness" ethos that seemed to reek of collectivism. That the forces responsible for the loss of self were elevated to the status of "isms"—"groupism," "momism"—suggests the new ideological context in which men's problems were often framed. Loss of self was no small concern in the age of the Cold War. The self was the necessary bulwark not simply against the false delicacies and coddled sensibilities that Henry James's hero Basil Ransom ranted about when he declared his generation sadly "womanized" but also against conformity's new mid-twentieth-century corollary: totalitarianism.[25] As such, the postwar expression of a crisis in masculinity, while stemming from a mixture of old and new trends, dislocations and fears, now carried unparalleled ideological weight.

The tendency of male critics in the 1940s and 1950s to blame women for men's emasculation surely had its precedent too in late-nineteenth-century cries of "over-civilization" at the hands of pushy, reforming women. The enemy for many midcentury male critics was less the female reformer (the forbidding image of Eleanor Roosevelt aside) and more the assertive, civilizing woman in the private sphere and a looming matriarchy emanating from the home. While the claims of midcentury male critics about women's influence on the male psyche were often overblown at best and absurd at worst, they do reflect unresolved anxieties about female roles. Elaine Tyler May's work has tracked complex connections between women's entry into the wartime work force, anxieties about female sexuality, and the rise of the Cold War, all of which underlay the revival of domesticity in the postwar years.[26] Exaggerated domestic ideals magnified an already vexing dilemma: when women wielded more power in the domestic sphere, that power was experienced as all too overwhelming.

Yet domesticity was not a monolith even within the white middle class. Its revival coexisted uneasily with other trends, including the continued rise of a female (and married) work force, women's participation in reform politics, peace movements,

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[24] On postwar preoccupation with male physical fitness, see Jesse Berrett, "Feeding the Organization Man: Diet and Masculinity in Postwar America," *Journal of Social History,* 30 (Summer 1997), 805–25.

[25] Henry James, *The Bostonians* (1886; New York, 1984), 327.

[26] Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York, 1988).

and organized labor, a new awareness of female achievement and capability born of the wartime experience, and a common assumption, voiced often in men's writings, that women were finally now politically, personally, and *sexually* emancipated. It is tempting to write off such an account as more imagined than real; the second wave of feminism had yet to begin, and we are accustomed to thinking of this era as a profoundly limited, conservative one for women. But we would do well to take male critics at their word and assume that they were reacting to something very real, if immeasurable: a heightening female self-assertiveness, nourished by World War II and the space for female autonomy it created and by postwar affluence, which brought Americans of both sexes greater expectations for individual self-fulfillment. Recent scholarship has suggested that the midcentury American women asserted themselves in public life in highly visible (and no doubt unsettling) ways. And male observers at the time perceived a growing sexual equalitarianism in private life. As Abram Kardiner, a popular writer and scholar of American sex roles, wrote in 1954, "The influence of feminism is not limited to those women who enter careers. All women today are feminists in that their expectations for themselves from marriage have changed." An exclusive focus on domesticity—with its implicit assumption of female subordination or conformity—as the *sine qua non* of women's postwar exist-ence obscures other aspects of women's lives and changes in relations between the sexes that revisionist historians are unraveling.[27]

Male critics' focus on mass society and its softening, feminizing features (includ-ing female assertiveness) led them to elide one possible source of male unease and insecurity: the militarization of the United States. Michael S. Sherry's work has stressed the extent to which war became an ever-present preoccupation of Ameri-cans during and after World War II, national security a consuming source of anxi-ety. Militarization exacts its own conformity; the assertion of United States global superiority its own burdens and frustrations; the threat of nuclear war its own sense of dread, powerlessness, or impotence. Male critics typically eschewed such issues; even Schlesinger, who was elsewhere concerned with issues of war and global con-flict, did not explicitly consider them as possible sources of the masculinity crisis. Yet if male writers typically located men's problems within the contours of mass society, the assumption that the latter was softening the nation's men coexisted alongside nagging doubts that American men were prepared to meet the demands of a hypermilitarized nation. Uncertainties about the hardness of the nation's cold warriors hovered over the manhood debate, surfacing frankly in a widely cited 1946 book by the psychiatrist Edward Strecker warning of the rising numbers of young

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[27] Abram Kardiner, *Sex and Morality* (Indianapolis, 1954), 233. For revisionist historians' challenges to the assumption that the domestic ideal was pervasive in the postwar United States, see Joanne Meyerowitz, ed., *Not June Cleaver: Women and Gender in Postwar America, 1945–1960* (Philadelphia 1994); Joanne Meyerowitz, "Beyond the Feminine Mystique: A Reassessment of Postwar Mass Culture, 1946–1958," *Journal of American History,* 79 (March 1993), 1455–82; Daniel Horowitz, *Betty Friedan and the Making of the Feminine Mystique: The American Left, the Cold War, and Modern Feminism* (Amherst, 1998); and Eva Moskowitz, "'It's Good to Blow Your Top': Women's Magazines and a Discourse of Discontent, 1945–1965," *Journal of Women's History,* 8 (Fall 1996), 66–98.

men deemed incapable of coping with soldierly discipline and rigor and rejected by or discharged from the military. For Strecker, such "immaturity"— the end result of excessive mothering that left American children "enwombed psychologically"—was "our gravest menace" and a "threat to our survival" as a democratic civilization.[28]

Political concerns found their way into professional and popular psychology, while the language and preoccupations of professional and pop psychology found their way into political discourse, to which Schlesinger's rhetoric of maturity and womblike retreat bears witness.[29] But was the crisis real? Was masculinity on the decline? Masculinity is an ideal, and insofar as there was a growing disparity between the ideal itself and the avenues available for white middle-class men to realize that ideal, there was in fact a "crisis," hyperbole aside. For better or worse, the sources of an older male identity—based on individual initiative and achievement, autonomy and mastery, male prerogative in public life and patriarchal authority in the home— *were* eroding. And while midcentury male critics were surely reacting to trends that were over half a century in the making, those trends were vastly accelerated in the 1940s and 1950s, magnified at the very moment when easy military security became a faint memory.

World War II not only ushered in a heightened concern with national defense and an uneasy sense of vulnerability; as a catalyst for rapid social and economic change, it altered sexual and racial relations.[30] The exaltation of the nuclear family and the revival of domestic ideals emerged in part as a defense against an unrestrained (female) sexuality and the rising tide of working women in the 1940s and 1950s—writ large during the war when women flooded into the labor force and experienced some relative autonomy. And if manhood was defined by a sense of mastery over one's world and authority over others, then cumulative social, political, economic, and sexual trends—including a postwar civil rights movement whose challenge to white dominance was implicitly a challenge to white male authority—undercut an older ideal of manhood.

But something else in this disjuncture may account for the shrillness of male rhetoric (political and otherwise) and the emphasis placed not just on manliness per se but on male heterosexuality, and perhaps it was the inevitable corollary to a perceived crisis in masculinity: fear of homosexuality. In 1958 Schlesinger stressed that the arrival of mass society meant loss of self, and loss of self meant loss of gender identity, and while we have "not yet quite reached [a] condition of sexual chaos," the implication was that we were fast approaching it. As evidence of a masculinity crisis, he observed that homosexuality was "enjoying a cultural boom new in our history"; in a theater review of 1957 he called "homosexual anxiety" an "increasingly

[28] On the militarization of the United States, see Michael S. Sherry, *In the Shadow of War: The United States since the 1930s* (New Haven, 1995). For criticism of excessive mothering, see Strecker, *Their Mothers' Sons,* 219; and David M. Levy, *Maternal Overprotection* (New York, 1943).

