‘A Central Issue of Our Time’: Academic Freedom in Postwar American Thought

A thesis presented to

the faculty of

the College of Arts and Sciences of Ohio University

In partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree

Master of Arts

Julian Tzara Nemeth

August 2007
This thesis titled
‘A Central Issue of Our Time’: Academic Freedom in Postwar American Thought

by
JULIAN TZARA NEMETH

has been approved for
the Department of History
and the College of Arts and Sciences by

______________________________________________

Kevin Mattson
Professor of History

______________________________________________

Benjamin M. Ogles
Dean, College of Arts and Sciences
Abstract

NEMETH, JULIAN TZARA., M.A, August 2007, History

‘A Central Issue of Our Time’: Academic Freedom in Postwar American Thought (108 pp.)

Director of Thesis: Kevin Mattson

In the early years of the Cold War, more than one hundred American academics lost their jobs because university administrators suspected them of Communist Party membership. How did intellectuals respond to this crisis? Referring to contemporary books, articles, organizational statements, and correspondence, I argue that disputes over academic freedom helped shatter a tenuous liberal consensus, unite conservatives, and challenge defenses of professorial liberty among academia’s largest professional organization, the American Association of University Professors. Specifically, I show how Sidney Hook and Arthur Schlesinger Jr.’s dispute over academic freedom was representative of larger quarrels among liberals over McCarthyism. Conversely, I demonstrate that conservatives such as William Buckley Jr. and Russell Kirk overcame serious differences on academic freedom to present a united front against liberalism, in and outside of the academy. Finally, I show the difficulty an organization such as the AAUP encounters when defending professional values in a democratic society.

Approved: _____________________________________________________________

Kevin Mattson

Professor of History
Acknowledgments

George Wald observed that, “we are the products of editing rather than authorship.” Scholarship, which takes place in an academic community, is much the same. As I drafted this thesis, a number of readers inspired me with their thoughtful suggestions including Jeff Bloodworth, Patrick Campbell, David L. Chappell, Jeffrey W. Coker, Mathew Cotter, Ashby Crowder, John Patrick Diggins, Andrew Hartman, Brendan King-Edwards, Kevin Mattson, Paul Milazzo, Mary Melfi, George Nemeth, Chester Pach, Jon Peterson, Sarah Quinn, Ellen Schrecker, Richard Sonn, and Adrienne Weber.

Ellen Schrecker not only commented on a draft of chapter one but also invited me into her home to discuss my research. Kevin Mattson, my thesis advisor, has been generous with his time and insight. For two years, I hogged many of his office hours engaging him in countless discussions about my research, cold war liberalism, and American intellectual history.

Without archivists, I would never have been able to complete this project. These include, Jennifer King at George Washington University, William Massa at Yale, Jordan Kurland at the AAUP, and Peter Filardo and Donna L. Davey at NYU’s Tamiment Library. I also owe a debt of gratitude to Daniel Bell and William Buckley Jr., who both granted me access to their papers at the American Committee for Cultural Freedom and National Review Magazine respectively.

Finally, generous research grants from the Quebec Fund for Research into Society and Culture, Ohio University’s History Department and Contemporary History Institute made the research for this thesis possible.
Table of Contents

Abstract .............................................................................................................................................. 3

Acknowledgements ......................................................................................................................... 4

Introduction: Academic Freedom in a Changed World ................................................................. 6

Chapter 1: Cold War Liberals and Academic Freedom .............................................................. 16

Chapter 2: Postwar Conservatives and Academic Freedom ...................................................... 42

Chapter 3: The AAUP and Academic Freedom ........................................................................... 73

Conclusion: The Debate Endures ............................................................................................... 96

References ....................................................................................................................................... 101
Introduction: Academic Freedom in a Changed World

“We have entered a strange new world following the war—a very confusing world.”¹

This is how George Shannon, Chairman of the American Association of University Professors’ Committee ‘A’ on Academic Freedom and Tenure, chose to address the organization’s annual meeting in 1950. He was referring to an educational landscape that had changed dramatically since the onset of the Second World War. Propelled by the G.I. Bill, college enrollments soared: over two million veterans, many of whom did not plan to pursue a degree before their military service, enrolled in post-secondary education programs.² Besides the massive increase in students, the federal government began investing heavily into the nation’s premier research universities to fund the development of military technologies fit for the nuclear age.³ Finally, the international tensions of the Cold War intruded on the ivory tower as anticommunists called on colleges to root out subversives. High-level charges leveled against Julius Rosenberg, Alger Hiss, and Robert Oppenheimer stoked popular fears of pointy-headed researchers trading military secrets with the Soviet enemy.⁴

In addition to their potential security risk, Americans commonly believed that communist professors used their classrooms to indoctrinate students on behalf of the Soviet Union. In 1949, Gallup reported that 73% of Americans believed Communist

---

¹ “Annual Meeting Transcript,” Box 1, Folder, “Annual Meeting 1950.” AAUP Archives.
teachers had no place in the classroom.\textsuperscript{5} By 1953, only 23\% of Americans believed even ex-communists had a right to teach at the college level.\textsuperscript{6} Sensitive to popular opinion, in 1953 congress launched loyalty investigations into the nation’s colleges, which only seemed to confirm suspicions that universities operated as hotbeds of subversion. At the height of the early Cold War, between 1949 and 1956, more than one hundred American academics lost their jobs for declining to answer questions about their political history, for refusing to sign a loyalty oath, or because college administrators suspected them of current or even former membership in the Communist Party.\textsuperscript{7}

While scholars have noted the political quiescence affecting higher education in the early 1950s, few have remarked on the period’s vigorous debate over academic freedom.\textsuperscript{8} This is odd because many intellectuals during the early Cold War considered academic freedom “one of the central issues of our time.”\textsuperscript{9} Not only were their frequent disputes over academic freedom in the postwar years, but these polemics resulted in far-reaching consequences. Debates over academic freedom helped shatter a tenuous Cold War liberal consensus, unite the modern conservative movement, and challenge traditional defenses of academic liberty among academia’s largest professional organization, the AAUP.


\textsuperscript{6} \textit{The Gallup Poll}, 1135-1136.


On the surface academic freedom may have seemed like a straightforward concept—the right for professors to teach their subjects as they saw fit—but the exigencies of the Cold War forced intellectuals to examine the concept’s basic foundations. Did academic freedom protect communists, who destroyed intellectual liberty wherever they had taken power? Was it acceptable to fire colleagues because they refused to answer questions about their past or present political associations? In a democracy, should only professors decide what students learn? What about the citizens that fund higher education, did they have a say in the American university’s mission? Initially advanced by concerns over academic freedom, these debates helped intellectuals shape their wider views on the meanings of toleration, professionalism, elitism, liberalism, conservatism, and most importantly, democracy itself.

Liberal Anticommunists and Academic Freedom

The most influential liberal thinkers in the early years of the Cold War were also dedicated anticommunists, which informed their debates over academic freedom. While anticommunism played a role in shaping liberal thought on the topic, it did not determine its outcome. This is apparent in the debates between Sidney Hook and Arthur Schlesinger Jr., two of the period’s most influential liberal anticommunists. Hook and Schlesinger espoused radically different views on the appropriate measures to take against communist professors—professors who potentially spread a totalitarian ideology in classrooms across the United States.

While liberals such as Hook and Schlesinger debated the meaning of academic freedom, historians have tended to focus on how their anticommunism managed to
encourage McCarthyism. Richard Pells, in his otherwise judicious The Liberal Mind in a Conservative Age: American Intellectuals in the 1940s and 1950s, claims, “McCarthyism was an extension, however distorted, of the liberals’ own militant anti-communism.” Similarly, in her work on academic freedom cases in the 1950s, Ellen Schrecker argues that liberal anticommunists “did not think that they were McCarthyites, but because their red-baiting narrowed American politics by excommunicating its left, they inadvertently fostered the furor to come.” This position has become so entrenched that Lionel Lewis, author of the Cold War on Campus, notes it as an “an article of faith,” that “because of their rabid anti-communism, liberals could not bring themselves to protect radicals or radical ideas from the furor generated by the Cold War.”

The debates between Schlesinger and Hook about academic freedom reveal that these articles of faith in a liberal consensus are in need of qualification. Schlesinger vocally opposed firing communist professors simply because of Communist Party affiliation. University administrators, he believed, had no reason to change the traditional policy of looking into cases of professional misconduct on a case-by-case basis. In contrast, Sidney Hook claimed that by their very presence on campus, communists posed a threat: not only were they covertly recruiting students and professors into their Party, but as members of that Party they were under the thumb of a foreign...
power that conspired to destroy America. Most damning of all, Hook believed that communists had surrendered their critical faculties to the Communist Party leadership, and this intellectual subservience was *prima facie* grounds of professional incompetence. Hook elaborated on this argument in many articles and in his 1953 book *Heresy Yes—Conspiracy No*.16

Conservatives and Academic Freedom

Unlike their liberal counterparts, who struggled over the proper response to loyalty oaths, congressional investigations, and the professional fitness of communist professors, conservatives generally agreed that the Soviet menace precluded the need for painful moral searching. In fact, conservative intellectuals often pointed to liberal concerns over civil liberties as evidence of moral incompetence and political naiveté.17 Conservatives such as William F. Buckley Jr. and Russell Kirk used discussions of academic freedom to launch a wider critique of the postwar university in particular and liberalism in general.18

Studying right-wing critiques of academia during the 1950s poses a dilemma, because while most scholarship points to the postwar university as a conformist institution, nothing united the early conservative movement as much as the belief that liberals controlled higher education and used it as a tool to indoctrinate young people into godlessness and socialism. Conservative thinkers debated each other on many issues, yet

---

nearly all agreed that academia rejected their values in favor of pernicious liberal shibboleths.

Attacks on academia galvanized the conservative intellectual movement. Conservative thinkers expended little energy in justifying the expulsions of communist professors; they took the validity of such dismissals as axiomatic. Instead, they focused their considerable intellectual strengths elsewhere, particularly in devising theoretical justifications to combat what they saw as the rampant promotion of secularism, philosophical relativism, and socialism on campus.

Historians have largely overlooked conservative perspectives on academia during the early Cold War. In recent years, scholarship on conservatism has increased substantially, but Alan Brinkley’s assertion that “it would be hard to argue that the American Right has received anything like the amount of attention from historians that its role in twentieth-century politics and culture suggests it should,” stands more than a decade later. This is unfortunate because conservatives posed enduring questions about the relationship of knowledge to power and the limits of liberal tolerance, foreshadowing concerns of the student left. Like later student radicals, conservative thinkers blasted the university for its elephantine bureaucracy, its commitment to socialization as opposed to humanism, and its pretense of being a “marketplace of free ideas,” when perspectives outside the pale of corporate liberalism received contemptuous treatment.

Like their liberal counterparts, leading conservatives, such as Buckley and Russell Kirk, disagreed over the meaning of academic freedom, but also shared many beliefs about the ills afflicting American higher education. Arguing from radical free-market

---

principles, Buckley argued that professors had no right to decide what they taught in the classroom. Instead, that right belonged to the educational consumer in the form of the parents and alumni who paid for a students’ university education. Kirk, a firm traditionalist and one-time professor himself, rejected Buckley’s assault on professionalism and academic independence. Yet, unlike liberal anticommunists, who could not agree whether communism or McCarthyism was the bigger domestic threat, conservatives shared a clearly defined common foe, the liberal establishment. For all their disagreements, Kirk and Buckley agreed that the postwar university neglected conservative thought in favor of philosophical relativism, socialism, and contempt for religion.

The American Association of University Professors and Academic Freedom

Unlike the public intellectuals who formed the liberal anticommunist American Committee for Cultural Freedom (ACCF) or National Review magazine, the AAUP did not simply publish articles and policy statements, but represented over 30,000 members and mediated on behalf of professors in danger of losing their jobs. Since its establishment in 1915, the AAUP articulated the principles of academic freedom and tenure, defended embattled faculty, and censured college administrations for violating professional rights. The national staff recognized that depending on the organization’s reputation, it could either help secure or ruin a compromised professor’s career.

As academia’s largest professional organization, how did the AAUP defend its principles against massive public scrutiny? As the Red Scare gained momentum, did the AAUP change the kind of arguments it made on behalf of academic freedom? How did
the organization plan to implement its vision of academic freedom, when it seemed so out of touch with the mainstream values of the McCarthy era? More broadly, what does the AAUP’s response to McCarthyism reveal about Cold War ideology and professionalism in the public square?

While a handful of studies have examined the AAUP’s reaction to McCarthyism, they have focused almost entirely on personalities and institutional development; none has looked carefully at the organization’s ideas and rhetoric. Yet an understanding of the AAUP’s intellectual response to the Second Red Scare gives a fuller picture of one of the nation’s most significant professional organizations reacting to a period of crisis. It also points to the difficulty of defining academic freedom.

During the early Cold War, political forces pulled the AAUP in two opposing directions. On the one hand, the national office believed that to keep its venerable standing, it needed to avoid gaining a reputation as a special interest group or as left-wing sympathizers. On the other hand, the executive understood its central concern of the era, defending academic freedom, required lobbying on behalf of leftwing professors. The AAUP resolved this dilemma by defending academic freedom in the abstract, as a right shared by all professors no matter what their political attachments, but saying very little about specific cases, which almost invariably involved charges of fellow-traveling and communism. The AAUP’s Committee A on Academic Freedom and Tenure censured no

20 Scholars have emphasized the crippling effects of Ralph Himstead’s term as AAUP General Secretary during the McCarthy era. They have also showed that the AAUP almost came apart over the academic Red Scare, with many regional AAUP’s complaining the national office did do little to defend their interests. See, Philo A. Hutcheson, A Professional Professoriat: Unionization, Bureaucratization, and the AAUP (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2000), 22-43; Walter P. Metzger, “Ralph F. Fuchs and Ralph E. Himstead: A Note on the AAUP in the McCarthy Period.” Academe 72 (6) (Nov.-Dec, 1986), 29-35; Schrecker, No Ivory Tower, 308-337.

university administrations between the years 1948 and 1955, the period in which the most violations of academic freedom took place in American history.

The Red Scare took its toll on the organization’s morale. Sensing a potential backlash against academics in late 1947 and 1948, the AAUP formulated an aggressive policy that defended the profession from outside interference. However, as the Cold War intensified, the organization weakened its uncompromising position. At first, the AAUP strictly maintained that only incompetence in the classroom or in research could justify a professor’s dismissal (even for communists), but during the Korean War and McCarthy’s period of influence, the organization backed down. As McCarthyism became a reality, many in the AAUP believed that the United States faced an epidemic of anti-intellectualism. Professors fretted over how to defend academic freedom in what they considered an uncongenial climate. Yet, by focusing on anti-intellectualism in the general population, the AAUP downplayed the fact that academics themselves instigated many of the dismissals of their left-wing colleagues. To assert their patriotism, in a period in which many professors believed the public viewed them as potential subversives, the AAUP promoted academic freedom as a quintessentially American concept. McCarthy, the organization charged, had much more in common with the Soviet Union, than the patriotic civil libertarians at the AAUP. This often-hyperbolic rhetoric enabled the AAUP to defend academic freedom in the abstract while simultaneously distancing it from charges of left-wing sympathy.

Understanding the early Cold War debates about academic freedom helps put today’s academic controversies in fresh perspective. Manhattan Institute senior fellow
Abigail Thernstrom recently inverted a common saying about the American university; instead of “a sea of freedom in an island of repression,” she called it an “island of repression in a sea of freedom.” In this statement, Thernstrom is echoing a call made by many of today’s conservative intellectuals. In a highly publicized and controversial campaign, conservative activist David Horowitz has put pressure on universities and state legislatures to adopt an “academic bill of rights,” with the goal of protecting students from liberal professors. Ironically, both the campaign’s supporters and detractors claim to be rallying for “academic freedom” against modern day McCarthyism. While significantly removed from the cultural climate of the early Cold War, obvious parallels exist between such campaigns and the struggle over intellectual freedom in the 1950s. What was the role of the academy in postwar American society? How did America’s leading liberal intellectuals conceptualize academic freedom? With their strident anticommmunism, did liberal thinkers work to suppress legitimate dissent? Answers to such questions will not only enable a deeper understanding of Cold War liberalism, but are necessary in order to put today’s raucous debates over academic freedom into their proper historical context.