[29] On the nexus between professional psychology and Cold War political culture, see Ellen Herman, *The Romance of American Psychology: Political Culture in the Age of Experts* (Berkeley, 1995).

[30] See James T. Patterson, *Grand Expectations: The United States, 1945–74* (New York, 1996); William Chafe, *The Unfinished Journey: America since World War II* (New York, 1986); and Godfrey Hodgson, *America in Our Time* (New York, 1976).

prevalent obsession of our theater, if not of our age." Lurking beneath the crisis in masculinity was often the specter of an expansionist homosexuality.[31]

Fears of sexual chaos in American culture were not new in the early Cold War years, nor was gay-baiting in the partisan political arena entirely novel, but the perception that homosexuality was becoming ever more prevalent in the United States was new. The Kinsey report brought the issue into the national spotlight in 1948; its data suggesting unexpectedly high rates of same-sex male attraction and sexual relations and the observation that homosexuals often passed as straight raised the possibility that there were more gay men in the country than previously thought. In his 1957 book, *America as a Civilization,* Max Lerner noted the "uneasy sense" in the early 1950s that homosexuality was increasing in the United States, an assumption voiced by many observers and social critics at the time. Whether a male homosexual orientation was attributed to the effects of a self-crushing, impersonal mass society, an increasingly matriarchal family, or a growing secularism and moral laxity, the perception that it was dramatically on the rise helps distinguish the sexual anxiety of this period from that of earlier periods.[32]

Despite the popular (and deserved) reputation of the 1940s and the 1950s as a repressive era for gay Americans, homosexuality may have been more visible than ever before. According to historians of sexuality, World War II was a watershed in gay and lesbian history, a nationwide "coming out experience" for many gay members of the military. Uprooting men and women from their homes and local neighborhoods, the war brought them together in sex-segregated units and provided a space in which to pursue same-sex relationships. The rise of gay and lesbian urban enclaves in the postwar years suggests that the war helped establish a larger or at least more noticeable gay subculture in America. If World War II was a national coming out experience for so many, surely such a watershed did not go unnoticed by tense heterosexual observers, whose definition of manhood always rested on the tacit assumption — so axiomatic it hardly needed articulation (*until now?*) — of male heterosexuality.[33]

Nor did the issue of homosexuality escape the notice of some critics of conformity. If it was a coincidence that Riesman's only example of another other-directed culture was fifth-century Greece, there was no subtext to decipher in the work of the psychoanalyst Robert Lindner, whose 1956 tract *Must You Conform?* devoted a chapter to the male homosexual, whose rise Lindner blamed on the conformist "sex-

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[31] Schlesinger, *Politics of Hope,* 238, 244, 252–53.

[32] On fears of sexual chaos at various points in United States history, see John D'Emilio and Estelle B. Freedman, *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America* (New York, 1988). On the use of sexually charged rhetoric as a partisan political weapon in the Gilded Age, see Richard Hofstadter, *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life* (1962; New York, 1966), 184–90. Alfred Kinsey et al., *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* (Philadelphia, 1948), 610–66. For speculations that male homosexuality was on the rise, see Max Lerner, *America as a Civilization* (New York, 1957), 683; Kardiner, *Sex and Morality,* 160–64; Wylie, *Generation of Vipers,* 68; Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (1963; New York, 1984), 274–76; and Nathan Glazer and David Riesman, "Intellectuals and the Discontented Classes," in *Radical Right,* ed. Bell, 119.

[33] John D'Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities: The Making of a Homosexual Minority in the United States, 1940–1970* (Chicago, 1983), 23–39; D'Emilio and Freedman, *Intimate Matters,* 288–91; Allan Berube, *Coming Out under Fire: The History of Gay Men and Women in World War Two* (New York, 1990). For an autobiographical perspective on the period, see Martin Duberman, *Cures: A Gay Man's Odyssey* (New York, 1991).

denying" culture of the time, which constrained heterosexual relations and left them fraught with excessive tension for many men. (Only on the issue of homosexuality was this critic's answer to the question "must you conform?" an unequivocal yes. Homosexuality was a "negative" form of nonconformity, Lindner insisted, "despite the benefits claimed for it as a way of life by its many apologists, e.g. Plato.") Anxieties about male homosexuality also found their way into several 1950s anticonformity films. The 1955 film *Rebel without a Cause* (the title borrowed from Lindner's earlier book by the same name), which linked the masculinity crisis to the rise of juvenile delinquency by dramatizing the gender role reversals within Jim Stark's (James Dean's) troubled family, also displayed a subtle unease about male homosexuality. Sal Mineo's nearly parentless character, Plato, was depicted as excessively needy and immature, even psychotic; his name an arguable marker of his latent homosexuality. *Tea and Sympathy* (1956), another film concerned with male conformity and critical of competitive male norms, implied (as overtly as was possible in a film) that male roles were so ridiculously rigid that a young man might flee from manhood and thus begin a slide toward homosexuality.[34]

The belief that male homosexuality was an adaptational response to the burdens of manhood and thus a flight from masculinity reflected a new trend among midcentury psychoanalysts who began to locate the causes of homosexuality in external social phenomena (as opposed to innate biological-libidinal drives). While the belief that homosexuality was a pathology continued, the idea that it could be culturally and socially induced was popularized by psychoanalysts such as Abram Kardiner, whose 1954 *Sex and Morality* tried to explain the apparent rise in male homosexuality in recent years. Kardiner denied that such an increase could be explained biologically ("no biological variant can increase one hundred per cent in a period of thirteen years"). Shifting the focus from biology and the individual to culture and society, he suggested that the large-scale "flight from masculinity" stemmed from stepped-up male role expectations and twentieth-century social disorders (from the "instrumental use of human beings" to "universal anxiety and the fear of annihilation"). Though no consensus existed among midcentury experts on the root cause of a male homosexual orientation—most psychiatrists attributed it to family dynamics, that is, weak fathers and strong mothers (patterns that could themselves be socially induced)—the notion that homosexuality was in large part an acquired trait that resulted from men's "adaptive failure" to cope with modern life gained an audience.[35]

The adaptational theory implied that any man plagued by excessive adaptive fail-

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[34] Lindner, *Must You Conform?*, 31–76, esp. 43, 64; *Rebel without a Cause*, dir. Nicholas Ray (Warner Bros., 1955); *Tea and Sympathy*, dir. Vincente Minnelli (MGM, 1956). The title of the film *Rebel without a Cause* comes from Robert Lindner, *Rebel without a Cause: The Story of a Criminal Psychopath* (New York, 1944). Yet the film's content corresponds more with themes in Lindner's later *Must You Conform?* For a more generous reading of *Tea and Sympathy*, see George Chauncey's essay in *Past Imperfect: History According to the Movies*, ed. Mark C. Carnes (New York, 1996), 258–61.