Chapter I: Cold War Liberals and Academic Freedom

Sidney Hook’s Long Journey to Liberal Anticommunism

Pragmatist philosopher, withering polemicist, and devoted anticommunist, Sidney Hook was one of the most prominent American intellectuals of the early Cold War. David Caute, the renowned historian of McCarthyism, has called him, “the most influential Cold War liberal on the questions of liberty.” During the early Cold War, Hook wrote prolifically, promoting his brand of liberal anticommunism in books, specialized journals, and popular magazines. His near-evangelical zeal arose partly from profound disillusionment with the Soviet Union. During the late 1920s and early 1930s Hook had not only been a communist sympathizer, but also one of America’s leading Marxist intellectuals. At New York University (NYU), he was the first American professor to teach a class on Marxism. With support from the Soviet regime, Hook even spent part of 1929 researching at the Marx-Engels Institute in Moscow. In 1933, he published his most important philosophical work, *Towards the Understanding of Karl Marx*, which synthesized Marx’s critique of capitalism with pragmatism. While the book implicitly challenged official Soviet doctrine, Hook refrained from any explicit criticism of the Soviet Union, hoping this restraint would make it more influential among Party members. Hook later complained that while *Towards the Understanding of Karl Marx* helped convert a number of readers to the Communist Party, his critique of official

---

doctrine went largely unheeded.\textsuperscript{28} In fact, later in his career Hook made sure to have his publisher suppress the book.\textsuperscript{29}

The “decisive turning point” in Hook’s move towards an aggressively liberal anticommunism was the Moscow Trials in 1936. As a young professor at NYU, Hook sat on a committee with his famous pragmatist mentor, John Dewey, to investigate the Trials’ impartiality.\textsuperscript{30} American Trotskyites had pushed for the committee and hoped that Dewey’s considerable prestige would publicize their beleaguered cause. During Hook’s investigations of Stalin’s purges, he discovered “the face of radical evil—as ugly and petrifying as anything the Fascists had revealed up to that time—in the visages of those who were convinced that they were men and women of good will.”\textsuperscript{31} After speaking out against the Trials’ injustice and brutality, Hook, as one student recalled, was “hissed by Stalinist students as he walked through Washington Square.”\textsuperscript{32} For the rest of his life, Hook remained bitter that so many on the left ignored or condemned his committee’s report.\textsuperscript{33} Raised at the turn of the century in the poor Jewish neighborhood of Williamsburg, Brooklyn, Hook had always been an intellectual “street fighter,” but after the Moscow Trials, he saved his hardest blows for communists and their sympathizers. \textsuperscript{34}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{28} Ibid., 176-177.
\item \textsuperscript{29} Postel, A18. Hook scholar Christopher Phelps recently fought successfully to have the book reissued.
\item \textsuperscript{30} Hook, \textit{Out of Step}, 225-236.
\item \textsuperscript{31} Ibid., 218.
\item \textsuperscript{33} That Communists and progressive intellectuals lied about the Moscow trials is a perennial theme in Hook’s oeuvre (including his private correspondences). For a sense of his feelings on this period, see the chapter “Moscow Trials” in his autobiography \textit{Out of Step}, 218-248.
\item \textsuperscript{34} Jumonville, \textit{Critical Crossings}, 17-18.
\end{itemize}
By Hook’s own account, he had “fought more cases on academic freedom and been on more committees to fight such cases than any other person in the teaching profession.” As a rigorously logical philosopher, Hook made sure to define academic freedom before he came to its defense. Thus during the course of his attacks on communist teachers and reactionary pressure groups, Hook developed a sophisticated and radical defense of the concept of academic liberty. Ironically, in defending his position that academia bar communists, Hook devised a powerful justification for the tenure system, academic autonomy, and the right for professors to teach whatever their research led them to believe.

Historians of academic freedom have often ignored Hook’s philosophy of education to focus instead on his anticommunism. In her comprehensive work on academic freedom cases in the 1950s, Ellen Schrecker argues that Hook’s rationale for banning Party members became “something like the gospel, even among liberals,” but does not discuss it in relation to his broader educational theory. In his work on the Owen Lattimore hearings at the University of Washington, Lionel Lewis reduces Hook’s views on education to that of any number of indistinguishable “moral entrepreneurs” whose goal was to “establish an orthodoxy…by working to eliminate differences.” In Hook’s reasoning for excluding Communist Party members from the academy, cultural historian Steven Whitfield detects “an eclipse of rationality.”

---

36 Hook’s anticommunism is of course a fascinating subject. For critical treatments, see Caute, The Great Fear, 52-53; Schrecker No Ivory Tower, 105-109; Frances Saunders, The Cultural Cold War (New York: The New Press, 2000), 46-56.
37 Schrecker, No Ivory Tower, 105-110.
39 Whitfield, The Culture of the Cold War, 24-25.
assumptions were flawed, a survey of his extensive writings on academic freedom shows his thinking was neither narrow nor irrational.

Pragmatism and Hook’s Theory of Education

It is impossible to understand Hook’s objections to communist teachers without first appreciating his commitment to philosophical pragmatism and its relation to his theory of education. Developed by Charles Peirce in the late nineteenth century, pragmatism rejects the detached abstractions of idealism and instead stresses truth’s intrinsic relation to practical results. As a young man in the 1920s, Hook synthesized pragmatism with Marxism to make communism more open to “flexibility, experimentalism, and revision.”

As Danny Postel has noted, from Hook’s “pragmatist point of view, truth is not fixed and unchanging; it is fallible, situated in history, and open to revision.” Following Dewey, Hook believed that pragmatism necessitated a democratic vision of society, in which popular discussion and debate fostered social improvement. In such a society, Hook believed “policies would be treated as hypotheses, not as dogmas; customary practices as generalizations, not as God given truths.” True democracy would be impossible, however, if citizens were not trained to debate each other rationally. Once trained in critical reasoning, citizens could make the best arguments for their

---

42 Postel, “Street Fighter,” A18.
positions and easily see through propaganda from either the left or the right. To bolster his claims that democracy required an educated citizenry, Hook placed his thought in the tradition of Thomas Jefferson and Abraham Lincoln. He argued that both of these towering figures in the history of American liberalism understood that “a democracy which was not enlightened could not long remain free. It is this recognition of the importance of creative intelligence in the functioning and defense of a free society, and in the liberation of human personality, which constitutes the link between John Dewey and Thomas Jefferson.”

Since democracy is dependent on the ability of its population to use critical reasoning, Hook placed an immense responsibility on the nation’s teachers. Due to his Marxian-pragmatist belief that the environment is the principal influence on character, this responsibility was even more daunting. Teachers not only taught reasoning skills but also formed their students’ personalities, thus they played a pivotal role in shaping the future generation of citizens. Besides parents, Hook believed that “the characters of the men and women of tomorrow owe more to the daily efforts of [teachers] than to…any other group.” Taking a page from the romantics, Hook argued, “It is the teachers, more than the poets, who are the unacknowledged legislators of the world.” Approvingly quoting President Eisenhower, Hook even claimed that during the Cold War, “no man

---

46 Hook, Heresy, 149.
47 Ibid., 149.
flying a warplane, no man with a defensive gun in his hand, can possibly be more important than a teacher”.48

For Hook, the teacher’s most important role was to develop the students’ critical faculty because this was the only way they could make intelligent and informed choices about politics. While students may demand conclusive answers, the teacher must instead encourage the students to search them out for themselves: “the teacher cannot begin too soon to encourage independence.”49 The best teachers encouraged students not to rely excessively on their authority; they played the devil’s advocate in order to keep the students unsure about their beliefs.50 These views fit with Hook’s pragmatic objection to absolute truth. He famously argued that, “more important than any belief a man holds is the way he holds it.”51 The true scholar “is prepared to learn from anyone. As a scholar, he recognizes no doctrines as subversive. From his perspective, doctrines are only valid or invalid in the light of objective evidence and logical inference.”52 Therefore, as long as teachers backed up their claims with evidence and logic, Hook supported their right to espouse radically anti-democratic ideas in the classroom. In fact, Hook believed that as long as they were not members of a party that decided their opinions for them in advance, teachers who promoted fascism or communism in front of his students could be good for democracy. Exposure to a number of different opinions could only benefit students’ critical thinking skills. Hook was confident that anti-democratic criticism made

48 Ibid., 228.
49 Ibid., 125.
50 Ibid., 125.
democracy stronger, not only because it showed democracy’s greater capacity for
tolerance but also because liberals could learn from those criticisms.53

Similarly, Hook believed that it was a Cold War imperative for schools to make
the writings of Lenin and Stalin required reading. He insisted that the American
communist newspaper the Daily Worker was a great instrument for promoting class
discussion. Not surprisingly, Hook believed that students would reject what he
considered the “unlimited opportunism” and “absolute fanaticism,” of the Soviet Union’s
supporters, but he also believed students could learn from their critique of capitalism and
democracy. The fact that communism had millions of supporters around the world
showed the doctrine was not simply “a tissue of falsehoods.” Hook thought that students
could learn from communist “criticisms of the shortcomings of democratic life,” and this
knowledge would inspire them to work for reform.54 Instead of just presenting
democracy as an alternative to communism, Hook encouraged professors to teach it “as a
way of life to be independently explored, developed, and criticized in relation to the
problems of contemporary society.”55

In the early years of the Cold War, as Hook encouraged teachers to use the Daily
Worker as a teaching tool, right-wing organizations made a concerted effort to ban
subversive literature from classrooms and school libraries, a movement Hook condemned
as a “vicious…invasion of the professional prerogatives of educators.”56 Many of these
“cultural vigilantes,” as Hook called them, supported Senator McCarthy. To Hook,
McCarty was an irresponsible demagogue who “terrorized the innocent as much as the

53 Hook, Heresy, 171.
54 Ibid., 44.
56 Hook, Heresy, 44, 131. For more on the textbook which-hunt, see Whitfield, Culture of the Cold
War, 56-58.
guilty.”57 McCarthy specialized in “wild, undiscriminating, unscrupulous harangues.”58 His smear tactics that labeled liberals treasonous were “taken from the arsenal of communist slander.”59 These cultural vigilantes from the business, religious, or political world blocked “the roads of inquiry,” “encouraged conformity” and failed to recognize that the only final authority on any subject is “critical method—or intelligence.”60

It was in this climate of McCarthyite attacks on academia that William F. Buckley, Jr. published his popular critique of the liberal and secular nature of the modern university, God and Man at Yale. In Buckley’s view, liberals had hijacked the academy. Professors did not hold patriotism and Christianity in high enough regard. To solve this problem of bias, Buckley called on Yale’s conservative alumni to stop funding the school unless it reinstated a traditional education that centered on free-market economics and Christianity.61 Hook called Buckley “brilliantly wrong-headed,” but was irritated that so many academics dismissed him as a fascist.62 Putting his faith in the ability of rational debate to resolve political issues, Hook wrote a sensitive response to Buckley’s book. He argued that while right-wingers like Buckley opposed academic indoctrination, their impassioned attacks against the New Deal and Keynesian economic textbooks showed what they really wanted was an “indoctrination for the economic status quo.”63 If Buckley believed in the immutable truths of Christianity, Hook asked, what harm could come from scrutinizing them academically?64 Hook supported teachers’ efforts to instill

57 Hook, Heresy, 55.
58 Ibid., 69.
59 Ibid., 56.
60 Ibid., 125, 128.
62 Hook, Heresy, 153.
63 Ibid., 40.
64 Ibid., 168.
patriotism and loyalty in their students, but only if they did so in the “distinctive libertarian aspects of our traditions.” While Hook admitted that the community that supported a school financially had the right to participate in its governance, teaching remained the prerogative of professionals. The fact that teachers were professionally qualified to design course syllabi did not mean—as Buckley claimed—that they were anti-democratic social engineers who wanted all society run by left-wing professionals.

Hook conceded that the community might require a university to drop a subject that it deemed irrelevant to the public good, however, only the professor can decide from what viewpoint he will teach the class. He argued, “If any subject is to be taught, then the principles of academic freedom require that those who have been professionally certified as competent, and only those, teach it.” Without professorial autonomy, cultural vigilantes, Hook predicted, would highjack the curriculum, making a teacher’s professional competence worthless. Similarly, he observed that, “without security of tenure academic freedom is a myth.” Finally, if non-professionals dictated the limits of academic freedom, they would prematurely stunt Hook’s ideal of a critically educated citizenry schooled in the “free market of ideas.”

Hook Contra Communist Teachers

Hook’s belief in the professional incompetence of communist teachers stemmed from his theory of education. For Hook, membership in the Communist Party precluded the most obvious requirement for teaching in a democracy: intellectual independence. For Hook,

---

65 Ibid., 132.
66 Ibid., 170.
67 Ibid., 161.
68 Ibid.,
69 Ibid., 157.
the teacher’s most sacred duty was to impart the skills of critical thinking to his students; membership in the CP required surrendering one’s intellectual independence to an organization whose goal was to destroy academic freedom. Thus for Hook, a teacher’s membership in the CP was the equivalent of a physician joining an organization whose main goal was to destroy the Hippocratic Oath. In Hook’s philosophy what counted was not the beliefs one held, but the way in which one held them; this is why he had no problem accepting autonomous academics with fascist or communist views. Party members, on the other hand, did not base their beliefs on reason and evidence but on the dictates of the Party leadership. Thus, teachers who followed the Party line “taught in 1934 that Roosevelt was a fascist; in 1936, during the period of the Popular Front, a progressive; in 1940, during the Nazi-Stalin pact, a war-monger and imperialist; in 1941, after Hitler invaded the Soviet Union, a leader of the oppressed peoples of the world.” They did not change their opinion because of new evidence, but because the Party told them to change their opinion. To strengthen his claim, Hook quotes the CPUSA pledge from 1936: “I pledge myself to remain at all times vigilant and firm defender of the Leninist line of the party, the only line that insures the triumph of Soviet Power in the United States.”

The most common objection to Hook’s line of reasoning was that it made people guilty by association. Technically, a communist might be obligated to follow the party line, but in practice, he or she may choose not to. Civil libertarians and the AAUP argued that in a democracy, one is innocent until proven guilty. Until evidence existed that a teacher had abused his position by indoctrinating students with propaganda, Party

---

70 Ibid., 180.
71 Ibid., 204.
72 Ibid., 180.
membership was no grounds for dismissal. Hook had a number of rejoinders to meet these objections, all of which were consistent with this theory of education. Hook’s experiences with communists in the 1930s led him to believe that it was almost inconceivable that a Party member would not try to indoctrinate his students. Those who disagreed ignored “the concrete documentary evidence which shows that members are under instruction to inject the party line in the classroom, to build cells and capture departments.” 73 Hook quoted trial evidence where an ex-communist admitted that he had been under instructions to inject the Party line subtletly into his teaching. The Party, Hook believed, would expel a communist professor who chose not indoctrinate.

Moreover, Hook argued even if one granted that some communists chose not to abuse their position, the fact that they were in an organization that encouraged them to do was sufficient grounds for professional incompetence. By way of analogy, Hook argued that just because a man in a band of assassins may choose not to kill, this does mean it would be wise to put him in a position where he could kill you. 74

Not only did Hook believe that it was sensible for schools to avoid the professional risk of employing teachers pledged to violate professional ethics, he also argued that judging communists on their classroom behavior necessarily involved subverting the academic freedom one was trying to protect. Either administrators would have to send in experts to monitor classes, or schools would encourage students to inform on their teachers. Not only would this disrupt the privileged teacher-student relationship, which Hook compared to the one between “priest and communicant,” but the classroom

74 Hook, Heresy, 222.
itself would become a “police state.”  

Hook’s response to communists who claimed they were being smeared with “guilt by association” was this: “Why should I take all the time and trouble involved in watching you? Your act of voluntary membership in a group which officially instructs you to betray our trust is an indication of professional unfitness to carry out the public trust.”

While academic integrity was the principal reason Hook opposed communist academics, he also believed that they posed a potential security threat. Of course, he knew by the 1950s that there would be no communist revolution in America, but he was concerned about industrial sabotage in the event of a war. Hook reminded his readers that “The American communist does not work in isolation, but in accordance with a coordinated strategy that has behind it the power of a regime which controls the human and natural resources of one third of the globe.” Hook even went so far as to call the Communist Party USA “a para-military organization.” If CP teachers succeeded in indoctrinating only a few students, especially in industrial sciences, they could pose a serious security risk during a war.

The security argument, however, was not Hook’s major justification for barring communist professors. His main point was that CP members had given up their intellectual independence “for the promise of political salvation which the Soviet Union holds out.” Hook was adamant that ruling on the unfitness of communist professors was primarily a question of professional competence, and as such, only teachers were

---

75 Ibid., 189.
76 Ibid., 188.
qualified to address the problem. He strongly rejected any government investigations into America’s schools. Instead, teachers should set up ethics committees to investigate charges of communist membership themselves. Faculty would have privileges of counsel and CP membership would “constitute a presumption of unfitness” but not an “automatic ground for dismissal.”

Ethics committees should make exceptions if the benefits of keeping a communist teacher were exceedingly high; for example, Hook would not recommend firing Pablo Picasso from an art department. Hook conceded that such a committee could possibly lead to “foolishness and hysteria,” but he was convinced that if the teaching profession did not “clear up its…sore spots” by firing communists, reactionary interest groups or government agencies would make sure to do it for them.

Teachers must prevent this at all costs, because without their autonomy academic freedom would become meaningless.

To sum up his points on barring communist professors, Hook frequently made reference to the official policy of The New School for Social Research, a university founded in large part by “Frankfurt School” refugees from Nazi Germany. The decree stated:

The New School knows that no man can teach well, nor should he be permitted to teach at all, unless he is prepared ‘to follow the truth of scholarship wherever it may lead.’ No inquiry is ever made as to whether a lecturer’s private views are conservative, liberal or radical; orthodox or agnostic; views of the aristocrat or commoner. Jealously safeguarding this precious principle, the New School stoutly affirms that a member of any political party or group which asserts the right to dictate in matters of science or scientific option is not free to teach the truth and thereby is disqualified as a teacher.