[35] Kardiner, *Sex and Morality*, 160–92, esp. 160, 164, 190; Lionel Ovesey, "The Homosexual Conflict: An Adaptational Analysis," *Psychiatry*, 17 (Aug. 1954), 243–50, esp. 247; Hendrik M. Ruitenbeek, ed., *The Problem of Homosexuality in Modern Society* (New York, 1963). For commentary on this discourse, see D'Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities*, 140–45.

ures could conceivably relinquish heterosexuality and adopt a homosexual orientation. In *Look*'s "The Decline of the American Male" series, one writer, citing "experts," warned that men left passive or fatigued by the many burdens now placed on them (including those by sexually aggressive women) might in a worst-case scenario become sexually impotent, desert their families, and/or retreat into homosexuality in a "flight from masculinity."[36] Such was the implication, too, in Schlesinger's references to the new cultural "boom" in homosexuality as male self-doubt grew in a mass society. The potential consequence of a crisis in masculinity—homosexual retreat—loomed over the manhood discourse as it had not before.

Although surely transhistorical and transcultural, anxieties about sexuality are embedded within complex social relations that shape their form and expression at given historical moments. Yet charting over time something as intangible as expressions of virility and their cultural or psychological origins raises a host of questions. How do we historicize sexual anxieties—their quantity, form, level of intensity, sources? Determining the level and form of anxieties about manhood in 1950 as opposed to 1900 is complicated by the advent of professional psychology and the mass media, whose experts increasingly defined universal sexual norms to an ever-larger audience and then declared perpetual "crises" upon discovery of their absence. Even so, if Teddy Roosevelt's blunt, undiluted call to recover a lost physical strength and manly character was one indicator of impulses in turn-of-the-century American life, can we say that those impulses were qualitatively different from the kind that Schlesinger and others expressed half a century later? Arguably more tension-fraught, erotically charged, and self-consciously heterosexual, might midcentury male rhetoric reflecting the masculinity crisis suggest a society in which the older restraints on sexuality and sexual behavior—still largely in place in 1900 despite the waning of separate spheres—were breaking down with disconcerting speed, a society that would in due time experience an unprecedented sexual revolution?

Clearly the cultural-sexual milieu within which postwar men grappled with the meaning of manhood had changed profoundly from that of Roosevelt's time. By the late 1940s, social, economic, and market forces were encouraging a new current of sexual modernism, often expressed in popular media, that bumped fitfully (as the first Kinsey report had in 1948) against an official ideology that insisted on allegiance to the nuclear family and sexual restraint. From the debates over the publication of *Lolita* and Christine Jorgensen's sex-change operation to the proliferation of sex and marriage manuals and the greater willingness to discuss female sexual needs, sexual impotence, and homosexuality more frankly, midcentury sexual discourse raised previously buried, unmentionable, or unconfronted issues and phantoms for men. And in an era of accelerated social change in which male writers were chafing against the prescribed male role and all that came with it—the constraints of breadwinning, family life, and the togetherness ethos, the conformity induced by the organization or overly demanding women—it is not entirely surprising that

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[36] J. Robert Moskin, "Why Do Women Dominate Him?," in *Look, Decline of the American Male,* 3–24, esp. 12, 22.

the image of the homosexual loomed over the manhood discourse. At once a figure of terrifying fear, buried envy, and loathing, he appeared to have what many male critics (not yet attuned to the cultural trends that would later sanction a male flight from commitment) seemed ultimately to desire: freedom from marital commitment, ease of sexual relations, and a kind of power over his life that conventional male roles precluded.[37]

If the male homosexual became a sexual bogeyman by the early 1950s, it is perhaps no coincidence that he also became a threat to national security. As John D'Emilio has shown, fear of homosexuality surfaced in the political arena in an unprecedented fashion. When Undersecretary of State John Puerifoy revealed in 1950 that most of the ninety-one employees recently dismissed from the State Department were homosexuals, politicians expressed alarm at what had long been rumored about the diplomatic corps but never so publicly confirmed. Conservatives quickly turned the issue to their advantage. GOP party chairman Guy Gabrielson circulated a letter to thousands of party members saying that "sexual perverts . . . have infiltrated our government" and were "perhaps as dangerous as the actual Communists." He spoke of the new "homosexual angle" in Washington and advised Republicans to express their outrage, especially since "decency" prevented the media from discussing the matter too openly. The Republican floor leader in the Senate, Kenneth Wherry, called for a full inquiry into the presence of homosexuals in government.[38]

The result was to unleash what D'Emilio has called the image of the "homosexual menace." That image rested on the notion that homosexuals were by definition morally bankrupt and, as such, politically suspect. As Wherry explained to the *New York Post*'s Max Lerner in 1950, "you can't hardly separate homosexuals from subversives. Mind you, I don't say every homosexual is a subversive, and I don't say every subversive is a homosexual. But a man of low morality is a menace in the government, whatever he is, and they are all tied up together." The senator also claimed that Joseph Stalin had obtained Adolf Hitler's "world list" of homosexuals who could be enlisted for the purposes of subversion. Thus Wherry's call for measures to secure "seaports and major cities against sabotage through [a] conspiracy of subversives and moral perverts in government establishments."[39]

The outcome of the Senate investigation was the report *Employment of Homosex-*

[37] On the cultural currents from *Playboy* magazine to humanistic psychology that encouraged a male flight from commitment, see Ehrenreich, *Hearts of Men.*

[38] On postwar sexual anxieties and the fear of homosexuality, see George Chauncey Jr., "The Postwar Sex Crime Panic," in *True Stories from the American Past,* ed. William Graebner (New York, 1993), 160–78; and Estelle B. Freedman, "'Uncontrolled Desires': The Response to the Sexual Psychopath, 1920–1960," *Journal of American History,* 74 (June 1987), 83–106. On the purge of the State Department and the partisan political reaction, see D'Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities,* 40–53, esp. 41.

[39] On the "homosexual menace," see John D'Emilio, *Making Trouble: Essays on Gay History, Politics, and the University* (New York, 1992), 57–73. For Kenneth Wherry's statements, see Max Lerner, *The Unfinished Country: A Book of American Symbols* (New York, 1959), 313–16, esp. 313; and Nicholas Von Hoffman, *Citizen Cohn: The Life and Times of Roy Cohn* (1988; New York, 1992), 130.

uals and Other Sex Perverts in Government. The report's operative assumption was that "those who engage in overt acts of perversion lack the emotional stability of normal persons." Because their "moral fiber" had allegedly been weakened by sexual indulgence and because they were compromised by a socially unacceptable affliction that left them vulnerable to extortion, the report deemed homosexuals blackmail-prone and thus national security risks. Echoing Kinsey's observation that the outward appearance of homosexuals did not always correspond to the stereotype of the effete male, the report called for more rigorous efforts to detect and remove homosexuals in government.[40]

McCarthy, for one, understood all too well the utility of the homosexuality issue, hence his "Communist and queer" epithets. When questions arose about his list of Communists who had allegedly infiltrated the State Department, McCarthy, lacking evidence, fell back on a guilt-by-association strategy and stressed to his Senate colleagues that a few cases involved homosexuality and revealed the "unusual mental aberrations of certain individuals in the department," citing "one of our top intelligence men" who believed that practically every Communist is "twisted mentally or physically in some way." McCarthy continued thereafter to employ the image of the homosexual menace to bolster his charge of twenty years of treason.[41]

Other conservatives used the homosexuality issue to put Democrats on the run. Thomas Dewey blamed the Truman administration for tolerating sex offenders in government. The excitable *New York Daily News* considered homosexual subversion the "primary issue" of the 1950 congressional race: "The foreign policy of the U.S., even before World War II, was dominated by an all-powerful, super-secret, inner circle of highly educated, socially highly placed sexual misfits in the State Department, all easy to blackmail, all susceptible to blandishments by homosexuals in foreign nations." When Rev. Billy Graham praised the patriots who were "exposing the pinks, the lavenders, and the reds who have sought refuge beneath the wings of the American Eagle," liberals, homosexuals, and Communists had been linked by virtue of their common moral weaknesses. To the far Right, the pink-lavender-red trinity was inseparable from its affluent breeding grounds: the eastern establishment, the Ivy League, and the State Department.[42]

For some observers, such associations may have been suggested by the sexual subtext of the Alger Hiss case. In many ways, the personal drama of its two principal actors was paradigmatic for the era unfolding. Hiss, a Harvard Law School graduate, New Deal liberal, and former official in Franklin D. Roosevelt's State Department, was accused in 1948 by the former Communist party operative Whittaker Chambers of passing classified State Department documents to the Soviet Union in the 1930s. By now both a devout Catholic and an anticommunist, Chambers privately

[40] U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Expenditures in the Executive Departments, *Employment of Homosexuals and Other Sex Perverts in Government,* 81 Cong., 2 sess., Nov. 27, 1950, pp. 3–11, esp. 4.

[41] Reeves, *Life and Times of Joe McCarthy,* 240–57, esp. 240.

[42] On Republican reactions, see D'Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities,* 41. For the statements by *New York Daily News* and Billy Graham, see Stephen J. Whitfield, *The Culture of the Cold War* (Baltimore, 1991), 44–45.

confessed to the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) that he had been gay in the 1930s, claiming to have "conquered" his homosexual "affliction" at the same time he presumably conquered his Communist "affliction." That the defense would raise the issue of Chambers's homosexuality in court (which in any case became widely known) to discredit him was doubtful, since the FBI had learned that Hiss's stepson had been discharged from the navy for an alleged homosexual offense. The FBI's "hints" about its discovery of this information apparently prevented Priscilla Hiss's son from testifying altogether. Defense lawyers begged Hiss to let his stepson take the witness stand to refute Chambers's testimony about crucial facts at issue in the case. Hiss, however, fearing the consequences for his wife's son, nixed the only defense strategy that might have helped him win an acquittal.[43]

While some observers speculated about a previous infatuation with Hiss on Chambers's part or even a past sexual relationship between Chambers and Hiss or Hiss's stepson—something that might explain disparities in the two sides' account of the nature of their past friendship—what is significant here is not the truth of such speculations, but the ideological fallout of the case's subtext. Chambers's self-proclaimed sexual affliction fed the imagination that linked political subversion and "sexual perversion"; his mysterious friendship with Hiss in the 1930s implicated the latter in Chambers's murky past. And although the sexual overtones of the case did not result in explicit accusations that Hiss was homosexual, he did become the pro-totypical weak-willed, effete, treasonous eastern establishment liberal, whose soft-ness left him prone to transgressions of a political, moral, and perhaps even of a sexual nature. And for Cold War liberals such as Schlesinger, who lamented the sor-did liaisons of the Popular Front days, Hiss was no doubt the model for the Dough-face-turned-accomplice-of-Stalin and thus for liberalism's ill-fated flirtation with Communism in the 1930s.

The connections between liberals, subversives, and homosexuals (and the State Department, Hiss's terrain) were slyly alluded to by McCarthy in his 1952 mani-festo, *McCarthyism: The Fight for America.* Citing the Senate report on "homosexu-als and other sex perverts" in that election year broadside, McCarthy pointed out that "in addition to the security question, . . . individuals who are morally weak and perverted and who are representing the State Department . . . certainly detract from the prestige of this nation." He proceeded to attack Acheson (who had vowed not to turn his back on his friend Hiss), stressing that it was Acheson who had sent Hiss to Yalta and thus conjuring up a conspiratorial connection between pinks, reds, and lavenders.[44]

The image of the effete "striped-pants diplomat" of the State Department was not McCarthy's invention, however; by the early 1950s the diplomatic corps had become an object of derision and ridicule in some political circles. The tendency to

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[43] Most accounts of the Hiss-Chambers case mention the sexuality issue and its relevance to the case. See Allen Weinstein, *Perjury: The Hiss-Chambers Case* (New York, 1978), 383–84. For an autobiographical account, see Whittaker Chambers, *Witness* (New York, 1952). On the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and Alger Hiss's stepson, see Curt Gentry, *J. Edgar Hoover: The Man and the Secrets* (New York, 1991), 363.

[44] Joseph McCarthy, *McCarthyism: The Fight for America* (New York, 1952), 14–15, 23–24.
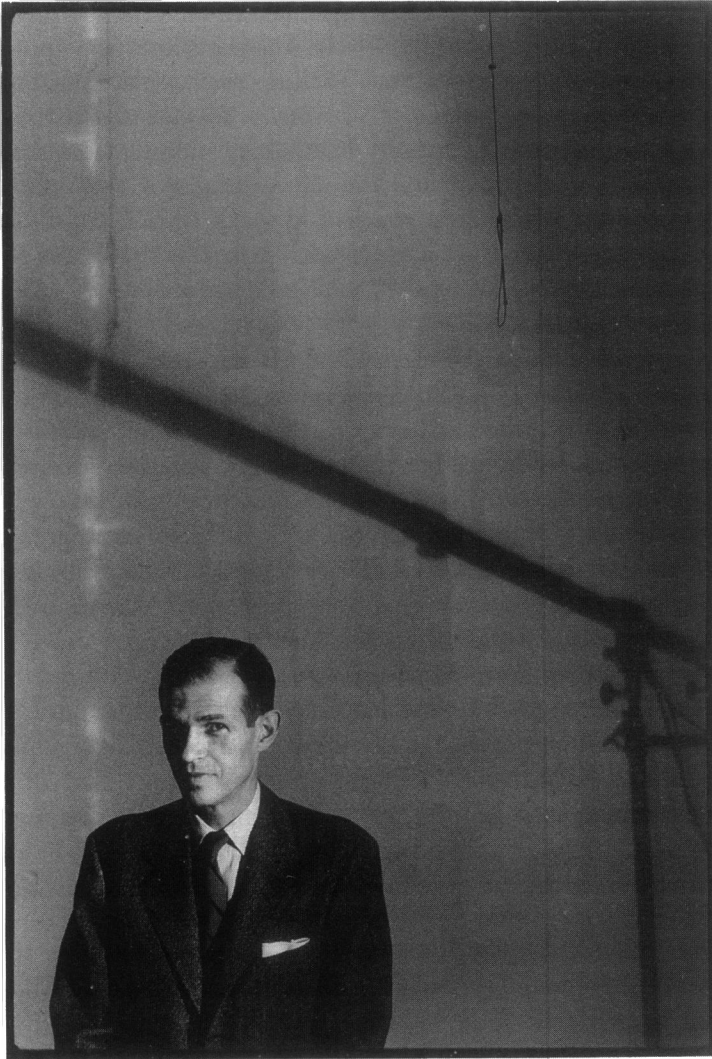
The epitome of the eastern establishment liberal, Alger Hiss in
1957, almost a decade after Whittaker Chambers first named
him as a Communist and a Soviet espionage agent. Hiss
was convicted of perjury in 1950. The Hiss case
put Democrats on the defensive for the
next ten years.
Photograph by Elliot Erwitt.
Courtesy of Magnum Photos, Inc.