---

81 Ibid., 265.
82 Ibid., Heresy, 229.
83 Ibid., Heresy, 269.
Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr., Civil Libertarian

Besides his commitment to liberalism and anticommunism, Hook shared little with American historian Arthur Schlesinger Jr., also one of the early Cold War’s most famous public intellectuals. Unlike Hook, Schlesinger never flirted with communism, nor did he develop his sense of politics in the internecine intellectual warfare of New York City’s radical left in the 1930s. Many scholars see Schlesinger’s book, *The Vital Center*, as a foundation text for postwar consensus liberalism. Published in 1949, Schlesinger exhorted his fellow liberals to take a tough-minded and practical approach to politics. Inspired by the theologian Reinhold Niebuhr, Schlesinger reminded liberals of man’s innate capacity for sinfulness. Inherent limitations within the human condition made utopian solutions impossible. In Schlesinger’s view, utopian idealism had helped usher in the harsh realities of Stalinism. *The Vital Center* called for a policy of containment abroad and a mixed economy at home. It encouraged liberals to eschew the political naiveté of Henry Wallace’s Communist backed Progressives, and work for concrete changes through the Democratic Party. While Schlesinger called for a liberalism that would be a “fighting faith,” his style was more moderate than polemical. Committed to certain core values—freedom of speech, representative democracy, New Deal social programs—Schlesinger also believed in a politics that favored ironic detachment and compromise. Democracies, he believed, distinguished themselves chiefly by the inevitably of conflict; socially beneficial legislation only came through compromises arising out of that conflict.
While Schlesinger and Hook were in one sense political allies—they were both board members of the ACCF—on the issue of academic freedom they evinced strikingly different positions. Unlike Hook, Schlesinger was convinced as early as 1949—before McCarthy appeared on the national scene—that right-wing activists posed a greater threat to American education than did communist teachers. Like Hook, Schlesinger strongly condemned government investigations into the nation’s schools, but he believed that effect had been worse than anything Americans communists could achieve. According to Schlesinger, supporters of the House Committee on Un-American Activities (HUAC) had fostered a climate of intimidation, which encouraged conformity and stifled dissent. In the *Vital Center*, he noted that with “reckless accusations and appalling procedures,” HUAC had been “sowing confusion and slander for more than a decade.” The “unlovely progeny” of committees that imitated HUAC on the state level had made matters even worse. Schlesinger decried the recent “textbook witch-hunt” in which business organizations pressured schools to ban Keynesian economics texts. Teachers, Schlesinger argued, barely made a “living wage,” so their reactionary opponents “kicked [them] around with impunity.”

Schlesinger strongly disagreed with Hook’s position that teachers should lose their jobs solely because of membership in the Communist Party. As a traditional liberal, he believed in freedom of speech, except in cases of slander or incitement that constituted a “clear and present danger.” Membership in the Communist Party fit neither of these

---

87 Ibid., 208.
88 Ibid., 204.
89 Ibid., 205.
90 Ibid., 206.
91 Ibid., 204.
criteria. In 1949 the University of Washington, following guidelines very similar to the ones Hook advocated, fired three of its professors because Party membership made them professionally incompetent. Schlesinger was appalled. The fact that the university conducted a thorough investigation and provided the professors with counsel only made the case more illiberal because “the action has clothed a terrible fallacy with a respectability, and thus threatens real harm to our freedom.”92 Schlesinger believed that by firing communist teachers, liberals not only betrayed civil liberties, but also engaged in a cynical defeatism. Were the foundations of liberalism really so weak that a handful of communist teachers posed a serious threat? If so, this would be “a devastating commentary on the effectiveness of the 700 non-communist members of the faculty, not to mention the democratic idea itself.”93

While Schlesinger hated the duplicity of Communist Party members and their defense of tyranny in the Soviet Union, he, unlike Hook, understood that by the late 1940s communists exerted very little influence anywhere in American life. He believed that communist decline in the United States had nothing to do with McCarthy’s witch-hunts, which were simply a means to smear the left, but was instead due to liberals who in the 1940s combated Stalinism “within our traditional framework of debate and exposure.”94 Not only did universities have no right to fire a teacher without evidence of wrongdoing, but also by 1950, he thought, “a communist idea has about as much future in this country as a snowball in hell.”95

93 Ibid.
95 Ibid., 10.
Schlesinger, Hook, and the American Committee for Cultural Freedom

In 1953 when Congressional committees held hearings on communist subversion in academia, the American Committee for Cultural Freedom responded by drafting a statement on academic freedom. A young Irving Kristol, then executive director of the ACCF, prepared a draft of the statement, which he then sent for approval to distinguished academics and ACCF members Sidney Hook, Arthur O. Lovejoy, George S. Counts, Paul Hays, and Arthur Schlesinger Jr. Schlesinger was the only committee member who refused to sign. The final draft of the statement, “In Defense of Academic Autonomy,” reflected Hook’s positions in Heresy Yes, Conspiracy No. While strongly opposing any congressional investigations into academia, it noted:

Where does the Communist teacher fit into the scheme of academic freedom? The only reasonable answer is: He does not. A member of the Communist Party has transgressed the canons of academic responsibility, has engaged his intellect to servility, and is therefore professionally disqualified from performing his functions as scholar and teacher.

Schlesinger, of course, rejected this logic. At this point, he could have easily decided to abandon the issue; instead, as a proponent of action and compromise, he submitted his own alternative draft of the statement in which he incorporated much of the original version. Schlesinger’s composition was still as stridently anti-Stalinist as Kristol’s original draft. He noted that, “academic freedom everywhere in the world is

96 Letter, Irving Kristol to Dr. Arthur Lovejoy, January 29, 1953, Box 8, Folder 1, American Committee for Cultural Freedom Records, Tamiment Library, New York University, New York, New York.
97 “ACCF Press Release: In Defense of Academic Autonomy,” Monday, July 13, 1953, Box 8, Folder 1, ACCF Records. It is worth noting that Kristol’s original draft focused much more on the dangers posed by Communist teachers than the final draft (edited by Hook and the other academics), which stressed opposition to the congressional investigations. While at the time a liberal, by the 1980s Kristol would be a leading neo-conservative.
98 Ibid.
under the monstrous and implacable threat of Communist aggression.”100 Unlike
Kristol’s statement, however, Schlesinger’s is equally concerned with defining the limits of academic freedom in relation to a teacher’s action in the classroom, not by his membership in an outside organization. He called for the committee to adopt a statement that read, “we do not believe that party membership is per se a ground for automatic dismissal.”101 Finally, he wanted the committee to acknowledge that in 1953, communists posed little or no threat to academia, if they ever had. He hoped the ACCF’s statement would read:

Whatever damage they may have done in the past—and even here there have been no conclusive findings of widespread harm—it is certainly most unlikely that today, in the present profoundly anti-communist atmosphere, the communist teachers…present any threat to our national security which cannot be adequately met by the Federal Bureau of Investigation. In short, we see no clear and present danger threatened by pro-communist activities in the field of higher education which would justify an abandonment of the traditional theories of academic freedom.102

Before the ACCF released its final draft of “Academic Autonomy,” Sidney Hook tried to persuade Schlesinger to change his mind and sign the document.103 Seemingly confirming the “consensus” view of liberal anticommunism, Hook told Schlesinger, “I don’t believe there is much difference in substance between the two drafts. The appearance of disagreements flows from the tone and emphasis. These are important, of course, but don’t involve matters of principle.”104 In the same letter, however, Hook emphasized the necessity of banning Communist Party members (except in exceptional cases) as a matter of ethical principle. While he agreed with Schlesinger that communist professors may not always pose a clear and present danger, he still believed that

100 Ibid.
101 Ibid.
102 Ibid.
103 Letter, Sidney Hook to Arthur Schlesinger Jr., March 6, 1953, Box 8, Folder 1, ACCF Records.
104 Ibid.
Communists disqualified themselves from the profession because they engaged in “conduct unbecoming” by joining an organization “which instructs them to violate their professional duties and responsibilities.”105

Not only was firing communists simply for belonging to the Party wrong on principle, Schlesinger argued, but the effects of such a rule would have devastating consequences for academic freedom generally. This was because the effects of “such a rule…would constitute an invitation to ignorant and reactionary forces all over the country to beat down upon college faculties.”106 Schlesinger was convinced that a chill had already descended on non-conformity in the academic community and searching out harmless communist professors would only make it worse. Hook tried to convince Schlesinger that rooting out communists would keep reactionary outsiders from interfering with the university.107 Schlesinger, however, knew from his “own experience that a lifetime record of anti-communism is no guarantee against being attacked as a communist or fellow-traveler.”108 In fact, when Schlesinger worked as an advisor for Adlai Stevenson’s presidential campaign in 1952, McCarthy smeared Schlesinger on television.109 According to Schlesinger, stalking the academic communist would do more harm than good.

105 Ibid.
109 Whitfield, Culture of the Cold War, 40.
The Case of Owen Lattimore

Schlesinger also revealed his flexible liberal anticommunism in his reaction to the misfortunes of John Hopkins University Sinologist Owen Lattimore. In 1950, McCarthy began his campaign of denunciations by labeling Lattimore the “top Soviet espionage agent” in the United States. Lattimore had worked under the auspices of the State Department as an advisor to Chinese Nationalist leader Chiang Kai-shek. This experience convinced Lattimore of Chiang’s corruption. In a number of articles, Lattimore encouraged the United States to remain neutral in the Chinese Civil War that pitted Nationalists against communists. In a controversial and widely read January 1950 article in *Atlantic Monthly*, Lattimore urged the Truman administration to recognize the Chinese Communist government officially, while encouraging the country to remain independent from the Soviet Union. With the “loss” of China in 1949, many Republicans believed these views demonstrated evidence of treason; McCarthy made Lattimore into a scapegoat. After a Senate Committee judged Lattimore innocent of any wrongdoing in 1950, dissatisfied Republican senators convinced the Senate Committee on the Judiciary to make a further investigation in 1951.

The fact that Lattimore defended Stalin’s Show Trials in the late 1930s influenced both Hook and Schlesinger’s response to the investigations; nonetheless, they took markedly opposing views on his hearings. Hook was confident that they were necessary. He believed Lattimore was influential in making government policy and he

---

111 Ibid., 10.
was “at the very least, a devious and skillful follower of the party line.” In 1952, the New Leader reprinted Lattimore’s 1937 defense of the show trials—in which he called the purges “democratic”—and allowed Hook to criticize it in a sidebar. Hook sensed hypocrisy in Lattimore’s defenders presenting him as the victim of a witch-hunt. During this supposed witch-hunt, Hook insisted, Lattimore remained “secure in his job, published a best-seller, and still exercises a professional influence in the field of Far Eastern affairs greater than all anti-communists combined. Some witch! Some witch-hunt!”

Schlesinger also expressed disappointment at seeing Lattimore become a “campus martyr”, but he thought it was crucial to oppose the injustice of the hearings. Schlesinger’s willingness to defend Lattimore may have come partly from his own attacks on the corruption of Chiang’s nationalist regime, which he had published in The Vital Center. In 1955, after ACCF chief executive Sol Stein wrote a letter to the New Republic attacking Lattimore, Schlesinger publicly distanced himself from the ACCF’s position. Schlesinger wrote a response to the New Republic that began by stating, “I disapprove of the prosecution of Mr. Lattimore.” He then wrote a letter to the ACCF that he asked be read in front of entire executive committee. In this lengthy but telling quotation, the differences between a Schlesinger and a Hook become obvious.

Schlesinger noted,

---

114 Ibid., 207
116 Ibid., 208.
118 Schlesinger, The Vital Center, 232.
I cannot believe, for example, that the ACCF attack on Lattimore, repugnant as I find Lattimore to be, served any great purpose in the furthering of cultural freedom. In the balance of forces in our current society, I hardly think the anti-Lattimore forces need to be reinforced by the ACCF. The whole thing, as David Riesman suggested, has too much the aspect of kicking a man when he is down; indeed, I cannot resist the feeling that there are occasionally elements of vindictiveness in the harrying of fellow travelers, as if we’re re-fighting in the fifties the old, dead battles of the thirties and the forties…I would hope that in the future we might test our public declarations by the standard: does this, or does it not, on balance promote the cause of cultural freedom in the United States? 121

Schlesinger’s Anticommunism

While Schlesinger strongly disagreed with Hook’s call to fire communist professors, it would be wrong to see him as a radical proponent of academic freedom. According to Schlesinger, communists should not lose their jobs simply for being communists, but neither should universities hire them, no matter what their qualifications. He believed that communist support for Stalinist mass murder was like racism or antisemitism, beyond the pale of acceptable academic opinion.122 Schlesinger also objected to communists teaching in primary schools because “elementary education exposes an immature and impressionable student to a single teacher who controls all his time in school.”123 While he argued communists had a right to keep their jobs, his anticommunism prevented him from feeling much sympathy when they lost them. Discussing the professors fired from the University of Washington, he said “all the evidence suggests that these men are contemptible individuals who have deliberately lived a political lie, pretending to be American liberals while secretly responding to the dictates of a foreign nation and of a totalitarian conspiracy.”124 Indeed, one of Schlesinger’s (and Hook’s) frequent complaints about McCarthyism was that it turned

123 Ibid.
124 Ibid., 18.
Stalinists into political martyrs. The University of Washington had not only damaged academic freedom but had “transformed these wretched nonentities into living evidences of the capitalist assault against freedom, now paraded through the Eastern campuses and far more powerful in martyrdom than they were in freedom.”

Although Schlesinger understood that reactionary attacks on civil liberties and academics were real, like Hook, he tended to suggest that liberals exaggerated McCarthy’s strength. This was due to Schlesinger’s robust anticommunism, but also because of his interpretation of American history. Schlesinger believed that American political history was like a pendulum that swung back and forth from the political left to right. What he called “countervailing forces” on either side of the American political spectrum made it impossible for one party to dominate politics for very long.

Similarly, in *The Vital Center*, Schlesinger argued that while the constitution gave the structural foundation of American freedom, “It has not been our idealism which has given that structure strength as it has been the remorse which has followed our occasional betrayal of idealism.” Applied to the early 1950s, this meant that McCarthyist repression would be a passing trend, followed by greater levels of freedom. In a review of several books on the topic in 1956, Schlesinger argued that teachers in the 1950s actually had more academic freedom than at any time in American history. Professors complained because:

The renewed sense of status vulnerability, the slanders against the academic profession, the swing from pro-intellectual to anti-intellectual attitudes in government, the misinterpretation of McCarthyism as a permanent phenomenon of the Cold War—all these factors help account for the fact that American professors feel so strong a pressure on their academic

---

125 Ibid.
This of course gave little respite to the professors that had lost their job in the meanwhile.

Hook, Schlesinger, and Cold War Liberalism Reconsidered

Arthur Schlesinger Jr. and Sidney Hook were two of the early Cold War’s most influential liberal intellectuals. While they both attacked Soviet communism and defended cultural freedom, they disagreed on tactics. Hook believed that domestic Communism, because of its ties to the Soviet Union remained a threat, which intellectuals needed to expose and confront. Communist teachers, Hook insisted, surrendered their critical faculties to the Soviet International; this disqualified them from teaching, an occupation that required an open mind. Hook knew McCarthy was a foolish reactionary, but thought that compared to the Soviet threat he was a paper tiger. The political repression in the United States during the First World War, Hook argued, was much more severe than it was in the 1950s—to say nothing of the indiscriminate terror used in the Soviet Union.

Hook never changed his mind. When in 1981, the historian of early Cold War academic freedom cases, Ellen Schrecker requested an interview he angrily declined. Schrecker had amassed considerable evidence that for reasons of scholarly pride and personal safety, communist teachers rarely indoctrinated their students. In response, Hook noted, “You are obviously unfamiliar with the way a Communist Party cell functions on campus, unaware of official Communist Party literature on the subject of

---

education, and unaware of actual Communist Party activities on campuses.”¹²⁹ He went on to claim that her ignorance suggested she had never read his work on the subject.¹³⁰ This obstinacy characterized the rest of Hook’s career. In a review of Hook’s 1987 autobiography, Out of Step, Arthur Schlesinger Jr. expressed disappointment and surprise that a man as accomplished as Hook continued to express such evident bitterness. Schlesinger noted that, “underneath the reasoned surface of the text throbs a repressed rage.”¹³¹ Echoing a complaint Schlesinger had already made to the ACCF in 1956, he added that Hook “remains forever in the New York City trenches of the 1930s fighting the Stalinists. And he retains the spitefulness that marked factional disputes among New York intellectuals.”¹³² While he celebrates the contributions Hook made to Anti-Stalinism before the 1950s, Schlesinger concludes the review by reprimanding him for forgetting that “there are…more things in heaven and earth than are dreamed of in the anti-communist philosophy.”¹³³

Indeed, Schlesinger’s position is consistent with what he was writing by 1949. By then, he believed, domestic communism posed no threat to American democracy. Whereas Hook thought that attacking communists would fortify liberals against right-wing smear campaigns, Schlesinger knew better. He knew from personal experience that dedicated liberal anticommunism would do little to prevent the Republican right from smearing you as a red. The real threat to liberalism was from the radical right. Communist professors posed no threat to the nation’s students, except he argued, the

¹³⁰ Ibid.
¹³³ Ibid.
threat of “killing them by boredom.”\textsuperscript{134} They broke no laws; there was no question they should keep their jobs. Arguing otherwise only empowered McCarthy, which is exactly what the postwar conservative intellectual movement hoped to accomplish by their attacks on academia.