link homosexuality with the State Department went back to the early 1940s; the
notion of aristocratic "sexual misfits" undermining United States foreign policy was
clearly a reference to Sumner Welles, FDR's undersecretary of state, who resigned
amid allegations of homosexuality. Yet insinuations about the diplomatic corps

could be heard from all partisan quarters, even before the Puerifoy speech. *The Vital Center* made oblique reference to the "effete" men at State who "pushed cookies" and wore "handkerchiefs in their sleeves," hailing their replacement by more able, expert men. The conservative authors of *Washington Confidential,* a 1951 best-selling tell-all exposé of the "dirtiest community in America" that targeted the capital's dissolute "parlor pinks," joked that "until the recent purges of the State Department, there was a gag around Washington you had to speak with a British accent, wear a homburg hat, or have a queer quirk if you wanted to get by the guards at the door."[45]

Others took the State Department's reputation more seriously. In 1953 John Foster Dulles instructed Charles Bohlen, the newly appointed ambassador to the Soviet Union, to travel to his post on the same plane with his wife. Such a scenario would presumably quell any doubts that Bohlen was less than a "normal" family man. The Harvard-educated Bohlen, who had been close to the Roosevelt and Truman administrations and present at Yalta, had been the subject of a security-clearance investigation into his private life and sexual preferences, which were insinuated to be for men.[46]

The first gay advocacy organization in the United States, the Mattachine Society, worried some observers. Founded in 1951 by several ex–Communist party members, the society came under the scrutiny of the *Los Angeles Mirror* in 1953. Reporting Mattachine leaders' Communist party ties, the *Mirror* warned readers that homosexuals were known national security risks and that, if united, they could potentially "swing tremendous political power." The FBI must have concurred; it infiltrated the Mattachine Society in the 1950s and kept the organization under constant surveillance. Whatever J. Edgar Hoover's own sexual orientation (in response to FBI harassment, Mattachine leaders made their own arguably ironic point by putting the director on the society's regular mailing list), Hoover used the same "logic" that linked moral, sexual, and political subversion as did other anticommunists. His pledges to root out "sex deviates" from the FBI, his surveillance and smear campaigns against sexually suspect political enemies, and his profile of the "maladjusted" Communist in his book *Masters of Deceit*—all suggest that for Hoover the enemy was sexual as well as ideological. And like other anticommunists, he depicted the typical Communist as "neurotic" and "twisted" and cited, among other reasons why people joined the party, "sexual pleasure."[47]

Though Hoover did not elaborate on the nature of that sexual pleasure, other critics pondered the psychosexual basis of the Communist party's erotic lure. The scholar John Kosa noted the party's appeal to the lonely, neurotic person who gains "an almost sexual satisfaction from his relationship with the Communist move-

[45] On the Sumner Welles episode, see Gentry, *J. Edgar Hoover,* 307–10. Schlesinger, *Vital Center,* 166–67; Lee Mortimer and Jack Lait, *Washington Confidential* (New York, 1951), 9–11, 90–97.

[46] Gentry, *J. Edgar Hoover,* 436; David M. Oshinsky, *A Conspiracy So Immense: The World of Joe McCarthy* (New York, 1983), 287–93.

[47] On the *Los Angeles Mirror* article and FBI surveillance of the Mattachine Society, see D'Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities,* 76, 124. On J. Edgar Hoover and the Mattachine Society, see Anthony Summers, *Official and Confidential: The Secret Life of J. Edgar Hoover* (London, 1993), 84, 93. J. Edgar Hoover, *Masters of Deceit* (New York, 1958), 102–5.

ment." Always attuned to the red psyche, Schlesinger stressed more pointedly the "psychology of clandestinity" that Communists found enticing, comparing their ability to identify each other on casual meeting to the way homosexuals allegedly identify each other: "by the use of certain phrases, the names of certain friends, by certain enthusiasms and certain silences. It is reminiscent of . . . the famous scene in Proust where the Baron de Charlus and the tailor Jupien suddenly recognize their common corruption."[48]

Whether it was Marcel Proust who provided the operative model for the high-brow crowd or the Hiss-Chambers drama that fed the imagination of less erudite observers, the threat of Communism became entangled with the threat of an unrestrained sexuality and, by extension, homosexuality. Surely sexually loaded rhetoric and lavender-baiting served personal, partisan, or nationalistic interests for those who sought to stigmatize political enemies and shore up their own manly, heterosexual credentials. This was the view of David Riesman and Nathan Glazer, who in 1955 attributed right-wing attacks on "sissified" liberals to an exploitation of the growing fear of homosexuality in America. The homosexual, the authors observed, had become "a much more feared enemy than the Negro." What Michael Rogin has more recently called "political demonology" has a long, complex history in American political culture; sexual fears and fantasies have often underlain the demonization of those perceived as a threat to American order and civility.[49]

As a political weapon, sexually charged rhetoric clearly relied upon real anxieties about both Communism and sexuality. Just what was the nature of those anxieties and how might they be linked? While similar in their rhetorical expression (for example, the imagery of penetration), are fears of Communism and fears of an unrestrained sexuality *parallel* fears that derive from separate sources and intersect only at the point of heightened national security concerns?[50]

To some observers, sexual containment was necessary for the containment of Communism. Indeed, an Indiana Catholic archdiocesan newspaper attacked Kinsey's studies (which showed that Americans were hardly chaste) because they "pave the way for people to *believe in* communism and to *act like* Communists." Yet here, as elsewhere, a deeper connection was being made between sexuality, Communism, and liberalism, suggesting anxieties that were not just parallel but deeply intertwined in their origins. To Billy Graham, the word "tolerant" was synonymous with "liberal" and "broad-minded."[51] Liberal permissiveness and moral relativism, it

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[48] John Kosa, *Two Generations of Soviet Man* (Chapel Hill, 1962), 155; Schlesinger, *Vital Center,* 127, 163.

[49] Glazer and Riesman, "Intellectuals and the Discontented Classes," 119; Rogin, *Ronald Reagan, the Movie,* esp. 236–300.