\textsuperscript{134} Schlesinger, “Loathsome Ideas,” 8.
Chapter II: Postwar Conservatives and Academic Freedom

William Buckley and the “Superstitions of Academic Freedom”

The nascent conservative movement’s first and most influential book criticizing the contemporary university was William F. Buckley’s *God and Man at Yale: the Superstitions of Academic Freedom*. Published in 1951, the book launched Buckley’s career as a conservative polemicist, set off a critical maelstrom, established an enduring genre of conservative literature, and unexpectedly made its way to the *New York Times* bestseller list.

Garry Wills favorably summed up Buckley’s contributions to the conservative movement by observing, “before there was Ronald Reagan there was Barry Goldwater, and before there was Barry Goldwater there was *National Review*, and before there was *National Review* there was Bill Buckley with a spark in his mind.” More than any postwar conservative, William Buckley Jr. gathered the contradictory strands of postwar conservatism and united them together into a powerful intellectual movement. Some scholars have suggested that Buckley may have noticed few inconsistencies in libertarianism and traditionalism because a devout Catholic who also happened to be a multi-millionaire oil speculator raised him. In *God and Man at Yale*, Buckley serenely vacillates between elitism and populism, libertarianism and traditionalism, absolutism and relativism. Whether consciously or not, Buckley wrote as if he agreed with Emerson’s dictum, “a foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of small minds.”

*God and Man at Yale* is the work of a conservative muckraker. Buckley aimed to illuminate the corrupted state of American higher education by recounting his

---

136 Ibid., 15.
experiences as a recent Yale undergraduate.\footnote{John B. Judis, \textit{William F. Buckley Jr.: Patron Saint of the Conservatives} (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1988), 83.} \textit{God and Man at Yale} gained widespread attention because of its audacious claims, scintillating prose, and the novelty of a student radical stumping on behalf of conservatism. The respected libertarian journalist John Chamberlain’s glowing introduction gave the book an aura of credibility that the unknown Buckley lacked. Wisely published to coincide with the celebration of Yale’s 250\textsuperscript{th} anniversary, \textit{God and Man at Yale} gained invaluable publicity from the institution’s incompetent handling of the Buckley’s accusations.\footnote{Dwight Macdonald, “God and Buckley at Yale,” \textit{The Reporter} (May 27, 1952): 36.} The cultural climate of the red scare also helped make the public receptive to a book that claimed that America’s professors indoctrinated their students in alien doctrines and sapped the nation’s strength in its showdown with the Soviet Union.

Before examining \textit{God and Man at Yale} in detail, it is worth noting the book’s three major intellectual influences, each of which makes up a separate pillar in the postwar conservative movement. The libertarian ruminations of Albert Jay Nock, a close friend of Buckley’s father, profoundly affected Buckley’s political thought.\footnote{Judis, 44-45; Franklin Foer, “The Happy Hater,” \textit{The New Republic Online}, (Nov. 24, 2004): http://fairuse.1accesshost.com/news2/happy-hater.html.} In books such as \textit{Memoirs of a Superfluous Man} and \textit{Our Enemy, the State}, Nock promoted contempt for the vulgarity of mass democracy and opposition to government intervention in the economy, which he believed destroyed individual liberty.\footnote{Ibid.} Frank Chodorov, a Nock devotee and maverick libertarian journalist, helped Buckley edit \textit{God and Man at Yale}.\footnote{Buckley, \textit{Miles Gone By: A Literary Autobiography} (Washington, D.C: Regnery, 2004), 58.}
Nock, an agnostic and isolationist who believed that the U.S. should avoid warfare because of the strong powers it gives the state, had little influence over Buckley’s militant stance on the Cold War and his right-wing interpretation of Christianity. These attitudes owe more to Buckley’s father, who raised his children in a politicized Catholicism that viewed communism as the embodiment of the antichrist. Buckley Sr. taught his offspring that “communism was not merely a foreign ideology-like socialism or fascism-but a satanic faith that threatened the soul of Western civilization.”

Buckley’s claim in *God and Man at Yale* that America’s struggle with the Soviet Union was as much Holy War as Cold War foreshadows the rhetoric of Whitaker Chambers one year later in *Witness*. Like Buckley, Chambers believed that “the crisis of the Western world exists to the degree in which it is indifferent to God.”

What distinguished *God and Man at Yale* from libertarian elitists such as Nock, who had little hope for the democratic mob, and Chambers, who feared that Americans were too far along the path of materialism to defeat communism, was Buckley’s redemptive faith in the power of the public. As intellectual historian David Hoeveler has noted, *God and Man at Yale* was one of the first conservative assaults on a “New Class” or “rogue elite” poisoning the nation by undermining mainstream values from within.

Once conservatives exposed the perfidy of the elites, Buckley predicted, the sensible majority would fight to regain control of the government, media, and academia. While cultivating an image of high-culture sophistication, Buckley denigrated professional elitism in favor of democratic populism. William Buckley Jr., urbane, wealthy, and sophisticated to the point of caricature famously confessed that he “should sooner live in

142 As quoted in Judis, 27.
a society governed by the first two thousand names in the Boston telephone directory
than in a society governed by the two thousand faculty members of Harvard
University.”

Buckley’s faith in populism derives in large part from his mentor at Yale, political
science professor Wilmore Kendall. As Buckley admits, the outspoken right-wing
populist from Oklahoma had a tremendous influence on his thought and helped him
write God and Man at Yale. Kendall believed in the inherent goodness of the
American political tradition, except his understanding of that tradition was rather
unconventional. He thought that the right of a community to “ride somebody out of town
on a rail” was the central tenant of American democracy. A majority-rule democrat,
Kendall disparaged respect for minority rights and claimed that they were of little
importance to American political history. Buckley relates a story of a Yale faculty
meeting in the early 1950s that illustrates Kendall’s political temperament. As his
colleagues discussed McCarthyism’s menace to academic freedom, Kendall sat silently
for two hours, until he stood up to recount a talk he had that morning with the black
janitor: “‘Is it true, professor’— ‘Is it true, professor, dat dere’s people in New York City
who want to…destroy the guvamint of the United States?’ ‘Yes, Oliver, that is true,’”
Kendall replied. ‘Well, why don’t we lock ‘em up?’ At this point in the story, Kendall
informed his colleagues that the janitor’s statement contained more wisdom than
anything uttered by Yale’s entire political science faculty since the meeting began.

144 As quoted in Hoeveler, 43.
145 Buckley, Miles Gone By, 69.
146 As quoted in Winchell, 15-16.
147 Buckley, Miles Gone By, 59.
The application of Kendall’s populist insights onto a libertarian and culturally conservative framework in *God and Man at Yale* marks a major shift in American conservative thought. In his 1950 alumni day speech, which contains *God and Man at Yale’s* central arguments, Buckley argued that administrators should determine curriculum instead of professors—not a radical leap from the recent past. While writing the book, however, Buckley decided to shift pedagogical responsibilities onto parents and alumni. This was a fundamental departure from most conservative thinking on education. Previous conservatives, such as Nock and Irving Babbitt, wanted teachers insulated from the whims of the public. They had no faith in the crude understanding of parents and alumni.  

For this reason, Kendall himself expressed strong reservations over Buckley’s prescriptions. As Buckley biographer John Judis observes, “*God and Man at Yale* assumes a ‘liberal establishment’ of administration and faculty ruling without clear mandate over a conservative majority. It sounded the clarion of revolution, calling upon the conservative majority to rise up and overthrow the liberal elite.”

Besides, these sophisticated influences, *God and Man at Yale* contributed to an established genre of post-war conservative literature: the shocking exposé of inconspicuous university professor corrupting the nation’s youth from within. While writing the book, Buckley studied tracts, such as “How Red are the Schools” and “Red-Ucators at Yale University” produced by the National Council for American Education, the American Legion, and the magazine *Educational Reviewer.* Yet, Buckley

---

148 Judis, 86.
149 Ibid., 87.
150 Ibid., 86.
151 Box No. 200, Unmarked Folder, William Buckley Jr. Papers, Special Collections, Sterling Library, Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut. (The folder contains draft material for *God and Man at Yale* along with several tracts including the National Council for American Education’s “Red-Ucators at Yale University,” “How Red are the Schools?” and “Three Important Articles on Academic Freedom.”
distinguished himself with the originality of his arguments. Unlike red-baiters, who claimed Soviet sympathizers controlled academia, Buckley admitted that communism posed no threat on campus. Instead, he argued that the real threat to university students was liberalism, which inexorably led to socialism and atheism. The claim that liberals exercised hegemony on campus was more difficult to rebut than claims of Soviet influence.

In *God and Man at Yale*, Buckley sought to undermine academic freedom as advanced by the American Association of University Professors since its establishment in 1915. The AAUP Statement of Principles on Academic Freedom and Tenure, which nearly every major university signed onto by 1940, states that due to their professional status, academics enjoyed certain special rights. A professor’s expertise, as judged by his peers, allows him to pursue research and teach classes as he sees fit, provided he stay within acceptable professional boundaries. Since administrators, trustees, and parents lacked relevant knowledge, the AAUP believed these groups should have no role in determining what merits acceptable scholarship. Besides the appeal to professionalism, the AAUP Statement on academic freedom assumes that only in a free-market place of ideas, in which universities refuse to establish dogmas, can scholars discover knowledge from which the public ultimately benefits.

Buckley argues that, in practice, the AAUP’s definition of academic freedom is anti-democratic, self-serving, and threatens the security of the nation. He challenges the

---

153 The 1940 Statement can be accessed at: http://www.aaup.org/AAUP/pubsres/policydocs/1940statement.htm
notion that professors have unique professional rights. Those who pay for private universities—generally the parents of the students who attend them—and those charged with governing private universities—college presidents and a board of trustees who are ultimately responsible to the alumni—have a right and a responsibility to control what is taught in the classroom, not a charmed circle of unaccountable university professors. Buckley labels academic freedom a pernicious “superstition,” which allows a small coterie of professors to subvert the values of the community that employs them. According to Buckley by the late 1940s, Yale College, an institution founded to train Christian ministers, disdains religion and individualism. He is convinced that Yale’s economic backers have no idea what kind of education its students receive. He finds it amazing that “the institution that derives its moral and financial support from Christian individualists addresses itself to the task of persuading the sons of these supports to be atheistic socialists.” A conservative muckraker, Buckley writes God and Man at Yale as an exposé of the socialism and agnosticism that he claims are predominant not only at Yale, but in most American universities. The book is a call to arms for parents and alumni to take back higher education.

In God and Man at Yale Buckley does not defend the merits of Christianity and laissez-faire capitalism against their purported opponents, instead he assumes their validity, and focuses on showing how professors deride them in Yale’s classrooms. A central assumption of Buckley’s book (which it shares with Hook’s educational philosophy) is that teachers exert tremendous influence over their students. He wrote “I

---

154 Buckley, God and Man at Yale, 190.
155 Buckley, xvi.
should be disrespectful to Yale if I did not credit her with molding the values and thinking processes of the majority of her students.”  

Since Yale’s students go on to exert enormous power in business and government, Buckley claims that the future of the United States depends on the values they learn at school. This is especially crucial during the Cold War because he considers “the duel between Christianity and atheism the most important in the world [and] the struggle between individualism and collectivism is the same struggle reproduced on another level.”

In his section on religion, Buckley laments the fact that professors refuse to preach the gospel in the classroom. Religion courses invariably treat Christianity as any other academic discipline, objectively, as literature or ethical philosophy. According to Buckley, this reduces the Christian faith to the level of Greek Mythology. He claims that is unconscionable that the religion department contains agnostics aiming to foster doubt in their students. Buckley goes so far as to argue that all the humanities and social sciences should make their courses explicitly pro-Christian. Unless professors openly espouse the Christian faith, Buckley believes the next generation of Yale alumni will be composed of committed atheists. He chides Yale’s President Charles Seymour for promoting Christianity in his speeches but doing nothing to “Christianize Yale.”

Not only is Yale uncongenial to Christians, but according to Buckley, it also treats proponents of the free-market as pariahs. “Collectivists,” whom Buckley defines as anyone supporting government intervention in the economy, he explains, exercise almost

---

156 Ibid., 114.
157 Ibid., xvii.
158 Ibid., 34.
159 Ibid., 43.
total control over Yale’s economics department. Buckley quotes Yale’s principal economic textbooks, used in dozens of schools across the nation, to show that they promote limitless deficit spending, steep progressive taxation, a large welfare state, and an end to the capital gains exemption tax. These textbooks, Buckley complains, take strong “social” positions that have nothing to do with economics. They portray large corporations as predators whose excesses the government must tame. Buckley is convinced these policies lead to political oppression. He is angered that professors ignore or dismiss free-market thinkers such as Friedrich Hayek and Ludwig von Mises, whom he believes possess the closest thing to gospel truth that is possible in economics.

Buckley explains that the student complacency that many social commentators saw plaguing the 1950s was due to the many professors who taught their students to shun entrepreneurship and embrace economic collectivism. After mulling over their options students, “…finally decide to go down to Washington and get a job with some government bureau. Or maybe tie it in with AT&T.” Brooding over this state of affairs, Buckley claims “individualism is dying at Yale, without a fight.” If the educational status quo continues, the next generation of Americans will have lost their will to defend free enterprise and religion.

Buckley argues that the “professionalism” argument made on behalf of academic freedom is in reality a self-serving justification for professorial license and the domination of a hegemonic liberal elite. It is not at all surprising, Buckley notes, that professors want total control over what they teach in the classroom because it works to

160 Ibid., 67.
161 Ibid., 81-82.
162 Ibid., 85-86.
163 Ibid., 193.
their advantage. Professors simply cloak their self-interest under the guise of “academic freedom” and usurp the rights of parents, trustees, and alumni. For Buckley there is only one true definition of academic liberty: “For in the last analysis, academic freedom must mean the freedom of men and women to supervise the educational activities and aims of the schools they oversee and support.” He attacks the hypocrisy of Yale’s administration, which frequently reminds the alumni of their crucial role in shaping academic policy, but simply pleads for their donations. He highlights the fact that when Yale hires members for its board, it does not ask potential members about their views on politics and education, but simply for a distinguished c.v. Buckley calls instead for a politicized Board of Trustees to put into place what he believes is the alumni’s conservative agenda.

While criticizing the permissive attitude that supposedly allows collectivism and atheism to flourish at Yale, Buckley simultaneously argues that academic freedom does not really exist. He points out that there are already many restrictions on what even a qualified and honest professor may teach. Since these restrictions already exist, Buckley argues the alumni may tighten them. The fact that Yale’s president publicly announced that he would not knowingly hire a communist, he argues, is obvious evidence of this fact. Racist biologists and anti-democratic political scientists abound, he claims, but their values make them unacceptable to Yale’s liberal faculty. Defenders of academic freedom pretend to promote tolerance, but in fact, this tolerance does not extend to ideas.

---

164 Ibid., 190.
165 Ibid., God and Man, 118-120. It is highly questionable whether the alumni supported Buckley’s conservative agenda. In a marketing plea to Yale alumni, a vast majority of respondents rejected Regnery’s offer to buy God and Man at Yale. Hand-written responses from Yale alumni included ones that labeled Buckley, “scurrilous and fascistic,” and “a twisted young man.” One simply noted, “I don’t like Mr. Buckley and he can got to hell.” Box No. 411, Folder “God and Man at Yale, W”, William Buckley Papers.
166 Buckley, God and Man, 150-151.
beyond liberal bromides. Buckley argues that it is inevitable that professors have
biases and there is nothing wrong with espousing them in the classroom; only the content
of these values must come from parents and alumni.

Taking on the AAUP’s idea that knowledge only advances with open debate,
Buckley argues that truth does not prosper in the free marketplace of ideas; instead, it
only prospers when societies have it promulgated. The “lie” of fascism, he argues, took
hold in Italy and Germany, even though they had been democracies in which freedom of
expression flourished. Buckley argues that forcing students to contend with many
points of view promotes skepticism, which leads to inaction or even fascism. He claims
that universities have a responsibility to inculcate students in the values that the
community believes are closest to the truth. Since Buckley speculates that Yale’s
economic backers believe overwhelmingly in capitalism and Christianity, professors must.encourage these values. Buckley admits that teachers should expose students to
capitalism and Christianity’s opponents, for example Weber and Keynes, but only to
deflate them. If socialists founded a school, Buckley would expect them to give the same
treatment to Locke and St-Paul: they should serve as straw men for Karl Marx.