[50] Metaphors of gender, sexuality, and disease permeated national security discourse during the Cold War and rigid gender roles and restrictive policies toward sexual "deviants" in government were understood as crucial to tranquillity and national security, according to Geoffrey S. Smith, "National Security and Personal Isolation: Sex, Gender, and Disease in the Cold-War United States," *International History Review,* 14 (May 1992), 307–37. An analysis of Cold War–era scandal magazines suggests parallels between portrayals of Communists and homosexuals: Barbara Epstein, "Anti-Communism, Homophobia, and the Construction of Masculinity in the Postwar U.S.," *Critical Sociology,* 20 (no. 3, 1994), 21–44.

[51] For the statements by the Indiana Catholic archdiocesan newspaper and Billy Graham, see Whitfield, *Culture of the Cold War,* 80, 186.

seemed, invited the subversion and perversion of all that was normal and sacred: freedom, God, private property, the family, and *sex polarity*. Communism, insofar as it was the final, hideous denouement of liberal-progressive inclusivity and naïveté, overturned all "natural" hierarchies and relations—free man and the state, God and man, the individual and the collective, and at a most basic level, man and woman. Popular depictions of hard, mannish Soviet women and slavish, emasculated Soviet men provided one negative referent against which the United States could be defined, its moral superiority imagined, its order and civility restored.

So too did the liberal imagination project a loss of order and a reversal of hierarchies onto the enemy; so too did liberal rhetoric obliquely promise deliverance from chaos, sexual and otherwise. Schlesinger's brand of liberal anticommunism, with its opposition between free individualistic virile man and collectivist state-subservient feminized man, its emphasis on the human potential for evil and corruption underlined by the theologian Reinhold Niebuhr, and its functional, Christian realist–tinged rhetoric—freedom is christened a "fighting *faith*" in *The Vital Center*—shared with conservative anticommunism anxieties and ideological appeals expressed by the latter less self-consciously. In the end, Schlesinger's images of "secret, sweaty, furtive" relations between comrades made a point that conservative, avowedly religious anti-communists (typically snubbed by the more secular, cosmopolitan liberal intelligentsia) often made: Communism turns everything on its head and destroys the boundaries of individual identity, boundaries that establish gender.

When viewed from the vantage point of sexuality, anticommunism was more than a defense against Communism (or liberalism); in its broadest cultural manifestations and most feverish imaginings, it was a defense against America itself—its self-indulgence, its godlessness, its laxity and apathy, its lack of boundaries, its creeping sexual modernism—which is why it could be so readily wedded to family values and sexual containment. Norman Mailer may have overstated his case in 1960 when he said that "the excessive hysteria of the Red wave was no preparation to face an enemy, but rather a terror of the national self: free-loving, lust-looting, atheistic, implacable."[52] But it is hard to escape the conclusion that underlying the excesses and absurdities of anticommunist rhetoric—of which the image of the communist-as-homosexual was only the most lurid—was an anxiety about unsettling trends at home as well as abroad, not least among them sexual modernism. That creeping sexual modernism—whether it was evidenced by the decline of masculinity, the rising tide of working women or assertive wives, Alfred Kinsey's portrait of the collective sexual sins of the nation, or the rise of gay and lesbian communities in the postwar United States—was projected onto an enemy whose quasi-Victorian culture and rigid material theology made it an altogether unworthy repository of American anxieties and frustrations.

To say that the specter of sexual chaos underlay certain fears of and fantasies about Communism is not to say that sexual modernism caused anticommunism; rather it was a source of an anxiety that gave the emergent opposition to Commu-

[52] Norman Mailer, *The Presidential Papers of Norman Mailer* (1960; New York, 1964), 40.

nism an ideological unity and a moral intensity and purpose that could be immediately and viscerally felt. It helped to lay the basis for what Bell called "the equation of Communism with sin," thereby elevating the Communist issue from the level of a serious national security matter to the level of a *moral* issue worthy of extraordinary fervor. And the more that resistance to the red menace became entangled with homegrown fears and frustrations, the more it became a useful medium for the expression of so many extra-Communist concerns. Whatever else anticommunism most certainly was, once unleashed in the culture it served to redefine America against the tide of social change, operating in some cases as an ideological buffer against discomforting postwar trends or perceived social ills. Racial integration, secularism, materialism, apathy, commercialism, conformity, youth rebellion, Jewish upward mobility, internationalism, and welfare statism were among the trends that were not infrequently imagined as subversive to American order and thus discouraged under the aegis of anticommunism. Sexual modernism was uniquely disquieting inasmuch as it could be so readily personalized; fears of being less than a real man, less than a real woman, less than heterosexual, less than *normal* could strike deep emotional chords in a way that fears of materialism or secularism or perhaps even the bomb could not.[53]

If the reputation for softness became something like the political kiss of death, the ultimate casualty of the anxieties of the era may have been Adlai Stevenson. Stevenson had all of the attributes that the right wing suspected: an Ivy League pedigree, style, intellect, a penchant for verbosity, and a prior association with Hiss. (He had vouched for Hiss's character in the first trial.) Anticommunism was at its high point in 1952, and the fallout from the Hiss and Rosenberg cases, the "loss of China," and the first Soviet explosion of an atomic bomb—all of which occurred under a fifth successive Democratic administration—surely meant that any Democrat would have been at a considerable disadvantage. Yet at a time when Sen. Everett Dirksen could promise that, if elected, Republicans would drive all "lavender lads" out of the State Department, Stevenson was unusually vulnerable to a campaign to impugn his manhood.[54]

Perhaps in no other United States presidential election was hard/soft imagery more conspicuous. The *New York Daily News* called Stevenson "Adelaide" and claimed he "trilled" his speeches in a "fruity voice." His proponents were "Harvard lace-cuff liberals," "lace-panty diplomats" who, in the face of McCarthy's charges, wailed in "perfumed anguish" and sometimes "giggled" about anticommunism. McCarthy, who saw a kindred spirit in the Republican vice presidential candidate, Richard M. Nixon, predicted that a Nixon victory would be "a body blow to the Communist

[53] Bell, "Interpretations of American Politics," 64. Hofstadter observed long ago that the radical right was engaged in a revolt against modernity emanating from America's heartland and fueled by grievances and anxieties associated with modernization and social change. Hofstadter, *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life,* 40–44.
[54] For Everett Dirksen's statement, see Whitfield, *Culture of the Cold War,* 44.

conspiracy" and threatened to expose the "pinks, pansies and punks" on the Steven-son campaign staff. And while Dwight D. Eisenhower took the high road with his tough-minded "Korea, corruption and Communism" platform, his running mate used the strategy that had served him so well in the past, implying that his opponent was a hopelessly soft Communist dupe. Nixon called Stevenson "Adlai the appeaser," a "Ph.D. from Dean Acheson's cowardly college of Communist containment."[55]

Even when Stevenson was not explicitly charged with effeminacy, the contrast between Eisenhower's paternal, military persona and reputation as an *ordinary* American and Stevenson's sophistication, style, and "teacup words" left the latter at an oft-noted disadvantage. Stevenson's speech at the Democratic convention no doubt projected weakness more than the humility and integrity he wanted to project. "I accept your nomination," he said, adding "I should have preferred to hear these words uttered by a stronger, a wiser, a better man than myself."[56] And while Steven-son had served the military only as a civilian, working as an assistant to the secretary of the navy during World War II, Ike had led the D day invasion of Europe, and in the political climate of the time the general's admission that he had never registered to vote may not have been much of a political liability.