Buckley summed up his education theory in a later essay, “The Aimlessness of American
Education.” He argued that, “Schools ought not to be neutral. Schools should not
proceed as though the wisdom of our fathers were too tentative to serve as an educational
base….Certain great truths have been apprehended; and those who disregard them fall
easily into the alien pitfalls of communism, or fascism, or liberalism.” The fact that

167 Ibid., 139-140.
168 Ibid., 157-159.
169 Ibid., 181.
170 As quoted in Winchell, 77.
Buckley lumps liberalism in the same category as communism and fascism is typical of his polemical style.

The upshot of Buckley’s position on academic freedom, as he admits, is that Yale should fire many of its professors. According to Buckley, such dismissals would not infringe on professors’ rights in any way. It would only make professors have to suffer the normal consequences of a free-market society; when there is insufficient demand for one’s goods or services one is out of a job.\textsuperscript{171} Anticipating objections that this system would impede the search for knowledge and entrench orthodoxies, Buckley argues that researchers, not professors, are responsible for discovering new truths. The doctrine of academic freedom, he argues, conflates the rights and responsibilities of researchers and teachers. Knowledge cannot advance without original and unimpeded research, Buckley admits, but he claims this has nothing to do with what professors teach their students. Even here, Buckley does not see carrying out original research as a necessary component of the university; wealthy donors can set up their own research institutes.\textsuperscript{172}

\textit{God and Man at Yale} received dozens of reviews in media that ranged from newspaper tabloids to academic journals. Every major newsmagazine covered the book, including \textit{Time}, \textit{Life}, \textit{Newsweek}, \textit{The New York Times Book Review}, \textit{The Atlantic Monthly}, and \textit{the New Republic}. The book garnered so much controversy that \textit{The Saturday Review} gave \textit{God and Man at Yale} three separate reviews.\textsuperscript{173} The book also gained valuable coverage from the many articles written about the controversy that it spawned. Many contentious books fall into the category of “love it or hate it,” but this

\textsuperscript{171} Buckley, \textit{God and Man}, 189.
\textsuperscript{172} Ibid., 189-190.
\textsuperscript{173} Buckley, \textit{Miles Gone By}, 74
was not the case with *God and Man at Yale*. Many reviewers hated the book vehemently, which likely contributed to its sales, but the favorable reviews all contained major reservations.\(^{174}\) Typical of such reviews, *Time Magazine* chided Buckley for his absolutism but praised him for the questions he raised: “What is the moral responsibility of an American University? Has it any? Should a university have convictions—or no convictions? Should it be neutral or against all religion? Or encourage Christianity as the most-favored faith? Or what?”\(^{175}\) Libertarians praised his section on economics, but distanced themselves from his ideas on religion. Communist turned libertarian Max Eastman’s review (large portions of which were used to advertise the book) is representative.\(^ {176}\) Buckley convinced him that “students of economics at Yale are being pretty well indoctrinated, by and large with the principles of creeping socialism.”\(^ {177}\) He praised *God and Man at Yale* as a “brilliant, sincere, well-informed, keenly reasoned, and exiting read.”\(^ {178}\) Yet Eastman blasted the section on religion, noting “to me it is ridiculous to see little, two-legged fanatics running around the earth fighting and arguing in behalf of a Deity whom they profess to consider omnipotent…Thus I think the thing to do with Mr. Buckley’s chapter about God at Yale is to cross it out and forget it.”\(^ {179}\) Finally, on elitist and libertarian grounds, Eastman disagreed with Buckley’s call for alumni control.\(^ {180}\)

---

\(^{174}\) Buckley, *Miles Gone By*, 84.

\(^{175}\) *Time Magazine*, “Rebel in Reverse,” (Monday, Oct. 29, 1951), http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,821813,00.html


\(^{177}\) Ibid., 23.

\(^{178}\) Ibid., 26.

\(^{179}\) Ibid., 23.

\(^{180}\) Ibid., 25.
Traditionalists also questioned Buckley’s methods for ensuring a conservative orthodoxy on campus. Unlike most other reviewers, they pointed out the contradiction in making consumerism and capitalism the means to enshrine traditional values. Peter Viereck, writing in the *New York Times Book Review*, praised Buckley’s assertion that man had a moral nature but asked, “Is there no selfish materialism at the National Association of Manufactures?”¹⁸¹ The Catholic Press almost universally came to the same conclusion. In the *Catholic World*, Christopher E. Fullmann commented, “Now it is surely quite obvious that Christ and Adam Smith have very little in common.”¹⁸² Edward A. Tenney attacked the book from a traditionally conservative elitist standpoint. He argued that Buckley’s version of academic freedom represented an insidious form of populism. He wrote, “It is a clear expression of an all too dangerous modern fallacy, the fallacy that truth is a majority opinion. This fallacy is the basis of democratic totalitarianism, a totalitarianism that can be as tyrannical in its way as other modern forms of absolute government. The belief expressed in this book is that a liberal arts college should be a thought control machine, that is should inculcate whatever set of values a majority of the Yale constituency demands.”¹⁸³

The many critics that charged Buckley with advocating totalitarianism attest to the fact that *God and Man at Yale* represented a radical turn in contemporary conservatism. A few examples will suffice to show the tone adopted by many reviewers. In the *Journal of Bible and Religion*, S. Vernon McCasland said the book was a “startling broadside by a recent graduate of Yale and could become the campaign pamphlet of a

¹⁸¹ As quoted in Judis, 96.
¹⁸² Ibid.
totalitarian movement to assume control of all American higher education.”\textsuperscript{184} In the \textit{Yale Daily News}, Christian philosopher T.M. Greene called Buckley’s prescriptions for academic freedom “pure unadulterated fascism.”\textsuperscript{185} Frank Ashburn ominously warned in the \textit{Saturday Review} that, “The book is one which has the glow and appeal of a fiery cross on a hillside at night. There will undoubtedly be robed figures who gather to it, but the hoods will not be academic. They will cover the face.”\textsuperscript{186}

In a preface to \textit{God and Man at Yale} written twenty-five years later, Buckley addressed these critics by noting that community control over higher education represented the opposite of totalitarianism.\textsuperscript{187} In fascist or communist countries, an unaccountable elite controlled education and would never allow citizens democratic participation in establishing curriculums. Totalitarianism, Buckley retorted, shared much more in common with the demands for academic freedom made by the AAUP, which did not allow the public a role in educational policy. While Buckley’s proposals may have been reactionary, they were certainly not drawing on totalitarianism, but on a populist and regionalist tradition that goes as far back in American history as the anti-federalists. It was the same tradition that in 1968 inspired African-Americans in Brownsville, New York to establish community control over their local high schools against the wishes of the local teacher’s union. While black power activists, who shared little of Buckley’s conservative politics made up this movement, his support for their goals was consistent with his arguments in \textit{God and Man at Yale}.\textsuperscript{188}

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{185} As quoted in Henry Luce, “God, Socialism, and Yale,” \textit{Life Magazine} (October 29, 1951): 32.
  \item \textsuperscript{186} As quoted in Buckley, \textit{Miles Gone By}, 77.
  \item \textsuperscript{187} Ibid., 78-79.
  \item \textsuperscript{188} Hoeveler, 41.
\end{itemize}
One of the major theoretical innovations of God and Man at Yale was to link Christianity with right-wing economics. Buckley believed that the individualism inherent in Christianity demanded a commitment to the unadulterated free-market. Today, the connection between religious fundamentalists and the pro-free market Republican Party is commonplace, yet in 1951, many vocal Christians did not see the Welfare State in conflict with their beliefs. Nor did they believe higher education involved indoctrination into right-wing theology. Buckley’s call for professors to “Christianize” academia elicited angry responses from many religious quarters. Mainline Protestants charged Buckley with advocating a papist form of education for a traditionally Protestant school. In his searing review of God and Man at Yale in the Atlantic Monthly, McGeorge Bundy noted “it seems strange for any Roman Catholic to undertake to define the Yale religious tradition.”\(^{189}\) He also observed that “in Mr. Buckley’s strict definition of a Christian such men as Jefferson, Emerson, Lincoln, and Yale’s own William Howard Taft would fail to qualify.”\(^{190}\)

Ironically, while a number of Protestant reviewers denounced Buckley as advocating Papist education, Catholics almost universally denounced his stand on economics. Since the late nineteenth century, Papal encyclicals strongly condemned individualism, materialism, and supported government social programs to relieve poverty.\(^{191}\) In a review for a Catholic news service, an anonymous critic noted Buckley’s “analysis is nineteenth century liberalism, which has been explicitly rejected by the Church and clearly identified by the social encyclicals of Leo XII and Pius XI and one of

---


\(^{190}\) Ibid., 51.

the principal causes of the development of modern socialism."[192] Buckley said very little to counter these claims, which were on strong theological ground. He later admitted that he was “confused by some of the statements that appear to be social encyclicals.”[193]

There were some Christian fundamentalists, however, that strongly supported the way Buckley tied the struggle against Communism abroad with the struggle against atheism and socialism at home. Buckley believes it was what convinced the American Council of Christian Laymen in Madison, Wisconsin to compare him to Solomon and Confucius.[194]

Many reviewers roundly condemned *God and Man at Yale* for quoting textbooks out of context and generally engaging in hyperbole. As Buckley biographer John Judis points out, the book “urged Yale to fire not only Marxists, but followers of John Maynard Keynes and the Truman administration’s tepid Fair Deal. He grouped the ideas of Thomas Huxley’s Darwinism, Harold Laski and Sidney and Beatrice Webb’s Fabian Socialism, and John Dewey’s Pragmatism with those of Marx and Hitler.”[195] In an extremely harsh review in the *Yale Law Journal*, Vern Countryman gives strong textual evidence that Buckley systematically distorted the message of the economics textbooks that he used as proof of Yale’s collectivist bias.[196] Noting the book’s use of exaggeration, Dwight Macdonald argued Buckley’s attitude toward truth also influenced his view of red-baiters, pointing to the fact he defended the book *USA Confidential* even though it was full of dishonest smear attacks. Buckley had said, “I don’t like the way the

---

192 As quoted in Macdonald, 36.
193 As quoted in Judis, 96.
194 Buckley, *Miles Gone By*, 69
195 Judis, 83.
book is written any more than you do. But it’s on our side…And anyway you’ve got to write that way to reach a big public.”

Macdonald acknowledged Buckley’s hyperbole but still believed that his description of contemporary higher education was correct. Macdonald wrote, “Though many of Buckley’s specific charges are exaggerated, distorted, or just not true, he is clearly right when he points out that Yale has changed a lot since the eighteenth century, and that its teachings and textbooks do not indoctrinate the students with a faith in either Christianity or free-market capitalism. All this means, of course, is that Yale is a large American university, that America in 1952 is not very religious or free-enterprising, and that Yale reflects the predominant culture of the nation it serves.”

Buckley, a radical reactionary, was not satisfied with Yale or the American culture it served in 1952.

Russell Kirk: Academic Freedom against Modernity

One of Buckley’s fellow leaders in the postwar conservative intellectual movement, who also disdained the liberal climate of the 1950s, strongly disagreed with his work on academic freedom. In 1955, Russell Kirk published *Academic Freedom: an Essay in Definition*, a work that challenged many of Buckley’s ideas in *God and Man at Yale*. Kirk achieved prominence in the early conservative movement because of his book *The Conservative Mind*, published in 1953. A romantic traditionalist, Kirk believed in absolute values, hierarchy, and the Christianity more than he believed in capitalism, which explains some of his quarrels with Buckley. His work on academic freedom

---

197 As quoted in Macdonald, 38.
198 Ibid., 37.
199 Nash, 61-62.
200 Ibid., 62.
shows fissures in the early conservative movement, which unlike similar disagreements among liberals, were ultimately resolvable. Kirk’s critique of the modern university also prefigures criticisms launched from the left by student leaders in the 1960s.

According to Kirk academic freedom “is the principle designed to protect the teacher from hazards that tend to prevent him from meeting his obligations in pursuit of truth.”201 Academic freedom is a right assigned only to scholars who “are dedicated to conserving the intellectual heritage of the ages and to extending the realm of knowledge.”202 Like the AAUP, Kirk believes that academic freedom is a special right reserved to a professional class. He differs with the AAUP in considering academic freedom a natural right, which places it above manmade laws. If authorities banned academic freedom, professors would have a right to disobey their edicts. He traces the concept’s lineage back to Plato’s academy and the Medieval University in which, he believed, scholars enjoyed considerable autonomy.

Kirk’s elitism makes his objections to the quasi-populism of God and Man at Yale understandable. Buckley’s definition of academic freedom as “the freedom of men and women to supervise the educational activities and aims of the schools they oversee and support,” runs counter to Kirk’s defense of a scholarly caste protected from the whims of the mob. While sympathetic to many of Buckley’s values, Kirk nonetheless chides him for advocating “indoctrination of things as they are.”203 He blasts the idea that outsiders, whether parents, alumni, or trustees, are more qualified to run classes than professors. Like many defenders of academic freedom during the McCarthy period, Kirk highlights the plight of Socrates, executed for corrupting the youth of Athens. Kirk is sympathetic

202 Ibid., 3.
203 Ibid., 118.
to capitalism and Christianity but argues that a professor’s commitment is to truth, not
dogma. In addition, Kirk argues, propaganda on behalf of the free-market and
Christianity is unlikely to convince students. The students will understand that they are
not listening to what a teacher believes is the truth, but instead what he is forced to teach
by outsiders with an interest in the status quo. Moreover, as far Christianity is concerned,
one cannot force faith onto students anymore than one can force love onto relationships.

Kirk also attacks Buckley’s rhetorical excesses. No matter how much one may
disagree with John Maynard Keynes, Kirk remarks, he is no way the fanatical collectivist
that Buckley portrays. Instead, Keynes was a moderate economic interventionist, who
hoped to save capitalism during the depression years. Economics professors may
genuflect unnecessarily in Keynes’ direction, Kirk notes, but firing them for this reason
would provide a “remedy worse than the disease.” Instead of calling for the removal
of professors, Kirk writes that Buckley is better off exposing their faults and engaging
them in a public debate.

If one were to focus only on Kirk’s stinging critique of William Buckley, he
would appear almost indistinguishable from the academic freedom stalwarts at the
American Association of University Professors, but the thrust of Academic Freedom: an
Essay in Definition is not to defend embattled campus liberals, but to attack them
relentlessly. This is because he believes that McCarthyism is an exaggerated, passing
trend that poses little threat to academic freedom. Liberals, he argues, pose the bigger
threat. Their promotion of mass democracy, big government, and philosophical
relativism are insidious dangers that may destroy academic freedom from within.

204 Ibid., 126.
205 Ibid., 73.
Kirk launches a major attack against definitions of academic freedom that rely on the benefits it brings to society. He believes that scholars have a higher calling to teach and discover truth. This responsibility endows them with the special privilege of academic freedom. Kirk’s ideal is the Medieval University, in which men devoted to knowledge of the sacred investigated, debated, and promulgated ancient truths. They had no need for instrumentalism. He looks favorably upon the Middle Ages, a period in which scholars commanded so much respect that “the community did not expect to be served, except in the sense that it might be so fortunate as to gather some crumbs from the academic table.”206 By contrast, Kirk argues, pragmatists ground their defense of academic liberty in the tangible benefits it brings to the state. This approach makes professors into the servants of society, rather than the servants of truth. Without reference to a higher power, Kirk argues, academic freedom loses any philosophical foundation allowing it to supersede political authority—whether exercised by a dictator or the majority of the electorate. Kirk believes that the democratic pragmatism favored by John Dewey and Sidney Hook (along with the populism propounded by Buckley) undermines the foundation on which academic freedom establishes its authority. The scholar has nowhere to turn if the people turn against him. Kirk warns that, “the people may send Mr. McCarthy…to teach…the popular version of this relative truth. If the people are the standard of right and sole objects of learning, who shall say them nay?”207

To enhance his point about the relationship between belief in a higher power and academic freedom, Kirk draws on his experiences touring America’s universities. He asserts that academic freedom thrives in schools tied, however tenuously, to a religious

206 Ibid., 18.
207 Ibid., 53.
denomination. Unlike Buckley, Kirk opposes religious institutions that push adherence to a doctrinal line; he simply believes that academic freedom thrives in an environment with a strong religious heritage. Kirk notes that, “The links between churches and ‘denominational’ colleges may have grown weak, in many instances; yet the belief that scholars are Bearers of the Word dies hard, in such places, and fortifies the professor against intimidation, and reminds the administrator that there are moral limitations upon his prerogatives.”

Kirk’s sympathy for denominational colleges is also due to their separation from government. Kirk bases his argument against state-funded universities partly on old-fashioned elitism. He notes that “private institutions have inestimable advantages of diversity and of appeal to a select body of opinion, as contrasted with the dependence of the state institution upon an executive or political authority chosen by a mass of citizens inferior in education and discipline to the scholar and teacher.”

More importantly, Kirk believes that decentralized privately funded colleges are best suited to resist the drift towards conformity and anti-intellectualism taking place in American higher education. Furthermore, intellectual subservience to outside authorities, Kirk asserts, is much more likely under a powerful state than under a small group of parents and trustees.

Throughout the book and in his articles on academic life for *National Review*, Kirk argues that it is not communists, but elitists, that are often the real victims of contemporary attacks on academic freedom. He goes into detail about the case of Professor Frank Richardson at the University of Nevada, a tenured professor who nearly lost his job for distributing an article in *Scientific American* that criticized large

---

208 Ibid., 39.
209 Ibid., 38.
classrooms. The university’s chief administrator espoused mass higher education and treated faculty dissent as akin to treason. Kirk applauds the AAUP for intervening, but claims it delayed its response because the school had not accused him of being a communist sympathizer. In the chief administrator’s militancy, Kirk sees the unintentional results of John Dewey’s ideas about democratic education—stifling conformity and the abandonment of academic freedom in the name of greater democracy. While the “herd of independent minds” focused on the ephemeral trend of McCarthyism, Kirk predicted that the structural changes caused by massive expansion of higher education would have long-term and damaging consequences.\textsuperscript{211}

One of the reasons Kirk believed that academics exaggerated McCarthyism’s threat to academic freedom was because he sympathized with a number of McCarthy’s goals. Kirk believed that membership in the Communist Party constituted sufficient grounds to fire a professor. Although Kirk attacks Hook’s pragmatism, he refers to Hook’s anticommmunist writings to argue that Communists almost invariably indoctrinate their students. According to Kirk, and many others during the McCarthy era, tolerance cannot tolerate intolerance.\textsuperscript{212} Unlike Hook, Kirk claims that the government has a right to investigate university professors because communist intellectuals threaten the security of the nation. He also disagrees with the AAUP’s position that taking the Fifth Amendment did not imply a presumption of guilt. While he admits the small number of Communist professors in the United States, Kirk draws ominous parallels with the small vanguard of Soviet revolutionaries that eventually overthrew the Czar.\textsuperscript{213} He believes the

\textsuperscript{211} Kirk, \textit{Academic Freedom}, 105-106
\textsuperscript{212} Ibid., 107-118.
\textsuperscript{213} Ibid., 143.
US government’s methods for investigating campuses have so far been too intrusive, but that it has a right and a duty to confront the threat of communism in higher education.

Kirk blasted liberal historian and editorial writer Henry Steele Commager for defending the rights of communist professors and for naively underestimating their strength on campus.214 Kirk also makes the strange argument that the fact New York City has been dismissing many teachers for their supposed ties to communism proves that there are a large number of communist indoctrinators on campus. Like Hook, Kirk calls Owen Lattimore a “valuable Soviet agent,” (even though there was absolutely no evidence for this assertion).215 Kirk’s critique of Commager extends to his critique of contemporary liberalism in general. He calls it a movement of “disintegrated liberals” because their embrace of relativism and total freedom of thought has made them lose touch with any affirmative values. Liberals, he claims are “out-of-touch, desperate, statist, and finished.”216 While liberals, he believes are not as bad as indoctrinators, they are their enablers. He argues that Commager has not paid attention to the monstrous crimes of the last fifty years, his naïve liberalism places him in the nineteenth century. He complains that Commager cannot see that a congressman deserves more respect than a communist.217

Kirk repeats Buckley’s assertion that Hitler came into power in Nazi Germany not because of repression, but because of too much freedom of speech and a lack of respect for justified authority.218 Kirk takes his critique of liberalism back to one of its towering

214 For Commager’s defense of civil liberties during the McCarthy era see Neil Jumonville, Henry Steele Commager: Midcentury Liberalism and the History of the Present (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 99-129.
216 Ibid., 136.
217 Ibid., 136-138.
218 Ibid., 131-133.
figures John Stuart Mill. Mill’s thought he believes promotes atomism, social anarchy, and denigrates communal values. Mill’s optimism has no place in the twentieth century, an era that has shown that without a guiding principle, things fall apart. Academic freedom, Kirk believes, cannot be based on Millsean non-conformism, it can only be based on tradition and affirmative values.219

While Kirk excoriates Buckley for promoting academic indoctrination, he reserves even more scorn for progressive education and their liberal enablers. The dogged secularism of these educational theorists is what Kirk finds disturbing. He claims that progressive educators promote civic participation, fealty to the secular state, and the avoidance of religion. Labeling such theorists “social reconstructionists,” Kirk argues that their dogmatic prescriptions promote a soft totalitarianism.220

Kirk’s critique of liberalism and the contemporary university foreshadows arguments made by the student left in the 1960s. Like students in SDS and the Free Speech Movement, Kirk believed that academia was moving towards a model of education that favored the demands of the market and the government over humanistic learning. Schools were turning into large “socialization factories” or “degree mills” in which academics were nothing but employees and students nothing but consumers.221 Universities, Kirk lamented, drew their chief administrators from the ranks of business and government; efficiency and profit meant much more to them than truth.222 Attacking the dehumanization of higher education, Kirk mocks college presidents who believe, “the only thing wrong with the higher-learning in America…is that it simply isn’t mechanized

219 Ibid., 138-140.
220 Ibid., 127-130.
and standardized and impersonalized enough.”223 Kirk complained of the mushrooming student to teacher ratio, which he believed contributes to the depersonalization of education. A number of college presidents, he laments, have supported the use of “canned lectures” delivered by close-circuit television. Kirk compares the bureaucracy and dehumanization of the contemporary university to Bentham’s Panopticon and Big Brother.224

Some of Kirk’s complaints are indistinguishable from the rhetoric of the famous Port Huron Statement and Berkeley’s Free Speech Movement (except Kirk would never have countenanced giving students a say in their education in the way the New Left demanded). Kirk writes, “No room is left for leisure in the ‘educational institution’ I have described, nor for true thought; the professor-employee is there to indoctrinate his cure of students in approved attitudes; and then they will go out to make money and run their machines.”225 His rhetoric echoes in the Students for a Democratic Society’s famous Port Huron Statement, which states “…the actual intellectual effect of the college experience is hardly distinguishable from that of any other communications channel—say, a television set-passing on the stock truths of the day. Students leave college somewhat more ‘tolerant’ than when they arrived, but basically unchallenged in their values and political orientations…The real function of the educational system—as opposed to its rhetorical function of ‘searching for truth’—is to impart the key information and styles that will help the student to get by, modestly but comfortably, in

223 Kirk, “The University Imperialists.”
224 Ibid.
225 Kirk, Academic Freedom, 176.
the big society beyond.” Discussing college presidents and administrators Kirk wrote, “The secret of their success is not in acute financial management, but rather in grandiose educational empire-building, attracting students by publicity campaigns and winning fat appropriations from legislatures by diverse wiles. In their opinion, bigness seems to be all, or nearly all…A university, to him, is an efficient plant which turns out as many degree holders as possible: literally a degree-mill.” Attacking the administration at Berkeley for styling itself as a management team, Free Speech Movement Leader Mario Savio similarly intoned in 1964: "Now, I ask you to consider: if this is a firm, and if the Board of Regents are the board of directors, and if President Kerr in fact is the manager, then I'll tell you something: the faculty are a bunch of employees, and we're the raw material!…There is a time when the operation of the machine becomes so odious, makes you so sick at heart, that you can't take part.”

Kirk believed that the dramatic transformation of the university along corporate lines was a much more insidious threat to academic freedom than the passing trend of McCarthyism. He attacked liberal professors that no longer believe the university had a purpose except to satisfy a demand in the market. From his perspective, they had become sophists. If universities continued with expansion, overspecialization, and the growth of the physical plant over intellectual excellence, the “reason for academic freedom has vanished, the academy having degenerated into a custodial institution where the

---

228 Mario Savio, “Free Speech Movement Sit-In Speech” (Dec 3, 1964) Available at http://www.fsm-a.org/stacks/mario/mario_speech.html
229 Kirk, Academic Freedom, 182.
immature are exposed to ‘socialization’ and indoctrinated in ‘approved social attitudes.’

Academic Freedom and the Growth of the Conservative Movement

Postwar conservatives believed that ideas mattered. They saw themselves as outsiders, right-wing radicals shunned by a liberal establishment dominating the media, the government, and the university. Conservatives took it as an article of faith that one of the main reasons their ideas failed to gain greater currency was because of liberal hegemony over academia. To counter this perceived handicap, they wrote books for right-wing publishing houses and founded journals such as *Modern Age* and *National Review*, which regularly criticized the academic status quo. Historians often discuss the creation of a conservative “counter-establishment” of think tanks, research institutes, and publishing houses that eschewed academia’s peer review system as a product of the 1970s, when in fact, it is a movement rooted deeply in the 1950s.

Russell Kirk and William Buckley disagreed sharply over the meaning of academic freedom, but unlike their liberal counterparts such as Arthur Schlesinger Jr. and Sidney Hook, they did not let their disagreements slow down their intellectual movement. While the liberal anticommunist ACCF lost several members, including Schlesinger, because of academic rebaiting, conservatives put aside their differences to form magazines, journals, and later student groups such as the Young Americans for Freedom. Even though they disagreed over academic freedom, Buckley still gave Kirk a bi-weekly column on academic life when he founded the *National Review* in 1955.

---

The higher level of comity among conservative thinkers is likely because they saw themselves as underdogs fighting a liberal behemoth; and nothing unites people as much as a common enemy. By the mid 1950s, liberal anticommunists no longer shared a clearly defined common foe. Hardliners continued to focus on the Communist menace, but moderates began to argue that violations of civil liberties in the name of national security posed a more serious threat to American freedom. Moreover, while conservatives like Kirk and Buckley disagreed on the meaning of academic freedom, they shared many fundamental beliefs. Kirk and Buckley believed they were intellectual outsiders, conservatives struggling against a liberal academic and political establishment. Both vigorously denounced philosophical relativism and pragmatism, which they believed led to moral paralysis or totalitarianism. They agreed that Christianity had a crucial role to play in American higher education. Both agreed that government should have little involvement in the economy or in the academy (except in the case of national security).

Since both Kirk and Buckley attacked what they saw as a hegemonic liberal consensus, it is not surprising that some of their ideas prefigure later arguments leveled against the university by the New Left, which also lambasted what they considered a liberal establishment. Kirk’s critique of the corporate-bureaucratic model of higher learning anticipated calls for humanistic education among student groups in the 1960s. Similarly, Buckley’s academic populism shares similarities with the New Left’s demands for community control and attacks against elitism. Perhaps unintentionally, Buckley also prefigures the attacks on the objectivity of knowledge launched in the late sixties and seventies by Michel Foucault. Buckley, like Foucault, argues that what professors
present as “the truth” is only accorded that status because of their power as gatekeepers in an academic institution. While professors claim to be open to new evidence, they automatically dismiss perspectives outside of their predetermined mindsets. Buckley believes that objectivity is impossible, yet his solution to this epistemological quandary is not the endless self-questioning of postmodern philosophy, but indoctrinating students in the values that their communities believe to be closest to the truth.

Kirk and Buckley’s books and articles about academic freedom did little to challenge the way American universities ran themselves. Except for a handful of parochial institutions, parents and alumni generally have no say in curriculum planning and faculty hiring. When professors defend academic freedom, they generally do not turn to natural law, nor do faculty indoctrinate their students in Christianity, as Buckley desired (economics departments have however become much more sympathetic to the free-market in the intervening years). Kirk and Buckley’s importance lay less in their direct influence on academia than in their ability to unite disenfranchised conservative thinkers behind their movement. *God and Man at Yale* set the rhetorical template for several books attacking “the liberal academy” in the 1950s including Merrill Root’s *Collectivism on the Campus* and in Felix Wittmer’s *Conquest of the American Mind*.232 This genre of literature continues well into the twenty-first century. More importantly by putting liberals on the rhetorical defensive conservatives helped empower McCarthyism, a movement that unlike there liberal counterparts, they generally supported. Buckley’s follow up to *God and Man at Yale, McCarthy and his Enemies*, concluded with his observation that “as long as McCarthyism fixes its goals with its present precision, it is a

---

movement around which men of good will and stern morality can close ranks.” While certain Cold War liberals may have enabled McCarthyism on campus, conservatives created the furor.

---

Chapter III: The America Association of University Professors and Academic Freedom

The Dawn of the Campus Red Scare

McCarthyism significantly influenced the way the AAUP chose to defend academic freedom. The organization’s support for its traditional definition of the concept, which protected Communist Party faculty, rose and fell according to the currents of public opinion. While Committee A never abandoned its core beliefs in academic freedom, as McCarthyism gained strength, it promoted them with less zeal than in the past. In 1947, the first year the AAUP considered the possibility of a rightward turn in American politics, the political climate still seemed favorable to the organization’s principles. Since the beginning of 1946, only a single reported violation of academic freedom took place. Except for that one charge, the Committee A report for 1946 observed, “no one had reported trouble through classroom lectures, choice of textbooks, or publications offensive to local mores.”234 The report considered three potential threats to academic freedom: “grandiose projects befitting the atomic age”; administrative favoritism for top research scientists; and lastly, administrators blaming unsuccessful courses on the professors who taught them rather the departments that designed them.235 None of these concerns had anything to do with communism or civil liberties. While Committee A remained optimistic, it counseled vigilance. The report predicted, “if there is a strong national swing to the right, professors of the more ‘liberal’ sort, even in the ‘safe’ subjects, may sometimes find themselves embarrassed by private activities or utterances

235 Ibid., 67.
which would have passed unnoticed in the recent past, when liberalism was more fashionable.”236

One year later, as the Soviet Union extended its reach over Eastern Europe and the United States unveiled the Truman Doctrine, the AAUP sensed the rumblings of just such a dramatic shift to the right. Contemplating the contemporary political situation, Committee A urged its membership to remember the wave of faculty dismissals that had accompanied the Red Scare following World War I.237 The Committee A report for 1947 prophesied the beginning of a Second Red Scare. The report’s author and head of Committee A, George Shannon, predicted that academic freedom would soon face “considerable pressure from legislatures and legislative committees, donors and potential donors, alumni groups, civic and patriotic organizations, and local newspapers.”238

The AAUP braced itself for a second Red Scare. Committee A used its report for 1947 to articulate a strong defense of academic freedom that took into account the international tensions of the Cold War. The report addressed the thorny question of Communist Party membership in the academy, acknowledging the difficult issues posed by the “inherent antagonism and the daily friction between communistic totalitarianism and democracy; from a general abhorrence of the philosophy and practice of communism; and from a fear of communist infiltration.”239 While communism presented a controversial topic, the AAUP took a strong stance in favor of traditional practice; it would not support the dismissal of professors simply for belonging to the Party. Only

---

236 Ibid.
237 For the AAUP’s response to academic freedom cases during World War I, which in many ways foreshadows their response to McCarthyism see Carole S. Gruber, Mars and Minerva: World War I and the Uses of the Higher Learning in America (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1975), 164-172.
238 Shannon, 129.
239 Ibid., 119.
professional misconduct in the classroom or in research, as judged by one’s academic peers, could warrant dismissal.

The Committee A Report for 1947 rebutted many of the arguments, put forward by the likes of Sidney Hook, against tolerating communist faculty. These included the belief that communists were unfit to teach because they committed themselves to overthrowing the U.S. government by force; that they were pawns of the Soviet Union; that they participated in illegal and conspiratorial activities; that membership required they indoctrinate students; and the belief that C.P. members had willingly surrendered their freedom of thought.240

To counter such criticisms, the AAUP emphasized the Communist Party’s legality. Membership in legal political organizations, however unpopular, remained a constitutional right. The report boldly declared, “this Association regards any attempt to subject teachers to civic limitations not imposed upon other citizens as a threat against the academic profession and against the society which the profession serves.”241 The report challenged the belief that Communist Party members shared identical political ideas. Communists exhibited varying levels of commitment; the academic profession must judge them individually. The AAUP believed dismissing a scholar simply because of his Party loyalties required judging guilt by association, instead of by conduct. Like all academics, a communist deserved to lose his job if he committed “acts of disloyalty or because of professional unfitness, and not because he is a communist.”242

While communists in Eastern Europe functioned as an integral part of a dictatorship, in a

---

241 Ibid., 129.
242 Ibid., 126.
democracy constitutional law held them in check. Committee A expressed confidence that communism’s phenomenal unpopularity in the United States (along with the country’s abundance of material wealth) made it highly unlikely that a handful of communist professors could make a substantial impact.\textsuperscript{243}

The report for 1947 not only countered calls for an academic purge, but it also stood up for the rights of left-wing professors, (as opposed to defending scholars in the abstract), the only time it would do so for the next decade. The AAUP predicted (like Arthur Schlesinger Jr.) that if universities expunged communists, a chill would descend over progressive scholarship in general. Committee A promised never to abandon scholars who conducted themselves professionally, even if they had an “emotional sympathy for the underdog,” believed in “social planning,” or defended “a reasoned belief in collectivism.”\textsuperscript{244}

In its report for the year 1948, the AAUP no longer had to speculate about the beginning of a Second Red Scare. The Committee bemoaned the new political climate of “repression,” “indoctrination,” and “dogmatism,” that it believed was poisoning academic life. In that year, the AAUP witnessed a sharp increase in reported violations of academic freedom, including the dismissal of faculty who had openly supported the Progressive Party candidacy of Henry Wallace. No longer on the rhetorical offensive, Committee A believed it had to defend itself against charges of supporting subversives. It did so by arguing that academic freedom represented a central component of the American political tradition and by accusing its conservative opponents of adopting totalitarian methods. Academic freedom’s enemies, the AAUP argued, were the true

\textsuperscript{243} Ibid., 125-127.  
\textsuperscript{244} Ibid., 128.
subversives. “Defenders of freedom,” the report stated, must not “acquiesce in the methods of repression.” True American values included protecting freedom of speech and protecting the rights of unpopular minorities.