Yet the reputation for effeminacy that Stevenson acquired was not the inevitable result of his persona; it also rested upon a determined effort to call his sexuality into question. Indeed, the 1952 presidential campaign may have been a high-water mark in the history of dirty politics in America. Eisenhower maintained his dignity, as senators Nixon, McCarthy, and William Jenner handled the innuendoes and smears against Stevenson. The source of what one journalist called the "ugly whispering campaign" about Stevenson was Hoover's FBI, which had supposedly obtained infor-mation that Stevenson had been arrested in Maryland and Illinois for homosexual acts and that a cover-up had ensued. According to Hoover's biographer Curt Gentry, the FBI "channeled this and any other derogatory information to Nixon, McCarthy, and members of the press. Although most newspaper editors had the story, none used it. But it was widely circulated, as anyone who worked in the campaign could attest." Receiving reports claiming that "Stevenson and Bradley University President David Owen were the two best known homosexuals" in the state and that Stevenson was known in gay circles as "Adeline," Hoover entered the governor's name in one of his special files marked "Stevenson, Adlai Ewing—Governor of Illinois—Sex Deviate."[57]

The national political unconscious is impossible to measure. Stevenson's defeats cannot be blamed on right-wing aspersions; liberalism was clearly on the decline, given not just what ultraconservatives were calling "twenty years of treason" but what cooler heads were calling a "time for a change" after five successive Democratic

[55] For the remarks in the *New York Daily News,* see Hofstadter, *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life,* 227. For those of Richard M. Nixon and McCarthy, see Wittner, *Cold War America,* 108; Oshinsky, *Conspiracy So Immense,* 242; and Marquis Childs, *Witness to Power* (New York, 1975), 66–69.

[56] On Adlai Stevenson's speech, see Hofstadter, *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life,* 224. On the contrast between the two candidates, see Goldman, *Crucial Decade—and After,* 220–34.

[57] On the "ugly whispering campaign" against Adlai Stevenson, see Childs, *Witness to Power,* 66–69. On Stevenson and the FBI, see Gentry, *J. Edgar Hoover,* 402–3; and Summers, *Official and Confidential,* 181–82.

administrations. Stevenson was also hurt by his divorce and rumors that he was a womanizer. But if the press did not report his alleged arrests because no police record could be documented, Stevenson's enemies, if only by insinuation, stigmatized him by calling him "Adelaide" and ridiculing his "fruity voice," among other suspicious feminine attributes. And while such innuendoes may not have cost him the election, they did earn him a reputation as the consummate effete liberal "egghead." Lacking a record in military combat, sports, or anything else that might have shored up his manly credentials, Stevenson was "only a gentleman with an Ivy League background," as Richard Hofstadter noted, "and there was nothing in his career to spare him from the reverberations this history set up in the darker corners of the American mind." (Stevenson was still dogged by innuendo in 1956: Walter Winchell told his Mutual Radio Show audience that "a vote for Adlai Stevenson is a vote for Christine Jorgensen," the first well-known recipient of a sex-change operation.)[58]

In the fallout from the 1952 election, the bleeding-heart liberal egghead superseded the image of the pragmatic, educated, manly liberal bureaucrat of earlier years. And when the new Republican administration arrived in Washington and that "plain" American settled into the White House—staffing his cabinet with businessmen from General Motors and other corporations, watching football games, and regularly playing games of golf in his considerable spare time—it seemed to liberals that, in Stevenson's quip, the New Dealers had been replaced by "car dealers." After twenty years of Democratic rule, in which the educated liberal reformer had come to enjoy an unprecedented status in American political culture, the funereal march for the egghead-in-politics seemed to smack of a low-blow, philistine attack on the manly credentials of the liberal braintrust. Liberals more defensive than Stevenson bristled at the ignominious "egghead" epithet, and the loudest voice was Schlesinger's. "Now business is in power again," he said, and it would no doubt bring "the vulgarization which has been the almost invariable consequence of business supremacy." With his usual rhetorical flair, he denounced the "rise to climax of the hatred of the intellectuals," a hatred that now "burst forth in full violence . . . the word 'egghead' seemed almost to detonate the pent-up ferocity of twenty years of impotence."[59]

For liberals less encumbered by Ivy League propriety, the lesson of McCarthyism (and of the invective heaped on Stevenson) was to fight fire with fire. When the liberal *New York Post* ran a series of articles on McCarthy in 1951 entitled "Smear, Inc.: The One-Man Mob of Joe McCarthy," the writers pointed out that "the man who flamboyantly crusades against homosexuals as though they menace the nation employed one on his office staff for many months." Occasionally, liberals vented their hatred of McCarthy with a heftier dose of the senator's own medicine, as did the famous liberal journalist Drew Pearson, who not only charged in his column

[58] Hofstadter, *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life,* 227. Walter Winchell's remark left sponsors uneasy and cost Winchell his first television show; see Gentry, *J. Edgar Hoover,* 445.
[59] Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr., "The Highbrow in American Politics," *Partisan Review,* 20 (March–April 1953), 162–65, is reprinted in Schlesinger, *Politics of Hope,* 219–29, esp. 224, 226.

In September 1951 the *New York Post* ran this photograph with the caption
"Joe McCarthy: A Strange Saga." Assailing McCarthy's smear tactics
and ridiculing his false tough-talking demeanor, the accompanying
article by Oliver Pilat and William V. Shannon noted that
McCarthy had employed a homosexual on his
staff, among other "juicy scandals" in
McCarthy's career.
Reprinted with permission from the New York Post, *Sept. 4, 1951.*

that a convicted homosexual had been on McCarthy's staff but also kept a file of affidavits from men who claimed to have had sex with McCarthy. Pearson preferred to circulate the affidavits within insider circles rather than put them into print, but others were not so cautious. Pearson's dubious testimonies found their way into the *Las Vegas Sun,* which in the midst of the 1952 election identified McCarthy: "Joe McCarthy is a bachelor of 43 years. He seldom dates girls and if he does he laughingly describes it as window dressing. It is common talk among homosexuals in Mil-

waukee . . . that Senator Joe McCarthy has often engaged in homosexual activities." Troubled by the "homo stories," McCarthy consulted the Anti-Defamation League about suing the *Sun* but in the end decided against a criminal libel suit. When insinuations about his private life surfaced in a Syracuse paper, however, McCarthy sued the paper and won.[60]

Though such efforts to malign McCarthy may not have damaged him much politically, they speak to a climate in which charges of homosexuality were made with such ease that no politician—not even Tail Gunner Joe—was spared. But the taint of homosexuality did hover over McCarthy's downfall in 1954. Suspicions about the sexual orientation of McCarthy staff members Roy Cohn and David Schine among observers of the Army-McCarthy hearings raised, as Joseph Alsop put it in his column, "certain suggestions as to the nature of the McCarthy-Cohn-Schine relationship." Those suspicions—real, inflated, or fabricated—surfaced dramatically when Sen. Ralph Flanders delivered to the Senate a devastating, innuendo-laden attack on McCarthy. Likening him to both Adolf Hitler and Dennis the Menace, Flanders spoke of the "mysterious personal relationship" between Cohn and Schine. "It is natural that Cohn should wish to retain the services of an able collaborator, but he seems to have an almost passionate anxiety to retain him. Why?" Flanders then raised the question of McCarthy. "Does the assistant have some hold on him, too? Can it be that our Dennis . . . has at last gotten into trouble himself? Does the committee plan to investigate the real issues at stake?" Given prevailing Senate protocol, Flanders had broached the subject of homosexuality as delicately as he could. The dialogue about "pixies" and "fairies" that arose during the Army-McCarthy hearings was a fitting token of the sexual undertones of the entire spectacle, the undoing of McCarthy, and the waning of the peak red scare years.[61]