The Public and Its Problems

While deceptively similar to the traditional liberties listed in the Bill of Rights, academic freedom is fundamentally different because it only protects a small segment of the population. Since its inception in 1915, the AAUP never conceived of academic freedom in the same way people conceive of freedom of speech. If institutions of higher education operated as regular businesses or government agencies, university managers could theoretically control what professors researched and taught without violating first amendment rights. From the AAUP’s first statement on academic freedom in 1915, however, the organization presented the concept not as a constitutional right, but as a professional right, which gave professors control over their disciplines.\(^{245}\) This meant that only academics themselves could set course requirements, decide what counted as useful research, and judge what constituted disciplinary standards, i.e. what counted as “good work.”

The AAUP’s primary justification for giving professors rights denied to the rest of the citizenry was the advancement of knowledge. As trained specialists, academics debated concepts that the public could never fully understand. To advance knowledge, specialists needed insulation from the whims of administrators, trustees, and politicians who lacked an understanding of the facts, but might try to influence research findings to

further their own interests. Academics also needed a space free from the “tyranny of public opinion” to experiment with unpopular ideas that may lead to a greater scientific understanding. The justification for tenure flowed from the necessity of intellectual independence. If administrators had an easy time firing professors, academics would be more susceptible to outside manipulation, thus eroding the objectivity necessary for scholarship.

While this justification for academic freedom may have sounded elitist, in that it distrusted the public’s ability to judge the fitness of academic standards, the AAUP argued that such elitism was a necessary means for the ultimate end of societal improvement. The 1940 Statement on Principles assumes that “the common good depends upon the free search for truth and its free exposition.” The AAUP rested its case for academic freedom on the scientific, social, and technological benefits that it brought to society; defending an elitist idea by arguing for its utilitarian ends.

During the McCarthy era, many professors feared that academic freedom’s utilitarian defense proved unconvincing with the public. Professors often despaired that a large majority of Americans had rejected the values of academic freedom in favor of the inculcation of traditional norms. Starting in 1950, the AAUP frequently blamed the public for the climate of repression that they believed existed on campus. Published in 1950, the Committee A report for 1949 stated, “the public may be unaware that it is defeating its own cause when, through pressure on a State legislature, a religious denomination, or other supporting body, teachers and scholars are intimidated and their freedom circumscribed.” At the AAUP Annual Meeting in 1952 members called on

the organization to combat, “the most serious problem we have in this country, anti-intellectualism.”248 The AAUP opposed the censorship of textbooks because it interfered with the work of specialists. Unlike the general public, professional training taught academics to shun “erroneous or biased presentations,” the profession had no need of “outside assistance.”249 The AAUP even went as far to criticize the democratic process itself for its unwillingness to defer to specialists when it worked in their best interest. Disparaging congressmen (and democracy along with it) for their lack of expertise, the report for 1949 claimed that, “because of the manner in which they are chosen, a majority of the members of a legislature naturally lack the knowledge and competence of making decisions on these questions.”250

In the early 1950s, a tension existed between the AAUP’s belief in professional elitism and its support for democracy. In order to justify the right of professors to hold unpopular ideas, the AAUP reminded its audience that democracy based itself on a faith in the majority choosing wisely among political options, even options the majority considered distasteful. The people must be trusted to reject dangerous points of view. Yet, just as often as the AAUP praised democracy, it also showed a profound suspicion of average Americans. Committee A made statements that claimed most people were conformist by nature. Only through their training did scholars develop the independent qualities of mind and intellectual toughness that enabled them to confront unsettling truths.251 If most people lacked the necessary qualities to understand the values of

248 “Council Meeting Transcript,” Box 18, Folder, “Council Meeting Nov. 1952.” AAUP Archives.
249 “Resolution on the Censorship of Textbooks,” Box 1, Folder, “Annual Meeting 1953,” AAUP Archives.
scholarship, how could academic freedom ever gain widespread acceptance? As Russell Kirk pointed out, since the AAUP placed so much stock in democracy, to whom could it turn when a majority of the people rejected its principles?252 At times, professors just wanted to raise their hands and give up. A participant at the AAUP’s Annual Meeting in 1950 laconically observed, “Democracy is government by public opinion…At times democracy seems intent on committing suicide.”253

Like many in the AAUP, Quincy Wright, the president of the American Association of International Law, blamed the excesses of the McCarthy era not on politicians such as McCarthy himself, but instead on “the abnormal state of public opinion.”254 Citing Walter Lippmann, Wright claimed that the public must learn to recognize that it did not have the ability to interfere on complex questions of public policy. Debate on policy questions, such as those involving academic freedom, Wright argued, “depend on detailed knowledge of the facts which the public cannot be expected to have.” He called for an ivory tower sheltered from the “exigencies of public opinion and political pressures.” Without such independence, he told his fellow professors, “we won’t have any satisfactory academic life at all.”255

While the AAUP leadership generally believed that it could not convince a majority of the population to support academic freedom, preferring to focus their efforts on university administrators, many in the organization believed that it could convince the public to support its goals. In the early 1950s, for example, the AAUP council discussed a variety of ways to “mitigate the hysteria” of McCarthyism on campus. Suggestions

252 Kirk, Academic Freedom, 53.
253 “Annual Meeting Transcript,” Box 1, Folder “Annual Meeting 1950.” AAUP Archives.
254 Quincy Wright, “Address to the 1956 Annual Meeting of the AAUP,” Box 2, Folder “Annual Meeting 1956.” AAUP Archives.
255 Ibid.
included contributing AAUP articles to *Reader’s Digest*, hiring a public relations officer, and dramatizing the principles of academic freedom through a television commercial.\(^{256}\) AAUP leaders rejected these suggestions because they thought they would cheapen and misrepresent the organization’s values, but the fact that many professors desired to get their message out to a mass audience shows the importance they believed public opinion exerted on academic life. It also shows a willingness on the part of AAUP members to focus on examples of “hysteria” in the general public, instead of considering similar forms of hysteria within the organization itself.

**Anticommunism**

In 1949, the University of Washington dismissed three professors because of their suspected ties to communism. Edward Kirkland, Chairman of Committee A, completed an investigation of the cases, which he believed would become one of the AAUP’s most historically significant reports. The dismissals had garnered extensive media attention, so the report would reach a much broader audience than usual. As the AAUP’s first thorough investigation involving communism during the nascent Cold War, the report would also set an important precedent for the cases to come. Kirkland wrote the report with the knotty question of communism in mind.\(^{257}\)

Basing his findings on faculty hearing transcriptions, which amounted to over 4000 pages worth of material, Kirkland believed his report countered many of the stereotypes about Communist Party members. The report’s confident tone echoed the Committee A report for 1947. Most of the professors under investigation, Kirkland

\(^{256}\) “Council Meeting Transcript,” Box 18 Folder “Council Meeting, March 53.”

\(^{257}\) Letter, Edward Kirkland to George Pope Shannon, CC: Walter Laprade, Ralph Himstead, QW, JMM, September 28, 1949, Box 151, Folder “COM A-Univ. of Washington General.” AAUP Archives.
noted, joined the Party during the Popular Front years of the 1930s, when the Party softened its message of violent revolution. The university did not present strong evidence that any of the professors currently belonged to the Party, nor did it have any proof that they ever engaged in espionage or showed loyalty to the Soviet state. The accused faculty had never participated in mass meetings, nor had they operated as functionaries obedient to Party leadership.

Kirkland also argued that the Marxist-Leninist body of doctrine, which the Washington administration used to undermine the possibility of a communist’s professional fitness, resembled the Bible, in that it was open to conflicting interpretations, especially on the necessity of violent revolution. The fact that some of the Washington professors disagreed with Marx on significant questions or had left the Party showed communists were not necessarily mindless automatons. Kirkland went so far as to argue that, “It takes individualism to be a communist in America!”\textsuperscript{258} The 1949 report on the University of Washington answered the pressing question of whether Communist Party members automatically engaged in unprofessional conduct. Kirkland observed, “the evidence as to their propriety, impartiality, and scholarship in the classroom is everywhere overwhelming.” He concluded his report with the observation that the University of Washington dismissals were “political prosecution, pure and simple.”

The General Secretary of the AAUP, Ralph Himstead, agreed with Kirkland’s report, but suppressed its findings because he believed it would create a public relations nightmare and potentially break apart the organization. While proclaiming the broad principles of academic freedom in public, in his private correspondence Himstead observed, “If the Association should get a left-wing or pro-communism tag, this would

\textsuperscript{258} Ibid.
certainly end the effectiveness of the Association, and [also end] the Association itself.”

Discussing attitudes towards the Communist Party in the AAUP, Indiana University Law Professor and executive member Ralph Fuchs observed, “There is a widespread view, of course, that membership in the Communist Party should no longer be maintained…among those who have made up their minds I do not know where the majority lies.” As early as 1949, the local chapter of the University of Nevada rejected the AAUP’s traditional stance on academic freedom by a wide margin. Unlike Committee A, the Nevada faculty believed that communist professors constituted a “real and present danger.” In 1950, as the University of California Berkeley confronted a divisive loyalty oath, in which dozens of faculty lost their jobs, the school’s faculty committee vociferously opposed the oath as an affront to civil liberties, but agreed with the school’s regents that membership in the Communist Party warranted dismissal. At a 1953 AAUP Council Meeting, a delegate from Florida noted that in a referendum, 75 percent of faculty rejected the right of communists to hold jobs as professors.

Not only amongst faculty committees, but also within the AAUP itself, strong voices supported a ban on communist professors. In a 1949 Council Meeting, for example, Professor James Hart echoed the arguments put forth against communist faculty by Sidney Hook. Hart maintained that communists surrendered all the qualities necessary for academic freedom: “intelligence, competence, and intellectual integrity.”

---

260 Council Meeting Transcript,” Box 18, Folder “March, 1950 Council Meeting,” AAUP Archives.
261 Letter, Austin E. Hutcheson to Dean R. Lutz, May 21, 1949, Box 151, Folder “COM A-Univ. of Washington General,” AAUP Archives.
262 John D. Hicks to Ralph Himstead, May 10, 1950
communists gained power, Hart argued, they would eradicate all vestiges of academic freedom. Like many other professors, he believed that liberal tolerance could not tolerate the risks posed by totalitarian intolerance. Hart declaimed, “any stand short of expulsion from the academic fellowship of any academic man who maintains membership in the Communist Party commits this Association, in principle to a policy of standing by which academic freedom is perverted and destroyed.”

Due to the passions it evoked, the AAUP approached the communist question with caution and uncertainty. In a 1950 Council Meeting, for example, one delegate observed that he supported the right of communists to teach in theory, but opposed it in practice. Although he believed only teaching and research determined competence, universities should not take a chance on communists, since they would likely indoctrinate their students. During a debate at the AAUP’s Annual Meeting in 1950, a professor from the University of North Carolina claimed that he hated loyalty oaths, but at the same time “honestly believed that a man who has a card in the Communist Party has put his mind in pawn.” He demanded that the executive clarify “what relation is there between what we regard as the free and the card carrying member of the Communist Party.” Ralph Fuchs’ response did little to alleviate the confusion: “I will not elaborate on the answer except to say that the convinced member of the Communist Party probably cannot engage in the pursuit of truth.” At a Council Meeting two years later, the communist problem

263 “Council Meeting Notes,” Box 18 Folder, “Council Meeting Nov. 1949,” AAUP Archives.
had not been resolved, as one professor admitted, “There is serious doubt in my mind what we, as a group, think of communists.”

Between 1951 and 1955, the AAUP significantly toned down its opposition to firing communists for Party membership alone. Fearing association with progressive causes, the AAUP never made any statements explicitly defending the political left. The Committee A report for 1951, for example, avoided renouncing traditional policy, but showed a marked shift in sympathies. It noted in an obvious reference to the Communist Party, “no one thinks that an individual ought to be recruited as a scholar or teacher who acknowledges unquestioning allegiance to any extraneous authority or dogma or that such as one ought to be retained in his post if inadvertently appointed.” In 1951, Ralph Fuchs claimed that the Supreme Court ruling in the Smith Act, which prosecuted communists who advocated the overthrow of the government but not the Party itself, was essentially the same as the AAUP position. The Committee A Report for 1952 condoned universities that refused to hire communists. To prove its anticommunist credibility, the report stated that, “Doubtless an overwhelming majority of the members of the Association agree with Dr. James B. Conant, who repeated…‘I would not be a Party to the appointment of a communist to any position in a school, college, or university.’”

By 1953, the AAUP seemed to have moved to the position that firing communist professors simply for membership in the Party was acceptable practice, as long as a

266 “Council Meeting Transcript,” Box 18 Folder, “Council Meeting, March 1952,” AAUP Archives.


268 “Council Meeting, Transcript,” Box 18, Folder, “Council Meeting, Nov. 1951.”

faculty committee approved of the dismissal. While open to interpretation, the Committee A Report for 1953 seemed to suggest that communists had no place on university faculties. The report stated that, “It is extremely unlikely under the circumstances that many [communists] have been appointed and retained. But the existing procedure, if fairly administered, makes it easily possible to dismiss those who acknowledge their first allegiance to an alien power or who conform to and seek to inculcate a dogmatic approach to their subjects of study.”

No longer aggressively asserting academic rights, the AAUP now felt obliged to make displays of its patriotism. The organization prefaced its 1953 resolution on “Political Investigations of Universities” by declaring “we believe that as a body American teachers are responsible, loyal citizens who have overwhelmingly rejected the doctrines of the Communist Party.”

The hedging in AAUP statements created confusion in what constituted acceptable practice in dismissal cases involving charges of communism. In 1954, for example, two professors from the University of Kansas asked that the AAUP Council remove their administration from the censured list, which it had been on for many years, because the school’s new president swore allegiance to the principles of Committee A. The AAUP refrained from doing so, because the Kansas administration had recently fired a tenured professor for refusing to answer questions about his political associations. The Kansas professors, however, defended the administration’s decision to fire the professors, because in consulting with faculty, it claimed that the school had followed AAUP guidelines.

---

271 “Political Investigations of Universities,” Box 1, Folder, “Annual Meeting, 1953.”
The representatives from Kansas admitted that there had been no evidence of professional wrongdoing on the part of the fired professor and there was not even any hard evidence that he was a member of the Communist Party. He simply had a reputation as a leftist, the professors observed, which caused a lot of concern among “townsmen, Faculty and students’ parents.” In the contemporary political climate, such a reputation severely damaged a school’s reputation.

When the Kansas faculty left the room, the AAUP Council agreed that it should investigate the case more thoroughly before making a decision. Yet the Council was also unsure how to respond to cases involving these kinds of dismissals, especially ones in which faculty supported firing their colleagues. One member of the executive committee observed, “We have to face this situation. What do we mean by freedom in universities?”

McCarthyism Inverted

In March of 1953, as the HUAC began its investigations into subversion in higher education, the Division of Social Sciences at Howard University held a conference on “Academic Freedom in the United States.” The conference included a passionate debate between Sidney Hook, who called for the expulsion of communist professors from the nation’s campuses, and Ralph Himstead, General Secretary of the American Association of University Professors, who argued the traditional methods of judging academic fitness, professional competence in research and in the classroom, needed no alteration.

Himstead’s speech highlights the rhetoric that the AAUP deployed to defend academic freedom during the height of the Red Scare: inverting the language of its

---

272 “Executive Committee Minutes,” Box 19 Folder, “April, 1954,” AAUP Archives.
ideological opponents. The AAUP referred to loyalty oaths, the censorship of textbooks, and the dismissal of professors without proper hearings as totalitarian, while it promoted academic freedom as quintessentially American. This tactic had the advantage of positioning academic freedom as a fundamental component of America’s creedal identity, while simultaneously distancing the AAUP from the “un-Americanism” of the radical left. In his speech at the Howard University Conference and in his subsequent debate with Hook, Himstead avoided discussing the specific persecution of communists, which was widely tolerated even among university professors, to draw attention to McCarthyism’s broader negative consequences. To deflect charges of radicalism, he emphasized the AAUP’s political neutrality. He noted that the AAUP defended alleged socialists, pro-Nazis, and “advocates of the minimum wage and social security,” but said nothing about its defense of communists, which made up the bulk of academic freedom cases during the period.273 Claiming academic freedom as a fundamental American right, Himstead quoted Thomas Jefferson who declared that his ideal university would “be founded on the illimitable freedom of the human mind.” To emphasize his commitment to the present order, Himstead closed his speech by reminding his audience that, “freedom is the road away from revolution.”274

In his debate with Hook following his speech, Himstead engaged in reverse red baiting by using the fact that Hook had once been a communist sympathizer in attempt to discredit his position on academic freedom. While acknowledging that Communist Party membership warranted suspicion, Himstead maintained that firing a professor for membership alone replicated the techniques of totalitarianism. Addressing Hook’s point

274 Ibid.
that communist doctrine required faculty members to indoctrinate students, Himstead ironically replied, “I am not as conversant with the communist literature as Dr. Hook.” He then observed that the fact that so many communists and fellow travelers had transformed into devoted anticommunists contradicted the notion that CP members irrevocably abandoned their freedom of thought. Emphasizing his long-term commitment to liberal principles, as opposed to ex-fellow travelers like Hook, Himstead observes, “We honor these former communists. I think everyone should have a chance to reform. I do not hold it against one because at one time or another he made a mistake and became a member of the Communist Party, but I get a little irked when they pose as great Americans on every subject.”275 Brandishing the Americanism of his position, Himstead warned that robbing CP professors or their livelihood would bring the United States down to the level of the Soviet Union. Himstead concluded, “I never want to see free America emulate totalitarian Soviet or Russian techniques.”276

Himstead often equated attacks on academic freedom in the United States with the enemy abroad. In an open letter to the governor of California Earl Warren addressing the state’s loyalty oath controversy, Himstead declared, “loyalty oaths tend to bring about those very totalitarian restrictions which we in this country are most concerned to avoid.” In a 1953 statement, the AAUP argued that the “application of political tests, standards of conformity, and inquisitorial procedures” were methods of an authoritarian society and “alien to the national character.”277 In Himstead’s view, academic freedom represented a traditional American freedom, on par with freedom of speech, religion, the press, and of

275 Ibid.
276 Ibid.
277 “Political Investigations of Universities” Box 1, Folder, “Annual Meeting, 1953,” AAUP Archives.
Inverting McCarthyist attacks on academics, Himstead claimed that, “to question the advisability of intellectual freedom in our schools and colleges is to question the validity of our constitutional system.” Essentially, he argued that only those who advocate totalitarianism could oppose academic freedom. At an AAUP Council Meeting, one participant noted that dissidents in Russia were looking to America as a beacon of freedom. Due to the climate of repression on campus, he wondered, “which side are we aiding in Russia?”

In his speech at the AAUP’s Annual Meeting in 1956, Quincy Wright, made one of the most striking examples of the argument that conservatives emulated totalitarians on the question of academic freedom. Wright echoed the critique of McCarthyism as a psychological aberration made in the 1950s by writers such as Theodore Adorno and Richard Hofstadter (who claimed McCarthy’s followers expressed “a rather profound if largely unconscious hatred of our society and its ways”). He claimed that there existed an “unconscious disposition” for Americans to try to seek advantages during the Cold War by “imitating the totalitarian dictatorships” that it was fighting. He argued that the potential for nuclear war led people to find scapegoats, which they did in “communists and fellow travelers and the academic mind.” To make the same link between totalitarians and McCarthyites, Himstead quoted the famous Chancellor of the

279 Ibid.
282 Wright, Address to the 42nd Annual Meeting, Box 2, Folder “Annual Meeting, 1956,” AAUP Archives.
283 Ibid.
University of Chicago, Robert Hutchins: “To persecute people into conformity by the non-legal methods popular today is little better than doing it by purges and pogroms. The dreadful unanimity of tribal self-adoration was characteristic of the Nazi state. It is sedulously fostered in Russia. It is to the last degree un-American.”

To boost its credibility among a population in the grips of the Cold War, the AAUP often defended academic freedom for the role it could play in defeating the Soviet Union. The AAUP argued that loyalty oaths, for example, fostered conformity, which weakened the intellectual inventiveness necessary for America to remain a great power. By limiting the scope of freedom of thought, loyalty oaths harmed the country’s ability to make “wise decisions concerning national and international policies.”

The strength of American leadership depended on the population’s critical reasoning skills, which only education in colleges that practiced academic freedom could provide. By 1956 when popular anticommunism began to wane, the new AAUP Chairman, Ralph Fuchs, defended the possibility of qualified communist instructors by referring to the Soviet Union itself. With the development of Soviet weaponry and space technology, no one could doubt the competence of Russia’s mathematicians and atomic physicists. If Americans fired qualified professors for their political views, Fuchs argued, the United States risked falling behind its communist enemies. After Sputnik, this line of reasoning became inescapable.

---

284 Letter, November 4, 1949 Himstead to A.J. Brumbaugh
286 “Resolutions,” Box 1, Folder “Annual Meeting, 1953.” AAUP Archives.
287 Ibid.
288 “Transcript,” Box 23, Folder, “Special Committee.” AAUP Archives.
The Red Scare Dies Down

With the potency of the Red Scare in decline and widespread concern among the AAUP executive that it had done too little to mitigate the excesses of the McCarthy era, the organization decided to reexamine its first principles in 1956. The AAUP formed a special committee to study all the violations of academic freedom that members had reported since the late 1940s. Was it wrong not to have censured any administrations during that period? Should the AAUP change its principles to protect academic freedom in a Cold War climate? The published report of the special committee, “Academic Freedom and Tenure in the Quest for National Security,” re-stated the basic principles that the AAUP had enunciated since the beginning of the Cold War, but finally censured several administrations for reasons related to the Red Scare. These included discharging professors for refusing to sign loyalty oaths, for having associated with groups considered subversive, or for having pleaded the Fifth Amendment. Committee A censured Berkeley, Temple, Rutgers, Jefferson Medical College, Ohio State, and University of Oklahoma. While the report did go out of its way to praise institutions that refused to bow to public pressure to fire leftists professors, the AAUP continued to maintain that CP membership and taking the Fifth Amendment were not grounds for dismissal, but suspicious enough to warrant hearings. The confusion Committee A still felt about communism is demonstrated in a long but telling quotation from AAUP Chairman, Ralph Fuchs:

Whether fitness could exist in the face of [Communist Party] membership as of today is not stated; and I suppose the truth is that none of us knows. Like you, I find it difficult to imagine a case in which an active member of the Party would be fit; but it is possible, for
example, that a teacher of music would be qualified for his position despite membership, especially if he were a Negro and were motivated by feelings aroused by racial discrimination. In other words, I do not think we can say absolutely that continued adherence to the Communist Party, by someone whose motives are understandable and who refuses to yield to pressure by resigning, is necessarily inconsistent with competence and good morals, despite what you and I and all but a tiny minority of people in this country think of the Party.”  

The AAUP membership discussed the report in detail at its Annual Meeting in 1956. One of the report’s sharpest critics, Sidney J. Socolar of the University of Chicago, argued that the language it used was so vague that administrators could use it to justify academic repression. He noted, “what does the term ‘integrity’ mean, ‘lack of integrity’ as a ground for removal? What does the term ‘lack of objective’ mean?…Who will be in a position to decide who is being objective?” Since the report acknowledged that professors should carefully choose their words and associations lest they harm the “academic prestige” of their university, Socolar asked why administrators could not simply use this as an “escape hatch” to fire troublesome leftists?  

Socolar called for a stronger statement than the one presented at the 1956 meeting, one in which the AAUP clearly declared that a professor’s extramural associations and private beliefs were irrelevant factors when judging a professor’s professional fitness. The only criterion Socolar believed in was professional competence as judged by one’s peers.  

Considering Socolar’s spirited criticisms of the weakness of the report on “Academic Freedom and Tenure in the Quest for National Security,” it is worth noting the equally opinionated responses of Sidney Hook, Russell Kirk, and William Buckley Jr. Buckley, who believed that the report was the first time the AAUP had “hinted” at the

right for communists to serve as professors, believed it was an ominous signal. He wrote a supercharged response to the report in which he claimed that even a “pathetic retard child” could understand that communists had no place near a university.\textsuperscript{292} He praised the “social pressure” of the McCarthy era, which had successfully helped eliminate many communist professors.\textsuperscript{293} Sidney Hook wrote of the Special Report, "I am convinced that the practical effect of the enunciation of the Special Committee's principles will be gravely damaging to the AAUP and, more important, to the cause of academic freedom."\textsuperscript{294} Kirk mischaracterized the report as suggesting universities should go out of their way to hire communist professors to teach the “other side’s” point of view. He called the AAUP “in favor of crackpottery \textit{per se}."\textsuperscript{295} While the McCarthy era may have ended, academic freedom, as defined by the AAUP, still had its determined opponents.

The AAUP in Crisis

The AAUP viewed McCarthyism as a sensitive issue. While the organization’s executive strongly believed in the traditional principles of academic freedom, it also understood that if the organization gained a reputation as left-wing sympathizers, it would have a difficult time assisting professors in danger of losing their job. In such cases, the AAUP preferred to have a strong national reputation in order to help embattled academics behinds the scenes. During the course of the McCarthy era, the AAUP as a whole struggled to define its relationship to the American public. How could it best promote professional rights, which only protected a minority of the population (and often a highly

\textsuperscript{292} William Buckley, “The AAUP States its Position on Fifth Amendment Teachers” \textit{National Review}, April 11, 1956, 25.
\textsuperscript{293} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{295} Ibid.
unpopular minority at that), to a democratic public? The AAUP’s response was to promote the Americanism of professional rights, casting their extreme anti-communist opponents as the totalitarian other. This served to defend academic freedom from its enemies, while distancing the AAUP from the political left. While it is difficult to assess the success of such a policy, because historians can never know if fewer professors would have lost their job if the AAUP took a firmer stance, it shows how important the organization considered the public’s opinion of the academic profession.
Conclusion: The Debate Endures

The democratic components of American higher education did little to ensconce academics in a protective ivory tower; instead, professors competed as one of many groups vying for control of the university in the years following the Second World War. Several factors contributed to the manifold discourses about academic freedom during this period. The early Cold War witnessed the rise of the Soviet Union as an atomic power with publicized, if not essential, assistance from American Communists. The United States “lost” China to the Reds and not long after found itself embroiled in the Korean War. During this period of heightened international tensions, the federal government began investing billions of dollars into military research on university campuses. The high profile espionage charges made against Julius Rosenberg, Alger Hiss, and Robert Oppenheimer caused understandable anxieties about academics conducting classified research. Besides the alarm caused by the possible outcomes of treason in a nuclear age, the dramatic increase in college admissions created by the G.I. Bill rose public concerns over what professors taught their students. The resulting political climate helped ensure that over one hundred professors, most of whom never worked on classified government projects, lost their jobs because of blacklisting between 1948 and 1956.296

Debates over academic freedom during the early Cold War generated far-reaching consequences extending beyond university walls. Notably, disputes over the fitness of communist professors exposed cracks in the intellectual coalition of liberal

---

296 The different political climate may help explain why Canada, which had a university system more akin to the United States than Western Europe, had no dismissal cases involving charges of Communism during the early Cold War. Western Europe, where faculty governance had a long history, had almost no dismissal cases.
anticommunists. In the immediate postwar years, liberal thinkers such as Schlesinger and Hook united to attack the communist-backed presidential campaign of Henry Wallace and to support centrist Democrats such as Harry Truman. Yet only a year later, the excesses of right-wing anticommunism began to pull Cold War liberals apart. Were communists really such a threat that academia should ban them? Where should liberals focus their ire, on American communists or on McCarthy?

Conversely, right-wing thinkers such as William Buckley Jr. and Russell Kirk took it as a given that academia should bar communists. Communists destroyed academic freedom wherever they had taken power; conserving American norms trumped protecting subversives. Instead of engaging in extended debates about the fitness or unfitness of communist professors, conservatives used academic freedom as a starting point to launch a much wider critique of American higher education. Buckley refashioned academic freedom to mean alumni and parental control over course content. In doing so, he created an enduring conservative critique of professional elites as out of touch with the democratic values of the American people. While Buckley’s conservative counterpart, Russell Kirk worried that this vision would lower educational standards, he too believed that the liberal dominated academy promoted insidious values of secularism, relativism, and socialism. Right-wing concerns over the damage caused by liberal professors encouraged conservatives to found magazines such as *National Review* and the *Modern Age*, and later, policy institutes and think tanks.

In the midst of these vociferous debates over academic freedom, the AAUP operated as one voice among many. It is true that the organization represented over 30,000 academics, but it competed in a public arena with varied and influential opponents.
These included figures such as Hook, whose writings on academic freedom were widely disseminated in the *New York Times Magazine*, William Buckley Jr., who wrote a bestseller with the express purpose of undermining everything the AAUP stood for, and HUAC who combed academia for subversives.

More ominously, the organization’s traditional position on academic freedom was extremely unpopular with the public. Not only a majority of Americans, but many in the AAUP itself believed in purging communist professors from the academy. Charged with the simultaneous task of publicly defending academic freedom while privately defending the careers of beleaguered professors, AAUP leadership chose to defend its values by portraying academic freedom as a fundamental American right. While studiously avoiding a reputation as left-wing sympathizers, the AAUP frequently attacked McCarthy and his supporters as representative of totalitarian values, thus distancing itself from the charge that academic freedom was somehow un-American. By 1956, the AAUP started to regret its inaction over McCarthyism and began a slow process of strengthening its commitment and institutional understanding of academic freedom.

Postscript

In *Academic Freedom after September 11*, a recent collection of essays that address dangers to scholarship in the post-9/11 world, Middle East historian Beshara Doumani argues that, “academic freedom is facing its most serious threats since the McCarthy era.”\(^{297}\) While parallels exist between attacks on academic freedom today and during the early Cold War, the comparisons obscure as much as they reveal. Unlike the Second

Red Scare, there have been no dramatic increases in professors losing their job because of their politics. In addition, recent attacks on the traditional definition of academic freedom tend to cloak themselves in the language of postmodernism and diversity. Instead of making crude calls for the dismissal of leftist faculty, right-wing activists tend to call for intellectual balance in order to inject conservative beliefs into the classroom. Unlike Buckley and Kirk who insisted on absolute values, Horowitz’s Academic Bill of Rights bases its demands on “the uncertainty and unsettled character of all human knowledge.”

Finally, in the 1950s there actually were professors who were current or former members of the Communist Party. Today, attacks against the “liberal academy” persist, but no one accuses American academics of belonging to or spying for al-Qaeda. This makes it much harder to get the public riled up about the threat posed by the nation’s professors.

One valid comparison between the McCarthy era and the post-9/11 United States that the contributors to *Academic Freedom after September 11* overlook is the similar roles played by private citizens groups. In their essays in the collection, both Doumani and Joel Beinin argue that today, the principal attacks on academic freedom come from private citizens, whereas during the McCarthy era they came from the government.

While government pressure through congressional hearings and loyalty investigations

---

298 Horowitz, “In Defense of Intellectual Diversity”
http://chronicle.com/free/v50/i23/23b01201.htm The AAUP’s somewhat hyperbolic response to Academic Bill of Rights also recalled the organization’s rhetorical response to the McCarthy era. Opposing an ABR bill on behalf of the AAUP Joan Scott claimed it recalled, “the kind of government intervention in the academy practiced by totalitarian governments (historical examples are Japan, China, Nazi Germany, Fascist Italy, and the Soviet Union) who seek to control thought rather than permit a free marketplace of ideas.” (Testimony by Professor Joan Wallach Scott Before the Pennsylvania General Assembly’s House Select Committee on Student Academic Freedom. November 9, 2005.
(http://www.aaup.org/AAUP/GR/state/Academic+Bill+of+Rights-State+Level/Scotttestimony.htm)
299 Doumani, 23; and Joel Beinin “The New McCarthyism: Policing Thought about the Middle East” 241.
helped legitimate a clampdown on communist professors, private groups vied to set the
terms for what constituted the limits of acceptable scholarship. The American
Committee for Cultural Freedom, the founders of National Review magazine, and the
AAUP all played a role in shaping the public discourse on academic freedom.
Considering the crucial role that higher education continues to play, and the vitality, if
not the civility, of democratic discourse in the United States, such debates are not likely
to stop.
References

Archival Sources


William Buckley Jr. Papers, Special Collections, Sterling Library, Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut.

American Association of University Professors Archives, Special Collections, Gelman Library, George Washington University, Washington, D.C.

American Association of University Professors Papers, National Office of the American Association of University Professors, Washington, D.C.

Published Primary Sources


http://www.aaup.org/AAUP/pubsres/policydocs/1940statement.htm


_______________. McCarthy and His Enemies. Chicago: Regnery, 1954

“The AAUP States its Position on Fifth Amendment Teachers”


http://coursesa.matrix.msu.edu/~hst306/documents/huron.html


Secondary Sources


Gruber, Carole S. *Mars and Minerva: World War I and the Uses of the Higher Learning*

http://hnn.us/articles/986.html


Scott, Joan http://www(aaup.org/AAUP/GR/state/Academic+Bill+of+Rights-State+Level/Scotttestimony.htm