By the time Schlesinger wrote "The Crisis of American Masculinity" in 1958, Cold War liberals were beginning to regroup in the wake of Stevenson's two crushing defeats. And in a suitable end to that article, Schlesinger urged American men to expect a "virile political life" to be a means of male liberation. The remark was an ominous one. The tide had begun to shift after almost six years of Republican rule. The threat of domestic subversion and perversion had run its course, but the sense of cultural malaise and national softness grew; the Soviet launching of Sputnik served as a sobering sign that the enemy possessed a superior hardness of purpose while Americans lazed their way through the decade, growing ever more sated and complacent. Schlesinger's references to the "boring," "banal" national politics of recent years were clearly allusions to Eisenhower and Nixon's tired, spirit-crushing influence on the nation; his call for American men to reject the status quo in favor

[60] *New York Post,* Sept. 4, 1951, p. 3. On Drew Pearson, the *Las Vegas Sun* story, and McCarthy's meeting with the Anti-Defamation League, see Oshinsky, *Conspiracy So Immense,* 310–11; Richard H. Rovere, *Senator Joe McCarthy* (New York, 1959), 68–69; and Von Hoffman, *Citizen Cohn,* 184–86.
[61] On Joseph Alsop's column, see Von Hoffman, *Citizen Cohn,* 225. On Ralph Flanders's speech and the "pixie" dialogue, see Oshinsky, *Conspiracy So Immense,* 427, 451.

of a "definite and hard-hitting" political life gave the crisis in masculinity a political outlet. Here Schlesinger anticipated the imagery he and others would employ in the next presidential election. The Republican old guard would become the standard-bearer of the dull conformity of the 1950s, the organization men responsible for casting a gray, other-directed shadow over the nation with their corny homilies, groupist mentalities, and hopelessly square personalities; the new guard would be cerebral, discriminating, and sufficiently inner-directed—its candidate's mind, in Schlesinger's familiar lexicon, "a first-class instrument, strong, supple, disciplined." Mailer instinctively understood the power of such a contrast in his famous 1960 *Esquire* piece "Superman Comes to the Supermart," which depicted an aged, infirmed, spent Eisenhower presiding over the desexing of America until the youthful, inner-directed "Superman" rescued its limp, lifeless body and restored to it an adventurous superpotency.[62]

If this liberal superman was the antithesis of the soft-minded organization man embodied by Eisenhower, so too was he different from Adlai in one crucial way. He was "a Stevenson with balls" in Joseph Alsop's unforgettable phrase, capable of restoring muscularity to what were once political liabilities: intellectuality, wealth, style, an Ivy League pedigree, and not least of all a liberal Democratic politics.[63] In the able hands of such men as Schlesinger, Mailer, and Alsop, John F. Kennedy became not just the incarnation of the virile "vital center" liberal whose template Schlesinger had created ten years earlier, but the antidote to the nation's crisis in masculinity.

Masculinity was clearly a rhetorical terrain on which political images were forged and partisan battles were fought, but how decisively the masculinity crisis shaped the political history of the era is a question whose answer is necessarily speculative. There *was* a world beyond the feverish imaginings of some cold warriors; standing tough in the face of Stalinism was not simply or uniformly a political posture born out of sexual anxiety or political opportunism but a moral and political commitment to many anticommunists for whom the lessons of Munich and the Moscow trials were deeply and inescapably real. No less real (and inescapable) is the inherently gendered nature of language itself, which inevitably colors political rhetoric along masculine/feminine lines.

But in the heady atmosphere of Cold War political culture, the hard/soft dichotomy gradually took on a life of its own, existing quite apart from tangible political and strategic considerations and operating in a symbolic milieu in which it often seemed as if the very manhood of the nation, and by extension that of its male citizenry, was at stake. The hard/soft opposition certainly limited the possibility of more meaningful political discourse and led to much gratuitous posturing; it may have influenced the outcome of national elections (Kennedy won by a slim margin). Yet perhaps a more important historical by-product of the hard/soft dynamic was

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[62] Schlesinger, *Politics of Hope,* 246. For the contrast between the old guard and the new and the crafting of John F. Kennedy's image as "strong, supple," see Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr., *Kennedy or Nixon: Does It Make Any Difference?* (New York, 1960), 24. Mailer, *Presidential Papers of Norman Mailer,* 25–61, 305.

[63] David Halberstam, *The Best and the Brightest* (1969; New York, 1972), 34.

that it led Democrats to overcompensate for previous deficiencies and transgressions and ultimately constrained their behavior in a rhetoric whose origins lay in part in *The Vital Center*. The Kennedy administration's much-commented-upon cult of toughness did not arise in a vacuum, but amid a political culture that turned muscularity into a prerequisite for Democrats, style into a commodity, and failure to act boldly and decisively into another Munich, another failure of nerve, another *male character defect*. And to the extent that Lyndon B. Johnson inherited the cult of toughness, he, like Kennedy, was beholden to a rhetoric that had reinvented the liberal's relationship to the "exercise of power" and demanded action. Certainly a constellation of powerful political forces and geopolitical interests converged to shape state policy making in these years. But inasmuch as individual self-image and institutional reputation—and an arguably new and unequaled self-consciousness about leadership style—played a role in that policy-making process, the cult of toughness and virility should not be underestimated. In foreclosing the possibility of more searching, effective, open dialogue and decision making within the White House and the national security bureaucracy, the premium placed on courage and hardness may have rendered the Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba and the flexing of liberal muscle in Vietnam a seeming masculine imperative.[64]

[64] On the Kennedy administration's cultivation of a cool, manly realism and toughness, see Garry Wills, *The Kennedy Imprisonment: A Meditation on Power* (1981; New York, 1983), esp. 240–49; and Bruce Miroff, *Pragmatic Illusions: The Presidential Politics of John F. Kennedy* (New York, 1976), esp. 11–22. Schlesinger noted the tendency of key players to strike "virile poses" in the Bay of Pigs decision-making process; see Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr., *A Thousand Days: John F. Kennedy in the White House* (Boston, 1965), 256. On the cult of toughness in the Kennedy-Johnson years, see also Halberstam, *Best and the Brightest;* and Richard J. Barnet, *The Roots of War: The Men and the Institutions behind U.S. Foreign Policy* (1971; New York, 1976), esp. 109–11. For a more recent analysis, see Robert D. Dean, "Masculinity as Ideology: John F. Kennedy and the Domestic Politics of Foreign Policy," *Diplomatic History,* 22 (Winter 1998), 29–62.